



TPRTA Survey of Truro Part-Time Resident Taxpayers

SEPTEMBER 2021

Results

In the summer of 2021, TPRTA conducted a survey of Truro's part-time resident taxpayers to get their views on key current issues and to hear from them about their concerns and priorities, especially for TPRTA to address with our new Town Manager and a changing Select Board. The main topics of the survey included voting in Truro; time spent in Truro as a result of COVID-19 and moving forward; tax-supported services; priority issues facing Truro and separately, for TPRTA priorities; and finally, questions about reliance upon and priorities for TPRTA as a voice and advocate for part-timers in the near term.

About the survey

At the time the survey was closed, we received responses from **513 households**¹ representing the views of more than 1500 part-time residents. This is the largest survey to have been conducted in Truro to our knowledge. The large number of responses is greater than the largest voter turnout in Truro and the largest ATM turnout in Truro. It also represents a cross section of the Truro community equivalent to more than half the number of full-time residences in Truro.

Beyond providing roughly 80% of the taxes and fees collected from Truro property owners, Truro's part-time resident taxpayers are the mainstay of Truro's economy and significant contributors to Truro's civic and community life - as clients, patrons, donors and volunteers for Truro's businesses, non-profits and official committees as well as regional entities. The added income we draw through visitors and guests amplifies these benefits to the Truro community. Given that part-timers do not have the right to vote, these results carry additional importance as a reflection of our collective voice in Truro. The views expressed should have considerable and affirmative impact if taken in consideration to the proportion of our contributions to the well-being of Truro.

¹ In total **516 responses** were received. Of these, three "junk" responses were not included in this analysis and report. The final "N" count for all responses is thus **513**. On the rare occasion that a respondent skipped a question, percentages are based on the total number responding to that item. No respondents were duplicative.

Highlights

VOTING

While about 6% are currently registered to vote in Town, more than half indicate they would consider it if eligible. Comments indicate that part-time resident taxpayers want a formal say in Town matters that affect them.

TIME IN TRURO

Truro part-time residents stay in Truro on two bases: either on a continuous basis (51%) or on a periodic basis (49% usually seasonal). About 18% reside in Truro on both bases. On average, “continuous” respondents spend 7 months a year in Truro, with some spending 12 months a year and some spending as little as 3 months a year. “Periodic” residents spend on average 14 weeks (3.5 months) a year in Truro, with as little as two weeks and as much 28 weeks (7 months) a year. This is a dramatic increase from 2018 survey results.

About 45% have increased their time in Truro as a result of the pandemic, about 25% have increased their time in Truro a bit, and **about 30% have seen no change** in the time they spend in Truro.

As the pandemic abates, **nearly 67% expect little or no drop in the amount of time they spend in Truro**. About 26% expect a moderate reduction, and under 7% anticipate a sharp reduction in their time here.

In other words, for the most part the increased time in Truro is not solely COVID-related and is likely to endure. These trends indicate that the presence of part-timers should bode well for businesses, trades, and organizations that rely on part-timers. This is excellent news for the local economy.

PART-TIMERS' DEMOGRAPHICS

We wanted to understand a bit about the age and household sizes of respondents, to compare with census data. We learned that head-of-household age ranges from 39 years to 91 years of age, with the average age at just shy of 68 years of age. On average, the size of part-timers' households has grown since 2018, from 2 persons to 3 persons on average per household, with a larger range as well, from 1 person to 12 persons. Given the relative size of the part-time to full-time taxpayer base, this indicates that the community is likely to remain a mature community for the foreseeable future.

Notably, data on age of full-time residents tracks with part-timers' reported information.

RESIDENTIAL TAX EXEMPTION

Since the RTE was adopted in 2017, we anticipated that part-timers would have accepted the fact of it in 2021 and would be largely concerned with capping the rate. So we phrased our question on that assumption. Our assumption was incorrect: While about 47% agreed that the maximum RTE rate imposed should be capped at 20%, **only one single person expressed support or “acceptance” of the RTE as a policy or tax matter**.

Only 15% think the RTE should not be rescinded fully and of those the vast majority think it should be capped at 10% or less. **Nearly 75% agree that the Town should shift to reliance on needs-based alternative tax exemptions for tax relief applied on an equal basis to all taxpayers**. Part-timers expressed strong support for tax relief options for those who truly need tax relief. They want the Town to justify the imposition of the RTE

on a “real needs basis” (rather than a “just because we can” basis) and to evaluate the full scope and costs of the RTE on the entire community, including the part-time community in Truro.

