

TRURO
PART-TIME
RESIDENT
TAXPAYERS'
ASSOCIATION

TPRTO Survey of Truro Part-Time Resident Taxpayers

July 2024

RESULTS

In June 2024, TPRTO conducted our periodic survey of Truro's part-time resident taxpayers to get your views on key current issues and to hear from you about your concerns and priorities, especially for TPRTO to address with two new Select Board Members now serving, including the first ever "part-timer" elected to the Select Board. We intend also to share this with the Town's newly re-established Part-Time Resident Advisory Committee which (as a non-representative Committee) is given the opportunity to recommend positions officially to the Select Board. TPRTO does so as an independent civic organization representing part-timers. This allows for cooperation within distinctive spheres of responsibility and action.

The main topics of the 2024 survey included time spent in Truro now and moving forward; voting in Truro; use of tax-supported Town services; Town spending; current priority issues facing Truro and separately for TPRTO in representing the interests of part-timers; and finally, questions about thorny issues such as the RTE and regulation of rentals that affect part-timers in the near and long term.

About the Survey

At the time the survey was closed, we received responses¹ from 665 households representing the views of 1850 part-time resident taxpayers and property owners. This represents a nearly 30% increase in responses from our last survey in 2021. To our knowledge, it is also the largest survey to have been conducted in Truro and it is consistent with the past year's significant increase in the engagement of full-time residents and an energized participation of Truro voters. The entire community of Truro has become more active, attentive, and engaged in 2023-24, and likely will stay so going forward.

THE CONTEXT OF THIS SURVEY

Part-time residents love Truro. This is the ground, literally, on which we walk and on which these responses are made. This is conveyed throughout comments in this survey and in communications we receive throughout the year. The defining context for this survey is found in the many ways we express our pleasure, gratitude, appreciation, and commitment to Truro that come across so clearly in this survey and by our presence and engagement in Truro.

Yet this survey has a more immediate and challenging context as well – it was issued at the end of what has unquestionably been the most civically contentious fiscal year in Truro's recent history. Through this lens, responses reflected deep concerns with more immediacy and urgency. Those we heard from also convey the view that Truro may be at a point of no return – where decisions made now and very soon will sustain Truro for a long time or alter it irrevocably and detrimentally. Part-timers are willing and ready to help – assuming room is made for us to do that in mutually respectful ways.

¹ Of the 665 responses received by the deadline, four were deemed "junk" responses (unable to confirm a legitimate email address) and were not included in this analysis and report. We received 7 responses after the deadline which are not included. The final "N" count is 661 households representing 1850 part-timers, both members and non-members. On the rare occasion that a respondent skipped a question, percentages are based on the total number responding to that item. No responses were duplicative.

From this perspective, the immediate context of concern had three prongs, largely led by year-round residents, though echoed in these survey responses:

- **Concerns about Town leadership, but not of the Truro community** – This was manifested in three ways:
 - By a June 2023 community petition signed by 440 people urging the Town to not renew the Town Manager’s contract. The Select Board (then under different leadership) dismissed the public’s stance when it chose to award the Town Manager with a three-year contract extension, and thereby activated a large number of voters who strongly opposed it;
 - By an increased number of public comments and Public Records Requests critical of the actions of certain Select Board Members and the Town Manager; and
 - By large voter turnout to elect two new, less partisan Select Board Members who will hopefully be more responsive to the community.
- **Taxpayer opposition to excessive capital budgets and spending plans** – When the long-term costs of a new Department of Public Works (DPW), Walsh property development as then proposed, acquisition of new properties by the Town, and other big-ticket items made clear to taxpayers that the tax burden could likely rise to exceed \$100 Million for 20 years plus, the voters mounted a formidable pushback. It became apparent before Special Town Meeting in October 2023 that the Town would not get the support some in leadership wanted. That led to prong three, below.
- **Challenges to new and established voter registrations** – TPRTA, along with other non-profits and an official State election committee, conducted voter registration efforts beginning in late Summer 2023. These multiple campaigns were successful in getting eligible residents to register to vote in strong numbers. However, just before Special Town Meeting, one voter lodged formal challenges to 66 new voters – almost all of whom were part-timers and/or seniors.² This in turn led to a series of disturbing challenge hearings³ to this group last November that shocked the entire community, delayed Special Town Meeting four times, and contributed to the high and observable uptick in voting over the past six months at Special Town Meeting, Annual Town Meeting, Town Elections, and Special Town Elections.

