



Phase 1

Listen & Explore

Findings Report

HEWRENEW.COM

JANUARY 2026



Table of Contents

1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

3-6

HEW RENEW BACKGROUND

7-11

APPROACH OVERVIEW

12

DATA & FINDINGS

13-39

DETERMINATIONS

40-42

DRIVING DECISION MAKING FORWARD

43

LISTEN & EXPLORE CONCLUSION

44

REFERENCES

45

Executive Summary



HEW Renew is a unique community-inspired design process with the goal of revitalizing the historic HEW complex, located at 10433 Willow Valley Rd. in Nevada City, California. Phase 1: "Listen & Explore" took place over 5 months and engaged over 300 members of the Nevada City community to identify community needs and opportunities for the HEW site. Through stakeholder outreach, a Community Needs Assessment Survey, and focus groups, Phase 1 community engagement was robust and produced important insights on both concerns about and hopes for future uses of the HEW site. This input is integral in determining the most beneficial and compatible use moving into Phase 2 of the HEW Renew Process.

Phase 1 data plainly indicates housing as the greatest community need and the most realistic vision the community has for the HEW site. In addition to housing, strong themes emerged around the desire for parks and green spaces, community gathering areas, business and professional uses, recreational facilities, health services, youth and senior enrichment, as well as support for marginalized populations. Throughout the data, community members emphasized preserving Nevada City's small town charm as well as the historical HEW building complex. The greatest concerns that consistently emerged around the future of the HEW site were traffic and fire safety. Further discussion in focus groups refined data with themes surfacing around intergenerational housing and "third-spaces," as well as inclusivity for vulnerable groups and mitigating nuisances. Input particular to housing highlights a nuanced trade-off between the community's potential to address the local housing needs, while maintaining the neighborhood's rural qualities. Data lays out visions for the HEW site ranging from low-density single family units to comprehensive mixed-use projects.

The findings determine compatible land-use directions that focus on housing with the potential to include community offerings—parks, trails and/or community spaces— while exploring limited business and professional uses. The initial input received will inform a forthcoming framework, the HEW Renew Guiding Principles, that draw on place-sensitive design, community connection and inclusivity, and neighborhood safety and resilience, while continuing a collaborative process that reflects ethical stewardship.

The resulting land use directions and design principles of Phase 1: "Listen and Explore" will inform and guide Phase 2: "Formulate and Select." In Phase 2, fundamental design concepts will be considered and then selected that best align with the values and needs of the community, ensuring the project enhances Nevada City's quality of life and fosters local connection. Phase 2 begins January 2026.

Community Overview

3

NEVADA CITY & COMMUNITY INTRODUCTION

Nevada City, nestled in the Sierra Nevada foothills, is a historic Gold Rush town with a population of approximately 3,200 within the incorporated city limits. It serves as the County seat and is part of Nevada County's broader community of about 101,000 residents. The area blends rural charm and historic character, with a rich cultural spirit. It features a thriving arts and music scene, a strong organic and farm-to-table culinary culture, an abundance of health and wellness services, and unique artisanal shops, all of which contribute to the community's vibrancy and vitality.

Population

Nevada City, California, has an estimated population of 3,195 as of 2025 according to U.S. Census projections. This marks a modest growth of about 1.4% from the 2020 Census count of 3,152. This slow increase reflects the town's stable, small-community appeal amid broader regional trends. The population skews older, with a median age of 49.4 years, and approximately 31.6% of residents aged 65 or older—more than double the California statewide average of 15.3%. This aging demographic highlights a community rich in experience but potentially facing challenges in intergenerational balance. Ethnically, Nevada City lacks significant diversity: about 85.2% of residents identify as White (non-Hispanic), 2.1% as Hispanic or Latino, 1.7% as Asian, 1.7% as Native American, 0.8% as Black or African American, and 0.1% as Pacific Islander, with 8% reporting two or more races. Educational attainment is a strength, with 94.9% of adults having completed high school (above the state's 84.8%) and over 45% holding a bachelor's degree or higher, fostering a well-informed populace but underscoring limited socioeconomic and cultural variety.

Community Overview



4

Economy

Nevada City's median household income stands at \$69,552 as of 2023 (latest available), slightly above the national average but challenged by high living costs in the Sierra Nevada region. Key industries include tourism, hospitality, retail, wellness, and arts/culture, which together drive significant economic activity—tourism alone supports a fragile yet vital sector, vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations, wildfires, and economic downturns, as seen in broader Nevada County trends. Job availability is moderate, with growth in construction, healthcare, and professional services projected at 0.9% annually through 2028, adding around 1,600 jobs countywide. Unemployment hovers around 4–5%, aligning with state averages, but poverty affects about 8.65% of residents, exacerbating inequities. Retail vacancy is notable downtown, often attributed to high rents and competition from online shopping, which impacts local vitality despite the area's draw for visitors seeking unique experiences.

Housing

Housing in Nevada City remains a pressing concern, with limited availability contributing to affordability challenges as a top community issue. The town's housing stock is constrained, with low vacancy rates amplified by short-term rentals like Airbnb, which reduce long-term options and drive up costs. Approximately 42% of households are burdened by housing expenses exceeding 30% of income, far higher than sustainable levels. The median home sale price reached around \$537,000 in 2025, far outpacing what a median-income resident can afford and exacerbating issues for seniors, youth, and low-income families—prices have risen modestly amid statewide trends, where California's median hit \$829,060. This mismatch highlights the need for more diverse housing options to support the community's stability.

Community Overview



5

Parking and Transportation

Downtown Nevada City faces ongoing parking shortages, particularly during peak tourist seasons or events, with limited public lots and street spaces often leading to congestion and frustration for residents and visitors alike. A 2023 parking demand study noted challenges from visitor influx and poor traffic flow, suggesting improvements like better signage or tech solutions. Transportation relies heavily on personal vehicles, with an average commute time of 28.5 minutes; most residents (around 70–80%) drive alone to work, contributing to a net outflow of commuters seeking jobs outside the area. Public transit options are minimal, with limited bus services connecting to nearby Grass Valley or Sacramento, underscoring barriers for non-drivers and emphasizing the town's car-dependent nature.

Crime

Nevada City maintains relatively low crime rates, aligning with its small-town character. The overall crime index is 31.51 (slightly below the national average of 33.37), with a violent crime rate of 17.19 (higher than average but still moderate). Property crime occurs at a rate of about 1 in 70, and violent incidents at 1 in 85, per NeighborhoodScout data. FBI reports for similar small California towns show Nevada City with minimal serious offenses, fostering a sense of safety that supports community well-being.

Health and Well-Being Indicators

Health indicators in Nevada City reveal gaps despite the area's wellness-oriented culture. Food insecurity affects around 9–12% of households, similar to county and state levels, linked to economic pressures and access issues in rural settings. Chronic conditions are prevalent, including anxiety and depression (topping lists in Nevada County at over 20–30% prevalence), alongside hypertension, tobacco use, and substance misuse, as noted in 2025 health assessments. These challenges are compounded for vulnerable groups, highlighting the need for accessible services in this aging community.

Community Overview



6

Social Engagement

Nevada City boasts strong civic engagement through local nonprofits and civic organizations. Albeit more popular with older generations, a healthy number of service clubs and fraternal groups, churches and faith communities exist, as well as considerable participation in local nonprofits such as the Chamber of Commerce, SYRCL or Sierra Harvest. Participating or volunteering with such organizations foster belonging and collaborative events that unite residents. Efforts toward social inclusion emphasize care for marginalized groups, with initiatives like racial equity programs and support for vulnerable populations promoting collective responsibility and empathy in this close-knit town.

Art and Culture

Nevada City's vibrant arts and culture scene flourishes within the Grass Valley-Nevada City Cultural District, one of California's 14 state-designated hubs, featuring historic venues like the Nevada Theatre and Miners Foundry. A thriving community of artists, musicians, performers, creators, makers, and healers animates intimate galleries, live music spots, alongside a rich culinary culture celebrating local flavors in a variety of eateries. Annual events such as the Wild and Scenic Film Festival, the Nevada City Film Festival, Hot Summer Nights, and Victorian Christmas draw crowds, fostering creativity and connection. Complementing this is a holistic health and wellness landscape, with spiritual retreats, yoga centers, and natural healing practices that nurture body, mind, and soul in this serene foothills setting.

Wildfire and Climate Impacts

Much of Nevada City lies in high fire severity zones, with over 80% of the area classified as moderate to very high risk, making wildfire a constant threat amplified by climate change. Recent state plans underscore the need for resilience, and the community shows strong regard for sustainability through local policies on green building and habitat preservation, aiming to balance growth with environmental stewardship.

HEW Renew Background



7

HEW RENEW CONTEXT & PURPOSE

The iconic HEW building has a long and storied history. The original wood-framed hospital, built on the site in 1856, was California's second hospital. In 1915, a grand jury report spurred the county to dismantle the original hospital and replace it with the reinforced concrete building that still stands today. The Nevada County Supervisors contracted William H. Mooser, a prominent architect responsible for several local landmarks including the Grass Valley Elks Lodge, the Grass Valley Library, and the Nevada County Bank Building on the corner of Mill and Bank streets in Grass Valley. The building was utilized as the county hospital until 1973, and then served a variety of uses under the umbrella of the county's Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) facility until 2006.

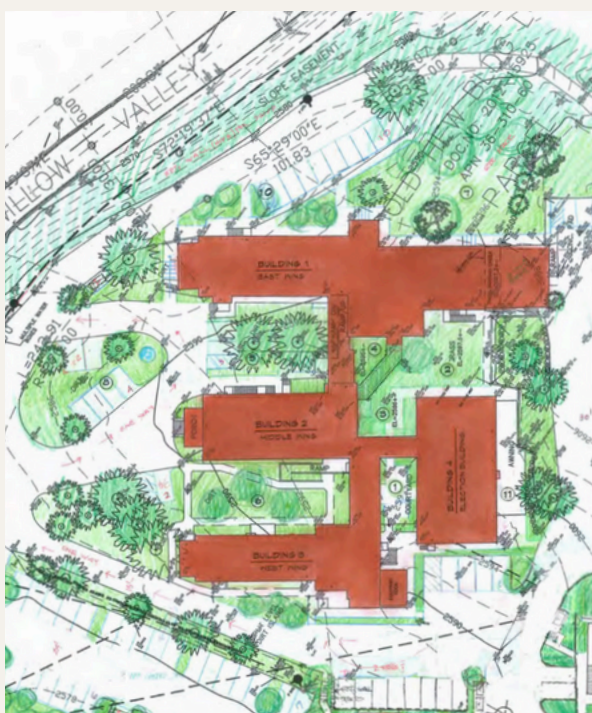


HEW Renew Background



8

Six years after its last use, in 2012, the county sold the property to local Bill Litchfield. Now retired, Litchfield grew up in Nevada County, and began his career as a contractor in 1973. Over the years since purchasing the HEW property, several housing project concepts were proposed but none garnered the desired public support to move forward. The historic building has sat vacant for 20 years now, becoming an attractive nuisance. Prolonged vacancy has led to increasing costs and exacerbating risks due to decades of trespassing and vandalism. Break-in averages have decreased to one per month with the addition of an on-site caretaker, with the risk of fires and other safety hazards persisting. As costs, risks, and uncertainty continue to increase, it is time to discover a clear path forward that is financially viable for today and is adaptive to the future, while serving the greatest good for the community. The HEW Renew Process arrives at a time of significant need and opportunity to preserve the historical building, mitigate safety concerns, and provide needed uses for the community.



