



# **Human Relations Commission Survey and Small Group Discussion Report**

**June 2021**

## Introduction

Libertyville has always been a caring place where neighbors look out for neighbors and help each other in times of need. That is who we are. Last summer, then-Mayor Terry Weppler asked the Human Relations Commission to explore with residents themselves whether and how the Village could be doing more to infuse our community with more of the inclusivity and welcoming that we feel from our neighbors. That exploration would help our Commission set goals and make recommendations to the Village Board that were well-informed by a range of local perspectives.

Given the constraints of an all-volunteer Commission with an extremely limited budget, we settled on a simple, two-tiered approach. First, we would distribute a survey to capture the general opinions of as many people who lived and worked in Libertyville as possible. Then, we would use the survey results to craft a series of small-group sessions where we could listen more deeply to what residents had to say about the topics that seemed the most pressing on people's minds. Though we considered several different topics, we limited our scope to what fell squarely under the mission of our Commission, and over which the Village of Libertyville has jurisdiction. For example, there was some conversation about inclusivity in Libertyville schools, but schools operate outside the purview of the Village.

We recognized and talked extensively about the limitations of our approach and tried to think creatively about how to include as many people as possible, especially those for whom English is not their first language. Though we had arranged a volunteer Spanish-language facilitator, we did not wind up having anyone opt into that session. However, our thinking around how to be more language-inclusive did result in the Village putting out a call for volunteer translators across all the languages spoken here who would be willing to help future efforts. That call resulted in an overwhelming response.

The results from our survey and small group listening sessions follow, and we will use them as we work to provide the best advice and counsel to Mayor Johnson and the rest of the Village Board. We on the Commission were struck by how deeply the people who live and work in Libertyville care about the future of our community and the energy and creative ideas they bring to ensuring that it is a place that is welcoming for all.

We shouldn't have been surprised. It's who we are.

# Report Overview

The Human Relations Commission (“HRC”) is made up of Libertyville resident volunteers appointed by the Mayor. Its mission is to foster attainable housing, equal opportunity and fair treatment for all residents, and positive relations between racial, ethnic and other groups that make up the community, with the ultimate goal of enhancing all residents’ quality of life.

This summary report consists of three parts. Part I provides a summary of information obtained as part of an online survey conducted by the HRC during the Summer of 2020. Part II contains a summary of small group discussions conducted by the HRC during the late Fall of 2020. Part III covers next steps.

## **Part I - Survey Summary**

The HRC developed a nine-question survey during the Summer of 2020 to help focus its efforts on issues of most importance to residents within the community. The brief survey was confidential. It also included an option to receive additional information regarding participating in future small-group meetings with other residents to share more insights with the HRC. The survey ran from July 30<sup>th</sup>-August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The survey was promoted to residents through all available channels, including news releases in English and Spanish, the Village newsletter and website, and social media. Access to the survey in English and Spanish was available through the Village’s social media sites (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Nextdoor), the weekly Village E-news, and the Village website. Paper copies were also available at Village Hall. A total of 538 individuals participated in the survey. A total of 522 identified themselves as Libertyville residents while 16 identified themselves as non-residents.

## **Part II - Small Group Discussion Summary**

The HRC held small-group meetings with Libertyville residents to learn about their experiences and ideas on the following topics: *Attainable Housing and Public Safety*; *Access to Cultural Opportunities and Events*; and *Diversity, Welcoming and Inclusivity*. Survey participants who provided their email addresses were notified directly and invited to participate in these meetings. Like the survey, the meetings were also promoted to the public through all available channels in English and Spanish. Advertisements for the meetings were displayed in English and Spanish. Registrants were offered the opportunity to select a session in Spanish. No registrants selected this option. A total of nine meetings were scheduled, three date/time options were offered per topic. However, at the conclusion of the sign-up period two meetings were canceled due to low registration and those registrants were offered the opportunity to attend other sessions. Three meetings were held on the topic of *Attainable Housing and Public Safety*. Two meetings were held on each of the topics *Access to Cultural Opportunities and Events*, and *Diversity, Welcoming and Inclusivity*. Each meeting was limited to ten participants, not including the moderator and notetaker. Comments and information learned in the meetings were not attributed to any individuals. A total of 56 individuals registered to participate in the sessions.

## **Part III – Next Steps**

The findings of the survey and small-group meetings will inform goal-setting for the HRC.