Opposition to the RTE is vehement and unabating among respondents. What they accept is, as one captured succinctly, the “futility of expecting changes in a system in which a tax is imposed upon taxpayers who have no vote on the matter – and where the residents who benefit continue to vote for the officials who make it happen. No one needs campaign finance when you have an RTE.”

Of the comments received on this issue in response to numerous questions, many express a deep concern for the recent rhetoric of a few vocal Town voters at the 2021 ATM and some members of the Select Board that plainly expresses disdain and disrespect for part-time resident taxpayers, treats part-timers as a “bank” to fund an ambitious budget of the Town, and cynically does so knowing part-timers have no vote.² As one commenter noted “Economic power is what counts today, and that’s the right to spend other people’s money. The more you spend, the more powerful you are.”

TAX-SUPPORTED SERVICES

Fewer than 6% reported using more Town services since the pandemic began in March 2020. Nearly 62% reported no increase in use of Town services since then, with the remainder indicating a minimal increase over typical use of Town services before the pandemic began.

As taxpayers, part-time residents are keenly aware of the steep rise in the town budget and in tax rates over the last decade. Respondents strongly agree with the proposition that big-ticket items - **Police, Fire/EMS, School and DPW - should be regionalized and/or placed on a cost-sharing basis.** More than 70% supported this for all four services, with a range of 72% to 77% respectively for DPW, School, Fire/EMS and Police. Notably, no one disagreed with regionalizing school services though 19-20% had no opinion on regionalizing the School and DPW respectively. About 10.5% disagreed with regionalizing Police and Fire/EMS. Irrespective of the details, regionalization is widely viewed as an effective tool to control costs and reduce Truro’s budget and taxes.

² Survey responses were obtained before the 2022 tax classification hearing where a 3-2 vote approved a 25% RTE rate, an increase of 5 percent. See the [Select Board \(SB\) meeting of 8/24](#) and the thoughtful [Principal Assessor’s presentation](#). The SB Chair suggested that the average cost of the increase from 20% to 25% was “the price of a dinner for four” notwithstanding that the average cost of the full 25% RTE is considerably higher and that the gap is quite large between the tax increase part-timers pay (e.g., \$245 tax shift at average assessed value) and the tax savings full-timers receive - regardless of need - at that same value point (\$1,003), for a **difference of \$1,248 for properties at the average FY22 assessed value of \$699,911.** Forty percent (40%) of qualified recipients have properties above the average assessed value.

The hearing showed a lack of mutuality and consideration of the full community: while part-timers acknowledge and support needs-based means of providing tax relief for full-time residents, the majority on the SB at best dismissed part-timers’ legitimate concerns.

The Chairman also stated that “through the click of a computer” the SB has determined that “some of the loudest opponents take advantage of other tax programs [at their primary residences, where they] ...“pay no taxes.” It is unimaginable that Town leadership tracks unidentified “opponents” clandestinely and evaluates their behavior elsewhere and out of context. This is just one of the corrosive hidden costs of the RTE.

TOWN PRIORITIES FOR FY22

These include an array of topics for the Town and for TPRTA to focus on. **Highest priority** for the Town was identified for **protecting ground and drinking water quality; preserving the rural character of Truro; addressing myriad impacts of climate change on the local environment; and as noted above, elimination of the RTE and assurance of fairer tax policies.** **Moderate priority** was linked to developing **work force and market rate housing** that is affordable, but **low priority** was given to subsidized (40B) housing, bike safety and sewerage of Route 6, which received the lowest priority rankings of all.

Comments illuminated the basis for lower ranked items: respondents agree that **market rate housing and workforce housing are important and needed**, but believe that **subsidized housing does not serve enough Truro residents** and instead makes housing available to members of other communities, exacerbating the underlying problem of an already poor job market for those who currently live here. For many reasons respondents **oppose sewerage Rt 6 and Rt 6A, including massive cost, serious environmental impact and the certain increase in suburbanization and over-development** that sewerage will trigger. They instead encourage (and applaud) the Town's elimination of cesspools, recommend strengthening septic requirements for wells, and urge the Town to seek regional solutions to meet 40B housing guidelines due to the limited land area available for development in Truro.

