

Union City Multi-Family Objective Development Standards Project

Community Outreach Summary

May 2023



Union City Multi-Family Objective Development Standards Project

Union City prepared a 15-question survey about multi-family housing design and development standards that was shared in October 2022. The questions addressed different types of multifamily and mixed-use housing, from townhomes to mixed-use apartments developments, the unique characteristics of different neighborhoods, and specifics about building design. The results of the survey are highlighted here, with further detail provided through a summary report.

At a glance:



**1 online
survey**



**643 online
survey
responses**



**3 in-person
events
100+ attended**

Over **75% of survey participants live in Union City** split between those who live in single family homes and those who live in multi-family homes.



**Survey conducted in
English, Spanish, Chinese,
Hindi, Tagalog**

For more information, and to sign up for project updates, please visit the project website:

<https://www.unioncity.org/606/Objective-Development-Standards>



Special Areas



Historic Alvarado District

Participants supported compatible design, including both traditional historic architecture as well as modern design with building articulation, such as balconies and bays.



Corridors

Participants preferred modern architectural design with ground-floor details and activity, such as commercial uses and balconies engaging the street.



Intermodal Station

Participants supported the most modern design features for the burgeoning transit district, with bold colors, high-quality materials, and stylish architectural details.



Apartment Design



Participants wanted to see buildings with varied shapes, roofs, heights and divisions to break down the size and scale.



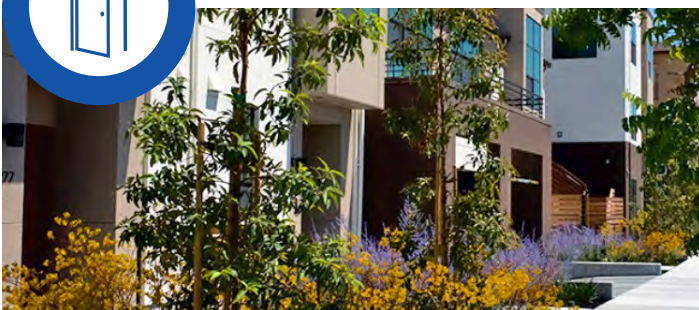
Townhouse Design



Participants wanted to see active street frontages with stoops, balconies and front porches. Simplicity was important and ways to distinguish individual units was encouraged.



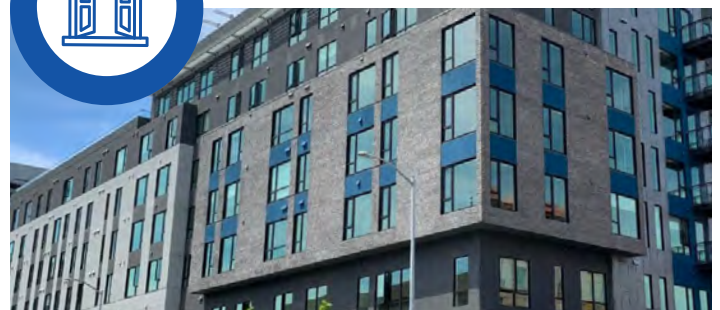
Entrances



Participants preferred entrances that are buffered from the sidewalk with landscaping or a low wall.



Windows



Participants wanted to see buildings with window treatments that are unique, flush with the wall and have lots of variety

Project Overview

Union City is updating its development standards applicable to multifamily and mixed-use housing. Development standards are the physical rules that new development must follow. They typically address the physical characteristics of buildings and site development, such as building height, open space, and landscaping. The development standards would apply to townhouses, apartment buildings, and mixed-use buildings (apartments over or next to shops), but would not apply to single family houses.

The Multi-Family Objective Development Standards Project will establish objective standards for each zoning district that allows multi-family and/or mixed-use development as a permitted or conditional use. The new standards will be objective, meaning they would not be subject to interpretation and aim to achieve high-quality design. Objective standards will provide property owners, developers, and community members with greater predictability and will help streamline the development review process.



The Planning Division provided an opportunity for the general community to learn more about the Multi-Family Objective Development Standards Project at the Union City Farmer's Market on October 15, 2022. The "pop-up" event was a chance to share information about the Multi-Family Objective Development Standards Project Online Survey and collect feedback, in-person.

Outreach Materials

Electronic and paper flyers

Flyers describing the project, survey and other ways to get involved were distributed via email, the project website, social media platforms and at in-person events described below.

The survey and associated notification were prepared in five languages - English, Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, and Hindi. The project was shared through digital and printed flyers, by email and social media.



Outreach Activities



Outreach Activities

The City encouraged public input throughout the planning process to:

- Inform the scope of the development standards
- Learn about design priorities and preferences
- Solicit feedback about how new multi-family housing and mixed-use development fit in with existing development in Union City

The City and consultant team have solicited input through the following events and activities:

- **Public hearings with Planning Commission and City Council.** The Planning Commission held a meeting on August 18, 2022 and City Council on September 13, 2022 to learn about the project, provide preliminary feedback, and discuss ways to participate.
- **Project website.** The project website serves as a library for background on the project, ways to get involved, and draft documents: <https://www.unioncity.org/606/Objective-Development-Standards>

- **In-person tabling at City events.** In October 2022, City staff and consultants set up informational tables at in-person City events to share information about the project, solicit input through a quick visual preference exercise, and encourage participants to visit the project website and complete an online survey. Tables were visited by over 100 community members in total at these three events:

- Union City Farmer's Market (October 15)
- Running Dead 5K Fun Run (October 30)
- Annual Halloween Community Carnival (October 30) (see images above)

These activities aimed to solicit input early in the planning process. This report summarizes these activities and the feedback from community members. Following the preparation of draft standards, the City will again solicit public input on the preliminary standards, and make revisions as appropriate based on this feedback, before finalizing standards for decision-maker review and adoption into the Zoning Ordinance.