## Part I: Survey Results

Surveys were collected from 538 individuals who represented all racial and age groups in Libertyville's population. It should be noted that the small number of respondents in the age group under 21 was not consistent with the Libertyville population since the majority of individuals in this group are minors and therefore did not have access to the survey. The survey respondents were self-selecting. Therefore, not all of the percentages of participants by race and age group are consistent with their percentages in the population. The intent of the survey, however, was not to produce statistically significant data, but to give all Libertyville residents who wished to participate a chance to be heard, and to get a general sense of the importance of these issues to Libertyville residents and where a need for change might be indicated.

### RACE

#### Survey Respondents

Race (As Categorized by Survey Monkey)	Percent
White/Caucasian	86.60%
African American	1.20%
Latinx/Hispanic	3.40%
Asian American	4.20%
Other	4.60%

#### 2019 Census Data for Libertyville\*

Race (As Categorized by the Census)	Percent
White Alone	83.90%
Black Alone	0.90%
Hispanic	5.10%
Asian Alone	7.10%
Two or More Races	1.50%
Other Race Alone	0.10%
American Indian Alone	0.08%

### AGE

#### Survey Respondents

Age	Percent
Under 21	1.74%
21-39	19.31%
40-59	49.03
60 and Up	29.92%

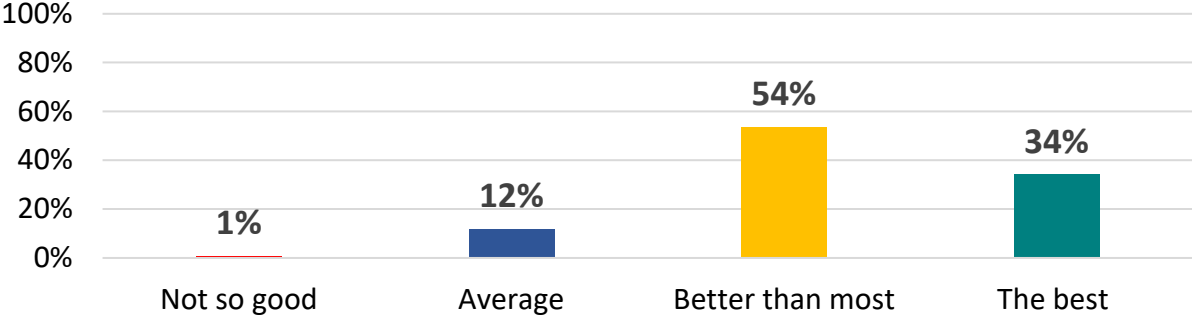
#### 2019 Census Data\*

Age	Percent
19 and Under	28.70%
20-39	16.60%
40-59	32%
60 and Up	22.20%

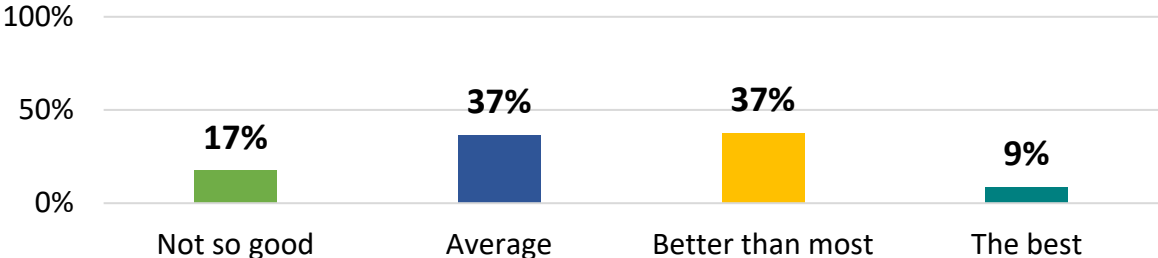
\*Census data are based on the 2010 Census and more recent surveys by the U.S. Census Bureau.