Comments further suggest that Truro's rural character and natural beauty *are* the basis for Truro's "micro-economy" and that efforts to over-develop through high-density housing projects or high-intensity industrial projects will undermine the local seasonal economy without the possibility of developing a viable year-round economy. In other words, as one comment notes "overdevelopment affords the worst of both worlds to Truro."

TPRTA PRIORITIES FOR FY22

TPRTA should continue to serve **an advocate for part-time resident taxpayers** according to 91% of respondents, and not to become an information-only organization. As one commenter noted with respect to TPRTA serving as a voice for part-timers, "If you don't do it, who will?" Nearly 80% of respondents believe that TPRTA **communicates with part-timers at the right frequency and level of detail.** Roughly 8% would like more frequent contact.

Because TPRTA **holds itself to being a fair-broker for the entire community and to communicate facts and views with honesty and integrity**, we wanted to ascertain if respondents think that we have achieved that goal. We asked respondents to indicate which of 10 communications platforms they rely upon for useful information about Truro. Overwhelmingly, **85% of respondent rely upon TPRTA's e-newsletters, web postings and emails.** In comparison, 44% rely on the Town website for useful information on Truro.

While the *Provincetown Independent* is most relied upon as a news media outlet (54%), many commenters noted they do not rely upon it for editorial opinions and for "news" on "hot topics" such as affordable housing and water quality, where the paper's bias is transparent and its reports are viewed as misleading. Rather, the *Independent* is relied upon for events calendars, reports on cultural activities, and local items of interest. Comments suggest that the *Provincetown Banner* is viewed as more even-handed on controversial matters. Notably, **social media are not a major source of useful information about Truro** to respondents, counter to larger online news trends.

Respondents want TPRTA to continue to **express their priority views and to educate and inform all citizens and officials on these matters in an accurate and fair manner accordingly.**

OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN

The survey asked for views on “most important issue” facing Truro that is “receiving too little attention and/or funding from the Town?” and for views on “other issues of concern.” **In addition to re-emphasizing the priorities and views reflected above**, we received an additional **247 comments on these questions**. Essentially, most additional comments reflected particular emphasis to these additional topics noted below (listed as of equal importance, quotes here capture multiple comments in a succinct way):

- **Reducing taxes** – noting that “Taxes have doubled in the last seven years and the Select Board continues to spend.”
- **Budget reductions** – especially for capital projects and senior staff salaries which are viewed as “excessive for the smallest town on the Cape.”
- **Overdevelopment** – “especially since Truro is the last rural Cape town”
- **“Housing that’s affordable”** – especially for “seasonal workers and for the next generation of Truro residents.”
- **Take regionalization seriously** – “it is the future for the Outer Cape.”
- **Broadband for all homes and businesses** – “it is the best hope for Truro’s resilience, every way.”
- **Protect Truro’s ponds and woods, not just its beaches** – “Pond management and safety affects so much of life in Truro” and “Tree removal by property owners and power companies is accelerating without understanding what trees do for the environment, for tourism and for our spirit.”
- **Protecting the marine ecosystem/developing aquaculture** – To mitigate degradation of the marine ecosystem resulting from “devastation of fish population by seals, ever increasing threat of sharks” and the “promise of local aquaculture as a food source and as a local trade.”
- **Water Protection** – “Water! It’s what allows us to live here. Without clean, potable groundwater Truro will wither. If we move to systems like in other parts of the Cape our tax burden will become unsustainable. It is the most precious thing we have and **MUST BE PROTECTED.**” (commenter’s emphasis)
- **Eliminating or gradually phasing out the RTE / finding better alternatives for tax relief** – “Voters give the Town permission to tax themselves, but part-time residents do not; the voters do that, too. Who can really think this is fair or right?”
- **Greater respect for and appreciation of the contributions of part-time residents** in every level and aspect of Truro life, “particularly important to hear this from the Select Board” which “exacerbates a climate of disrespect and divisiveness” through “mean-spirited remarks.”

