Libraries & Community Responsiveness
Community Profile: Shaler Township

Introduction
Libraries and Community Engagement

Across America, the role of libraries is changing. In today's digital age, where access to resources and information is literally at our fingertips, libraries are rethinking their roles and redefining their space in communities. Nationally, there have been several initiatives exploring what this new space might look like and, as it turns out, it doesn't look the same everywhere. The central lesson of these initiatives however, is consistent: To decide what role the library should play in a community, *ask the community— and engage them in the process.* This project, funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, aspires to enable libraries across Allegheny County to broaden their understanding of their communities and facilitate community-engaged service delivery.

The collection of literature on Community Engaged Libraries is broad, and offers several models and suggestions for libraries and communities on how to work together. The Harwood Institute states that libraries must "talk with community members to find out what they want for their community," the Aspen Institute highlights the need for institutional collaboration between libraries and other community organizations, and, in Canada, The Working Together project stresses the need to reevaluate traditional service planning models, and offers targeted guidance to increase community-directed service planning and delivery. This document is a collection of what was heard through that research and serves as a discussion guide to help librarians, staff, and other library stakeholders think about emerging opportunities for increased engagement.

Libraries must focus their efforts on discovering community aspirations and challenges through participatory practices and recognize that providing small-scale changes can provide tangible benefits that are just as significant as large-scale projects. Libraries can catalyze change in communities by spurring collaboration between community stakeholders. This project focused on researching communities by exploring individual and organizational aspirations in order to build upon community strengths to address pressing issues.

Tips from the Harwood Institute & the ALA:
Libraries Transforming Communities

The power of community engaged libraries was demonstrated by a 2014 project conducted by the American Library Association and the Harwood Institute called *Libraries Transforming Communities (LTC)*. LTC sought to develop strategies, tools, and guidance to help libraries initiate or deepen their community engagement practices.

They found that successful community engagement happens when libraries:

● Engage community members in decision-making
● Align programming to community need
● Develop partnerships and collaborations
● Facilitate community conversations & invite stakeholders
● Enable community members to take leadership roles in program development and facilitation
● Embed mechanisms for continual listening and engagement
● Include traditionally socially excluded populations

Community Engaged Libraries: Facilitate Community Conversations, Foster Local Leadership, Engage the Community in Decision-Making, Create Feedback Mechanisms, Recognize and Reach Out to the Excluded, Align Services to Needs, Collaborate with Community Partners

'

> **Discussion:**
> How do you see these strategies already happening in your library?

Bringing it Home: Shaler Township

Shaler Township has approximately 28,702 residents living in an area of 12.5 square miles. Shaler is a residential community six miles north of Pittsburgh. It is served by the Shaler Area School District, which ranked 253 out of 498 Pennsylvania school districts by the Pittsburgh Business Times in 2018. The Township is governed by a seven-member Board of Commissioners and boasts strong public services and amenities, including a pool, several parks, and an award-winning library. Residents also enjoy numerous community events, including Lite Up Night, Homecoming, and the 4th of July Parades.
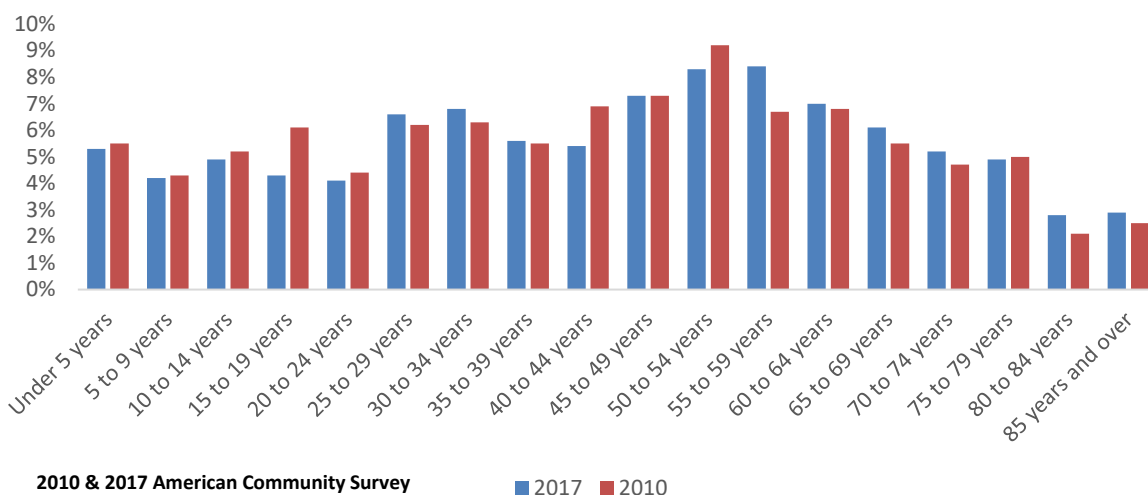
Population Data & Demographics