Another small group of established (not new) part-timer voters was challenged in October 2023, including three who hold official positions in Truro town government. A fourth was a new-registering spouse from a previously “split” voter household. Those challenges were not heard until April 2024, bringing the overall number to 70 challenged voters. By April, the basis used to evaluate the “66” challenged voter registrations were largely (and properly in our view) set aside and these four were upheld as valid registrations. These challenges, along with other voting-related Town actions – including a call for Town Meetings outside Truro, a February weeknight for Special Town meeting, and restricted parking on Route 6 for Town Meetings – were viewed as part of a larger, across-the-board pattern of voter suppression directed at eliminating perceived opposition to the

² Of the 66 challenged, 45 chose to defend their registrations; 18 of the 21 who did not defend their registration cited expense, stress, and distress as the reasons for not pursuing this course. Additionally, three prominent part-timers who have been registered in Truro for many years and a newly-registering spouse of one were also later challenged by two citizens. Of the 70 challenged voters about 50 defended their registrations; 88% were found to be valid and by the time these challenges were finished in April 2024, the criteria alleged as a basis for challenging the bulk of these challenges were themselves properly set aside as criteria. Simply put, eligible part-timers can lawfully register to vote in Truro if they truthfully declare Truro “home” and thereafter take the actions needed to make that intention manifest (like driver’s licenses, etc.). Those already on the rolls can stay on the rolls. The Town Clerk has yet to correct its website page of erroneous materials sent to new voters and to TPRTA, and to inform those “challenged voters” who withdrew that they can re-register to vote if they wish and are eligible.

³ See TPRTA website for multiple updates from October 2023 forward, [especially this post on the impact of the voter challenges](#). TPRTA arranged an expert-led free educational webinar on the laws governing voter registration and the process of voter challenges so that these 66 could decide what (if any) action they might want to take themselves. Further review and discussion with the State Elections Commission, the MA Office of Civil Rights and other review confirmed that [TPRTA’s efforts were lawful, accurate, properly executed, and within TPRTA’s non-profit mission](#).

DPW on Route 6 and other costly capital projects to be presented to Truro voters. Voters were having none of it and ultimately showed up in very large numbers, effectively creating a sea change in citizen engagement in Truro. It also made clear that full-time and part-time members of the community have more in common than was previously recognized and share a deep concern that Town leadership had been out of sync with views expressed by Truro residents.

In this context, the TPRTA 2024 Survey was conducted in anticipation of the TPRTA 2024 Annual Members' Meeting on July 6 where a verbal report of the preliminary results was presented. At the same time, the questions asked in this survey reflect recent changes in Truro that affect all residents, in the context mentioned above. The net effect of these and related actions by Town government motivated the largest-ever turnout of voters and the largest turnout of part-timers sharing their views in this survey.

Beyond providing more than 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 serve as essential 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 bring through visitors amplifies these benefits to the Truro community. Given that most part-timers are not registered to vote in Truro, these results carry additional importance as a reflection of our collective (yet diverse) views and voice in Truro. We hope that the views expressed will have considerable and affirmative impact if considered in the context of part-timers' contributions to the viability and well-being of Truro.

Highlights

IEWS ABOUT RESIDING IN TRURO

This survey did not ask direct questions on our underlying feelings about Truro, though it comes across loud and clear throughout the hundreds of comments we received. In part this was conveyed in phrases within comments:

"We LOVE Truro,"

"Such beauty..."

"The best times we have are here in Truro..."

"Irreplaceable for us..."

"Our family has been here since 1880 for good reasons..."

The single comment that best captures the view that Truro is important, valued, and treasured is this:⁴

"We just read the piece in the Truro Chamber of Commerce book called *Truro is in Our Veins* – it said everything we could ever say about our connection to Truro! But we are also grateful that the Chamber printed it – what a brilliant way to convey part-timers are here for good, doing good – a solid base to rely on. This recognition made me sign up for the TCC news, too. High five!"

VOTING

While about 11% (10.66%) of respondents are currently registered to vote in Truro, of those who are NOT current voters, there was a nearly even split about the impact of the challenges on their thinking: 49.6% indicated that the recent voter challenges had a chilling effect on their consideration to register to vote

⁴ Find this article, *Truro is in Our Veins*, at this link:

https://tpрта.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/TPRTA_TCC_Truro-is-in-Our-Veins_2024.pdf

here while 50.4% said “not at all.” Of non-voter responses, about 17% currently plan to move to Truro full-time within the next five years. Current part-timers would have to declare Truro “home” to be eligible to register to vote in Truro.⁵

TIME IN TRURO

Truro part-time residents stay in Truro on two bases: either on a continuous basis (53%) or on a periodic basis (47%), with some only “in season” and some spread out over the year. About 17% reside in Truro on both bases, intensely in the season and spread out over the year on shorter visits. On average, “continuous” respondents spend 5 months a year in Truro, with some spending 12 months a year and some spending as little as 2 months a year in Truro. “Periodic” residents spend on average 15 weeks (3.75 months) a year in Truro, with as little as two weeks and as much as 28 weeks (7 months) a year.