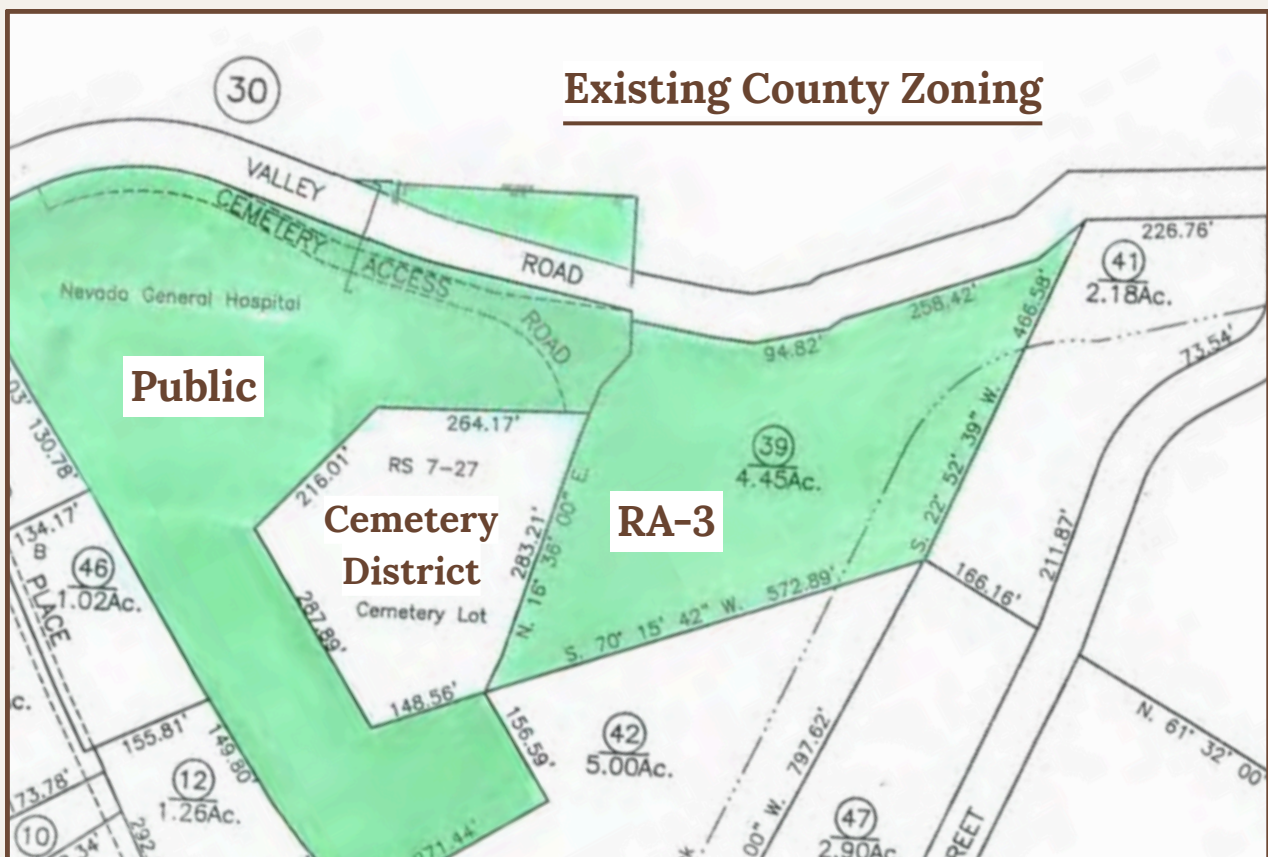
The historic 36,872 square foot building consists of four wings; one wing is one story in height, another wing is two stories, and two wings are three stories tall. In 2007 a Historic Resource Study was prepared by Page & Turnbull, Inc. on the HEW complex. The study determined significance “as the first county hospital in Nevada County, as a rare example of Spanish Colonial architecture in Nevada City, and as an example of a typical hospital building type; as such, the building appears eligible for listing on the California Register.” The survey also determined “The immediate surrounds of the building, including the setback from the street, gardens, and landscaping, are significant.”

HEW Renew Background



9

The building is situated in Nevada County on a 7.5 acre, 'Public' zoned parcel, with an adjacent 4.5 acre, RA-3 zoned, parcel under the same ownership. The nearly 12 acre HEW site, located less than a mile from the downtown historical district, sits within Nevada City's "sphere of influence." A "sphere of influence", determined by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo), is the area immediately outside of city limits where development is likely to occur, because of the proximity of existing services such as roads, water, sewer, police and fire. Upon a project submittal and requested zoning change, Nevada City has the option to annex the parcel, along with specific neighboring properties, and bring the site into the City's jurisdiction. If the annexation is declined, development would be handled by the Nevada County Community Development Agency, which would coordinate with Nevada City to ensure consistency with the City's design guidelines and conditions.



HEW Renew Background

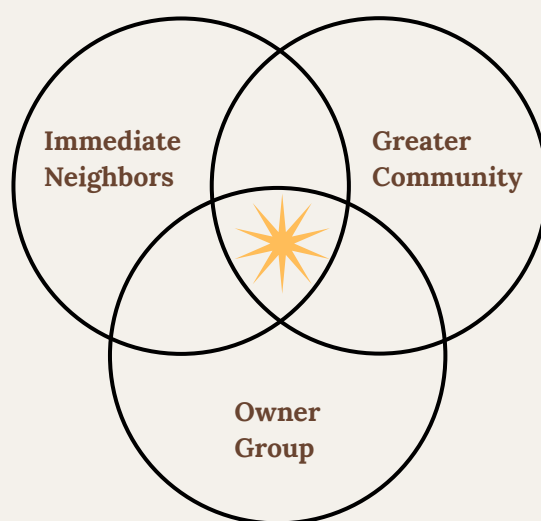


10

HEW RENEW A COMMUNITY-INSPIRED DESIGN PROCESS

The HEW Renew Process is grounded in the belief that the best solutions emerge from inclusive engagement, robust dialogue, and mutual respect. Inspired by Denis Kutch (1936–2025), a founding HEW Renew team member, community-inspired design invites people to help shape a space in a way that reflects their shared values and vision. Denis was a local architect who was deeply committed to the community, he served on the Nevada City Planning Commission for many years, and was often consulted when larger projects were being developed. Community-inspired design is an invitation and a process to bring people together to talk, to collaborate, to address concerns, and dream big. By fostering public dialogue, it transforms contention into cooperation, helping projects like HEW Renew to best serve the entire community.

In the community-inspired design process, "community" is viewed as three interconnected wholes: the owner group, the immediate neighbors, and the greater community. The owner group comprises those responsible for the property's stewardship and vision. Immediate neighbors include residents potentially impacted by a project proposal. The greater community extends to those who identify Nevada City as their home, town center and central hub, even if residing outside city limits—those who engage through local business, frequent visits, school involvement, or participation in cultural, social, and political activities that define the town's shared life. The community-inspired design process aims to create solutions that fall within the overlap of each of these circles.



HEW Renew Background



HEW RENEW THE FOUR PHASE PROCESS

PHASE 1

Listen & Explore

Launch process and generate public awareness, encourage whole community participation, review data, establish needs and values, and explore land-use directions.

PHASE 2

Formulate & Select

Discuss design elements, constraints, trade-offs; formulate general concepts and select one that best aligns with the community values and needs established in Phase 1.

PHASE 3

Prototype & Refine

Take concept to prototype. Discuss final design elements and options. Continue to refine input and inform the final proposal.

PHASE 4

Conclude & Propose

Share comprehensive process findings at a town hall. Present the proposed project. Receive public feedback and make final refinements.

Approach Overview

12

PRO-ACTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Phase 1 emphasized broad outreach to capture diverse voices, ensuring representation from neighbors, business owners, employees, frequent visitors and greater community residents. Public outreach was conducted through the HEW Renew website (hewrenew.com), social media platforms Instagram and Facebook (@hewrenew), local news outlets (Yubanet, the Union, KNCO, and KVMR), in-person community events and direct personal outreach. Presentations overviewing the HEW Renew Process were provided to city and county staff, non-profit boards and other local agencies and organizations. These methods garnered further participation and invited diverse and inclusive perspectives. Public outreach supported great participation in both the survey and focus groups.

Survey: The Community Needs Assessment Survey was designed and implemented using Google Forms. It consisted of 6 open ended questions allowing for long-format responses, in addition to demographic questions to understand the make-up of survey respondents, and a question inviting further participation in focus groups. Analysis of each survey question included the tagging and coding of key words within every written entry in order to distill common themes. Emerging themes from survey responses were used in constructing informative and engaging focus group sessions.

Focus groups: Participation in focus groups was garnered through a question on the Community Needs Assessment Survey, as well as through presentations to civic, business and nonprofit organizations, the HEW Renew email newsletter and individual outreach. Via USPS, 434 neighborhood mailers were delivered to every household within the HEW/Willow Valley neighborhood. Eleven, one hour focus group sessions were held at the HEW site within the historic building complex. In total, 59 people participated in Phase 1 focus groups.

Phase 1 gathered direct insights via stakeholder discussions, one-on-one conversations, social media commentary, and the Community Needs Assessment Survey. This data was then analyzed for recurring comments and patterns to identify core themes. Emerging themes were validated against focus group sessions ensuring a balanced and robust foundation for understanding community priorities.

Data & Findings

13

STAKEHOLDER FINDINGS

Stakeholder groups provided a wide array of insights regarding issues and potential uses important to their organization or efforts. Through one-on-one meetings, formal presentations and community gatherings, plus reviews of published material, stakeholder engagement provided process feedback and potential project concepts that were consistent with and supportive of the broader community input received through the Community Needs Assessment Survey and focus groups. Additionally, unique insights regarding potential uses or solutions often emerged within each engagement opportunity.