Since 2010, the population of Shaler has remained relatively stable. Census data shows that diverse communities are slowly growing, with Asian and African American populations doubling over recent years. Overall, the township has aged slightly since 2010, with the median age rising from 44.7 to 47.2 years.

Demographic Shifts in Shaler		
	2010	**2017**
Population	28,702	28,481
White	28,219	27,381
African American	225	463
Asian	81	169
Hispanic	198	187
Two or more races	126	408
2010 & 2017 American Community Survey		

Age of Shaler Residents 2010-2017

2010 & 2017 American Community Survey   ■ 2017 ■ 2010

Economic Indicators

Economic Indicators in Shaler							
	Median Home Value	Median Household Income	% Below Poverty Level	% Owner-Occupied Housing	Unemployment	High School Graduates	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
2012	$141,400	$62,416	4.7%	88.4%	5.8%	7,130	7,403
2017	$159,000	$71,009	5.5%	86.3%	5.8%	6,832	7,983
2012 & 2017 American Community Survey							

Over recent years, Shaler's economy has proven relatively stable. The median household income rose about $10,000 from 2012 to 2017, and home values have increased by nearly $20,000. However, poverty rates have risen by nearly 1%, and there is an increased disparity in educational attainment. Unemployment rates remain consistent and the vast majority of homes are owner-occupied.

> *Discussion:*
> How do you see this data reflected in your work or community?

Stakeholder Interview & Survey Results

Over the course of this assessment, 87 community members and stakeholders participated via interview or focus group, and an additional 462 surveys were administered both online and in the community.

Analysis of Reported Aspirations & Challenges: Key Themes

DESIRE FOR A COMMUNITY CENTER	Residents expressed that, while Shaler is tight-knit, the community is decentralized by nature and lacks a pedestrian-friendly business district to serve as a natural "town center." Residents desire places to gather and connect with each other, provide recreational activities, artistic opportunities, and serve as a hub for local resources and information. Many pointed out that the SNHL already serves as a natural community center offering meeting spaces, resources, and diverse programming and is "the heart of the community." Residents suggested the addition of indoor and outdoor seating space where people could enjoy snacks and coffee, or adding a basketball court for youth would expand the library's role as a community center.
INTEGRATION & INCLUSION	Many residents described Shaler as a "place people stay" with little transience and a strong shared identity among long-term residents. However, despite the friendly nature of the community,newer residents indicated they sometimes still felt like outsiders. Others mentioned they would like to see more partnerships with neighboring communities. Accessibility for individuals with special needs or physical disabilities was also mentioned. While Shaler currently has very little racial diversity, residents seem to sense that new ethnically and economically diverse populations will soon begin to arrive, and that there is a need for discussion around diversity and inclusion in the community as well as within its institutions to ensure Shaler is welcoming and respectful to all community members.
PRESERVATION VS. DEVELOPMENT	Public opinion regarding economic development in Shaler is mixed. Many would like to have access to more retail and restaurants (particularly small businesses) and see the community continue to attract new families, there is also a desire to preserve its current culture, green spaces, and homey "small-town" feel of the community. There is a sense that as Shaler grows, it may lose its sense of community or natural aesthetic, but conversely, residents recognize additional businesses would bolster the tax base and add convenience and attractive amenities to the community. The environmental impact of increased development was also a concern.
TRANSPORTATION & WALKABILITY	Transportation was described as a major gap in the community, and a barrier to accessing employment, basic needs such as a grocery store, and community events and programming. This is particularly challenging for older adults and youth who are unable to drive. Many residents expressed that they wished Shaler more pedestrian-friendly, with sidewalks (and to a lesser extent, bike lanes) to improve safety, however also recognized the existing infrastructure hampers this.