**SURVEY FINDINGS BY QUESTION**  
(Percentages of All Responses)

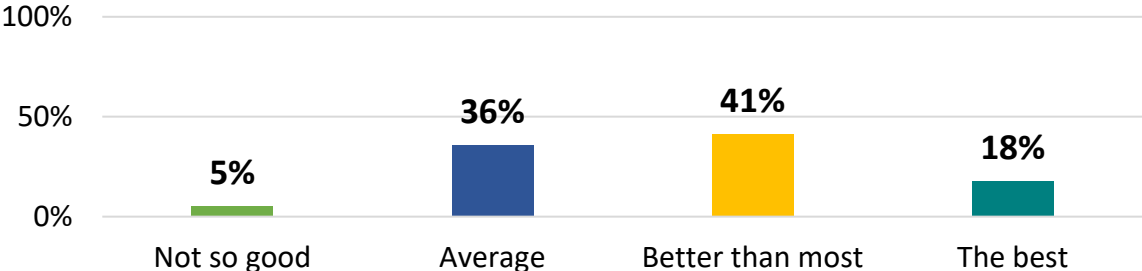
**Perception of How Libertyville Compares with Other Communities in Public Safety (Police & Fire)**



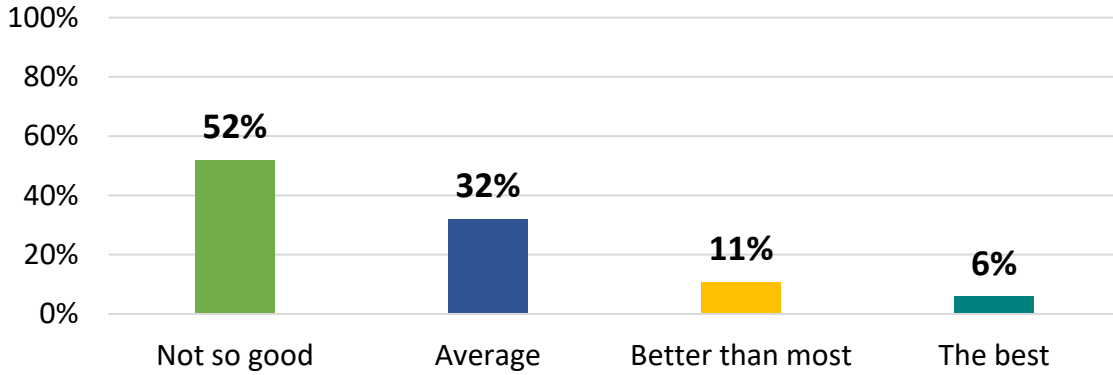
**Perception of How Libertyville Compares with Other Communities in Access to Cultural Opportunities**



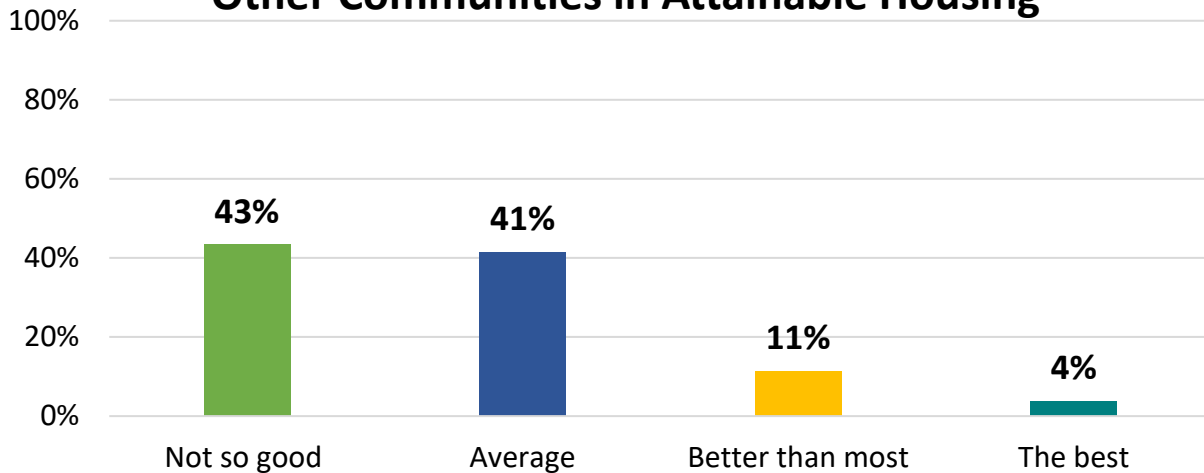
**Perception of How Libertyville Compares with Other Communities in Ease of Making Friends/ Getting to Know Neighbors**