A representation of stakeholder groups include:

Nevada City Staff and Elected Officials

Immediate Neighbors of the HEW site

Nevada City Police Department

Nevada County Contractors Association

Nevada City Chamber of Commerce

Nevada City Businesses (Historic District & Seven Hills District)

Nevada Cemetery District

Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital

Nevada City Office of Emergency Services

Nevada County Staff and Elected Officials

Nevada St. / Willow Valley Rd. Neighborhood Association

LAFCO: Local Agency Formation Commission

Nevada County Association of Realtors

Nevada County Economic Resource Council

Community Foundation of Nevada County

Sierra Commons

Sierra Streams Institute

Women of Worth

Briarpatch Food Co-op

Nevada County Arts Council

Nevada County Continuum of care

Nevada County Housing Working Group:

- FREED Center for Independent Living
- Nevada County Aging & Disability Resource Connection
- Sierra Roots
- No Place to Go Project
- Hospitality House
- NC Home Path
- Habitat 4 Humanity
- The CoHousing Co.
- Sol Learning

Data & Findings

14

Stakeholder Engagement – Key Takeaways

Excitement and encouragement for something viable and beneficial to move forward with the property (adaptive re-use of the building and site)

Concern around neighborhood opposition, legal actions, and political initiatives

Concerns around inflation, increased cost of materials and cost of building

Concern around lead, asbestos, and overall condition of the building

Concern around negative energy from the tragic 2001 shootings

Understanding that prolonged vacancies create blight and hinder public safety and economic vitality

Opportunity to address traffic safety at Lewis Rd. intersection

Exploration to create pedestrian path from HEW Site to Nevada Street

Possibility of a police annex station to create a sense of safety and order

Exploration around a trail system or emergency access across Deer Creek connecting to Boulder St.

Recognition that housing is a long-term documented need with broad social and economic impacts

Multifamily, townhomes, apartments and rentals are harder to find than single family homes

Non-profits and businesses of all sizes experience housing related hiring and employment impacts

Housing for marginalized populations, especially for younger folk and artists to maintain City's diversity and vibrancy, is an ongoing need.

Entry level homes are almost non-existent, and attract heavy competition from investors and "out-of-towners"

Workforce housing continues to trouble local businesses

Potential for a 'model' mixed-use type of development

Potential to house victims of domestic violence and trafficking

Opportunity to create work-live tech housing or co-working space

Data & Findings

15

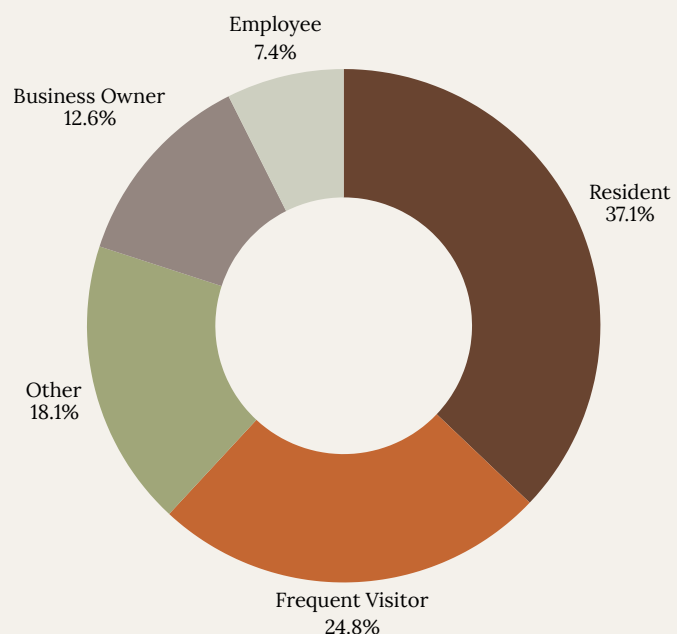
COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY PROCESS, DATA & RESULTS

The Community Needs Assessment Survey was launched on August 4th, 2025. The survey was announced through local media outlets, social media (IG & FB) and via the HEW Renew website, www.hewrenew.com. The survey consisted of six open ended questions allowing long-format responses, including demographic questions in order to discern the make-up of survey respondents. As of October 21, 2025 the survey had received 272 unique responses, these responses formed the bulk of data utilized in the focus groups. Analysis of each survey question included the tagging and coding of key words within every written entry in order to distill down common themes.

Demographics

In order to understand who was taking the Community Needs Assessment Survey, a number of demographic questions were asked. Given that the population of people who identify with Nevada City as their community have different relationships to the city, the first survey question was asked to help discern survey respondents' connection to Nevada City.

Figure 1.
"I am a _____ in Nevada City"
Survey Response



Data & Findings

16

Demographics

Respondents were given the option to choose more than one response, as well as the opportunity to write-in more specific context, providing more insight into those who responded "Other" or "Frequent Visitor".

Figure 2.
"I am an 'Other' in Nevada City"
Survey Responses

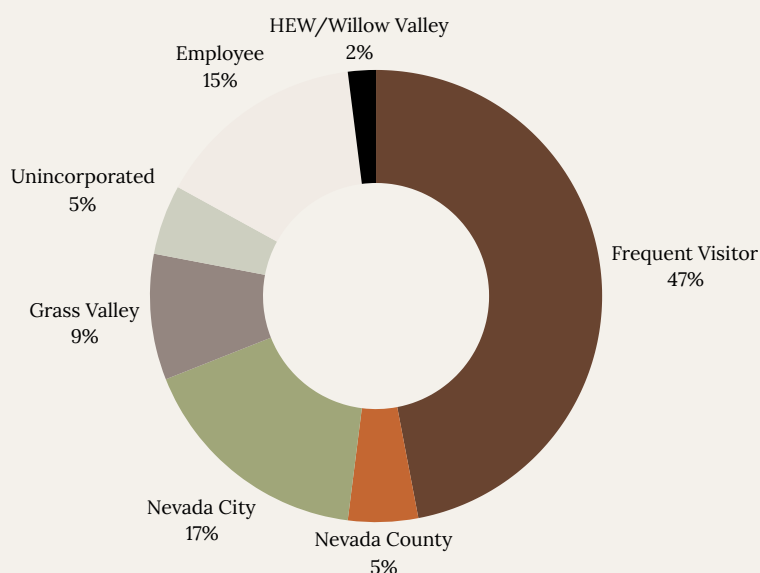
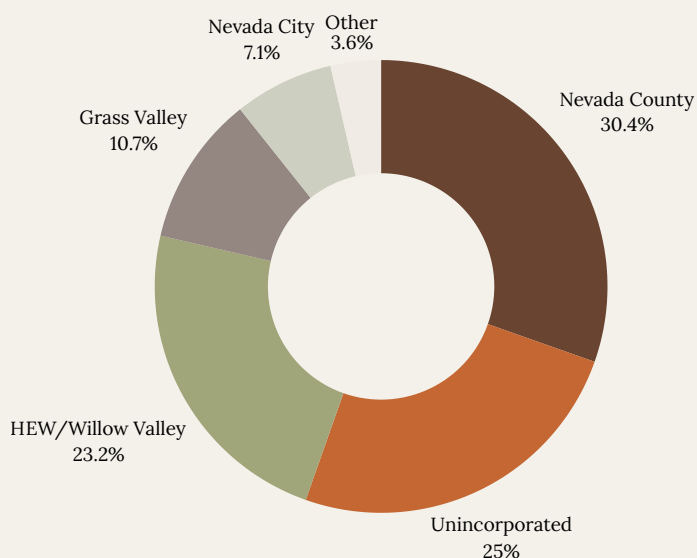


Figure 3.
"I am a 'Frequent Visitor' in Nevada City"
Survey Responses

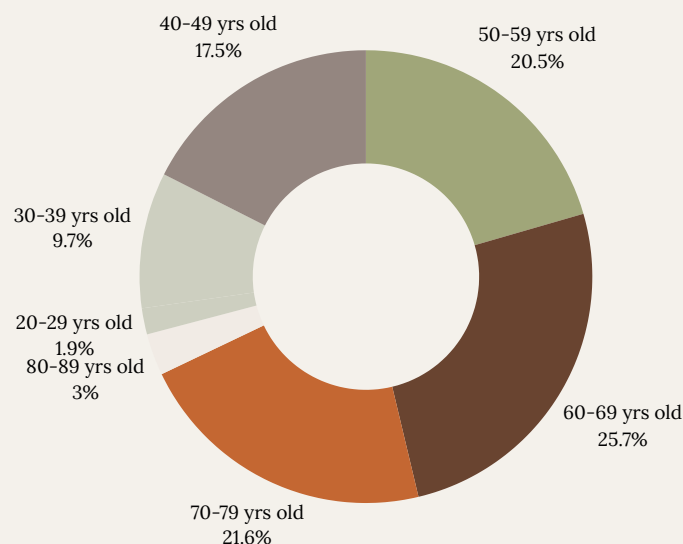
Data & Findings

17

Demographics

In addition to identifying each respondent's relationship to Nevada City, standard demographic information was collected in order to distinguish the make-up of survey respondents, and whether it was representative of the population of Nevada City. It was also important to discern the source of input being gathered and therefore whose interests were being addressed through this process.

Figure 4.
Age Demographic
Survey Responses



Reflective of census data for Nevada City, 49% of survey respondents were over 60 years in age and 55% of respondents have an average annual household income of over \$75,000.