SUPPORTING YOUTH & FAMILIES	The majority of respondents felt that youth were well-served by the school district, however thought the reputation could be improved. Bullying and drug use were isolated as concerns for youth, as well as spaces for them to gather outside of school. Young people expressed an interest in sports and recreation, art and music, and other suggested needs were inclusive programs for those with special needs, technology education, and supports for college and career development. Parents expressed a need for more affordable childcare solutions and afterschool programs, an interest in both whole-family programs as well as adult programs they could participate in individually, and improving access to formal supports, like increased referral to human services, as well as developing informal supports for single parents, such as coordinating carpool networks.
SUPPORTING OLDER ADULTS	As Shaler's population ages, need for senior services are increasing. The majority of Shaler's older adults continue to live independently, however local infrastructure, both in homes and in the community, can be challenging for those with mobility issues. Service providers stated that it was difficult to reach out to older adults who may need services and expressed concerns around isolation and individuals potentially "falling through the cracks." Seniors expressed a desire for places and opportunities to socialize, as well as concern around managing rising school and property taxes on fixed incomes.
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	Several regional and local stakeholders commented on the need for workforce development, particularly targeted at promoting trade and technical jobs. Many pointed to an opportunity for synergy between the current shortage of skilled employees and rising costs of college, underemployment, and student debt, however continue to see stigmatization among many parents towards community colleges or vocational education pathways. Bolstering resources for entrepreneurship and small businesses were also identified as needs.
HUMAN SERVICE SUPPORTS	Several strong human service agencies exist to serve the North Hills, including North Hills Community Outreach, HEARTH, Crisis Center North, and so on. Mental health and substance abuse, particularly opioids, were both identified as growing concerns in need of additional focus and public education. While many in Shaler are able to make ends meet month to month, unexpected expenses can threaten housing and food security for many. Food security was identified as a particular challenge (partially due to limited transportation options), which has led to a weekend backpack program at the school district, however it was expressed that pride can be a barrier to accessing other community supports, such as food pantries.

Discussion:
Do these resonate? Where do you see opportunities for the library?

Individual Responses

A selection of responses from individual interviews, focus groups and surveys are listed below.

Community Strengths & Aspirations

- Community reacts when an issue is recognized - many will become advocates for specific issues/cases
- Lower taxes, remain thriving and family oriented, continue to attract new families, schools are draw, "American Dream Living"
- SNHL serves as community center in Shaler, and township provides recreational programming
- It's easy to get to know people in same phase of life as you, as town and library have lots of different activities.
- Originally the community was very resistant to Hearth moving into the community, but they grew to see the good in the women and Hearth
- Township managers do a great job--regardless of party affiliation--they take good care of the roads
- Safe!
- Community aspiration would be for it to be more than just purely residential, Route 8 corridor should be spruced up and need more local businesses along the road
- Affordable
- More sidewalks, walkability and bikeablity -- improved infrastructure and safety concerns
- Sense of community - parades, community events
- Voter turnout is very strong -- people are engaged
- Lots of trees, green space in Shaler
- School system is trying to build on their strengths and show people quality of Shaler Schools, letting people know Shaler is a great place to live and raise a family
- Shaler wants to progress without losing its hominess, which creates a positive tension--want more of the amenities other communities have and technology without losing community feel
- Shaler is connected community- institutions all work together
- Small town feel, everyone working towards similar goals/moving in same direction
- Community is understanding and accepting of low-income residents- likely due to the blue-collar nature