This indicates that in large measure, part-timers came in large numbers (the 2021 survey indicated a 25% uptick) during the pandemic and remained on roughly the same basis since. Of respondents, about 51% indicated about the same level of time in Truro while 30% indicated they have increased time in Truro since the pandemic by “a lot” or “a great deal”. About 17.5% indicate they spend “a little less” time in Truro and a small number – just 2.5% – indicate they spend “a lot less” time in Truro since the pandemic ended.

In 2021, nearly 67% expected little or no drop in the amount of time they would spend in Truro. In fact, the data above show that nearly 80% of part-timers have remained steady or increased time in Truro, higher than anticipated during the pandemic.

In other words, for the most part the increased time spent in Truro that was triggered by COVID has endured and even increased since the pandemic. This suggests the increase in part-time residency is likely to endure.⁶ The presence of part-timers for longer periods continues to bode well for businesses, trades, organizations, and committees that rely on part-timers. This remains excellent news for the local economy and the volunteer service network that residents benefit from.

OTHER PART-TIMERS’ DEMOGRAPHICS

We wanted to understand whether the part-timer community is aging at all or in the same way as the full-timer community. We also wanted to understand household sizes of respondents, to compare with Census data. Heads-of-household⁷ ages range from 42 years to 93 years, with the average at 71 years of age. Given that three years ago the average age was 68, we view this as not aging faster than full-timers (who have also aged 3 years in this time). Of these, the distribution of ages is notable with 1% each in their 40s and 90s; about 37% in their 70s and about 60% in their 50s and 60s. This is significant for a number of reasons, primarily that it challenges a myth in Truro that young families will replace seniors over time. As Barry Bluestone, economic policy expert, reported on Truro's housing needs, “Seniors replace seniors in Truro.” This has implications for policy and development on many levels.

On average, the size of part-timers’ households has remained steady, most frequently 2-person households and with an average of 2.8 persons per household, but with a large range in household size from 1 person to 12 persons. Of those larger households (four or more), the modal size

⁵ Part-timers registering to vote must be able to truthfully and with good faith declare Truro as “home – the center of their civic and social life” at the time of registration. Like any new voter, they can establish confirming credentials thereafter. Based on survey results, we believe that another 10% of part-timers may be eligible to take this step. Currently, 90% have no vote in Truro and going forward we estimate about 80% will have no basis to vote in Truro.

⁶ It also suggests the loosely-identified “dividing line” that distinguishes between “full-timers” and “part-timers” is not fixed or certain but is fluid. This has many implications worth exploring.

⁷ We heard from three respondents that use of the term “head-of-household” was no longer an appropriate term, though it is commonly used in US Census and other reports. We will find another term to describe the age of the eldest resident property owner in the household.

is 10 persons, accounting for Trusts and multi-generational family use. Given the comparable sizes of the part-time and full-time taxpayer base, this indicates that the community is likely to remain a mature community for the foreseeable future.

Respondents reported in large numbers (82%) that **they used about the same level of Town services as were used during the pandemic**. About 6.5% reported using more services now and just over 11% reported using fewer services than in the pandemic period. In other words, more time in Town is not resulting in an increased reliance on Town services.

TAX-RELATED ISSUES

• The Residential Tax Exemption (RTE)

This remains the only true dividing line between full-timers and part-timers in Truro as we understand the data, largely because only “part-timers” pay for the RTE tax shift and most part-timers have no say (as expressed by votes) in whether and at what level this tax is imposed upon them. The injustice of this baffles, distresses and remains an important issue to the vast majority of part-timers, and neither Town leadership nor rank and file full-timers seem to be concerned. Part-timers would gladly support tax relief for full-timers who need it; but giving tax subsidies to those who have no need for it – and include some of the wealthiest individuals residing in Truro – is unjustified to the vast majority of part-timers.

Notwithstanding that we have conveyed this every year since to Town leadership, the so-far unshakeable view of the Select Board since 2017 is that because they can, they should – and so, they do. Since 2021, the RTE has increased by 10% to a whopping 30%, with a cap of 35% possible in the future. Yet not one shred of evidence – other than popularity among full-time property owners who claim it – has been obtained or verified that shows the RTE actually achieves what it was designed to do, namely relieve those homeowners who need relief from an untenable tax burden, increase residency retention, or otherwise promote a healthy Truro economy. On the contrary, while the RTE has helped some residents in need, it largely is viewed as a vote-buying scheme and a tax giveaway paid for by a captive taxpayer base.