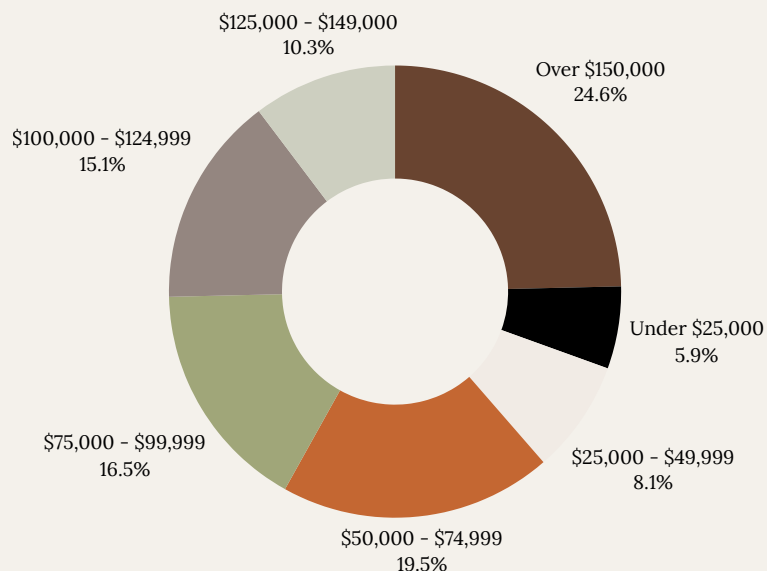


Figure 5.
Average Annual Household
Income Demographic per
Survey Responses

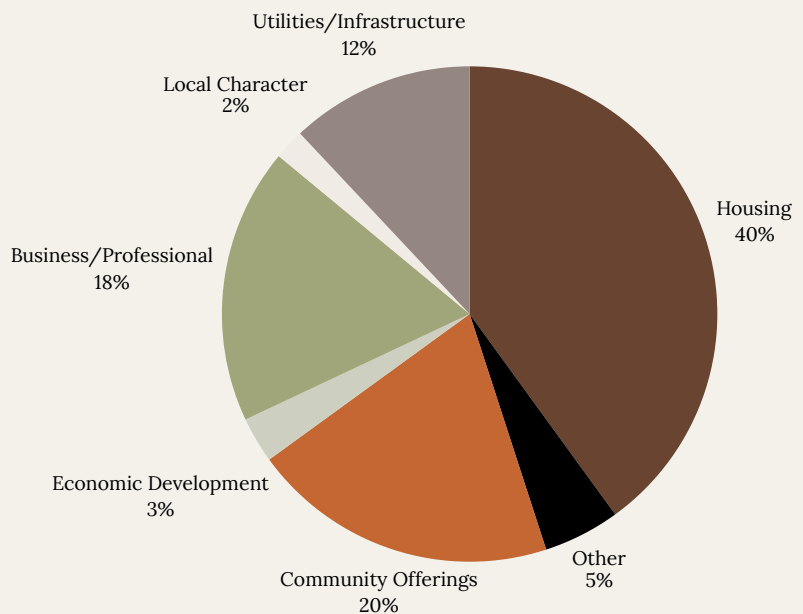
Data & Findings

18

Needs – Nevada City

The next survey question aimed to identify what people feel are current unmet needs within the community. It asked, “What are the top (three) amenities, services, or unmet needs you feel are lacking in our community?” Making sure that underlying needs are recognized is the most effective and appropriate way to steer any proposal towards offering potential solutions.

Figure 6.
Top 3 Unmet Needs
in the Community
Survey Responses



Examples of “Housing” Responses Include:

- “Workforce housing, will facilitate the natural healthy growth of Nevada City, retirement housing will open up the door for families in need of housing with the elder, moving out of large houses and into beautiful, small simple housing in a short distance to amenities”
- “Mid range housing (condos/apartments) for those of us who don’t qualify for low income, but cannot afford a home. The apartment scene is GRIM! Honestly cannot think of three. This has been the biggest challenge.”

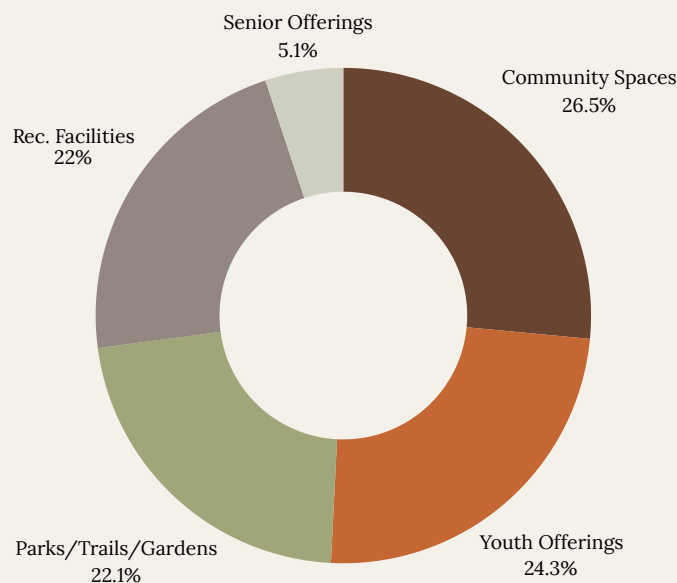
Data & Findings

19

Needs – Nevada City

To further determine what “community offerings” needs surfaced for the city those comments were analyzed to find:

Figure 7.
Top 3 Unmet “Community Offerings” Needs in the Community Survey Responses



Examples of “Community Offerings” responses include:

- “Youth programs, music education, recreation facilities”
- “Childrens/Family Indoor engagement/activity center, Community Recreation Center, Senior Services?”
- “Easier and more abundant water access, more parks, community hang out spots (particularly kid and weather friendly)”
- “A dog park, recreation facilities such as pickleball, soccer field”
- “Senior Living / Lifestyle Resources”
- “Free community meeting space for volunteer organizations, free/low cost adult education learning center, emergency shelter during evacuations.”
- “Food Forest/community gardens/arboretum
- “community center, recreation facilities, ev charging”
- “More parks and open space, access to natural gas, walkway along Deer Creek

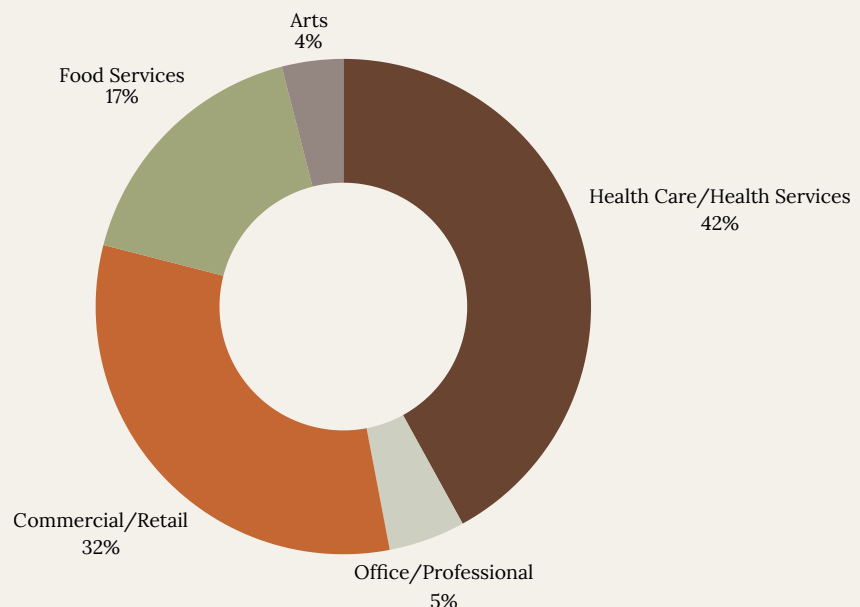
Data & Findings

20

Needs – Nevada City

To better grasp what “business/professional” needs surfaced for the city those comments were further broken down and analyzed to find:

Figure 8.
Top 3 Unmet
“Business/Professional”
Needs in the Community
Survey Responses



Examples of “Business/Professional” responses include:

- “1. local retail- I want to be able to buy locally for my needs and often have to drive or buy online. prefer local business to supply me. 2- more doctors, we don't have enough. months to get an appointment, also- one oncologist, one neurologist, one cardiologist for the whole place? 3. artist workspace- if we could support local art biz, that would add so much”
- “Mental Health Hospital. Drug rehabilitation Business development center. Job Training”
- “More Primary Care and Specialist Physicians are needed. Family restaurants.”
- “My dream would be to bring together offices providing services to help with sustainable farming; physical healthcare; mental healthcare; nutrition; housing resources; as we shift through these times where community alliance is critical for our future.”
- “Mental Health Facility, Private industry which provides skills and jobs, Court House.”

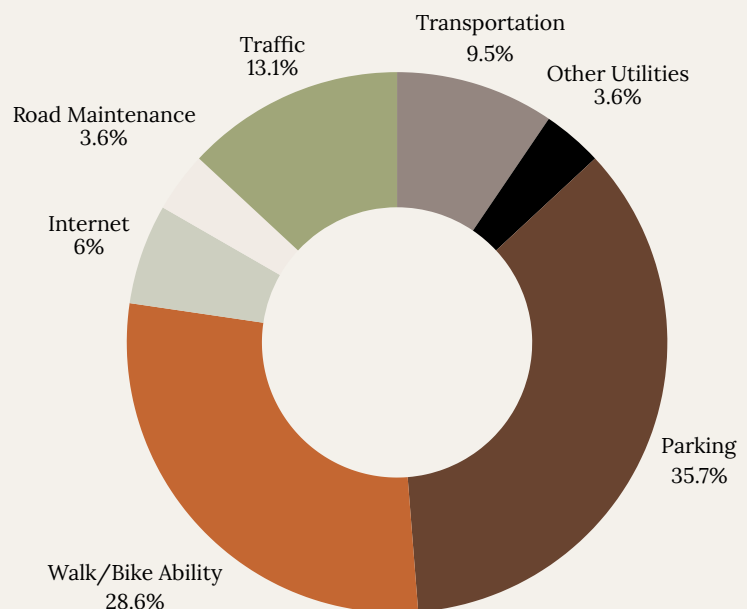
Data & Findings

21

Needs – Nevada City

To further discover what “utilities/infrastructure” needs surfaced for the city those comments were analyzed to find:

Figure 9.
Top 3 Unmet
“Utilities/Infrastructure”
Needs in the Community
Survey Responses



Examples of “Utilities/Infrastructure” responses include:

- “Walkability, downtown parking, more fire safety”
- “sidewalk repair and upkeep, parking”
- “Underground utilities, surface water mitigation and traffic speed control on local streets”
- “Traffic control, pedestrian infrastructure, neighborhood park plan”
- “Pedestrian and biking access.”
- “Safer walking/bike lanes along county roads, affordable housing, ADA accessible downtown /walking/recreation in Nevada City”

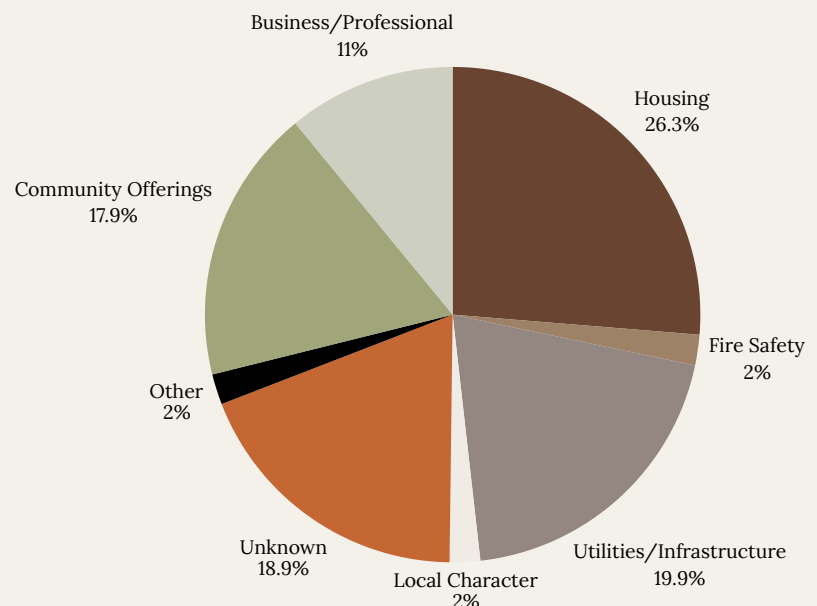
Data & Findings

22

Needs – Willow Valley Neighborhood

The HEW site sits within the Willow Valley neighborhood and every neighborhood is unique unto itself. Understanding that the general needs of Nevada City are different than those in each neighborhood, a question specific to the needs of the Willow Valley neighborhood was appropriate. It asked, “What are the top (three) amenities, services, or unmet needs you feel are lacking in the Willow Valley neighborhood?” Knowing that not all survey respondents are familiar with every neighborhood, this question still provided the opportunity to differentiate this particular neighborhood and any needs it may have, from those of Nevada City as a whole.