Gaps in Services

- [teens] Go to the Hampton Community Center. No place for teens to hang out outside of houses and Eat n Park
- Neighborhood feel dissipating a bit, used to feel more communal
- Living in the suburbs can be isolating -- no natural community hub, you see everyone gathering where they can
- Arts events, particularly for children or in community spaces
- Community event spaces - high demand for rental spaces
- Shaler needs sidewalks on main roads
- Lack of grocery store on main drag- you can't get to a grocery store by bus, want more one-stop-shops, like Kmart (which just closed down) or Target
- Maybe programming for kids with special needs since that is a growing population
- Need a better recycling program and to be more environmentally friendly
- Not a lot of local restaurants and coffee shops – gathering spaces
- High school students don't seem to be connected to enough community programming
- Need to serve kids of all interests; outdoor recreation to indoor gaming, structured and unstructured
- Transportation, transportation, transportation- bus lines continue to be cut, keeping residents from nearby jobs
- Affordable childcare
- Affordable, safe, decent housing
- Senior services, housing - county population is aging and county services will have to keep up
- Safe spaces for marginalized
- MH needs on the rise without a lot of supports

> **Discussion:**
> Take a moment to discuss this community feedback in your group.
> What connections do you see to your work with the library?

Library Use

- Enjoy exercise programs, genealogy
- Granddaughter met best friends here -- knew each other from school, but real connections made at the library
- Space is great -- conference room and equipment rentals are a big resource
- Library helps people navigate change - brings folks along with tech and cultural changes, stays current
- Add cafe - coffee, seating, outdoor seating, or make snacks/coffee in conference room accessible
- Sharing community information and raising awareness of certain issues
- Keep books, but also use space for more
- Shaler is very responsive and does a good job of managing variety, is welcoming to kids and families
- Skills workshops to meet basic needs- basic civic necessities like taxes
- Library is good at communicating with community, maybe they could be a more formal communications hub
- "I go to the Shaler library, even though I live in Ross because the people there are so nice and helpful"
- Can serve as a central one stop shop, welcoming to all, lacks stigma
- Get library services out of the library and into the community- bring the library to the people
- Human service navigation, job assistance, social work -- librarians notice individuals with challenges and can catch people who otherwise fall through cracks; NHCO posts their flyers at the library, tables at library
- Library makes big impact in community by offering computers to those who do not have one or are not comfortable using one
- Library's children's programming is great asset, benefits many families, especially young moms
- Library is already responsive, especially with children: There is no shhhhing
- "As a new resident, the library is like a second home"

Barriers to Library Use

- Think that a lot of people don't know what services the library offers and that more promotion of the services would help bring people in
- [teens] See library as place to get books and school has made reading not fun anymore. They are too busy with school to read and they don't like the books they have to read in school, so it's made them not like reading.
- Sometimes competitive over services as sometimes programs are offered by more than one place
- Parking is one issue at the library that needs to be addressed
- Time, busy lives
- There's not a lot of late hours which would work for me. (I can't make book discussions during the day!)
- Overdue books :(we're sorry we try! 😊
- I am concerned that my son is making too much noise in the library, he really enjoys the second floor play room with the kitchen/dolls/shopping carts and other toys, so I worry that sometimes when he's excited and loud that it would be too disruptive.
- I have health issues and have gotten into the habit of buying used books online, or purchasing e-books.
- no need
- It's not in walking distance; lack of transportation
- Not a "reader."
- Caring for my mother

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Tim Rodgers, Shaler Township
Jim and Julie McDermott, Shaler Area School District
Nick Haberman, Shaler Area School District
Dr. Dirk Lesnett, Elfinwild Church
Jennifer Kissel, North Hills Community Outreach
Bill Rock, Art & Inspiration International

Alyssa Sineni, Art & Inspiration International
Janet Miller, Friends of the Library
Lori Mizgorski, State Representative
Chris Chirdon, Walk Bike Shaler
Frank and Heather Perman, Perman Funeral Home
Gretchen Mullins-Sawicki, CCAC North