Outreach Materials



The objective of tabling events was to drive awareness of the online survey and to gather input in-person.



Tabling events included a spinner that invited people to share their opinion on one of eight questions from the online survey. Participants used hearts to indicate which image they preferred most. Not all participants responded to each question, and results from this exercise should be regarded as unscientific polling.

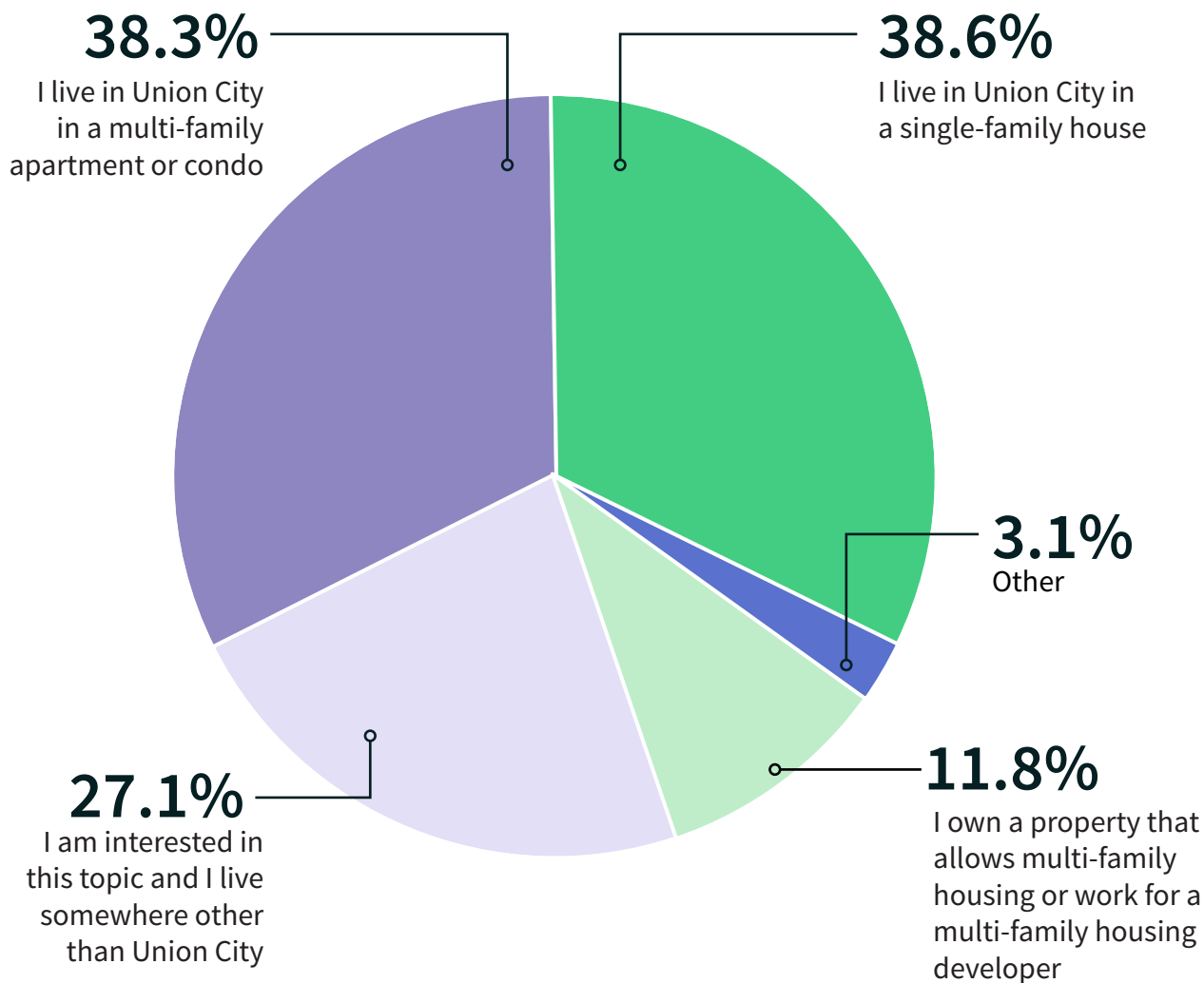


Survey Respondents

Question 1

Please tell us how you are associated with Union City multi-family housing?

Survey respondents could choose more than one category. Percentages are based out of total responses per category.

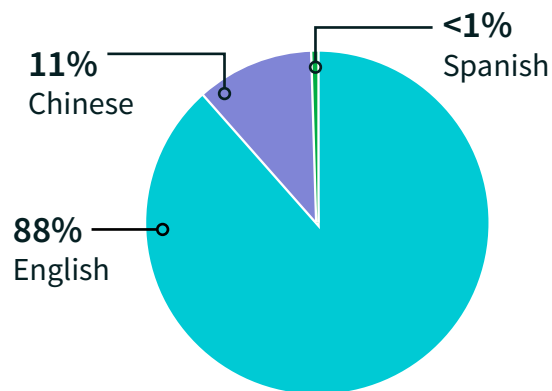


Results Summary

The online survey respondents primarily live in Union City, split between those who live in a single family home and those who live in a multi-family apartment or condo.