CONCLUSIONS

Part-time resident taxpayers responded in large numbers (513) to this survey, with a nearly 30% response rate. This is exceptional for public surveys, which typically garner a 2-3% response rate. This is also larger than the number of voters who participate in elections for Town officials and more than double the number who vote at All Town Meeting.³

Part-time resident taxpayers have increased the time we spend in Truro without proportionately increasing our use of Town services. We have become an increasingly large and continuous presence in Truro, bolstering business, cultural organizations, non-profits and the Town with support as clients, donors, patrons, volunteers, and - as full-time taxpayers.

Responses to both closed and open-ended questions indicates that part-timers are aware of and paying attention to the central issues facing Truro and want TPRTA to continue to work with Town officials and the community as a whole on these matters. Combined with a continuing commitment and desire among us to live as one community with our full-time neighbors, we see most of our interests as mutual and overlapping and seek ways to cooperate to the benefit of all.

The priorities and most pressing issues of importance to part-timers are focused on preserving the rural character and natural beauty of Truro for its own sake and because it is the engine of the local seasonal and tourist economy. We recognize the challenges of living here full-time and simultaneously recognize that Truro has never had a thriving micro-economy and can never have one; for this reason, we urge far more serious action regarding regionalization of big-ticket items. Likewise, Truro is not a good candidate for high-density cluster development because of its rural infrastructure, the predominance of federal land within Town limits, and the unsustainability of the rate in budget and tax growth in the past decade.

At the same time, part-timers want a real say in how we are taxed and how the Town operates. The unwavering opposition to the RTE four years after its adoption is telling - it is not going away. Simply blowing over or forcing the majority of the taxpayers in Truro to live with it against their will is a strategy that will fail - and without cooperation, consideration and compromise - will fail in unexpected ways. It further begs the question of whether the Selectboard considers part-time resident taxpayers to be their constituents or merely to be the Town's "bank." This in turn makes obvious the central underlying question: since we are part - and a majority part - of the community for which the Selectboard is responsible, will that body listen to the majority of Truro's residential taxpayers on this contentious matter? Or will it continue to vilify and alienate the majority of Truro residents with punitive and distorted rhetoric to justify adherence to a controversial policy when we can achieve the same goal in better ways?

The people of Truro for the most part are at peace with their neighbors. Leadership must encourage and sustain a community that works together for the good of all who call Truro home.

In the meanwhile, TPRTA will continue to do all we can to be informative, cooperative and effective voices on the many other issues facing Truro's entire community, full- and part-timers alike.

**For questions or comments, please contact tpрта@tpрта.org.
Thank you!**

³ The Town of Truro reports that 207 voted in Town elections in 2021.
https://www.truro-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3936/f/news/truro_2021_ate_final_results.pdf
Truro also reports that 197 voters attended 2021 ATM. See Article 18 notes for vote count.
https://www.truro-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3936/f/pages/06262021_atm_actions_signed.pdf

TPRTA Survey of Truro Part-Time Resident Taxpayers Details and Results

ABOUT RESPONDENTS

Q1. About You (to allow us to confirm you are a Truro part-time resident taxpayer)

100% of respondent provided information confirming they are Truro part-time residents.

VOTING IN TRURO

Q2. Are you registered to vote in Truro at this time?

YES: 5.85% NO: 95.15%

Q3. If no to Q2, would you or another member of your household register to vote in Truro, if eligible?

YES: 51.83% NO: 48.17%

TIME SPENT IN TRURO

Q4. Since March 2020, how much TOTAL time have you spent in Truro (# Weeks total or # Months total)?