The RTE is unquestionably popular among full-timers. But popular does not mean fair, right, or effective. Consequently, in this survey, we no longer asked about advocating for a cap – the Town will adopt 35% rate at some point; instead, we asked three different RTE-related questions:

- If we should continue to oppose the RTE;
- Should we consider advocating that in Truro all benefits programs be subject to equitable criteria – either all needs-based or none needs-based; or
- Should we advocate that the RTE be slowly reduced over time, as many in Town have suggested in other venues. “Afterall, only 17 of the state’s 370+ municipalities have adopted the RTE”, as one noted.

The quantitative responses and comments are clear even seven years after the RTE was first imposed:

- **Nearly 80% say TPRTA should continue to oppose the RTE on behalf of part-timers.** About 17% had no opinion and under 4% felt that TPRTA should not oppose the RTE. Their comments supported each position. Overwhelmingly, the majority feel that the RTE should be opposed “on principal” regardless of whether the Select Board chooses to listen to and respect the views of the majority base of taxpayers or not consider alternative tax-relief options that are evenly cost-distributed among all taxpayers. Those with “no opinion” most often commented that they need a better understanding of the real needs for tax relief among the Town’s residents, both full- and part-time. Several expressed concern over the tax pressure the RTE also places on middle class part-timers that could drive some out of Town and lead to the “Hamptonization of Truro”, the very thing neither full- nor part-timers want. The small number who believe that TPRTA should set the RTE issue aside reflected in comments that this is either “baked in and resistance is futile” or that a real need for tax relief, especially among Truro’s seniors, makes the offset onto part-timers worth it, even if it is unfair on its face.

- About 84% strongly believe all tax-supported benefits and tax burdens should be equitably distributed among all taxpayers regardless of residency duration. Under 10% had no opinion and about 7% disagreed. This reflects a nearly 10% increase since 2021 in the opinion that Truro should shift to reliance on needs-based alternative tax exemptions for tax relief applied on an equal basis to all taxpayers. Comments suggested that the sticking point for part-timers on tax abatements is the discriminatory basis for the RTE solely on the basis of “part-time status” when that status has no practical or quantitative basis any longer.
- Just over 70% believe the RTE should be phased out in increments over time beginning next year. Truro would not be alone if it chose this course of action. It could be beneficial to the harmony of Truro if during this transition it explored other existing needs-based options that would give the same or greater tax relief to residents who need it while distributing the tax burden among all taxpayers. About 21% had no opinion and 8% disagreed, including the suggestion that a minimum RTE should be set and capped permanently at 10%.

The unwavering opposition to the RTE remains strong among the actual persons who pay the RTE – part-timers – being the same vast majority of the taxpayers who fund 80% of costs for town services, town staff, town operations and capital infrastructure through taxes and fees. This comment neatly captures this sentiment:

“We HATE the extra taxation of part-time residents and feel it is not only unfair, divisive and unwarranted but a violation of our constitutional rights to 'due process under the law.'”

As in 2021, respondents expressed the view that they want the Town to justify the imposition of the RTE on a “real needs basis” (rather than a “just because we can” basis), to evaluate the full scope and costs of the RTE on the entire community, including the part-time sector, and to study the real impacts, both beneficial and adverse, on Truro taxpayers across the board. As one respondent stated succinctly:

“When a tax is imposed on taxpayers who cannot vote on the matter and the residents who benefit also benefit by voting for Select Board members who promise to keep it in place, there is no political incentive to be fair, just, or even decent. There are better ways to help our neighbors – someone in authority needs to champion the better alternatives.”

• Regionalization of Essential Services

In 2021 there was much support for this notion in light of potential economies on taxes, spending and future capital development; in 2024, the support was stronger but nuanced. We asked for views on regionalizing Police, Fire/EMS, Schools, Water Infrastructure, and Workforce, Seasonal and Affordable Housing.

While support for regionalizing all these potentially shared services is considered a priority for around 75% or more of all respondents, there are variations according to the type of service involved. Regionalization of all housing development and public schools received top rates of agreement – with 88% and 81% respectively agreeing that regionalization is an important move forward for these two areas. At the same time, on housing there is the clear view that regionalizing housing does not mean making Truro “a bedroom community for other Towns’ housing needs” nor that Truro should be developed in any way that compromises water quality of drinking /groundwater, especially, as our portion of the aquifer serves two towns. On the contrary, many respondents expressed the view that Truro’s affordable housing count should be partially exempted from the 40B housing guidelines as a way to better balance.