Respondents also included property owners and people who lived somewhere other than Union City who were interested in the topic.

Those who responded to the survey used English, Chinese, and Spanish versions.



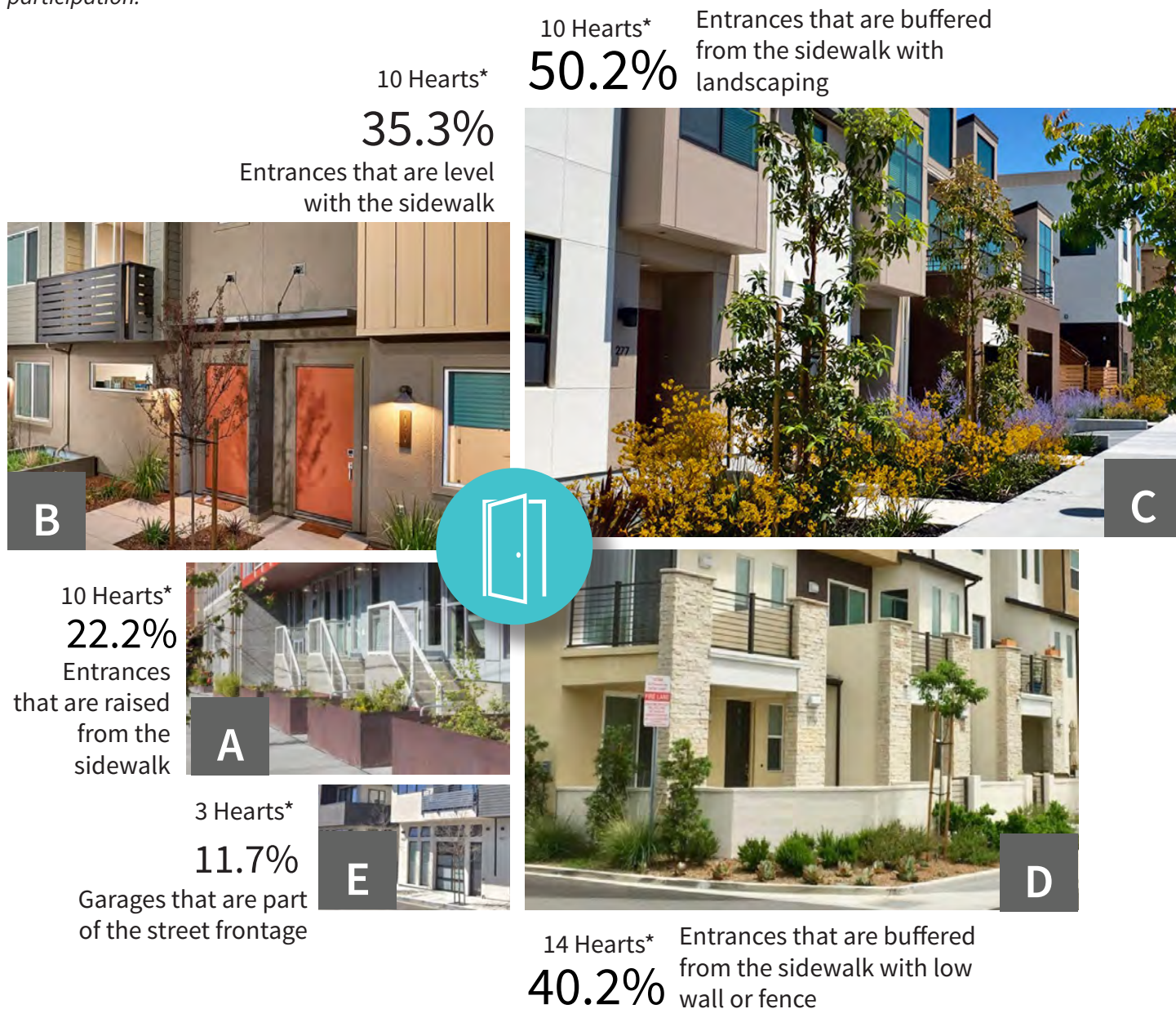
Ground Level Unit Entries

Question 2

For ground level units in multi-family developments, which entry designs would fit in to Union City? (select all that apply)

Survey respondents could choose more than one category. Percentages are based out of total responses per category.

**Hearts are listed from the in-person sticker choices for reference. The stickers placed are not an indication of total participation.*



Results Summary

Survey respondents preferred entrances buffered from the sidewalk with landscaping, with low walls or fences. There was a mix of preferences for entrances that were level or raised from the sidewalk. There was not a strong preference for garages that are part of the street frontage.