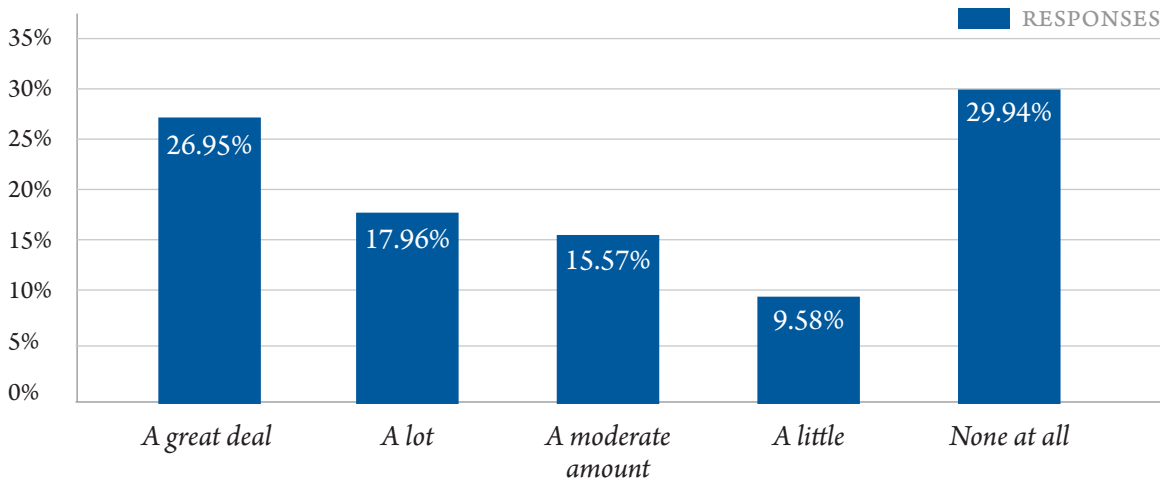
If spending time **periodically**: Average = 14.92 Weeks – 48.71% of respondents

If spending time **continuously**: Average = 6.94 Months – 51.29% of respondents

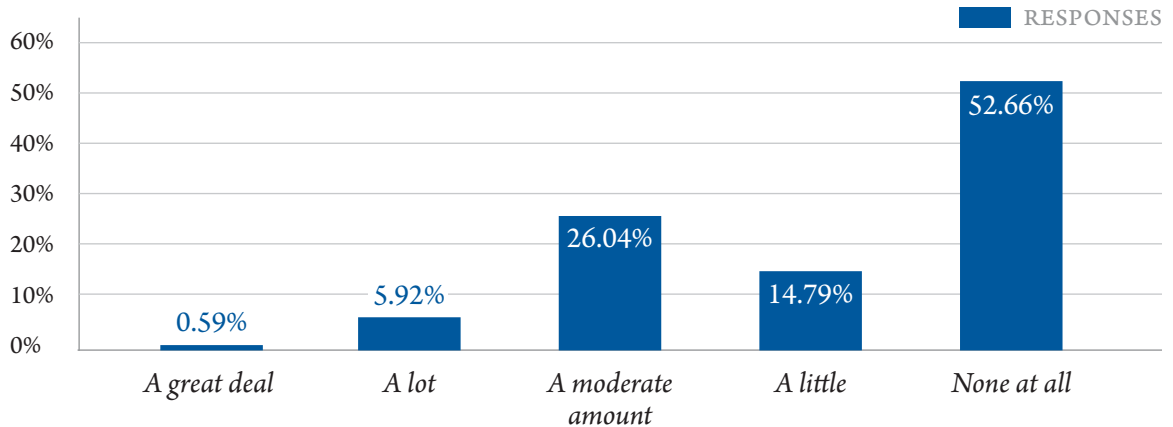
NOTE: Of these reported above, if spending time **continuously + periodically**:

Average = 7.12 Months – 18.42% of respondents

Q5. Are you spending more time in Truro as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?



Q6. As the pandemic abates, do you expect your current time in Truro will drop?



Q7. How many persons in your Truro household does this response cover?

One	11.11%
Two	67.84%
Three.....	8.19%
Four or more.....	12.87%

The reported range is from 1 to 10 persons per household; the mode was 2 persons per household and the average was 3.1 persons per household.

Q8. What is the age of the head of household in your Truro home?

Average/years	68
Maximum age.....	91
Minimum age	39
Mode.....	74
Median	69

RESIDENTIAL TAX EXEMPTION

Q9. I have accepted the RTE tax shift onto part-timers at the current 20% level and believe that should be the maximum imposed.

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>No Opinion/DK</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
29.81%	17.39%	13.04%	13.04%	26.71%

87 additional comments received - See Highlights, above.