Focus Groups
Art & Inspiration International Members
A.W. Beattie Career Center Staff
Pittsburgh North Chamber of Commerce Staff
Elfinwild Church Members
Shaler Area High School Students
Shaler North Hills Library Parents
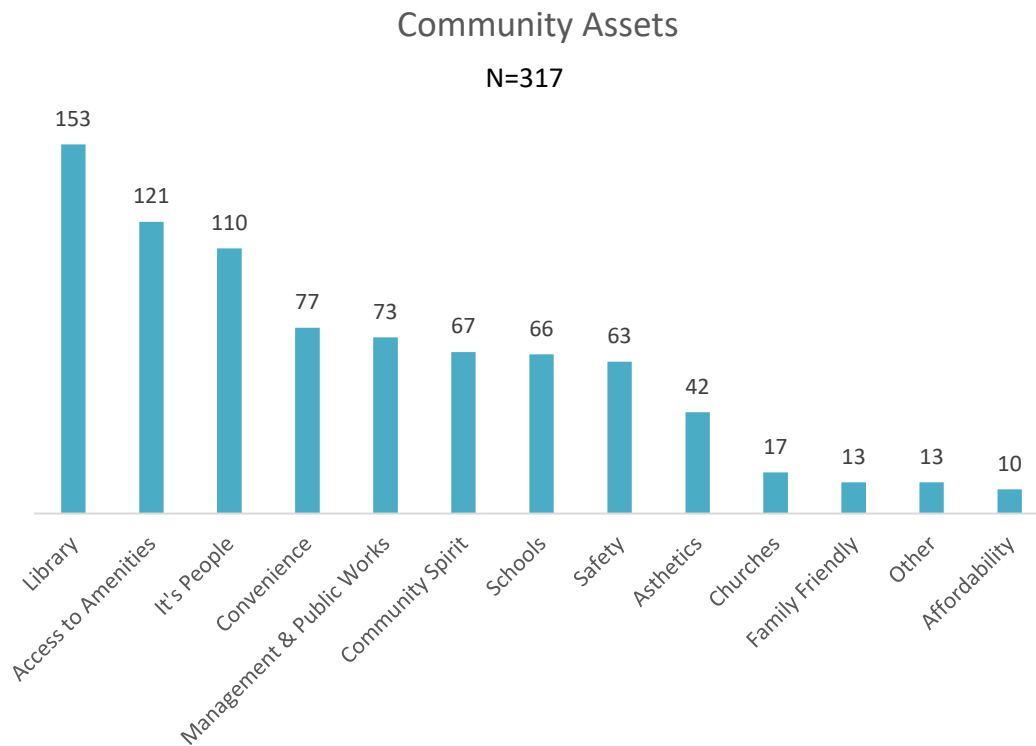
Suggested Programs of Interest at the Shaler North Hills Library

Library as Community Center

- Increase library involvement/visibility in community
- Youth activities like pool tables, ping pong--making library more of a community center
- Basketball court
- Open house events - food, welcoming newcomers, excluded, "outsiders" and introverts who need encouragement
- Offer community space
- Fun things, people need more fun.
- Build out one stop shop library/rec center/cafe = a place to gather and hang out
- Library is good at communicating with community, maybe they could serve as a more formal communications hub
- Foster community partnerships
- Community Center: parking, information hub, cafe, connecting people
- CPR/ First Aid classes
- Exercise classes like Yoga or Zumba

Youth & Families

- Whole-family programs engaging children, teens, parents
- If the library and the school utilize some of the same people, perhaps even paid by both the library and the schools, there would be more of a connection between school activities and library programming/Joint events.
- Educational programming in summer to combat summer learning loss
- Space for tutoring, studying
- Research support for those in school
- library could provide services for single parents, make connections that help single parents to help each other
- Programming around bullying with both youth and adults (give caregivers ways to know when their child is being bullied or the bully)
- Speech therapy for kids
- Music lessons that are ongoing
- Chess club/ checkers
- Outdoor activities (people tend to use the library more in the winter)

Economic Development

- Partner with AW Beattie: Students are able to lead programming - cosmetology, emergency response tech, etc. in evenings
- Entrepreneurship education -- what's involved, planning, info gathering
- Small Business Resource Webinars - time is a barrier for small business owners so off-hours or recordings are more accessible
- Meeting space is HUGE -- affordable meeting space is a major challenge for small businesses, one on one meeting space hard to find, coffee shops limited and loud, not private.
  - Chamber charges members $60/hour to use space -- most affordable option in area
- Small business resource center
- Could offer temporary office space/ incubator type space for a few months at a time, or coworking flex space -- gap in North Hills
- Positive PR for votech programs:
  - positive STEM perspectives and breadth of opportunities available
  - Position as valid alternative to college -- college level material for high schoolers
  - Presentations on Inflection Point - what careers are hiring regionally, local training ops
  - Library can be avenue to parents, want to engage when kids are young
  - Host events for parents (financial aid 101, etc.)