Window Designs

Question 3

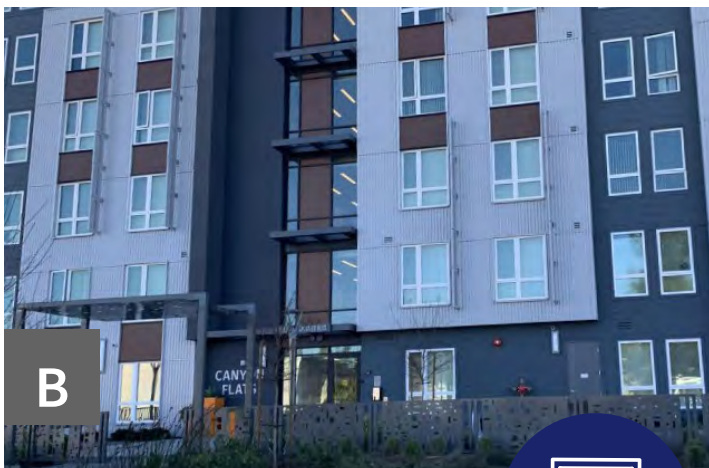
Which window designs fit in Union City? (select all that apply)

Survey respondents could choose more than one category. Percentages are based out of total responses per category.

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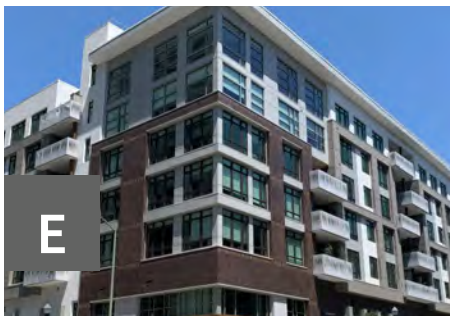
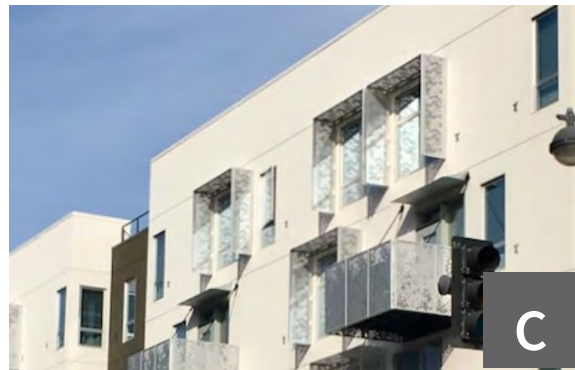
5 Hearts*

39.3% Buildings with lots of window variety



3 Hearts*

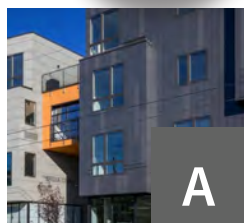
34% Windows with prominent or unique treatments



6 Hearts*

26.1%

Windows that are recessed from building walls



5 Hearts*

20.1%

Buildings with minimal window patterns



4 Hearts*

39.6%

Windows that are flush with building walls

Other features respondents wanted:

- Balconies
- Ability to control daylight

Results Summary

Survey respondents preferred buildings with windows that are flush with building walls and compositions of facades with lots of window variety, including prominent or unique treatments. Fewer liked the image with recessed windows, and there were a few that preferred minimal window patterns.

Exterior Building Design - Apartments

Question 4:

Which of the following exterior building design would fit in Union City?

(select all that apply)

Survey respondents could choose more than one category. Percentages are based out of total responses per category.

*Hearts are listed from the in-person sticker choices for reference. The stickers placed are not an indication of total participation.

21 Hearts*

39.6%

Varied shapes, roofs, and heights to create the impression of clearly distinct massing



5 Hearts*

39.3%

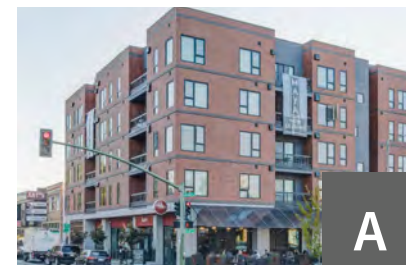
Treating long buildings with features that create the appearance of multiple buildings



5 Hearts*

34.0%

Dividing up long buildings with vertical features to create more variation



6 Hearts*

22.7%

Relatively flat facades with features such as windows and changes in colors and materials

3 Hearts*

24.4%

Stepped back upper stories

Results Summary

Survey respondents seemed to prefer apartment buildings with exterior treatments that vary shapes, roofs, and heights and to make long buildings appear as multiple buildings or divided with vertical features. There was also support for step backs and exterior treatments that use colors and materials.

Exterior Building Design - Townhouses

Question 5:

Which of the following exterior building design would fit in Union City?

(select all that apply)

Survey respondents could choose more than one category. Percentages are based out of total responses per category.

*Hearts are listed from the in-person sticker choices for reference. The stickers placed are not an indication of total participation.

Architectural features that help distinguish between individual units 3 Hearts*
37.2%



7 Hearts*
46.6% Active street frontages with stoops, front porches, and balconies



5 Hearts*
21%
More private street frontages



15 Hearts*
36%
Relatively simple architectural shapes



7 Hearts*
26.3%
Homes with a variety of exterior changes in colors and materials

Results Summary

Survey respondents preferred townhouse exterior design to include active street frontages, a distinction between individual units, and relatively simple architectural shapes. Some also cared about more private street frontages and a variety of exterior colors and materials.

Historic Alvarado District

Question 6:

The Historic Alvarado District located around Union City Boulevard and Smith Street was one of the first neighborhoods to be built in Union City. Which of the following multi-family projects would you be comfortable seeing in the Historic Alvarado District?

Survey respondents could choose more than one category. Percentages are based out of total responses per category.

*Hearts are listed from the in-person sticker choices for reference. The stickers placed are not an indication of total participation.

