

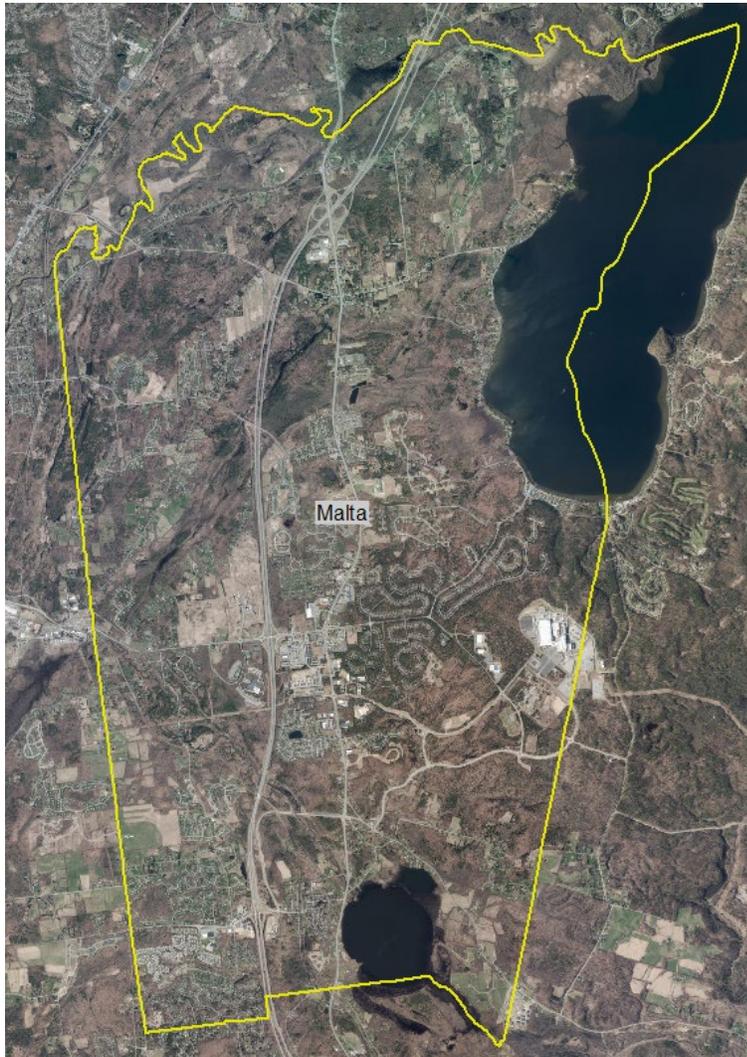


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Town of Malta Comprehensive Plan Community Survey Summary

**2540 Route 9
Town of Malta
Saratoga County, New York**



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Obtaining public opinions and perspective is a crucial step in the community planning process. Public participatory planning allows citizen stakeholders to influence and understand the developments and zoning regulations as well as the ability to influence the way their town gets developed. Robust public participation can minimize the potential risks of creating biased laws and regulations, inaccurately portraying development needs, and “tunnel-vision” development. Without citizens’ input in community planning efforts a true community can not be achieved.

This data was collected from a survey distributed by the Town of Malta through SurveyMonkey®. The following report summarizes the opinions and ideas for the Town of Malta’s future that were captured in the public survey.

1.1 General Demographic of the Town of Malta

873 responses were collected with the average time for completion being six-minutes. The estimated population is 15,373, according to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey, the Town’s response rate was 5.68%. The working age population is estimated to be 43.1% in 2017 down from 45.4% according to the 2010 U.S. Census Demographic Profile Data. This change is translated into an increasing elderly and college age population as well as a slight increase in school age children. The 2010 Census also noted a low vacancy rate compared to the Northeast average (10.3%) with a vacancy rate of 7.4% in the Town of Malta. This should be noted to be before many housing developments started construction and expanding including Victorian Landings, GrandeVille at Malta, and Malta Springs on Cramer Road. The vacancy rate is not provided as part of the American Community Survey. The 2010 U.S. Census Demographic Profile Data and 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates are provided in the appendices.