Fire / Emergency Medical Services (EMS) (78%), Water Infrastructure (77%), and Police (75%) were slightly lower but still strong priorities for regionalization and/or cost-sharing. Irrespective of the details, regionalization is strongly viewed as an effective tool to control costs and reduce Truro’s budget, taxes, and spending.

- Taxes, Budget, and Spending

As taxpayers, part-time residents are keenly aware of the steep rise in the town budget and spending as well as in tax rates over many years, and especially the last four years, where taxes have risen by 30% and spending by 51%. The strong pushback by voters on the Omnibus budget, free cash allocations and the defeat of expensive capital projects at STM/ATM showed that full- and part-timers are both more vigilant and more in alignment on these matters than ever. Respondents essentially agreed with voters' views expressed at STM/ATM that taxes and spending in Truro are a "runaway train."

TOWN PRIORITIES

Respondents identified clear priorities for the Select Board to consider.

These include an array of topics for the Town (and for TPRTA) to focus on. Based upon comments received from part-timers over the year, we enumerated eight priorities, asking respondents to rank these in order of importance. The results reveal several interesting findings:

- Highest priority for the Town was identified in this order of the top four priorities: curbing town spending (61%), protecting ground and drinking water quality (61%); preserving the rural character of Truro (57%), and disclosing proposed capital costs to taxpayers (58%). These reflect both the remaining concern for protecting the character and environment of Truro and for better control over and disclosure of Town spending. This is a shift for part-timers, who previously ranked other matters above tax/spending issues. These responses are aligned with voters' choices at Town Meetings as well, reflecting the growing community-wide concern that Town spending is excessive, not transparent, and unaffordable for all taxpayers and that housing and other development must be planned and developed on a scale that taxpayers can afford and that is in balance with Truro's character and environment. The single item receiving the highest ranking was preservation of Truro's rural character. These illustrative comments capture that essence, though the view was expressed by scores of respondents in similar ways:

"Spend our money wisely; this is not getting enough attention"

"We need honest, transparent discussion re: taxes and spending, the role of the part-time taxpayer in SB priorities and policy-making."

"Managing capital expenditures. Keeping the town affordable for seniors."

- Respondents seem at first to have contrasting views of increasing voter registration among part-timers. What at first appeared as a contradiction was clarified in many comments – that this is a clear priority for many part-timers, but not a responsibility they place on the Select Board. Comments indicate this is viewed as a civic and individual choice and responsibility, not a right the government should interfere with but can facilitate through good policy, accurate information and operations. (Many noted that the Town Clerk's website page is long out of date and contains inaccurate and misleading documents on it from 2023.) The voter challenges of 2023-24 were identified as the best example of why the Town government should stay out of the voter registration process, except as required by law for smooth operation of registrations and elections. As these comments illustrate:

"I was APPALLED by the blatantly biased and improper actions taken and/or facilitated by certain Town leaders and employees. Something needs to be done about this."

"The tax situation [for part-timers] is outrageous...Clearly we are taxed at usury levels with no vote about it."

- All other priorities were high and closely ranked with little meaningful distinction among the rankings. The Select Board, in other words, should address ALL these priorities according to survey responses. At the same time, we now see that in addition to a "forced ranking" we should also ask

respondents to rate the importance of each priority as a stand-alone item as well. As one commenter noted these priorities “are all interconnected and overlapping.”

We received hundreds of comments on this topic that illuminated these taxpayers’ concerns and questions:

- **Balanced approach to Walsh Property and other development.** Those who commented on housing largely focused on Walsh as an upcoming, large-scale development. Comments included a call for balancing competing needs at Walsh for housing, water quality, traffic safety, and low-density units. Many viewed the vote at Special Town Meeting (STM) adopting the Walsh Property Community Planning Committee (WPCPC) recommendations as a much-needed opportunity to re-visit the recommended total number (160) of units. These comments capture the essence of dozens of remarks on Walsh, housing, and related issues – **ALL** of which affirmed the need for and support for developing housing for multiple cohorts to make/keep Truro affordable for seniors, young families, workforce and seasonal workers.

“Achieving the correct balance among fiscal responsibility, moderating the tax burden and addressing affordable housing needs in a way consistent with all these considerations.”

“Look at the long-range impact of current decisions on water quality, traffic and tax burden.”

“I do value affordable housing for local residents, but dont [sic] understand the need for large scale housing development.”

“Create affordable housing with a sensible not wasteful comprehensive strategic plan.”

“We cannot build housing intended to make Truro affordable to live in and at the same time create a tax burden or environmental threats to water quality or make Truro too costly for current residents to live in. Truro has to be affordable and livable for us all.”