48.2% 1 Heart*

10 Hearts* 42.4%



20.5% 7 Hearts*

Spacious
Efficient
Comfortable
Practical
Generous
Simple
Durable
Private

3 Hearts* 33.5%

Question 7:

Why did you make your selection?

- A was chosen because it looks like a single family house and matches the scale of the area.
 - B was chosen because of its balconies and the variation on the front, though some thought it might be too trendy for the area.
 - C was chosen because it matched other development in the district and references older historic details to compliment other design in the neighborhood. It was also chosen because it has commercial on the ground floor and hides the parking.
 - D was chosen for its simple, minimal, clean, urban and modern. Some thought it looked industrial but doesn't seem to fit in the neighborhood.
- Color, design and visual appeal
 - Ability to fit better with Old Alvarado.
 - Combining modern architecture with traditional elements
 - Preference for detached garages and separated entries with patios

Boulevards

Question 8:

Which of the following multi-family projects would you be comfortable seeing in Union City on big streets such as Whipple Road and Mission Boulevard?

Survey respondents could choose more than one category. Percentages are based out of total responses per category.

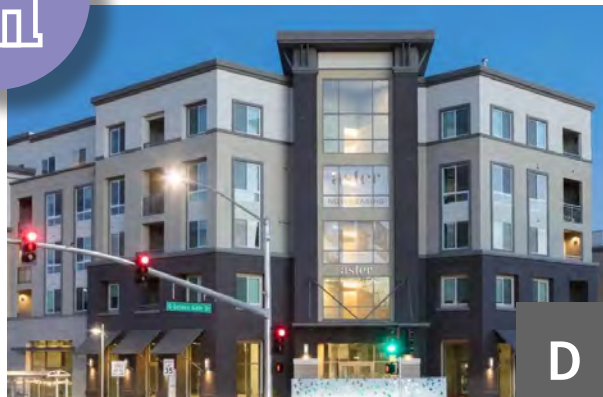
**Hearts are listed from the in-person sticker choices for reference. The stickers placed are not an indication of total participation.*

43.3% 5 Hearts*

4 Hearts* 36.4%



5 Hearts* 28.9%



*Welcoming
Simple
Clean lines
Appealing
Professional
Distinctive
Upscale*

35.6% 6 Hearts*

Question 9:

Why did you make your selection?

- A was generally disliked because it was too varied.
- B was the most preferred choice because it looks like typical apartments, and was commonly described as modern and light.
- C was visually preferred for its mix of materials, but also criticized for its roof form.
- D was chosen because of its symmetry and expression of prominence. It was also preferred because it has ground floor commercial uses.

- Modern and welcoming
- Private, safe, and feels comfortable
- Preference for balconies
- Opportunity for the corner to be a focal point
- Ground floor treatment on busy streets needs to be addressed for safety