2.0 SURVEY OPINION POLL

At the end of the survey was an optional question where users could enter their own free response. Out of the 873 total survey entries, 313 people added a response or opinion (or about 35.9% of respondents). The open-response opinions are divided into three main categories, Residential, Commercial, and Municipal, based on the area the issue most pertained to. Most responses are directed at Municipal and Commercial issues (162 and 119 responses, respectively) with Residential issues having 32 responses.

These responses were initially categorized by principal issue and then further subcategorized by the most salient issue brought up. Many responses covered multiple categories but to reduce the amount of double counting and the dilution of the significance of the impacts the respondents felt are at hand. The following sections will go into further detail explaining the categories and subcategories. A general summary of the main issues within each category will be included at the end of each section.

2.1 Residential Issues

Residential issues are categorized into five topics; Affordability/Affordable Housing; Condense growth; Volume of housing; Need better growth; and Apartments. The graph below is a visualization of the tabulated data.

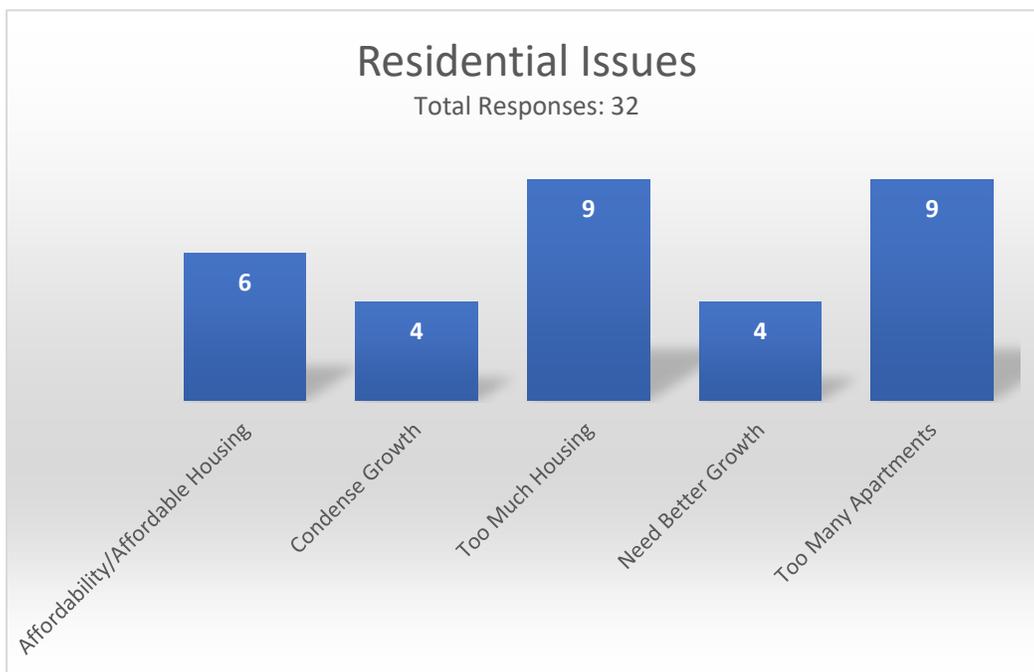
2.1.1 Affordability/Affordable Housing

The main issue identified is the overabundance of expensive apartment style and large starter home developments. One individual stated the issue of affordability related to elderly people and the impracticability of downsizing since houses of this type are not readily available for ownership. Another individual mentioned the overabundance of affordable housing but could be considered an overstock supply of the same type of housing which may create an imbalance in the revenue generated per housing type creating “more affordable housing”.

2.1.2 Condense Growth

Residents expressed their interests to keep Malta contained to the extents that it is now and prevent further expansion into open space and vacant forested land. Some mentioned the seemingly continuous spread of housing complexes and development construction. This leads to traffic congestion from commuters along the major roads as explained by a response.