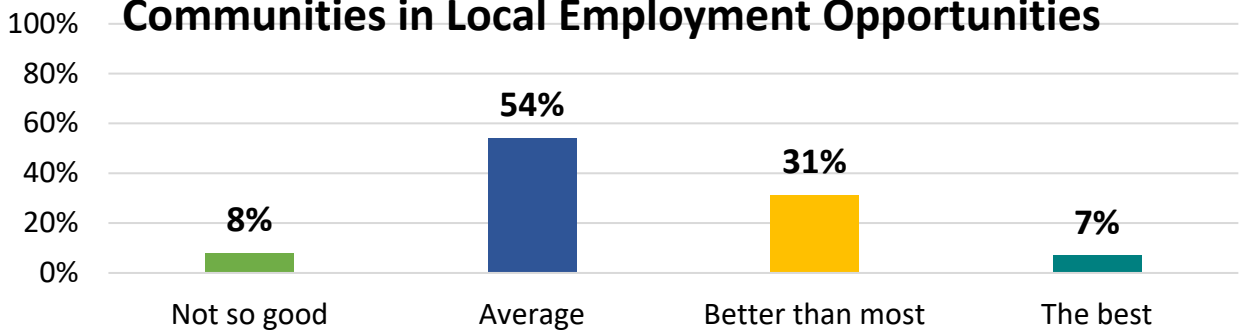
### Perception of How Libertyville Compares with Other Communities in Diversity



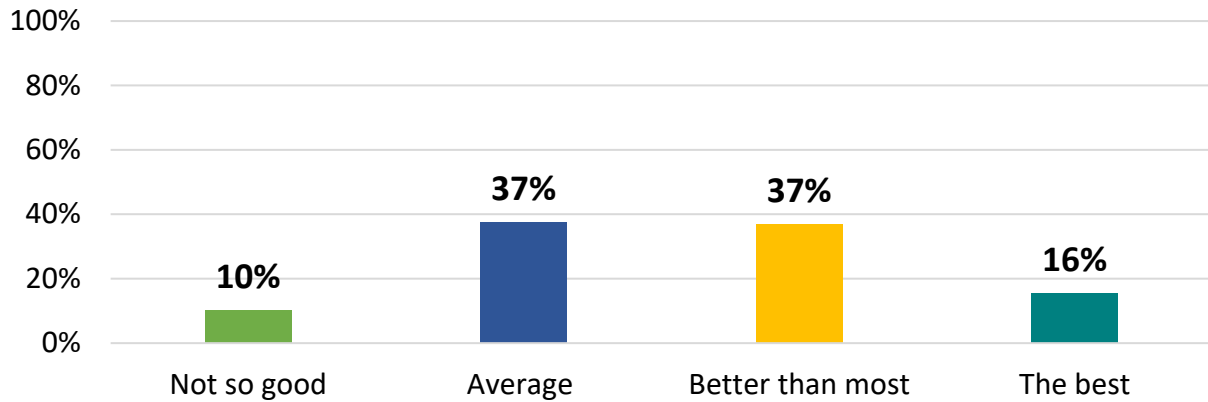
### Perception of How Libertyville Compares with Other Communities in Attainable Housing



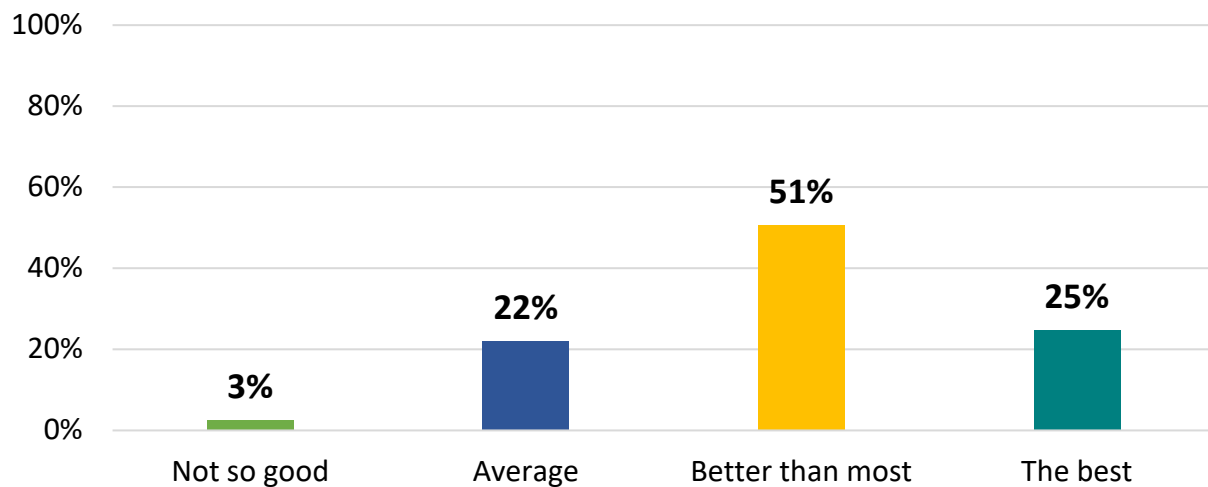
### Perception of How Libertyville Compares with Other Communities in Local Employment Opportunities