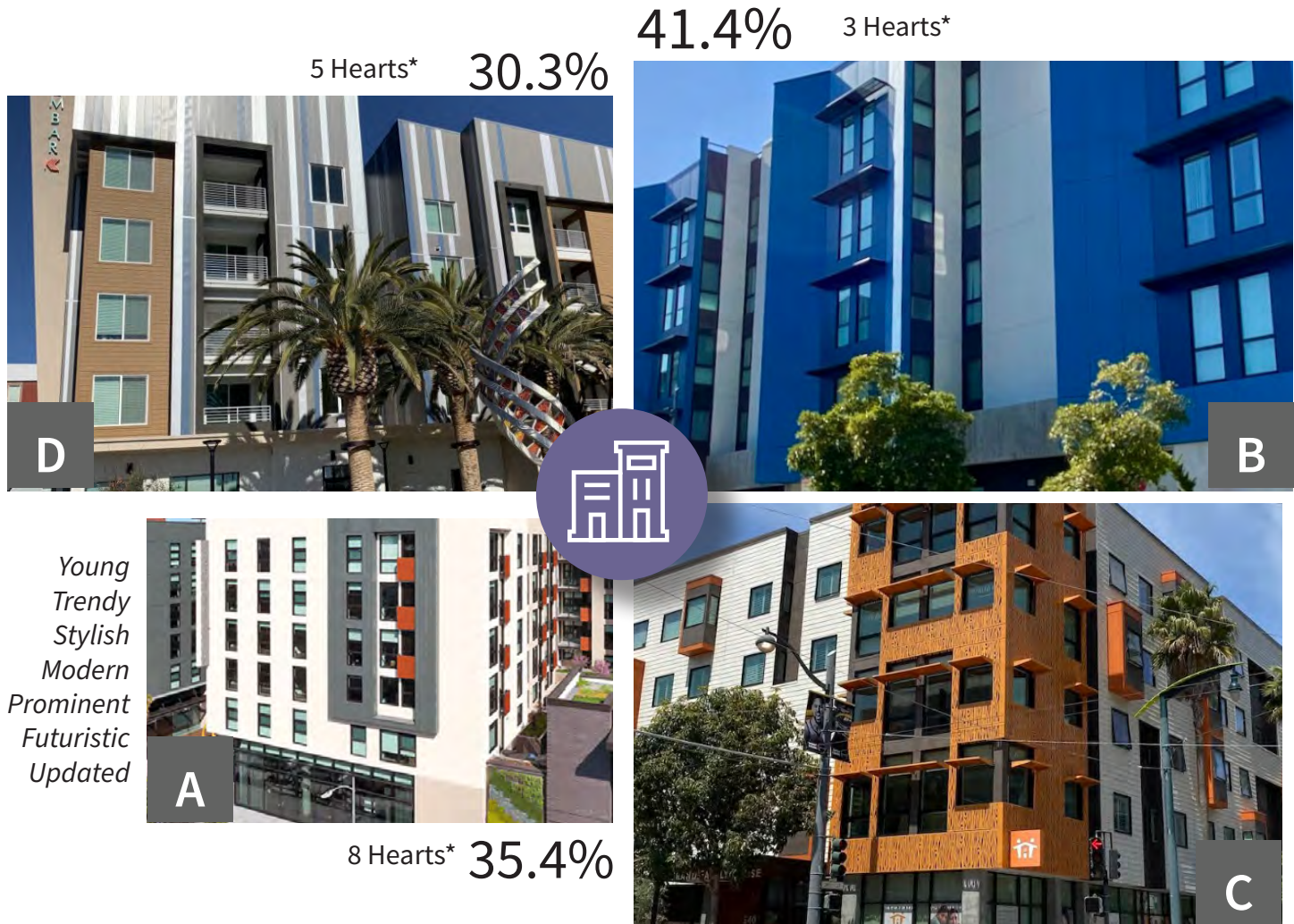
Union City Intermodal (BART) Station

Question 10:

Which of the following multi-family projects would you be comfortable seeing near the Union City Intermodal (BART) Station?

Survey respondents could choose more than one category. Percentages are based out of total responses per category.

**Hearts are listed from the in-person sticker choices for reference. The stickers placed are not an indication of total participation.*



Question 11:

Why did you make your selection?

- A was described as stylish, modern, and has good colors.
- B was chosen by those who liked the color and thought it looks roomier, but it was also criticized for looking defensive.
- C was chosen by those who thought it was similar to buildings in the area. It was described as beautiful and modern, and has bold colors.
- D appealed to many because its modern look, but some were concerned that the choice of materials would not stand the test of time.
- Colors & Aesthetics
- Modern design
- Ability to fit in with surrounding context
- Looking like it belongs in a transit area

Design Quality

Question 12:

When thinking about multi-family housing design in general, which aspects of building design (e.g. colors, materials, etc.) influence your overall impression of quality? (Open ended question)

These responses from the online survey and in-person events provide a record of the variety of opinions heard, then categorized into themes.

General Aspects

- Safety and security: Design to be friendly and inviting but safe for the owners.
- Personalization: Allow owners to make small modifications as needed.
- Anticipate, prevent, and design for resilience to disasters such as fire, earthquakes and power outages.
- Integrate sustainability: Rooftop solar, electrification.
- Utilize a high quality of construction for longevity, durability, and functionality.
- Provide some kind of historical connection to the area.
- Design for privacy.
- Make sure there is the feeling of having enough personal space.

Site

- Design open spaces with landscaping, plants and trees, and water features.
- Provide outdoor seating.
- Ensure accessibility to community amenities on site.
- Locate housing next to conveniences for living near shopping and access.
- Include mixed-use, ground floor commercial in the building to improve convenience.
- Parking: preference for attached garages and for garages to be hidden in the back

Massing

- Suggestions about how to make apartment buildings look less dense included:
 - Spacing between buildings
 - Break down the shape of the building with colors, materials, and changes in spacing
 - Emphasize individual units
- Privacy is a concern, and it was suggested to space entrances and windows between neighbors for privacy.
- Walkability: Space entrances and windows to create a rhythm and interest that is pleasing for pedestrians.

Design Quality, continued

Exterior Design

- Design the exterior for simplicity, unity, harmony, but not too minimal.
- Make sure exterior design is:
 - Distinctive
 - Unique
 - High quality
 - Tasteful
 - Functional
- Design preferences included both “modern, sleek” and “classic, traditional.”
- Design in a timeless way so that in a few years buildings will not be dated.
- Desire for materials and colors to have complementary palettes and lots of details/features/variety
- Design the outside appearance to have some complementary relationship to surrounding buildings.
- Avoid modern, institutional looking, raw materials.
- Windows: Access to daylight was emphasized repeatedly with many requests for more windows.
- Roofs: Ensure roofs appear uncluttered [air conditioners, etc, not visible from ground]
- Balcony Design: a variety of comments focused on a desire to have balconies and how they are designed.

Materials

- There were many comments about material quality, texture and appearance:
 - Liked: glass, wood, metal, stone, brickwork, stucco
 - Disliked: Stucco, metal
- There was a desire for materials to be:
 - weather resistant
 - durable
 - safe (healthy and environmentally sustainable)
 - ethically sourced
 - low-maintenance
 - easy to clean
 - sturdy
- There was a desire for the richness of materials to create a human scale.

Colors

- The majority of responses were about color.
- Complementary colors were important to many
- There was a preference for a wide variety of colors ranging from subtle, subdued, earth tones, to pure, bright and bold.
- Some stated 3 colors or more for trim, and others said not too many colors

Internal Design

- There was a preference for larger units with high ceilings.
- There were concerns about acoustics between units and suggestions for noise insulation.
- There were comments specifically about separating the kitchen from the dining room.
- There were multiple comments about preferring in-unit washer/dryers.