Figure 1: Residential Issues



2.1.3 Too Much Development

Simply stated by a response is the feeling that there should be no more development. A common theme within this is the impression that much of the housing stock built after 2010 is “workforce housing” for GlobalFoundries. Single-family and small household apartments are also noted as overabundant and almost rampant within Malta. Some responded on the slight difficulty in selling traditionally built homes with the all the newer housing developments and apartments.

2.1.4 Need Better Growth

A common theme with the responses is the growth of apartments compared to other housing stock. To match current and future demand of what residents envision Malta to be, less apartments and more small family homes need to be built or allocated from the current existing stock. Differing from the other topics is the central idea that the housing development is not entirely a bad thing. Rather it's the pattern and progress of the development needs to be thought out for longer term future needs rather than the near future goals of the Town and people looking to live in Malta.

2.1.5 Too Many Apartments

Much of the plight surrounding the issue of there being too many apartments is the relative instability and density of apartments and their externalities. The number of apartments has been noted numerous times to appear to be in excess of the current demand and rent to be higher than the general public can or wants to spend. The issue of the style in which the apartments are being built is brought up in the responses as well. The final architectural aesthetic and road front appearance of the apartments are also said to be less than ideal for the neighborhood they are in or to that which the surrounding residents expect them to appear. Noted as a negative externality of apartments is the increased density of cars and traffic relative to that of single-family or multi-family housing types especially when the apartments are in less than ideal areas for non-motorized transportation usage.

2.2 Municipal Issues

Municipal Issues are split into eleven different categories in order to completely grasp all of the unique issues expressed. The categories are as follows; Utilities; Non-motorized Improvements; Environmental; Small Town Atmosphere; Roadways; Other Development; Public Facilities/Services; Planning/Zoning; Financial; Praise; and Other. The graph below is a visualization of the tabulated data from the survey.

2.2.1 Utilities

Every response identified the need or want of public water and sewer utilities throughout the Town of Malta. The common areas of concern are the Route 67 area and the area near Saratoga Lake by Malta Avenue and Nelson Avenue Extension. Noted is the opinion that the amount of taxes and fees paid to the Town are insufficient relative to the amount of services provided and improved on by the Town.