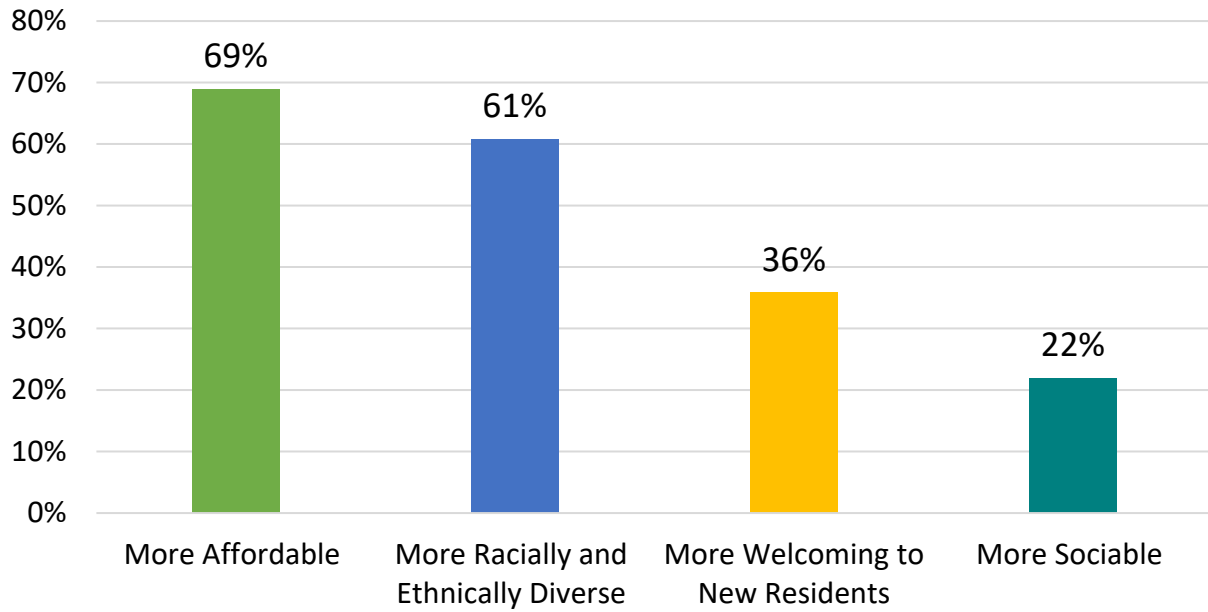
## Perception of How Libertyville Compares with Other Communities in Welcoming and Inclusivity



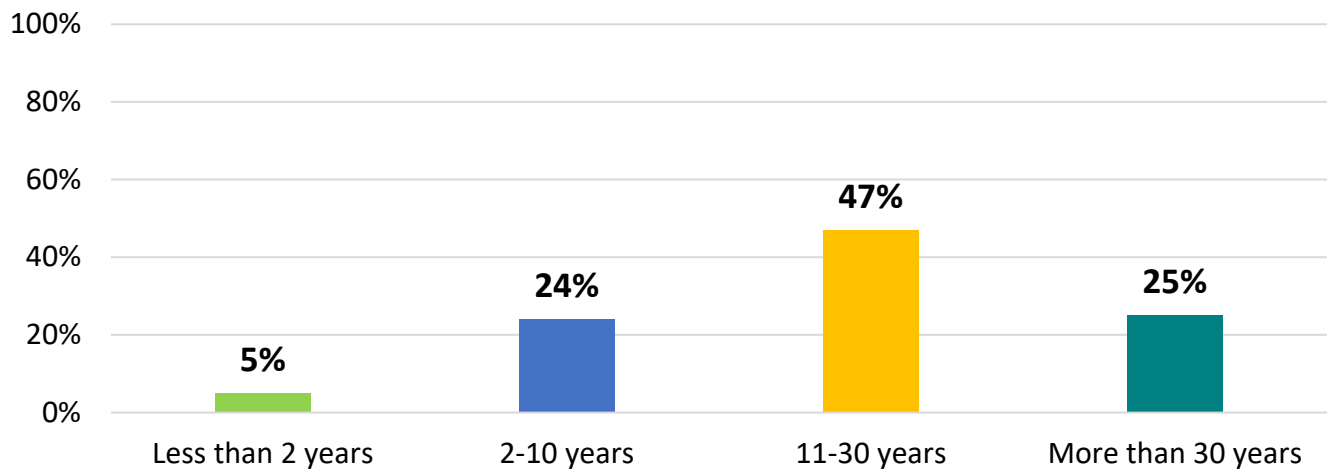
## Perception of How Libertyville Compares with Other Communities in Events