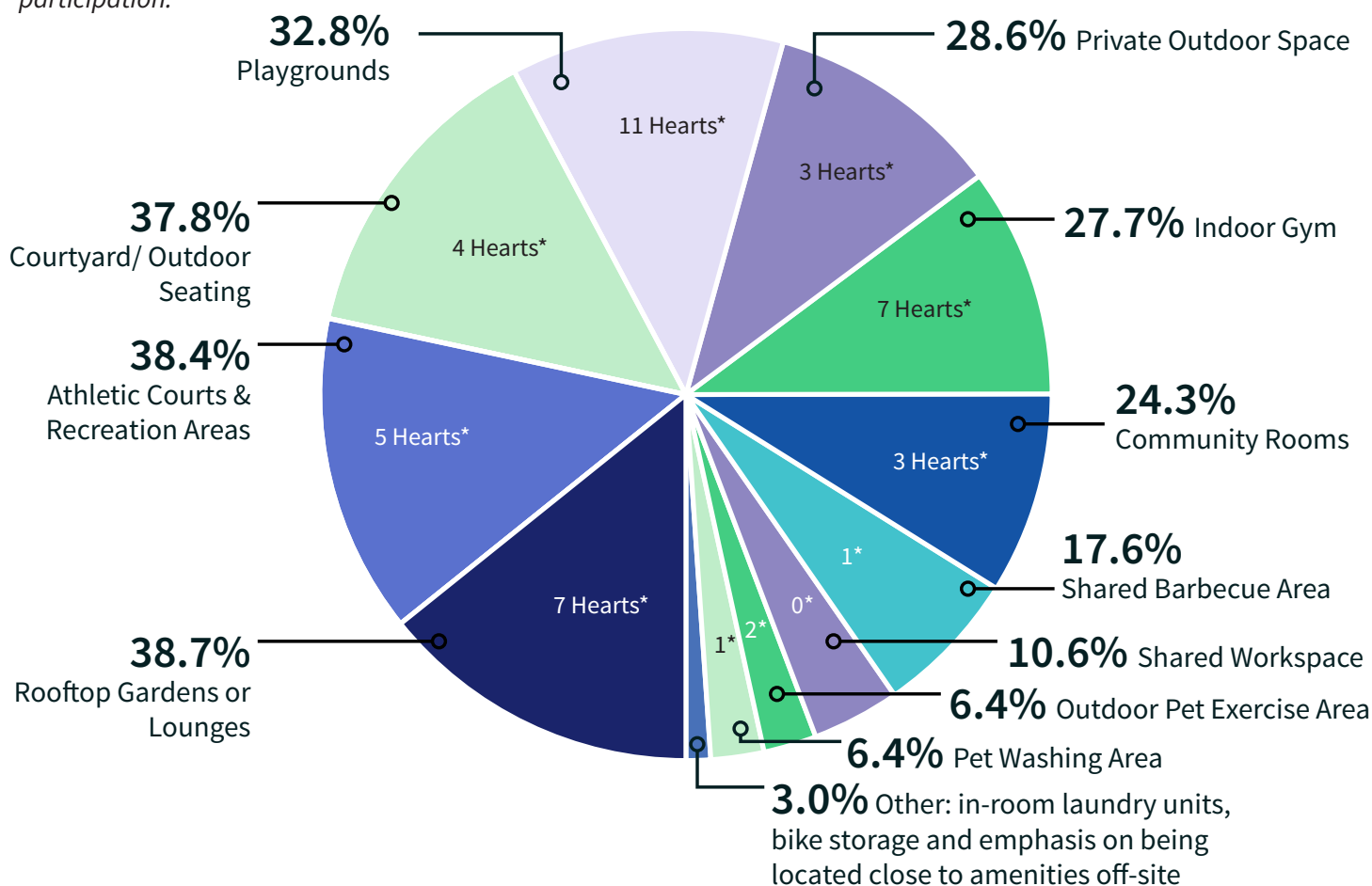
Amenities

Question 13:

Please pick the top 3 amenities that multi-family housing projects should have.

Survey respondents could choose more than one category. Percentages are based out of total responses per category.

*Hearts are listed from the in-person sticker choices for reference. The stickers placed are not an indication of total participation.



Top amenities that multi-family projects should have:



Rooftop Gardens or Lounges

Athletic Courts & Recreation Areas



Courtyards & Outdoor Seating



Playgrounds



Private Outdoor Space



Design Preferences

Question 14:

Is there anything you particularly like or dislike about multi-family design? (Open ended question.)

Design Preferences

- General Design: I like more humanized design
- General Design: Make it playful, energetic
- General Design: I like minimalist design.
- General Design: I like simple and generous design.
- Design for Families: Design open and inviting projects, while still creating privacy for each family unit. A good unit design makes the family's public activity space comfortable. Thus greatly increasing the emotional and communication between relatives. Design to be practical for parents and families
- Community aspects: There are a lot of new people around to meet, it makes it easier for me to make friends, and being able to live next to my parents and friends is great
- ADA: I would like them to be more elderly/handicap family friendly. Especially for families that take care of their grandparents.
- Safety: Design to make the place safe to live. No dead and hidden corners
- Private Open Space: A small private outdoor space would be super! A patio, balcony, or porch with a short gate entry would be the best.
- Common Open Spaces: Preference for private lounge area, public activity area, plants in common areas, large roof deck or terrace
- Shared Amenities: The multi-family design where there is a community room, indoor gym, and playgrounds are better. I would like to see community areas where children can play and families gather to have a BBQ or just enjoy the outdoors. + basketball courts
- Exterior: Incorporate big windows
- Exterior: Drawing from historical and modern designs to blend it into something would be ideal.
- Access: Parking should be in the rear of the building so it is easier for pedestrians to access the building. Access is preferred from outdoors versus enclosed and hallways.
- Emergencies: Make sure it's fire safe
- Parking: Add EV charging
- Parking: I like assigned and guaranteed parking for residents.
- Building Interiors: Air conditioning is desired
- Building Interiors: I would like to have bigger bedrooms
- Building Interiors: Build units with closets and utility areas in the common areas
- Security: Many people can take care of each other, but it is also especially lively.
- Convenience: I love the mix of small business into some of the housing projects, especially with small cafes or restaurants. Having functional shopping/eating/living within a block or two of your home with high walkability is really appealing.