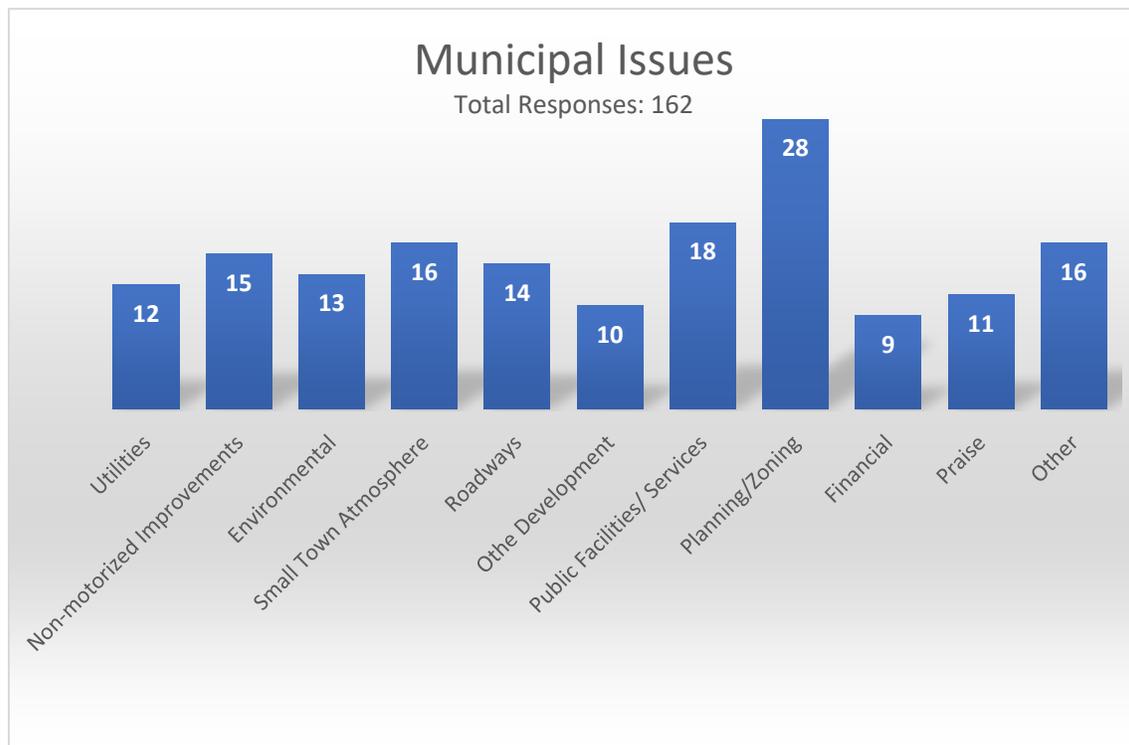
2.2.2 Multi-modal Improvements

This category encompasses areas where biking, walking, running, and other non-motorized transportation means would occur. Concerns more connected to roadway improvements and changes for vehicular traffic are listed in the *Roadways* category. A major theme is the desire for additional sidewalks along the Route 9 and Route 67 corridor as well as from the Round Lake traffic circle up through Cramer Road. Commenters noted non-continuous sidewalks and a lack of connectivity to destinations. Many responses expressed the need for improved sidewalks and bike lanes to ensure the safety of pedestrians and to improve the walkability of the Town. Another well explained point is the need for and the continued expansion of nature and non-roadway bike and multi-use paths through neighborhoods or preserved natural land. This included the addition of lighting of some paths to increase usability and functionality.

2.2.3 Environmental

A general trend of respondents is the desire for the preservation of forests and natural lands in the Town of Malta. Some wanted the specific expansion of the Luther Forest area and others wanted the expansion of the Zim Smith Trail to be more publicly more accessible. Of concern to respondents is the preservation of the health and aesthetic of Saratoga Lake and surrounding land. Another point is the possibility of making nature trails accessible and increasing the number of places for winter nature activities.

Figure 2: Municipal Issues



2.2.4 Small Town Atmosphere

One of the more emotionally driven categories, it encompasses some of the feelings' respondents had towards the position of the Town and their outlook for the future of the Town. Many stated that Malta is at or has surpassed the breaking point for becoming overdeveloped. Some stated the erosion of the fabric that makes Malta, Malta. A small-town feel, community neighborhoods, expanses of open spaces, varied land uses including working farms, and varied commercial uses are all expressed by the respondents as area that needed improving in order to revise the future of Malta. A specific point that is mentioned is the distrust in the government's accountability and incentive for actions.

2.2.5 Roadways

This category pertains more to direct effects on vehicular traffic patterns and surfaces in the Town of Malta. A common issue brought up is the approval of housing and commercial developments before road infrastructure is in place to handle the increased load. Again, Route 9 and Route 67 are noted as

congestion centers as well as Dunning Street near the Northway. The roadways are noted to lack adequate traffic control measures to ensure safe traveling speeds such as correct speed limits to reflect the change in land use demographics, protection toward pedestrians near traffic circles to ensure vehicles are correctly yielding, ensuring correct usage of the traffic circles are maintained by vehicles, and keeping the peaceful neighborhood feel of the existing developments from speeding cars and overweight vehicle usage. Malta Avenue is a particular street of interest for speed reductions.

2.2.6 Other Development

Responses that are too vague or otherwise uncategorizable were captured here. Some respondents mentioned the need to remove blighted and vacant properties to improve the Town's appearance. A couple responses mentioned the need to address the growing elderly population's housing, transportation, and commerce needs. Noted within the responses is the respondents' feeling of development taking place for people other than the residents of Malta, almost pushing them out of their own town.