Figure 10.
Top 3 Unmet Needs in the
Willow Valley Neighborhood
Survey Responses



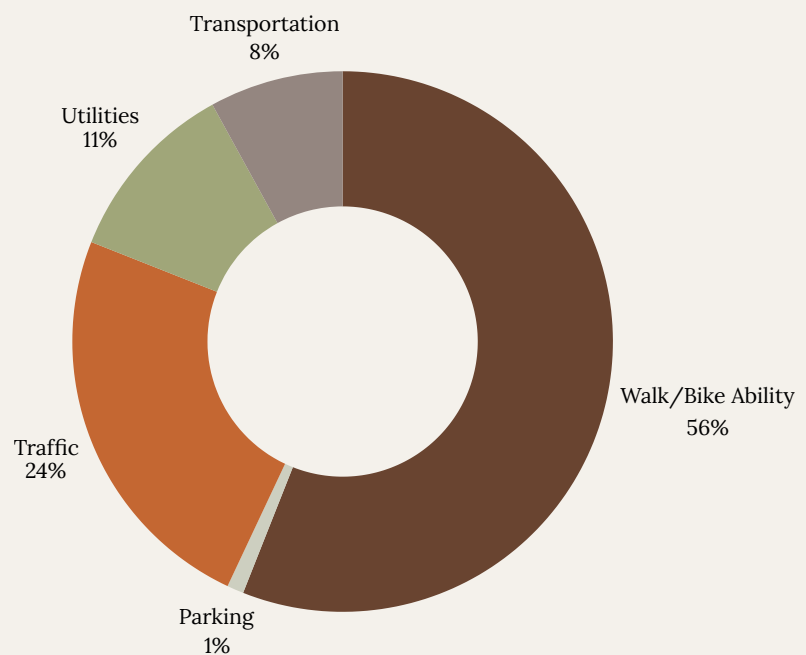
Examples of “Housing” Responses Include:

- “Housing for employees that work in Nevada City. Condos would be more affordable than single housing.”
- “secure housing or condos”
- “Senior apts. Community center. Smaller family homes”
- “Affordable Housing”
- “Low or moderately priced residential rentals! Senior living. Sidewalks. Community garden”
- “Single occupancy housing, affordable housing, apartments”

Needs – Willow Valley Neighborhood

To further understand what “utilities/infrastructure” needs surfaced in the neighborhood those comments were analyzed to find:

Figure 11.
Top 3 Unmet
“Utilities/Infrastructure”
Needs in Willow Valley
Neighborhood Survey
Responses



Examples of “Utilities/Infrastructure” responses include:

- Need better ways for traffic control. Too many speeders. No sidewalks...possibly speed bumps there too.”
- “Bike lanes and safe walking paths”
- “City sewer and water, bike usable shoulders on the road”
- “Walk ability, more fire safety, underground power lines”
- “internet services, access to public & nation-wide transportation”

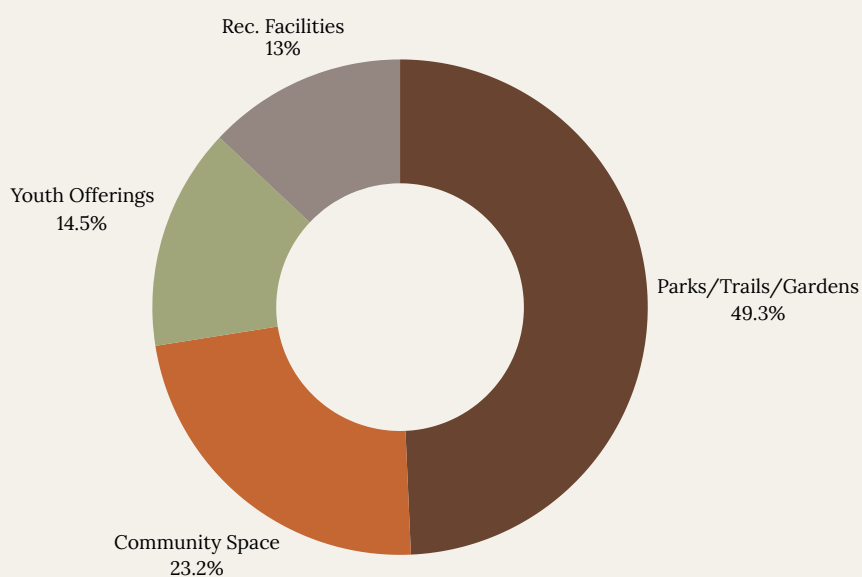
Data & Findings

24

Needs – Willow Valley Neighborhood

To distinguish further what "community offerings" needs surfaced in the neighborhood those comments were analyzed to find:

Figure 12.
Top 3 Unmet "Community Offerings" Needs in the Willow Valley Neighborhood Survey Responses



Examples of "Community Offerings" responses include:

- "Gathering spaces. Social activity opportunities"
- "Public access to Deer Creek and outdoor recreation areas"
- "Outdoor activities... more walking paths ... perhaps park like options?"
- "Park for children and walking trails"
- "Things for teens to do."
- "Public communal space for gathering/ working/ connecting"

Data & Findings

25

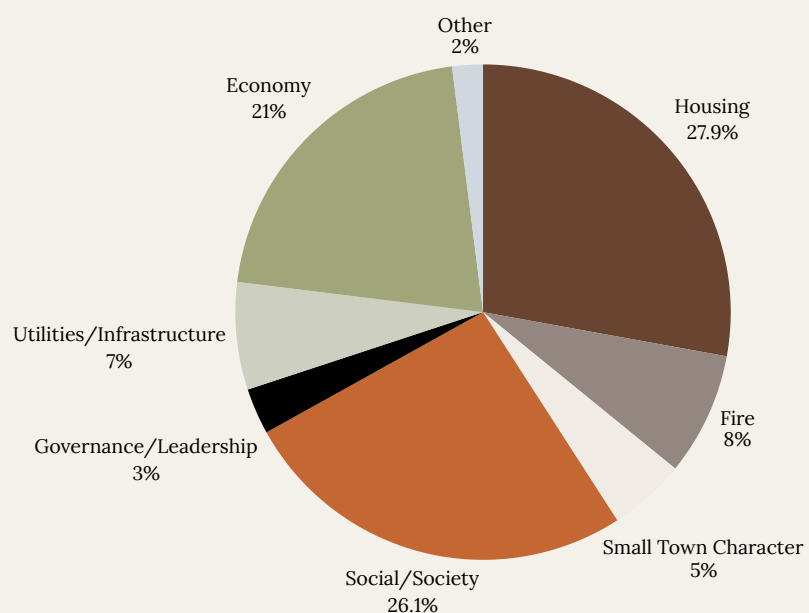
Needs – Nevada City & Willow Valley Neighborhood

The greatest unmet need expressed for both Nevada City and the Willow Valley neighborhood was housing. There is a notable sub-focus on the needs for community spaces for both youth and senior populations. A third of responses mentioned housing in a mixed-use context, with suggestions of housing with community space, green space, and/or small local business. Survey responses highlight a desire for greater walk and bike-ability as well as for additional parking opportunities.

Challenges

In identifying challenges the community faces, an opportunity is created to provide an alternate framework for values to emerge that may not be immediately apparent otherwise. By adjusting the orientation of inquiry the survey seeks to arrive at unique or unexpected insights.

Figure 13.
Biggest “Challenge”
People of Nevada City
Face Survey Responses



Data & Findings

26

Challenges

Below are examples of comments representative of each of the most significant “Challenges”

Examples of “Housing” responses included:

- “Affordable housing , especially for the senior community.
- affordable housing for vital workers (e.g., teachers, first responders, farm workers, shopkeepers and their staff, healthcare workers, etc.)”
- “Mid range housing for people who aren’t “low income” but still can’t afford a house”
- “High rents and lack of cheap and available spaces. High rents have driven out the people needed to maintain the buildings of Nevada City, notably.”
- “Affordable housing. Too many people with high income moving into the area buying up or renting homes at top price. Or worse, buying homes for airbnb.”

Within “Society/Social” many responses were individual words such as individualism, diversity, aging, capitalism, inclusivity. Other examples of “society/social” responses include:

- “balancing the desire for preserving history and adjusting to needed changes to provide for our community”
- “Homelessness, wildfire”
- “Getting over their NIMBY attitudes that make change and improvement in their community”
- “As the population ages, the lack of local resources and support for people living with dementia and their families.”
- “Communication and engaging with one another to solve many problems.”
- “Division of the community”

Examples of “Economy” comments include:

- “High cost of living, limited job opportunities”
- “Stifled economic development. The downtown has many empty storefronts.”
- “Seasonality of business, recessionary risk, locals not spending local”
- “Developing a sustainable economy other than tourism”
- “Keeping it rural and maintaining a welcoming tourism feel.”
- “Rising costs driving people out of the community”

Examples of “Infrastructure/Utilities” comments include:

- “High cost of living, limited job opportunities”
- “Developing a sustainable economy other than tourism”

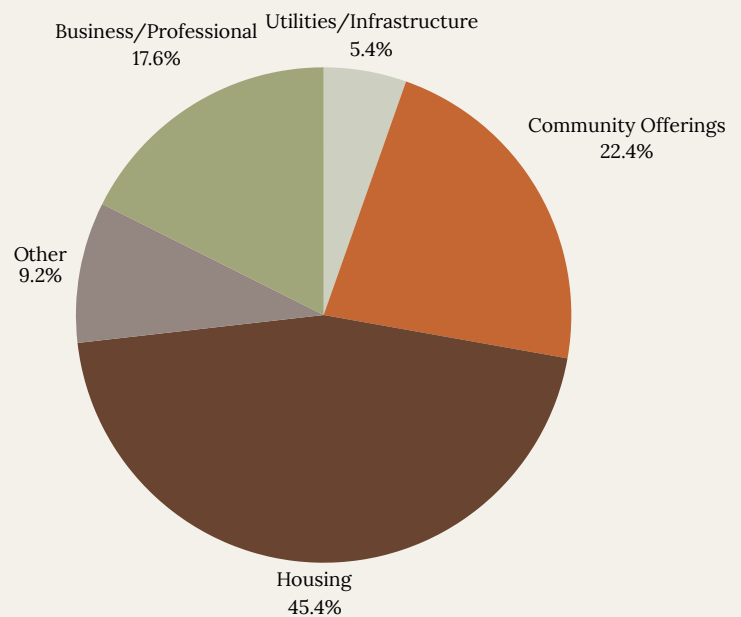
Data & Findings

27

Solutions

The survey then moved from needs and challenges to thinking about how the HEW site could potentially be part of the solution by asking, “How do you think the historic HEW complex could provide potential solutions for the Nevada City Community?”