Q10. The Select Board should rescind the RTE for FY22

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>No Opinion/DK</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
43.53%	17.06%	23.53%	8.02%	7.6%

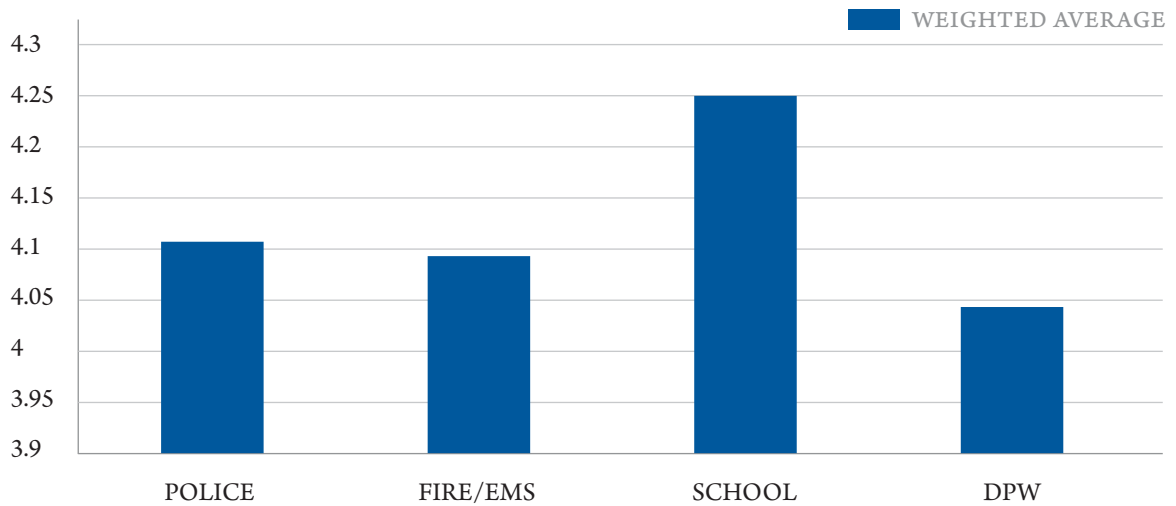
Q11. The Select Board should shift to reliance on needs-based alternative tax exemptions for tax relief applied on an equal basis to all taxpayers.

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>No Opinion/DK</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
53.25%	20.71%	21.89%	2.37%	1.78%

TAX-SUPPORTED SERVICES

Q12. Given changing tax demography, the Town of Truro should proactively work with neighboring Towns to regionalize and cost-share big-ticket items such as:

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>No Opinion/DK</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
POLICE	45.03%	32.16%	12.28%	9.36%	1.20%
FIRE/EMS	44.44%	32.75%	12.28%	8.19%	2.34%
SCHOOL	54.12%	21.78%	19.41%	4.71%	-
DPW	42.35%	29.41%	20.00%	5.88%	2.35%



Q13. Did your household use more Town services since March 2020 than you typically do?

<i>A great deal</i>	<i>A lot</i>	<i>A moderate amount</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
0.59%	4.71%	10.59%	22.94%	61.18%

PRIORITIES

Town Priorities

Q14. Please rank the importance and priority of the following issues facing Truro:
(7 = highest priority; 1 = lowest priority =1; 0 = NOT a priority)

For simplification of results, ranks are grouped as follows
5-7 = HIGH priority | 4 = MODERATE priority | 1-3 = LOW priority

	HIGH	MODERATE	LOW
Ground/Drinking Water Safety	63.52*	8.81	27.58
Preserve Rural Character	52.59*	12.99	34.96
Environment/Climate Impacts	49.34*	13.16	37.50
Bike Safety/Town Roads	40.89	11.95	47.18**
Work Force/Market Rate Housing	35.30	26.14	38.56
Affordable (Subsidized) Housing	34.65	18.15	46.40**
Sewer Route 6	34.74	9.68	55.48**

* Three HIGHEST priority

** Three LOWEST priority

TPRTA Priorities

Q15. TPRTA should continue to advocate for part-time residents' interests and concerns.