Older adults

- Room for elderly patrons to hang out in that has activities for them
- Transportation – continue on site programs at senior living complexes, explore a shuttle for those without transportation living independently
- Participate in Food Bank's Senior Box program

Arts & Enrichment

- Language classes
- Offer CCAC Classes
- With space, Art & Inspiration International can:
  - Bring in speakers (artists, poets, cultural perspectives)
  - Activate and connect libraries to creative people/resources in their communities
  - Develop Artist in Residence model
  - Host events, dialogues, podcast tapings, jazz night
  - Expand beyond "art" - offer unique programs that draw the 'tai-chi' or mindfulness crowd
  - Poetry workshops
  - Art sales / gallery night
  - Programs with special needs communities -- inclusive events, etc.

Human Services

- Can serve as a central one stop shop, welcoming to all, lacks stigma
- Help distribute/ raise awareness of resources
- Could they serve as a food bank location or summer lunch program?
- Human service navigation, job assistance
- Lib could bring programming to Hearth
  - Education programming for kids, story time, research/education assistance for women
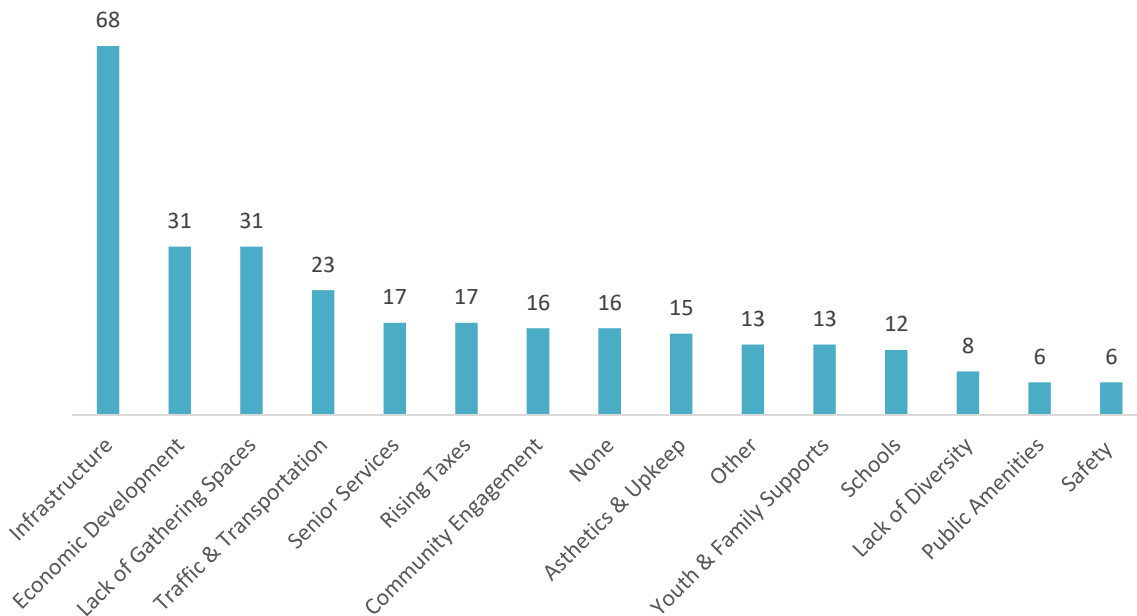
Community Assets

N=317

Library	Access to Amenities	People	Convenience	Management and Public Works	Community Spirit	Schools
SNHL consistently recognized as a major community asset, many travel form neighboring communities to attend programs	Many public amenities like parks and the swimming pool	People are friendly welcoming, and very neighborly and willing to help out others in the community	City of Pittsburgh is very accessible, along with major roads, residents don't need to travel far to meet their needs	Township is well managed and has strong municipal services – especially road maintenance and snow removal	Strong sense of community, citizens are engaged and community organizations do good work, residents appreciate events and activities that bring people together	SASD is strong and serves youth and families well.