## What Should Libertyville Aspire to Be to Attract New Residents? (Select All That Apply)



## How Long Have You Lived in Libertyville?





## OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

In addition to the questions asked within the survey, respondents were given an opportunity to provide an open-ended response to the following questions:

1. Where do you see areas where Libertyville could improve relations among residents?
2. What should Libertyville aspire to be to attract new residents?

A sampling of responses containing suggestions can be found below.

### No Improvement Needed

- “I think things are great.”
- “Do not change anything. It is not the job of government to improve relations among residents.”

### Affordability

- “Work on lowering property taxes. When your taxes are more than your mortgage that is a huge barrier to buying in Libertyville.”
- “Stop allowing tear downs of reasonably sized homes for replacements with massive structures ... It is ruining our environment, causing drainage problems for other residents, and making home purchase in this town completely out of reach for most.”
- “Would encourage the Village and builders to consider building some more realistic and attainable housing so people would be interested in moving here and keeping those who would like to stay.”

### Diversity

- To attract new residents Libertyville needs to be “more accepting of other nationalities” and “more diverse in all respects.”
- “(We are) disappointed in the lack of diversity after moving here, especially in the schools.”
- “Promote more diversity. The peaceful protest during BLM was nice ... but also a stark reminder how super white and ... disconnected this town is. And how different my family and I are.”
- “Raising two sons who are half Mexican has been a challenge. They have been called racial slurs in school multiple times. Not sure what the answer is but teaching cultural diversity should be a must.”

- “Cross-cultural interaction would be nice and just a statement overall that hate has no home in Libertyville and we welcome everyone to enjoy our restaurants, parks, and events. It’s a work in progress of course but it would be nice for people of color to know that at least Libertyville as a whole is trying to break some of these stigmas because a lot of great caring people live here.”

### **Events**

- “Libertyville is a sought-after community to live in already. Continued efforts to bring residents together to share in art, entertainment, food, culture, and educational experiences will maintain this reputation. Diverse offerings will help grow respect and appreciation for other backgrounds and make everyone feel at home and comfortable.”
- “Holding more neighborhood events such as block parties that help neighbors get to know each other would be helpful.”
- “Low-cost events encouraging diverse groups to gather at public locations particularly around arts and culture.”
- “Cultural events that celebrate diversity. I often wonder if people of other races feel a part of local customs and traditions.”
- “Getting people to work towards a common goal is a great way to get people involved. Perhaps there are activities/events where people could work together to make improvements or help others.”

### **Parks and Public Spaces**

- “I think the lack of a separate Park District really hurts our town. We bill ourselves as a family town, but our parks are generally outdated, and our park district offerings (which in general, park district programs tend to be more attainable and therefore more inclusive) are incredibly sparse compared to other local communities. A strong park district can truly be a hub of activity and socialization for all ages, and this is an area where Libertyville could really take some notes from neighboring communities.”
- “(Libertyville needs) better parks and recreation, bike paths, kids’ activities.”
- “In a town as large as Libertyville it might be tough for the Village itself to do anything in terms of relationships. This falls on where we gather in smaller groups (schools, sports, churches, neighborhoods, etc.). The best thing the Village can do is invest in public spaces and facilities, and to some extent events.”
- “Sidewalks on all residential streets would be a huge benefit. I live on a street where there is a sidewalk only on one side (not mine) and I don’t have neighbors walking by our house, so there is less social activity ... Sidewalks would help from a social and safety standpoint.”