Figure 14.
How Historic
HEW Complex Could
Provide “Solutions”
Survey Responses



Examples of “Housing” responses include:

- “By providing varied housing options to create neighborhoods of diverse community members”
- “Convert to mixed use affordable housing and art studios, cooperative”
- “We’d love to see a mixed housing development in a peaceful green setting that included lower income studios to family dwellings for living and community space similar to co-housing.”
- “Turn it into affordable efficiencies, 1, & 2 bedroom apartments. Rentals!”
- “by creating a lovely and loving community housing area”
- “I’d love to see sr apartments or condos for the aging population and smaller housing m s for first time buyers. I don’t want homes that can be purchased by speculative out of town buyers who Airbnb properties which raise the cost of housing for locals. I’d ask that the hew property put a restriction on this type of agreement”
- “affordable housing for workforce”

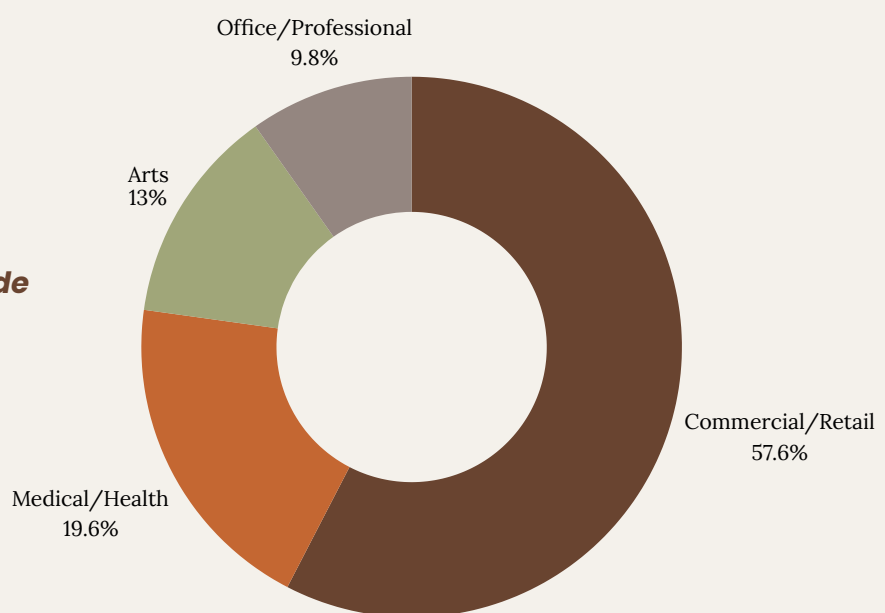
Data & Findings

28

Solutions

To further explore what “business/professional” potential solutions emerged those comments were analyzed to find:

Figure 15.
How Historic
HEW Complex Could Provide
“Business/Professional”
Solutions Survey
Responses



Examples of “Business/Professional” responses include:

- “Medical and Holistic Health Options, urgent care, educational classrooms, office spaces for Alternative practitioners public meeting rooms , public square, & parks.”
- “provide local market and services ie. restaurant, deli, medical clinic along with community housing.”
- “Artists Studios, artisan sellers, affordable spaces for classes and workshops.”
- “Localized multi business complex”
- “Grocery store. Except for SPD, there is no food available within reasonable walking or bicycling distance.”

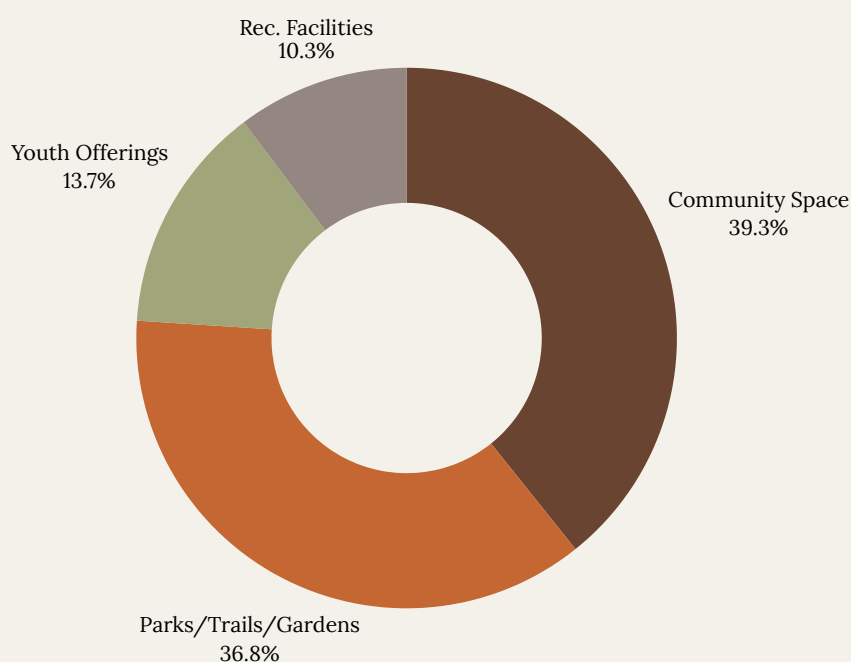
Data & Findings

29

Solutions

To better understand what “community offerings” potential solutions emerged those comments were analyzed to find:

Figure 16.
How Historic
HEW Complex Could
Provide “Community
Offerings”
Solutions Survey
Responses



Examples of “Community Offerings” responses include:

- “community Center for old and young.”
- “It would be nice if our teens had somewhere else to hang out and find enrichment. NEO is great, but for some in NC, it would be too far to get to.”
- “Make it into a neighborhood park. That’d bring the neighbors out of their personal bubbles and they could interact and build neighborhood bonds”
- “I see it as a potential community center that can offer classes, community connection and space for hosting local events. A better focus on young families will serve the future of Nevada City as this population has a long term investment in the health and well being of the city.”
- “A park or public space”
- “Localized multi business complex”

Data & Findings

30

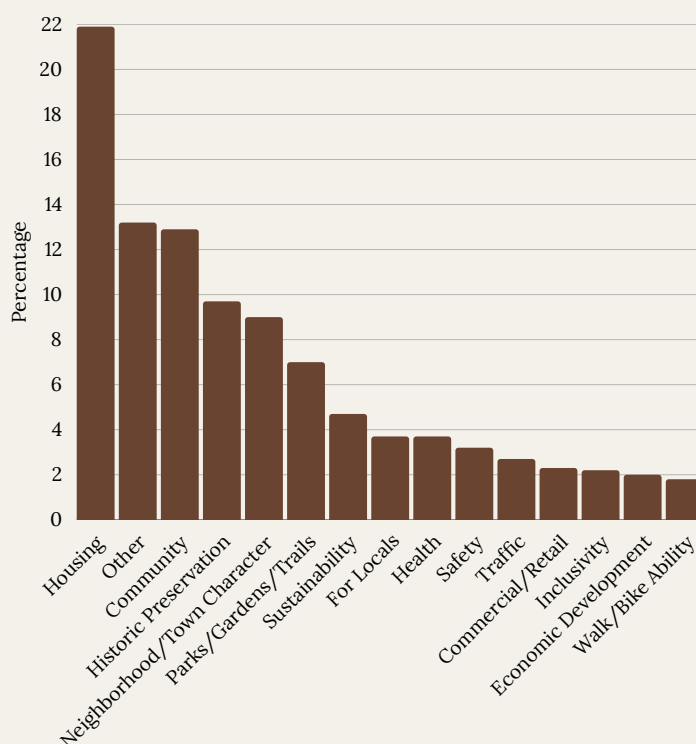
Values

"What values or characteristics should this project prioritize to best serve the community?" was asked to explore what values and characteristics to incorporate within this project. This question sought to discover the ideals and standards representative of the community's ethos. These are important considerations when adopting design principles.

Figure 17.
What Values/Characteristics
this project should prioritize
Survey Responses

Examples of Responses Include:

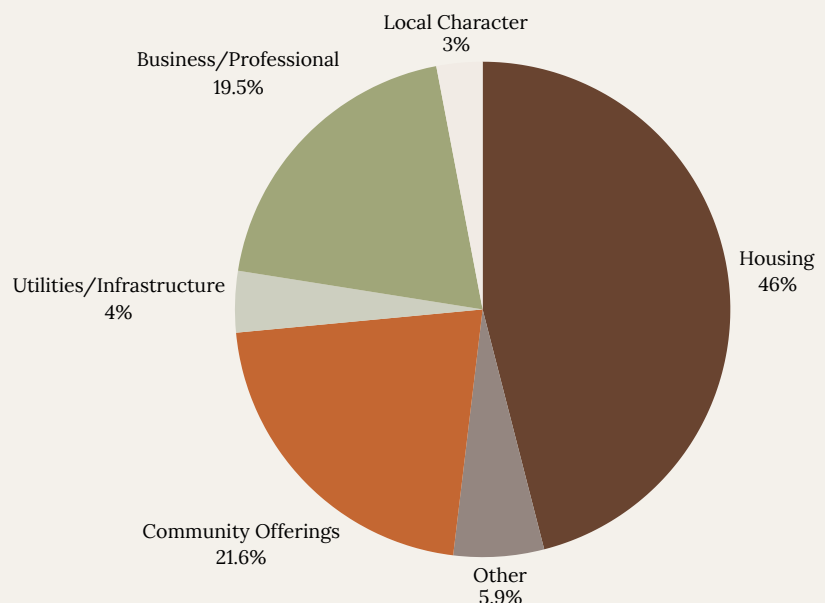
- "Accessibility, Inclusivity, Equity, Sustainability, Community"
- "Environmentally conscious, artistically driven, restored with local history & charm in mind"
- "Residents quality of life, environment, current culture of the town"
- "The project should incorporate the small town characteristic of Nevada City. It should be beautiful, treed, with beautiful strolling paths through it and provided housing for young to old people."
- "prioritize preserving the historical charm of the buildings while updating them for Safety"
- "Green spaces, Community space for residents and the neighborhood, honor the history of the building, be an example of green building and firewise Community."
- "Be alert to Traffic impacts and add green spaces or pocket parks"
- "Housing affordable to the low to middle income working class."