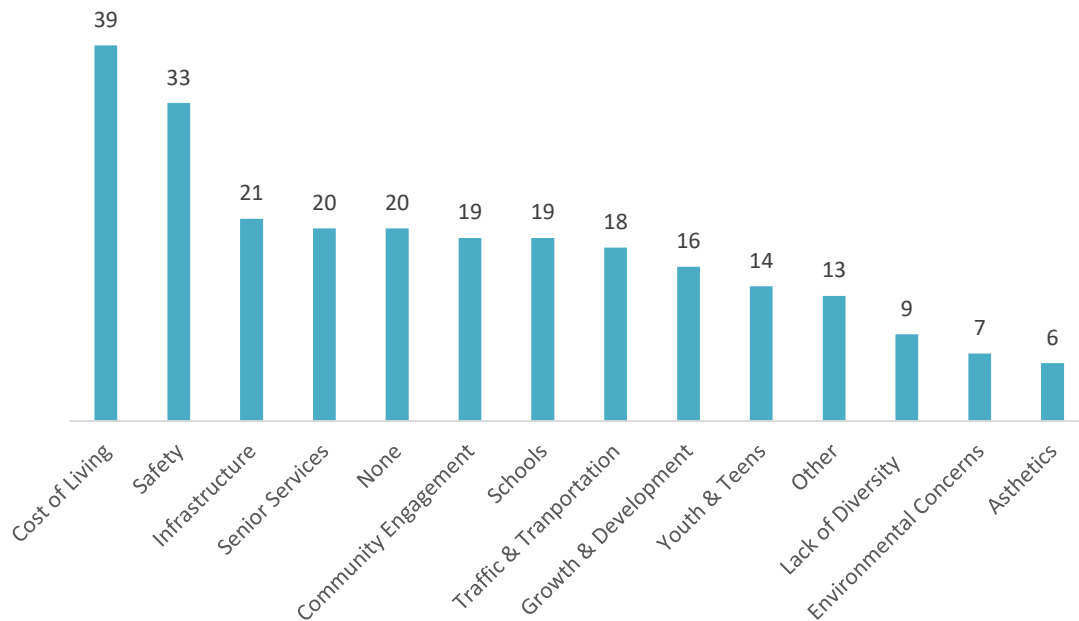| Safety	Aesthetics	Churches	Family Friendly	Other	Affordability	
Relatively low-crime, tight-knit and trusting community, safe place to raise children	Residents have strong appreciation for green spaces and rural, small town feel of the community, people are proud of their homes and most are well kept	Churches are a strong community support and grow 'sense of community'	Shaler is a good place to raise a family, with low crime, good schools, plenty of activities, events and amenities	n/a	Shaler is an affordable place to live with many local services and amenities for residents	

Community Challenges

N=233

Infrastructure	Economic Development	Lack of Gathering Spaces	Traffic & Transportation	Senior Services	Rising Taxes	Community Engagement
More pedestrian friendly, roads and potholes, parking, sewers and water runoff	small businesses, environmental concerns around development	Places to gather are limited, many desire a community center-- particularly with options for youth and seniors	Lack of public transportation is a barrier for many, increasing traffic, lack of traffic enforcement, and pedestrian safety are concerns	Opportunities for socialization, need for services, improved housing options, home upkeep is a challenge, transportation is a barrier	Particular concern for older adults on fixed incomes, concern that rising taxes will also be a barrier for new families	More opportunities to engage in the community via orgs, events, and activities