## Part II: Small Group Discussions Summary

Small group discussions were held virtually via GoToMeeting during the weeks of November 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of 2020. The meetings were open to all Libertyville residents and, as with the survey, participation was self-selecting. A total of 56 residents participated. The sessions were limited to a maximum of ten participants in each and a timeframe of 60 minutes. The questions asked and comments shared during these meetings are summarized in this section.

### Attainable Housing

*What has your experience been in finding attainable housing in Libertyville?*

- It is difficult to find attainable housing in Libertyville.
- Residents have had to move out of Libertyville because they cannot afford to stay here.
- Lack of attainable housing affects the following groups:
  - Adult children wanting to return to Libertyville
  - Seniors
  - Mid-income families
- Seniors find it difficult to afford to live in Libertyville.
- Individuals who work in Libertyville cannot afford to live in Libertyville.
- Residents who want to downsize can't find more moderate-sized houses.
- It costs more to downsize in Libertyville than to stay in your current home.

*What do you think the Village should do to improve access to attainable housing?*

- Are there potential policies that could be put in place to slow down or reduce tear downs of smaller or more attainable housing in the community?
- Lack of attainable housing limits diversity within the community. More diversity would improve the community, especially for children.
- The messaging regarding attainable housing policy will be important to clearly convey what attainable housing is and is not.
- People in the community are afraid of attainable housing. Some don't want people needing attainable housing to be here, and some don't want this commission to exist.
- Village will have to overcome some residents' objections to attainable housing:
  - There is a perception that attainable housing could impact existing property values.
  - It could increase traffic and place a burden on the infrastructure.
  - Some residents favor more diversity, and some want the status quo.
- The residents should have a say regarding an ordinance change, including a referendum.
- Communication will be the key to overcoming objections. When describing who qualifies for attainable housing, use examples that humanize the subject, such as a typical family of four with a household income of \$72,000. Avoid data-heavy explanations.
- It would be nice if the Winchester House property could be redeveloped to include attainable and market-priced rental units, possibly with retail space on the ground floor.
- Aim for a mixture of new developments with attainable units and scattered-site housing. Developments are scalable and attainable units can be added more quickly. For

scattered-site houses the Village could buy distressed properties and rehab them, which would upgrade the property and the neighborhood.

- The Attainable Housing Ordinance should put limits on the option of a fee in lieu of building attainable units for developers so that Libertyville will get the amount of attainable housing it needs.

## Public Safety

*How have you felt about your dealings with Libertyville's police and fire services? Have they made you feel safe? Confident? Respected?*

- Police and fire services are seen positively within the community.
- Professionalism is high by both departments.

*Do the police and fire services treat residents fairly, based on your experience and the experiences of people you know?*

- The handling of most situations is seen in a positive light.

*What ideas do you have for the Village to strengthen police-community relations?*

- The Village should look at adding a social worker position or other position to handle non-threatening or non-crime related calls.
- Would like to see more community participation, not just when you call them.
- Public safety services should be more socially involved in the community.
- Event-based outreach is a good way to integrate police and fire services into the community.
- What is included in crime reporting press releases and statistics and where is the information located? This could help to assess fairness in treatment of residents.
- What level of diversity exists within the departments?
- Libertyville needs more attainable housing so the police, fire and other village employees can afford to live here.

## Diversity, Welcoming and Inclusivity

*Why do you think Libertyville has not attracted a larger population of racial and ethnic minorities?*

- Some participants said their children do not intend to return to Libertyville because of the lack of diversity.
- Some participants said friends and colleagues have told them they wouldn't move to Libertyville because of the lack of diversity, or regret having moved to Libertyville.
- Many people move to Libertyville for the schools. Some participants said that the lack of diversity in Libertyville schools means that children are less prepared for success.
- Some participants who said they work in Libertyville can't afford to live here or find it difficult to afford to live here, limiting diversity.
- There is a lack of acknowledgement of cultural differences.

*In your experience, what challenges do minorities face in Libertyville?*

- Libertyville's Americana aesthetic may be less welcoming to people from different races, religions and cultural backgrounds, or people in the LGBTQ community.