Realistic Visions

The survey then tried to encourage a more grounded approach to thinking by asking, “What is your most realistic vision for the HEW property?” Previous survey queries encouraged respondents to think creatively, while this question asked respondents to temper previous answers with a sense of ‘realistic’ constraint and thereby provide an opportunity to differentiate, or not, from previous responses.

Figure 18.
Most Realistic “Vision”
for the HEW Property
Survey Responses



Examples of “Housing” responses include:

- “A senior or young parent living complex”
- “To have a multi use rental complex. From studios to 2–3 bedrooms and maybe even loft space. Not low income, but affordable so that we can keep locals, artists, etc. in the community. People come here for the history and I think it would be nice to not see this place completely gutted and left soulless and boring. To house people while maintaining a connection to the building (and lands) history would be nice to see.”
- “Single-family homes on the 7.5 acre parcel, with half acre lots.”
- “Housing. Lots of options – studio, one / two / three bedroom. Animal friendly!”
- “housing with gathering spaces shared”
- “Single family homes, affordable apartments, social services and tiny homes.”

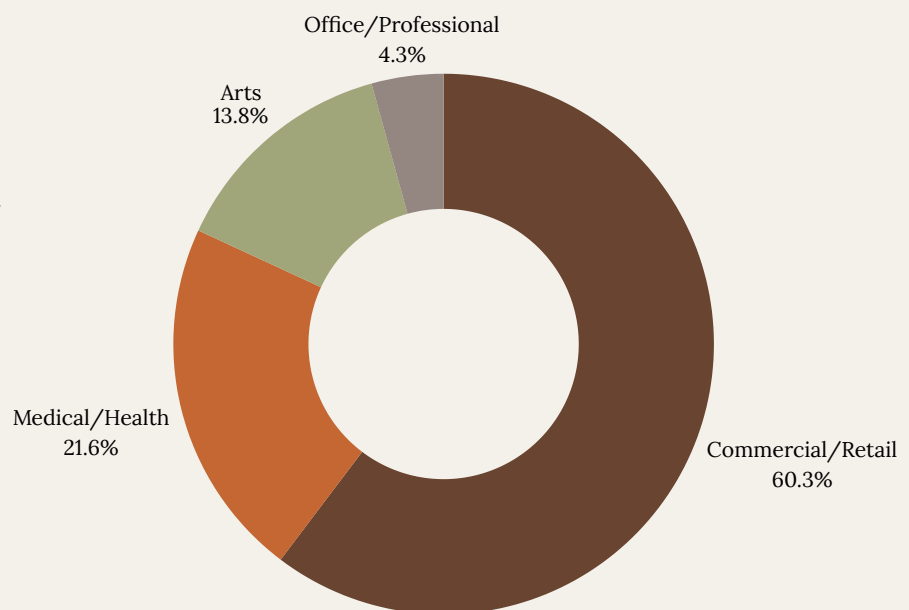
Data & Findings

32

Realistic Visions

To further explore what “business/professional” potential solutions emerged those comments were analyzed to find:

Figure 19.
Most Realistic
“Business/Professional”
Vision for the HEW
Property Survey
Responses



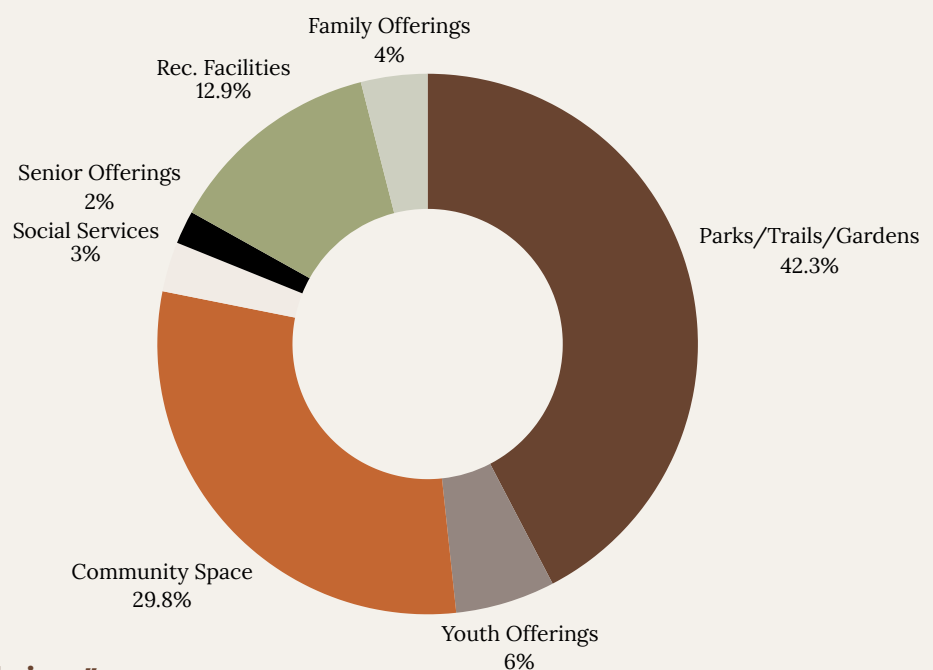
Examples of “Business/Professional” responses include:

- “Combination affordable hotel, hostel, restaurant(s), community and sports center, and public access to Deer Creek.”
- “A multi use creative space for the arts and education”
- “business/office space ground level with apartments up top; ideally with a cafe or something similar to bring in community; a small visitors center/museum to chronicle the history of the place”
- “An artistic hub could house artists and include possible gallery space / retail space? Education center”
- “Restaurants, theater/concert venue, brewery, smoke shop, boutiques, grocery on bottom floor and housing for veterans, students, nurses and seniors on the upper floors.
- “another medical practice or facility – kaiser permanente?!”

Realistic Visions

To further understand what realistic “community offerings” visions arose those comments were analyzed to find:

Figure 20.
Most Realistic
“Community Offerings”
Vision for the HEW
Property Survey
Responses



Examples of “Community Offerings” responses include:

- “park or recreation area”
- “A community-based Drop in Center providing resources to bring people together to create a sustainable future.”
- “Creekfront access for all, public park”
- “a park like atmosphere with humans of all ages and demographics, enjoying its beauty, getting us outside in nature and building what makes this city one of a kind, community”
- “A place for holistic support for the residents of NC. Coaching, Physical therapy or other movement classes. Maybe a lounge and enrichment classrooms for teens, maybe a pool or other activities that boost health and mobility, a cafeteria or farm to fork classes. Many aging residents face mobility issues, which means they can't stay independently in their homes, especially the higher altitudes. A place where they can get the support they need would be amazing.”

Data & Findings

34

FOCUS GROUPS – DATA & FINDINGS

Focus groups are important tools for qualitatively measuring information. They offer participants unique opportunities to have in-person conversations and perspective taking, while providing important insight into collective opinions and shared meanings.

HEW Renew hosted two rounds of focus groups in Phase 1 (Session 1.1 in November: Data Review and Land-Use Directions; Session 1.2 in December: Values, Challenges & Constraints Evaluation.) One hour focus group sessions were held in the historic HEW building. Participation in focus groups was encouraged throughout stakeholder engagement, garnered through a question on the Community Needs Assessment Survey, through the HEW Renew email newsletter as well as a neighborhood mailer that was delivered to the HEW/Willow Valley neighborhood. Each focus group involved a diversity of participants creating balanced representation across demographics and stakeholder groups. 59 people participated in Phase 1 Focus Groups.

Data & Findings

35

Focus Group Sessions 1.1 - November

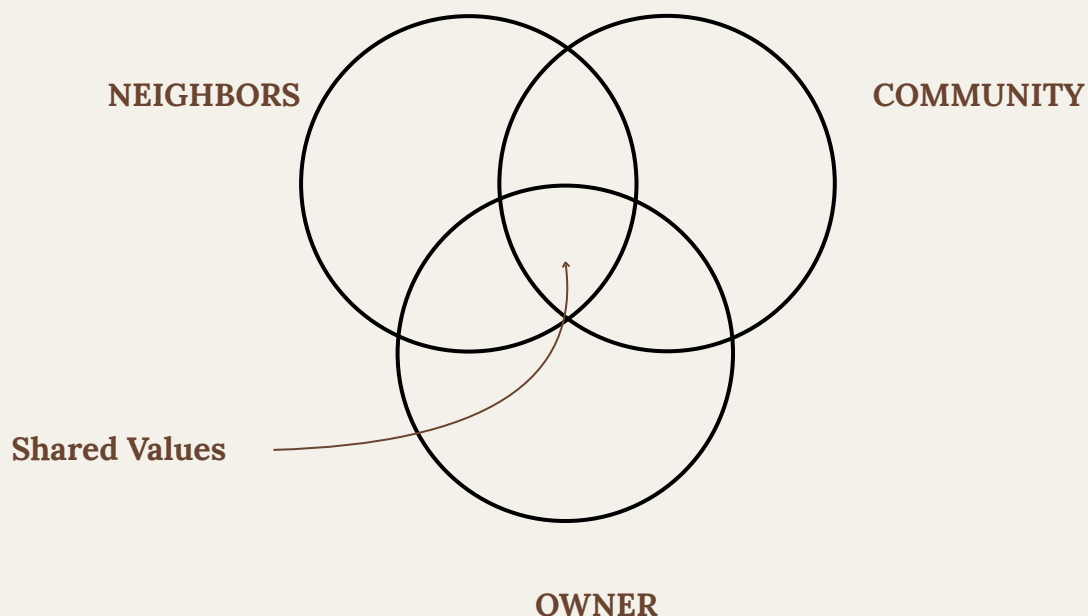
In Session 1.1, participants reviewed community needs assessment data, including demographics and questions around unmet needs and potential uses. Initial land-use directions were explored through facilitated discussions and breakout activities. Attendance was robust across sessions with attendees sharing personal motivations for participation—such as long-term awareness of the site's vacancy, a desire for thoughtful redevelopment, and concerns about the future and potential changes. Discussions fostered mutual awareness around development impacts, which underscored a collective desire for solutions that respect the site's history, and neighborhood compatibility while addressing practical realities like fire risks and economic viability. Differences in opinions emerged regarding “who” the project (should/would) serve, and individuals concerned with neighborhood impacts versus those seeking community benefits. These differences were evident in conversations around key topics such as traffic, density, and the appropriateness of businesses or other potentially higher impact public uses. Spurred by the community needs assessment data, prominent themes arose around the need for affordable housing, community spaces, and access to green spaces. These themes led to explorations of compatible uses like mixed residential and adaptive re-use; inclusive solutions that address diverse needs. An overarching consideration evident from the focus groups was on balanced redevelopment and the need to proceed mindfully with both impacts and opportunities.