Design Aversions

Question 14: continued

Is there anything you particularly like or dislike about multi-family design?

Design Aversions

- General Design: Affordable housing does not need to look cheap. Avoid the public housing look.
- Access/Circulation: I don't like narrow corridors and stairs
- Privacy: I do not like when the units are packed too closely together. What I don't like is that the privacy is a little bit worse than a single house
- Privacy: Multi-family design should pay more attention to the privacy of the individual. I don't like when outdoor seating is close to private doors and windows.
- Privacy: I don't like the idea of the front entrance to be too close to each.
- Private Open Space: I do not like to see clutter on balconies. People need privacy so these items should be at the rear of the building.
- Open Space: What I don't like is that the space between each household is small, which easily causes the public leisure space in the community to be limited. Most activities are limited to their own gardens, and many people's leisure and fitness needs are difficult to be fully met.
- Safety: What I don't like is that there are more people and more complex, there are all kinds of people, some are good and some are bad, it's hard to control) In some situations, there are too many people and it didn't feel safe
- Building Massing: Multi-family buildings are too tall. Two stories is better than three or four.
- Exterior: I don't like windows that are too small, or no windows
- Exterior: I dislike flat boxes
- Exterior: I do not like loud or too bold colors. Design with too many color and texture varieties - busy and dizzy
- Exterior: Often the design is boring and unattractive. The uniform design of these buildings is something that sometimes isn't pleasant to look at.
- Exterior: I think most modern minimal multi family designs are ugly and take away from the existing architecture/design of a city.
- Exterior: I dislike cookie cutter designs, they lack individuality. It's not good when it is boring, repetitive, and looks like no imagination was used in the creation
- Site Design: I don't like it when the building frontage is only cement and that the sidewalk is too small, or if a sidewalk is not provided, and when there are no parking spaces on street in front of resident building.
- Ground Floor: I don't like the front doors to be right on the street. Especially on busier roads. It cause anxiety for me - either little kids running out into the street or more easily accessible for porch pirates.
- Ground Floor: I don't like the idea of the front entrance to be too close to each.
- Building Interior: I don't like small units
- Building Interiors: Do away with shared laundry rooms; units should all have their own laundry in the unit. It's much safer, more accessible to people who work different schedules, and safer for kids and supervision.
- Acoustics: Noise irritates me. I dislike that not enough insulation or soundproofing gets used in building them. Dislike noise heard from other units and noise from nearby streets. Common walls not preferred!

Opinions

Question 14: continued

Is there anything you particularly like or dislike about multi-family design?

General Design Opinions

- I don't think there should be too many restrictions, people should be able to buy homes according to everyone's preferences (and developers should be able to build them).
- It's time to modernize Union City. Shine.
- General Design: If the architecture design is great there's nothing wrong with maximizing space it's all in the design.
- Multi-family housing can be nice if well maintained, well lit, safe, and the residents have pride in ownership

Non-Design Opinions about Multi-Family Housing

- Design for young people working and commuting, possibly with young children. Multi family buildings usually only include studio, 1 and 2 bedroom apartments. Families need more 3+ options available to them
- Make spaces for contractors to work and park. As a contractor myself they are the worst to work at.
- Union City infrastructure such as freeway capacity, school, hospital need to scale up with population increase. All occupants will use water and electricity. Where will that come from?
- My biggest issue w/multi-family designs is that they add more people to the neighborhood who use common resources like street parking, trails, parks, etc. that were built prior to population increase. The community should get builders to allocate more resources to offset the growth that will strain these resources due to increased usage.

- I dislike the fact that multi-family housing are slated for development in the older/historical neighborhoods. Stacking people (multi-family) on top of marginalized communities may meet the City's housing quota but does nothing for the City's neglect in providing programs and services in these same neighborhoods.
- I believe the city is looking to make money without thinking of what harm it would do. The disregard of life time families with generations from the start of our community.
- I'm not a fan of this design and living situation mostly because I don't care to live so close by others but I do understand the need for more housing and limited land space in this area.
- I like that it will help with the housing issues and hopefully bring rent down for renters.
- I like that it is high density and more affordable than single family homes. We have a housing crisis!
- I like the efficiency of multiple housing buildings and that it is saving land
- I like density because it makes the city more interesting and gives people in the Bay Area desperately needed places to live. I'm just overjoyed that the city is motivated to build housing that goes beyond the isolating and unaffordable single family home paradigm.
- I don't like housing that's too dense because it would make traffic a nightmare.
- Parking issues, Not enough parking for guests
- Not everyone will walk to BART. We know Bay Area residents like their cars.