- Libertyville has a lot of long-time residents and “founding families” that may make the Village feel closed off to outsiders.
- Libertyville, along with the rest of the North Shore, has a history of redlining and racially restrictive covenants – as described in a 2016 LHS-produced podcast called “A History of Racism in Libertyville and the North Shore – that engineered Libertyville into a white enclave and has not been addressed.
- There are very few minority-owned businesses in Libertyville.
- There aren’t many opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds, and particularly non-English speakers, to give their perspectives on community issues.

*What can the Village do to make minorities feel more welcome and improve their experience of living in Libertyville?*

- What Libertyville publishes about itself reinforces its image of old-fashioned charm, harking back to a bygone era. This may appeal to white people but could have negative connotations for others. It is suggested that Libertyville communicate a different message of being welcoming and open to change.
- The Village should work with other organizations in the community to promote welcoming and diversity.
- Instead of having the same vendors at the Farmers’ Market year after year, Mainstreet should be encouraged to let in new vendors, especially those with culturally diverse offerings.

*What experiences have you had in Libertyville that have made you feel especially welcome and included?*

- Libertyville takes pride in its Americana esthetic, with its MainStreet, town square, and summer parades, festivals, and walking tours.
- Libertyville is considered by most participants a place where people are friendly and neighbors help neighbors.
- Libertyville has a strong faith and interfaith community that is welcoming.

*Have you had experiences that made you feel not welcome or not included?*

- Children, and relatives, from diverse backgrounds have had experiences of feeling not welcome in Libertyville schools.
- Participants said they have heard that Libertyville is a place where some people of color feel uncomfortable driving at night.

*What ideas do you have for the Village to make residents feel more welcome and included?*

- Most participants said more diversity would improve Libertyville’s culture and appeal.
- Some participants pointed to the economic activity and diversity in Vernon Hills, which has many more multifamily and attainable housing options, while also having good schools.
- The government should not take on social engineering. That role is better left to community groups and other civic organizations.
- Libertyville needs a proactive plan to increase diversity. The Village should look at best practices in towns across Lake County to increase diversity.
- Libertyville does not currently acknowledge or celebrate diversity through its marketing materials or by recognizing cultural awareness days and months. Participants suggested that is an area where action could be taken immediately.

- It is unclear what the demographics of the Village's employees are, but participants suggested there could be efforts to add or mandate diversity in the police and fire departments and in other Village departments.
- The Village could work with the Chamber of Commerce and MainStreet to add diversity among Libertyville businesses and vendors at the Farmers' Market.
- The Village should engage with realtors who can encourage clients from diverse backgrounds to consider Libertyville.
- The Village could work with LHS, the College of Lake County, faith and interfaith groups, the Adler Center, etc., to celebrate diversity through events at Cook Park and in a variety of other ways.
- The Village needs to "walk the talk" and actually take action from the survey and focus groups.
- More multi-unit buildings and more rental units are needed to increase diversity.
- Does the Village have a goal regarding diversity?

## Access to Cultural Opportunities and Events

*What cultural opportunities do you most appreciate in Libertyville?*

- Individuals enjoy Libertyville events but do not really see them as cultural events.
- Participants stated that they enjoy Libertyville Days, Dog Days of Summer, First Fridays and Out to Lunch - which they see as events that are part of the Libertyville culture.

*What cultural opportunities are missing that would be important to you?*

- Need events other than "American" events.
- It would be nice to celebrate different heritage months with a banner in Cook Park or some recognition on the website by the Village.

*What can the Village do to make more cultural opportunities possible in Libertyville?*

- The Village should review what events and opportunities are currently being provided within the community and look for ways to potentially partner with the organizers or help to advertise them.

*What events do you most enjoy in Libertyville?*

- Dog Days of Summer, Farmer's Market, First Fridays, Out to Lunch, Fine Arts Festival, Memorial Day Parade and Libertyville Days.

*Which events attended by people from outside of Libertyville show our Village in the best light?*

- Participants indicated that all the events offered in Libertyville draw many individuals from outside of the community, specifically the Farmer's Market and First Fridays were noted.

*What other kinds of events would you like to see in Libertyville?*

- Events should be offered that are more culturally based.

### **Part III: Next Steps**

The HRC has developed this summary to document the data gathered from the online survey as well as the comments received during the small group discussions. The information obtained from these two processes will be used in the development of goals for the Human Relations Commission. The Commission will review these goals on a biennial basis and will publish them on the Village's website at [www.libertyville.com](http://www.libertyville.com).