“Let’s free ourselves of 40B housing regs by building what we must – then get on with building what we want to build, if we need more...”

“Continue to advocate for reasonable, sensible development at Walsh that respects the water resource beneath it.”

“We favor affordable housing – but in line with reasonable expectations for population growth and available JOBS.”

“Truro is the last stand for wild cape towns – we cannot allow the smallest Town population on the Cape to pay for the housing needs of other larger Towns from our taxpayers’ wallets – especially when it will cost us the very thing that makes Truro, Truro. We can take care of our own housing needs and should, without destroying who we are.”

Comments continue to suggest (as they did in 2021) that Truro’s rural character and natural beauty are the basis for Truro’s local economy and that efforts to over-develop through high-density housing projects or high-intensity industrial projects undermines the efforts in developing a sustainable year-round economy. Many encourage support for small businesses. As these commenters noted:

“Look at Provincetown – twice our size and at this for many more years than Truro – and failing to build a year-round economy. When will we learn the lessons of where we really are?”

“We need to give small businesses help – glad TPRTA helps with its Biz List to support jobs, attract and keep residents.”

“Support local artists; Truro Chamber could promote restaurants/small local eateries more, maybe a year-round coffee shop...”

- Restoring Trust in Town Government and Respect for Part-Timers as Select Board's constituents.

Part-timers are not alone in questioning the trustworthiness of Town government. The voters' calls for the non-renewal of the Town Manager last year, the then Select Board (SB) votes to keep him anyway, the false "whistleblower" claim against a moderate Select Board Member, the subsequent election of very different Select Board members, the unquestionable pushback on perceived voter suppression against offensive practices (like four delays of STM, parking bans on Route 6, etc.) leading to Town meeting, are concerns full-timers have asserted.

Yet, part-timers have been through a special wringer this past fiscal year, tinged with punishing voter challenges where a few in town management were viewed as active agents opposed to these voter registrations, where the Select Board Chair and Members of Town committees and staff used social media as well as local media to create and distribute a false narrative about new part-time voters, and where TPRTA was simply miscast through the same methods – these all served to compound a distrust of Town government (not Town neighbors) that has been growing community-wide for years.

As a result, part-timers' comments call on the Select Board to make peace with and engage respectfully with Truro's part-timers and with TPRTA. While the new Part-Time Resident Advisory Committee will hopefully be successful in advising the Select Board, its re-establishment has been viewed as an effort to control part-timers' views, not expand the Select Board and community understanding of them.⁸ The Town needs to correct this perception as well, in part by having no members of Town staff serve on the committee.

We received dozens of comments on this topic, including these that capture the range of views submitted:

"We need a new town manager. The DPW fiasco was a costly mess. Large sums of money were badly spent on "planning," with the same being true of the Walsh property."

"The Town Manager's mistakes just pile up – DPW, Town meeting hassles, unbelievable spending on new staff and consultants, unhappy staff and lots of staff losses. We will pay for the bulk of this with no input, recourse."

"Some Select board and Finnace Committee [sic] members' views of part-timers are just horrifying to hear. If we believe them, we are their cash cow, not their neighbors, constituents, or even the majority of property owners with rights. Hope these change soon with new leadership."

"It is hard to so love this place and so fear this Town government – makes it hard to feel welcome, safe, and respected. Our family is here more than a century. This is not okay."

- Potential Municipal Housing Trust Board

A few commented spontaneously on a recent announcement by the Select Board that it is considering establishment of a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Board based on two ATM articles adopted in 2022. This has far-reaching implications for use of Town lands and for the authority of this Board to act outside of voter control once it is activated.⁹ One commenter noted:

"Scariest thing I have heard recently. Town management not trustworthy, with unchecked control over Town lands and use of tax revenues in other Trust funds to spend freely? Terrifying. Must be publicly discussed, aired fully, and possibly stopped before we can't recognize the Town."

⁸ TPRTA has already expressed its commitment to cooperate and, where appropriate, to collaborate with this Committee to support its success as a government committee and as a complement to the distinctive and independent civic role TPRTA plays.

⁹ TPRTA has studied this matter, obtained expert opinion on the underlying articles and implications, and will share these publicly in the near future, intending to join with others in Town who want to bring this matter to public discussion before the Town takes action on it.

VIEWS ON TPRTA | PRIORTIES FOR TPRTA

Likewise, respondents identified clear priorities for TPRTA to pursue, trusting we will continue as advocates and information-providers to us and the entire community, for the benefit of all.