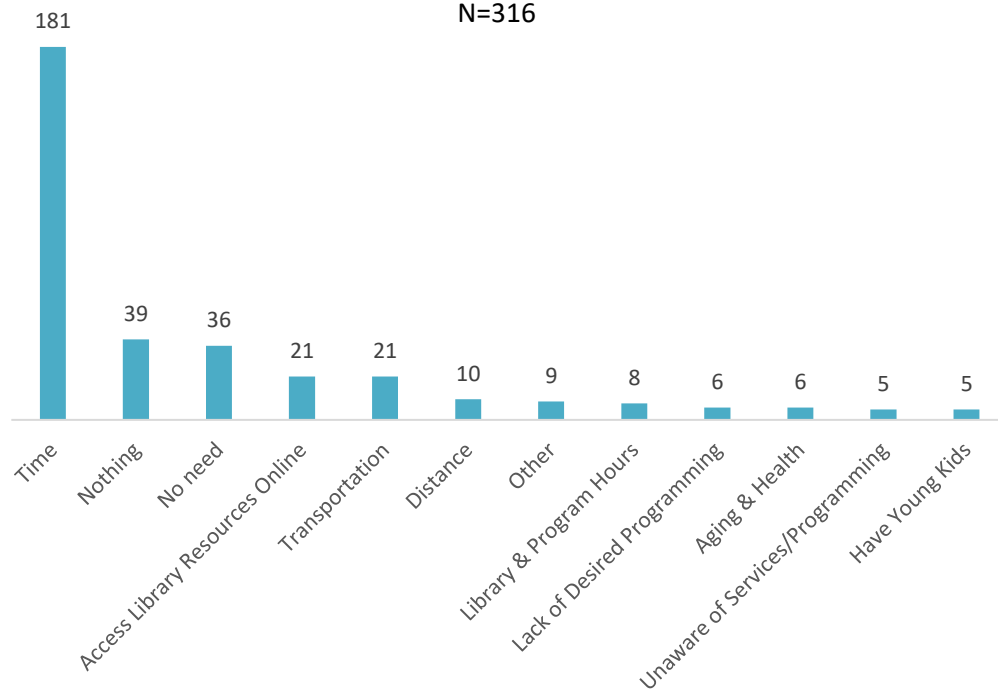| Aesthetics & Upkeep	Other	Youth & Family Supports	Schools	Lack of Diversity	Public Amenities	Safety
Promoting upkeep of houses and neighborhoods and recycling, litter and disrepair are challenges	e.g. Health and wellness, inequality, reputation, local policies and enforcement	Programs for youth and teens, affordable childcare, support for families with special needs or low-income	Improve district rankings, reputation-- though many feel well served. More academic supports needed. Bullying is a concern. Work with district to repurpose old buildings.	Local population is not diverse, inclusion is a concern	More recreation opportunities, desire for a dog park	Safety is a growing concern, fear of increasing crime and substance abuse

Priority Concerns

N=206

Cost of Living	Safety	Infrastructure	Senior Services	None	Community Engagement	Schools
Rising taxes, availability of affordable housing	General safety is a priority; crime, drugs perceived as threats	Improved pedestrian safety, parking, road maintenance, flooding and water management, mixed reviews on bike lanes, old buildings	Increasing older population in need of services, activities, older infrastructure can be challenge to mobility, rising taxes a concern	n/a	Maintaining senses of community -- more events, community spaces, opportunities to engage and grow volunteerism	Improving academic performance and district rankings, additional afterschool and academic supports, bullying and drugs are concerns

Traffic & Transportation	Growth & Development	Youth & Teens	Other	Lack of Diversity	Environmental Concerns	Aesthetics
Lack of public transportation is a barrier for many, increasing traffic, lack of traffic enforcement, and pedestrian safety are concerns	Limited growth and development a concern, particularly lack of local businesses and limited number of new families moving in. However, some concerned about community changing too much.	Safe spaces, programs and activities, parenting concerns, support for special needs and low-income families, drugs and bullying are concerns	n/a	Lack of diverse populations is a concern, interest in more access to cultural programs and education opportunities, however some concerned about demographic shift.	Maintaining existing parks and green space, wildlife management, water management, recycling,	Maintaining attractive neighborhood aesthetics, property values

Barriers to Library Use

N=316

Time	Nothing	No need	Access Library Resources Online	Transportation	Distance	Other
Busy with work, family, activities, other obligations	n/a	Access to internet, not a reader, buy books, etc.	Use library resources, but rarely visit the library	Transportation is a barrier for those who don't drive or lack access to a vehicle, particularly youth and older adults	Many travel from other communities to visit SNHL, but given the distance may not use the library as often as they would	Fines, poor weather, limited space and parking, feel uncomfortable

Library & Program Hours	Lack of Desired Programming	Aging & Health	Unaware of Services/Programming	Have Young Kids		
Schedule conflicts, particularly for those with non-traditional availability	No interest in current programming	Health constraints, age-related barriers, serve as caregiver for a loved one	New residents are unaware of library offerings, lack of internet access a barrier for some	Parents busy with children at home, some feel their children are too disruptive to bring to the library		