2.2.7 Public Facilities/Services

Most of the respondents commented on the need for expanded public facilities especially a local police force and a new school (i.e. elementary school) as the Town's population continues to grow. Having a local police force to enhance traffic safety and enforce local municipal laws are direct issues raised in the responses. Some also noted the abundance of public parks but incompleteness or failure to use the park space to its maximum potential to earn revenue for the Town. Creating concession stands or instituting user fees for certain parks to generate revenue is also mentioned. A new public library or an expansion of the existing one is an issue of concern for some respondents.

2.2.8 Planning/Zoning

Most respondents' complaints towards municipal issues are directed towards the general planning of the Town and the adherence to local zoning codes. The issue is addressed in three other subcategories: Infrastructure, developments, and Complete Streets.

2.2.8.1 Infrastructure

Quite a few respondents mentioned the need for infrastructure to be in place before development occurs. Having adequate sewer, water, and gas lines are especially important for new commercial and apartment developments along Route 9 and Route 67. Water and sewer lines are important for residential developments elsewhere throughout the Town of Malta. Adequate roadway infrastructure and traffic calming techniques are of utmost importance to all respondents in the *Infrastructure* category as unsafe traveling conditions are observed and dangerous traveling situation are experienced throughout the Town. Respondents want to ensure the zoning laws and regulations reflected the demands and needs of the Town's citizens to provide and ensure adequate public resources and general infrastructure capabilities.

2.2.8.2 Developments

For developments the common focal point is the lack of adherence to existing master plan guidelines and zoning regulations. Some signaled the issuance of too many variances relating to smaller lot developments

allowing too many houses per lot and having them too close or with insufficient buffers between other residences. The planning for and approval of so many housing developments are of concern to respondents as it is said to ruin the aesthetic and feel of the Town of Malta and alter its natural landscape for the worse.

2.2.8.3 Complete Streets

The Complete Streets concept is identified in many responses, few specifically calling it by name. More common is the call for better sidewalk connections, safer multi-use paths around and in shopping areas, more connected paths to residential and commercial areas, and better lighting and signage for pedestrians and drivers alike. The development along Route 9 is noted as a good opportunity to construct a complete streets landscape but needed the planning and zoning officials to adopt and recognize the importance of accepting such an initiative. Mandating new businesses and housing developments to construct sidewalks and multi-use paths that connect to existing pathways is a suggestion presented to be included in the zoning code.

2.2.9 Financial

The main issue brought up in this category is the idea of town taxes. No response explicitly said town taxes should never exist. The argument instead is that the current practice of building residential and commercial developments to “pay” for the town taxes that residents would pay is unsustainable and hurting the community. Tax incentives to attract new business developments are also seen as a plight to citizens and that no tax deductions/incentives should be given to large commercial businesses in the Town.

2.2.10 Praise

This category contains responses specifically giving accolades to the current planning and development pattern of the town. Of the 327 responses 11 (3.4%) are directly positive to the development and planning in the Town of Malta.

2.2.11 Other

The other category is the place where responses or issues not pertaining or concerning the development of the Town of Malta’s new comprehensive plan found its home. The responses ranged from general inquires into specific construction projects or properties and suggestions on the organization of the Town government to general questions about town specific services and facilities that do not pertain to a comprehensive plans’ focus.

2.3 Commercial Issues

Commercial Issues are split into seven different categories as follows; Too Much Development; Need Different Type of Development; Need Aesthetic Improvements; Speedway Concerns; Better Development Practices; Infill Development; and Supports/Likes Development. The graph below is a visualization of the tabulated data from the survey.