- Trust in TPRTA and Its Communications Is High

Respondents were clear and vocal about their reliance on TPRTA to keep them informed, to report accurately, and to advocate for part-timers' interests in Truro. TPRTA should continue to serve as an advocate for part-time resident taxpayers according to 94% of respondents (up from 91% in 2021) and should equally emphasize information-exchange and advocacy (95%). This is an especially notable vote of confidence in TPRTA given how it was miscast and mis-reported during the voter registration and challenges process in local media and on social media, abetted and encouraged by certain Town leaders. Many respondents praised and/or thanked TPRTA for our actions to support legitimately registered part-timer voters and protect voting rights. No cautionary or adverse comments about TPRTA were received in this survey. More than 86% of respondents (up from 80% in 2021) believe that TPRTA communicates with part-timers at the right frequency and level of detail. About 12% 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 agree. The simple answer is a resounding YES. We asked respondents to indicate which of 13 communications platforms (up from 10 in 2021) they rely upon for useful information about Truro. Overwhelmingly, 90.1% of respondents rely upon TPRTA's e-newsletters, web postings and emails for useful information about Truro. In comparison, about 59% rely on the Provincetown Independent, 49% rely on the Town's website (most frequently citing the Town Calendar, Assessor's database, and Truro TV tools), and 45% on Truro News, as the next three most relied-upon sources for useful information about Truro. Other sources, such as Truro Talks (42%), Take Back Truro (28%), and the Cape Cod Times (27%) provide some basis for informing part-timers.

New platforms, including Town and private social media, are each relied upon by less than 20% of respondents. Fewer than 9% also collectively cited anecdotally that they rely on friends and neighbors, the Truro Assessor's database, occasional conversations with Town staff and committee members, and other community organs including the newsletters of Truro Conservation Trust, Truro Historical Society, Sustainable Cape, the Truro Library, Friends of the Truro Meetinghouse and the Truro Chamber of Commerce e-blasts.

Notably, two sources cited received serious concerns from some respondents: The Provincetown Independent and Truro Talks. The "Indie" was sharply criticized by many in 2021 and this year's responses echo and amplify those concerns. Truro Talks did not exist until September 2021.

The Provincetown Independent is relied upon as a source for events calendars, reports on cultural activities, and local items of interest. Many commenters noted that editorial opinions and reporting on "hot topics" such as affordable housing, voter registrations, and water quality are biased and are viewed as very often serving the Town's agenda, not citizens' concerns or questions. Further, the paper's willingness to target groups and individuals that the former Town leadership targeted alarms respondents and reportedly causes a chilling effect.

Truro Talks likewise receives positive yet mixed reviews from respondents: they appreciate and trust most department reports, but are more skeptical of DPW, Town Planner and Board of Health reports. The Town Manager's letter in Truro Talks is viewed by those who commented as unreliable, self-serving and often inaccurate. Here are some comments illustrating these concerns.

"I have been disgusted by the Independents [sic] biased and inaccurate reporting about Truro and cancelled my subscription."

"I have found the Independent and the CC Times to be too heavily influenced by Truro Town Hall and elected officials to hope for fair coverage of controversial issues in Truro."

"Truro Talks is rife with error and bias, especially the way the Town manger [sic] spins information regardless of the facts. Sad. Hopefully a refreshed SB will make a difference."

"Why does the DPW put out information that it knows is out of date and incorrect? This is a smart communy [sic], so it does not serve the DPW or us. It also caused a lot of unnecessary grief leading up to Town meetings. Not helpful."

"Town Planner reports read like legal briefs, not planner info, maybe because the Town Panner [sic] is a lawyer? We need a planner that is just a planner, not one that requires us to have a lawyer in the wings from the start. Split the roles, split the reports in Truro Talks."

- **TPRTA's Priorities**

Respondents indicated that TPRTA's major role is to advocate with the Select Board and the community for the priorities identified for the Select Board. These do not need repeating here. However, comments also focused extensively on the tenor of relationships between the Select Board, the Town Manager and part-timers.

In context of the recent re-establishment of a new town committee on part-timers, the matter of TPRTA's independence as a voice for part-timers came across loud and clear in comments (only one of scores of comments indicated a concern that "independence" might seem divisive). The independent nature of TPRTA as an organization is what allows it to be responsive to part-timers' concerns and questions, proactive as advocates, and to present a perspective of the community rather than an official "Town" view. At the same time, it contributes to a varying relationship with Town officials who mistrust that independence and how it may express itself.

"Independent" is key – not under Town control, direction or mis-direction. we need more independent voices, not fewer."

"Unless the SB backs off it's [sic] historical stick it to the part timers attitude, you must be a strong advocate for us."

"[TPRTA] Must advocate against RTE, which has divided the town and led to irresponsible spending."