Data & Findings

36

Focus Group Sessions 1.2 – December

In session 1.2, participants reviewed community needs assessment data on the greatest challenges facing the people of Nevada City, and values and characteristics the HEW Renew project should prioritize. Feedback was captured through a series of interactive exercises designed to explore, clarify, and evaluate shared values: participants first individually prioritized a list of 30 values (derived from prior surveys and focus groups) on worksheets, rating them from "not important" to "very important" and attributing them to stakeholders (owners, neighbors, or community), then collaboratively mapped these onto Venn diagrams to highlight overlaps and distinctions. This further allowed participants to explore common ideals and learn where shared values may already exist between stakeholder groups (owner, neighbors, community). Discussions cited a lack of insight regarding the owner and his motives for revitalizing the site. Additionally participants noted a larger community-wide challenge of maintaining a small town feel while sustaining a vibrant economy; preserving the area's value while understanding the need for smart, responsible growth.



Data & Findings

37

Focus Groups – Highlights

- *Focus Group participants echoed the needs and concerns that were seen in the Community Needs Assessment Survey responses. Housing was understood and accepted as the greatest community need. The prospect of housing also spurred a number of debates primarily amongst those who live in the Willow Valley neighborhood regarding “who” would potentially be housed. “Who” being a result of the type and affordability of any prospective housing product.*
 - *Housing needs focused on affordability and types, including workforce options with rent-to-own or nonprofit management, intergenerational setups, and moderate-density townhomes or multi-family units to address entry-level shortages.*
 - *Debates centered on differing priorities—some Willow Valley/Nevada St. neighbors favoring low density versus broader calls for workforce housing.*
 - *Housing discussions revealed questions about solving problems for locals versus outsiders, and who benefits—workforce families, seniors, or other vulnerable populations?*
- *In almost every Focus Group, the term “intergenerational” arose in participants’ conversations. This brought to light a growing desire for housing and community spaces that encourage cross generational interactions, especially between youth and senior populations. Specific ideas included intergenerational housing (e.g., seniors near youth facilities) and community spaces for events, seen as compatible ways to solve multiple unmet needs like recreation and social connection.*
- *A strong push for mixed-use development emerged, integrating housing with “third-spaces” like parks, trails, and gathering areas to combat isolation; participant notes stressed compatibility, such as multi-family groupings with studios for singles and communal amenities for families.*

Data & Findings

38

Focus Groups – Highlights

- *Neighbors repeatedly emphasized traffic as the top issue to overcome, with some participants noting its underemphasis in survey results and the potential for any project to exacerbate existing issues on Willow Valley Road. Other participants differed on traffic fears, with some noting other projects, like Cashin's Field, where such fears never manifested.*
 - *The safety of Willow Valley Rd between Lewis Rd. and Nevada St. was a specific concern of those living in the immediate neighborhood, particularly regarding visibility (blind curve) and speed.*
 - *Opportunities to make Willow Valley Rd. more cyclist and pedestrian friendly were of notable interest, as well as ideas like shuttles or low-traffic models (e.g., senior housing with minimal driving) to mitigate impacts from any increase in residents or visitors.*
- *Fire safety was a recurring theme with evacuation routes and planning being the top concerns.*
- *When thinking about personal and community values, participants leaned into the importance of the small town charm and character of Nevada City.*
- *Other values of notable importance were historical preservation, safety (fire, road and community), and the need to avoid vacancy and blight (the Alpha Building in Nevada City as the primary example in people's minds).*

Determinations

39

LAND-USE DIRECTIONS

Based on the robust community input gathered through Phase 1—spanning focus groups, stakeholder engagements, and the community needs assessment survey—the clearest path forward centers on revitalizing the HEW site as a housing-led development with potential for thoughtfully integrating community offerings and selective business or professional uses to meet the community’s evolving needs.

There is a consistent narrative in the data: housing as the paramount unmet need, intertwined with desires for inclusive spaces that enhance connection and safety. This direction is reflective of a shared desire to address the housing crisis through intergenerational, mixed-income, and varied housing products that support working residents, families, young adults and seniors alike. Data highlights the imperative to address neighborhood safety concerns (e.g. traffic and fire), walk and bike-ability and compatible design aesthetics. At the heart of the data is a commitment to “place”—ensuring neighborhood compatibility, historic preservation, and ecological sensitivity. These initial insights—rooted in shared values of inclusivity, connection, and community-resiliency—set the stage for Phase 2, where general land-use directions will be refined into the most compatible concepts that align viability with community aspirations.

Determinations

40

INFORMING DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The information gathered during Phase I of the HEW Renew Process – aggregated from the Community Needs Assessment Survey and further captured and refined in the December 2025 focus group discussions and activities – form the foundational building blocks for developing a cohesive set of design guidelines or principles. Raw insights and themes like preservation of local character and place, safety, traffic, inclusivity, collaboration, viability and ecologically sensitive design will be integrated with local and regional frameworks such as Nevada City's 1995 Design Guidelines (revised 2015) and Eastern/Western Nevada County Design Guidelines, as well as best practices in land-use planning and urban design, such as the Sierra Business Council's Planning for Prosperity, resulting in a synthesized set of HEW Renew Guiding Principles. These principles will guide design decisions and will be used to evaluate future concepts and models ensuring alignment with community aspirations for the HEW site's revitalization.

Preserve Community Character & Sense of Place

Prioritize decisions that maintain small-town charm, rural tranquility and neighborhood compatibility through place-sensitive design that honors historic preservation and local cultural heritage.

Foster Community Connection & Inclusivity

Create spaces that promote community benefit and a sense of belonging. Emphasize care for marginalized or vulnerable groups (youth, seniors, artists, nonprofits, workforce) and provide appropriate housing and services.

“The benefits of a well designed and implemented community planning process are numerous.”

Sierra Business Council
“Planning for Prosperity: Building Successful Communities in the Sierra Nevada”

Ensure Viability & Vibrancy

Assure financial and market viability alongside cultural vibrancy and economic resilience. Ensure designs are innovative, reflect stakeholder support and create lasting value.

Determinations

41

INFORMING DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Prioritize Safety & Mitigate Impacts

Address fire and neighborhood safety by avoiding vacancy and blight and incorporating fire-safe features to alleviate risks. Mitigate impacts like traffic, light, sound. Explore access to Nevada Street thereby enhancing pedestrian/bike safety to protect residents.

Foster Collaboration & Partnership

Commit to stewardship, accountability, and clear communication. Encourage ongoing dialogue, mutual respect, and partnerships among owners, neighbors, and the community to refine concepts, ensuring the project reflects shared values and leads to a viable application for development.

Promote Sustainability & Environmental Sensitivity

Adopt ecologically friendly building practices and low-impact designs. Encourage human-nature connections through trails, green spaces, native landscaping and preserving habitat.

Integrate Inclusive Housing

Focus on developing housing that is reflective of the diverse elements found within the community. Provide for a diversity of needs including intergenerational, mixed-income, and a variety of unit types, thereby creating inclusive hubs that strengthen social fabric.

Driving Decision Making

42

HOW PHASE 1 INFORMS FUTURE PHASES AND NEXT STEPS FOR PHASE 2

Phase 1 successfully gathered a substantial and representative body of data from over 300 participants, reflecting a broad cross-section of Nevada City's voices through surveys, focus groups discussions, and stakeholder engagements. This input vividly captures community needs such as affordable housing and community gathering places, alongside challenges like traffic, wildfire, and economic instability. It also informed core values to guide the approach in ways that provide safe, adaptive, and beautiful solutions.

Building on this foundation, Phase 2 advances to formulation and selection. Community input will continue through stakeholder engagement and focus group participation. Discussions will focus on critical design elements, their constraints, and trade-offs. This exploration will help to develop generic schemes and land-use options. This collaborative dialogue will refine ideas into three viable concepts that best align with community aspirations. From these three concepts a single concept will be selected for further pursuit.



Phase 2
Formulate & Select

Listen & Explore Conclusion

43

Phase 1 of the HEW Renew community-inspired design process marks a pivotal milestone in reimagining the historic HEW complex—a site that has stood as a silent landmark in Nevada City for nearly two decades. Through inclusive outreach, the "Listen & Explore" phase captured a diverse array of voices from immediate neighbors, local stakeholders, and the greater community. This robust input, gathered via stakeholder meetings, a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Survey, and dynamic focus groups collected data on community needs, challenges, values and potential solutions.

Key findings identified a shared vision: revitalizing the site with housing as the cornerstone, interwoven with community amenities and the potential for selective professional uses to foster intergenerational inclusivity and mixed-income accessibility. The data underscores a consensus on values—emphasis on preserving a sense of place, creating connected and inclusive spaces, and a sensitivity to ecology and environment. Also emphasized is the support for continuing a community dialogue based in collaboration, communication and mutual respect that will inform the development of guiding design principles.

This phase's success demonstrates the power of community-driven dialogue, where robust data from surveys and focus groups not only validates regional challenges—like a 42% housing cost burden, an aging population (31.6% over 65), economic fragility in tourism-dependent sectors, and high fire severity zones—but also charts a path toward equitable solutions with the HEW site emerging as a catalyst for inclusivity, sustainability and vitality.

Moving into Phase 2: "Formulate & Select," concepts will be generated by exploring design elements, constraints, and trade-offs, and options will be refined that result from these insights. Continued participation is invited in upcoming phases to co-create a transformative reality that enhances quality of life, strengthens social connections, and builds resilience for generations to come. Collectively, this vacant landmark can become a thriving community asset.

References

44

Population

- [Census Reporter](#)
- [World Population Review](#)
- [Data USA](#)

Economy

- [World Population Review](#)
- [Data USA](#)
- [California Employee Development Dept.](#)

Housing

- [Zillow](#)

Parking & Transportation

- [Data USA](#)

Crime

- [Nextdoor](#)
- [Neighborhood Scout](#)

Health and Well-being Indicators

- [Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital](#)
- [Stacker](#)

Wildfire and Climate Impacts

- [Nevada County](#)

HEW RENEW
Phase 1 Findings Report
prepared by:

Maggie Philipsborn

Jonathan Collier
Usher & Sage Consulting

Brian Holloway
Holloway Land Co.