2.3.1 Too Much Development

Much of the issues raised surround the development of large retailers and strip mall like developments. Some have noted the shift of the Town towards the likes of Clifton Park and Colonie with the rapid construction of buildings. The notion that the Town of Malta has become overdeveloped is reiterated in every response with mentions of too much retail development and not enough small shops. The rate of development is also seen as too rapid and needs to be thought out more before new commercial construction takes place.

2.3.2 Need different Types of Development

There is a split between people wanting more big-box store versus smaller scale retail stores, all though recognized the need and want for different retailers to fulfil their shopping needs. Many noted the obstacle of having to travel to different towns to complete their shopping trips. A consensus is that GlobalFoundries should not be the focus of the type of development welcomed into the Town, but rather other manufacturing companies should be welcomed as well. More restaurants, storefront retail, walkable centers, and business sector diversification are all issues brought up by respondents. Noted is the lack of variety in restaurant types, grocery stores, and retail options for the non-Global Foundries residence with younger children or families,

2.3.3 Need Aesthetic Improvements

This category expounded more of the aesthetic and architectural issues respondents had with new and existing commercial construction mostly in the Route 9 area. The cohesive appearance of the buildings is noted to be absent or shoddily put together. Traditional architectural style homes and businesses are located next to new modern facilities adding to the “unkept” and hastily approved appearance of the Town. A suggestion from some respondents is to adopt a general architectural model for the Town to create a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing commercial façade. With a better look, respondents did mention their increased likeliness to shop in and the Town of Malta and support local businesses.