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>No Opinion/DK</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
91.22%	7.81%	0.58%	0.58%	-

39 Comments received

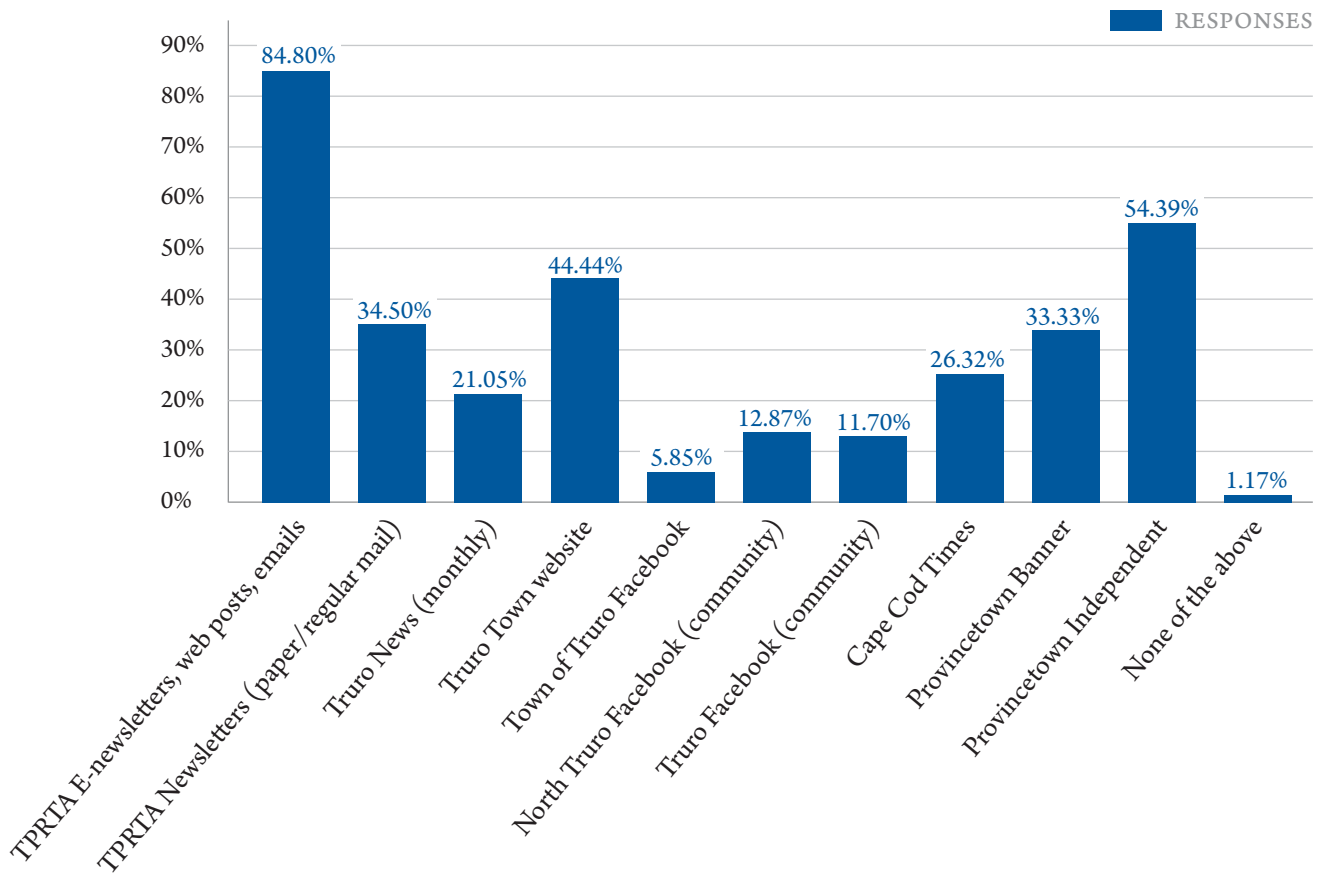
Q16. TPRTA should emphasize information-exchange over advocacy about part-timers' concerns.

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>No Opinion/DK</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
15.58%	12.94%	22.35%	37.65%	11.18%

Q17. TPRTA communicates with its members at the right level of information and frequency.

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>No Opinion/DK</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
17.54%	59.65%	14.82%	8.19%	-

Q18. Which source(s) of information do you rely upon for useful information about Truro?
(mark all that apply)



42 additional comments received - See Highlights, above.

Q19. What is the most important issue facing Truro now and in the future that is receiving too little attention and/or funding from the Town?

138 additional comments received - See Highlights, above.

Q20. What OTHER important issues facing Truro now and in the future should TPRTA address proactively as a priority? (Please note in priority order)

109 additional comments received - See Highlights, above.

For questions or comments, please contact tprta@tprta.org.
Thank you!