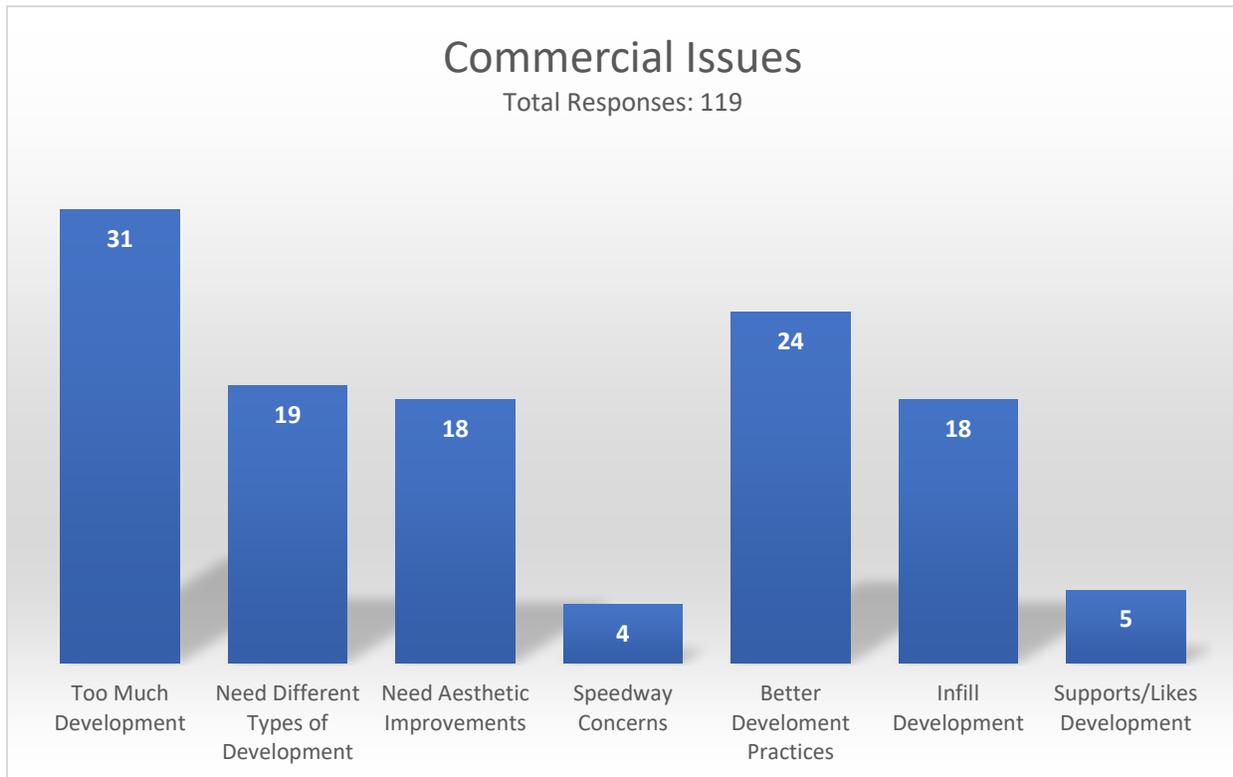
2.3.4 Speedway Concerns

How will development surrounding the Albany-Saratoga Speedway be managed and what is the outlook for the surrounding area? Respondents commented on the noise disturbance during operational hours and the increase in houses being built around the property. The implications of the disturbance is mentioned to be quite great. Acknowledgement of the importance of the Albany-Saratoga Speedway to the local economy is noted but the concern of development around it appears to take precedence.

2.3.5 Better Development Practice

A common theme is an interest in mixed-use interconnected shopping areas. Connections between the shopping areas by way of driveways and parking lots and with residential areas through multi-use paths is mentioned. Respondents noted that increasing walkability throughout the commercialized Route 9 corridor could attract other businesses to the area. Condensed commercial growth is the preferred planning form of respondents in the Town of Malta and the decrease of sprawl like development along Route 67 is encouraged. Vertical building rather than horizontal construction is advocated for throughout the Town to cope with the demand for new space but preserve the land area used.

Figure 3: Commercial Issues



2.3.6 Infill Development

A common issue presented is the abundance of existing unoccupied storefronts either from failed ventures or where businesses have moved locations. Multiple locations along Route 67 and Round Lake Road are viable locations for new businesses to occupy existing buildings. The general idea that any new businesses should first fill the shell of where old vacant businesses are located is communicated throughout the Town of Malta. The pressure of new development is echoed throughout the responses with the fear of the disappearance of existing farmland, forest, and open space. Run-down buildings are said to occupy prime land for businesses as well. The development of the lots for new mixed-use businesses are mentioned as a viable option to boost the appeal of the Town and increase land revenue.

2.3.7 Support/Likes Development

The last category encompasses the responses that praise or see the development as a boon for the Town of Malta and do not mind the increased traffic and population. Being in the halfway point for many major cities and towns between the Capital District and Southern Adirondacks offers many opportunities for respondents. The growth allows them to travel to work, go shopping, and find entertainment easily without having to travel far distances. Currently the Town of Malta not being considered as big or commercialized as Clifton Park or Saratoga Springs it still retains some of its community and country feel for some respondents.

2.4 Preliminary Findings

In general, most responses have a negative impression of current development patterns and planning of the Town of Malta. GlobalFoundries is also a major concern for residents as they fear that over time GlobalFoundries will eventually pull out of Malta and leave them with the burden of empty houses and businesses littering the landscape. Becoming another Amsterdam or Troy is mentioned as a real concern for many. Much of the current development is focused on the income from GlobalFoundries and the business its employees bring to Malta adding to the dependence of Malta on keeping GlobalFoundries.

Promoting local businesses and small-scale retail locations of a wider variety of larger retailers is a desire for many respondents to fulfill their everyday needs and to be able to ensure their money stays in the Town and its local entrepreneurs. It would also decrease the amount of travel time and distance of many residents decreasing the traffic on roads and increasing the desirability of Malta.

Many respondents feel as if they have been put on the backburner in turn to please developers and commercial and residential development rather than maintain the infrastructure that is already present and improve upon it. The residential development growth is seen as a bane to the fabric of what make the Town of Malta home, and an affliction to the natural environment that surrounds the Town.

Additional research and a technical analysis of the issues raised by survey respondents should be conducted. This will allow all parties involved in the planning process to utilize a share baseline of facts as they chart a future for the Town.