"Vital. Who else would do this if not TPRTA?"

"Do this while stressing common interests among all residents"

Respondents' comments also indicate that the part-time community calls on the Select Board and Town Managment to affirm and demonstrate respect, appreciation, and interest in the part-time community and in TPRTA, which they regard as serving them well and faithfully. These comments, just some of the dozens received on this topic, illustrate this view:

"Part timers need to be recognized as an integral part of the community. Welcomed, thanked, respected for our generosity, support, and longevity as community members."

"There should be a RTE for part timers and seniors who use less or do not use Town services at all for a good portion of the year – schools, police, fire, transfer station, etc."

"The Select Board should set a goal to achieve equal taxation for all residents. We have a misleading "single tax classification" that really results in three effective tax rates – and part-timers get the short stick in that draw."

"We may not vote but we pay taxes and we have property rights, not just taxable assets. The Town should also strike a good balance on restricting ownership for short term rentals to avoid growth in investment properties."

"If we can't vote we can still be informed and lend a hand in keeping Truro rural, above sea level and neighbor friendly."

"One vote one resident. No part-timer discrimination."

- **Other Issue of Concern**

The survey asked for views on "the 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 on these additional topics noted below (listed as of equal importance, quotes here capture multiple comments in a succinct way):

- **Reducing Taxes AND Spending** – noting that "Taxes have increased by 30% in the last four years and under the Town Manager's tenure, spending has gone up 50%+. Out of control. Things are not operating better, either."
- **Budget Reductions** – especially for capital projects, senior staff, and new staff add-ons salaries which are viewed as "rich for such a small town."
- **Preserving Truro's Rural Character / Over-development** – "Rural environment Rural environment Rural environment" especially since "Truro is the last wild cape town."
- **Attainable Housing** – "let's take a broader view of housing needs, especially for seniors."
- **Promoting Economic Stability for Small Businesses** – "Mom and Pop shops need to survive and are really important for the Truro community."
- **Broadband for All Homes and Businesses** – "We are still waiting! MUCH needed now!"
- **Safe in the Water** – Suggesting that "Truro should build a Town pool, we have the land and it will keep swimmers safe from shark attacks and worries about them."
- **Water Protection** – "Water! Water! Water! Protect it, protect it, protects it! All of it, everywhere we live, work, play."
- **Equal Taxation for All Residents and Businesses** – "the same, really THE SAME, for all." (Commenter's emphasis)
- **Eliminating or Gradually Phasing Out the RTE / Finding Better Alternatives for Tax Relief** – "Lawful but awful. Who can really think the RTE is fair or right? No evidence it actually helps those in need!"
- **Listening to All Residents / Showing Greater Respect for and Appreciation of the Contributions of Part-Timers** in every level and aspect of Truro life is "particularly important to hear [this] from the Select Board and the Town Manager [who] made the climate of disrespect and contempt even more serious this past year."

CONCLUSIONS

Part-time resident taxpayers hold Truro in high regard, with deep connections and genuine enthusiasm. Our basic attitude is appreciation for the community and for the "place" – all that Truro is on the ground, from the natural beauty to the community's beauty, from sports to cultural activities, from the quiet life to community events that are distinctively Truro (like Truro Treasures) – and even Town Meeting as a form of government. The views captured in responses from the hundreds who took the time to give us their views is that Truro is significant to us, not a pit-stop, throw away, or investment opportunity. Truro is in our veins, as the article captured. As a practical matter, this means we are a resource and a force for good – engaged and prepared to do more if welcomed and encouraged.

Part-time resident taxpayer households responded in large numbers (665, final N=661, representing just over 1850 residents) to this survey, with a more than a 40% response rate. This is exceptionally high for group surveys. This is also twice the number of voters who elected Town officials in 2024 and almost triple the number who voted at 2024 Town Meetings (i.e., about 625 at the high points).

Part-time resident taxpayers have sustained the large amount of time (on average) that 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 myriad central issues facing Truro and have the best interests of Truro as a whole forefront. Except for the RTE, there is general unity of vision and methods with full-timers on how to make and keep Truro a community we can all enjoy, support, and cherish for generations.

Respondents trust TPRTA and want TPRTA to continue to work with Town officials, the newly re-constituted Town Committee concerning part-timers, and the community as a whole on these matters. Particularly in light of this past year, respondents re-affirmed and confirmed that our interests as taxpayers and residents are largely mutual and overlapping with full-timers - and thus that we should seek ways to align our interests and efforts and to cooperate even more extensively for the benefit of all.

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 seven years after its adoption is telling – the opposition is not going away, and will remain as long as the RTE is in place. A cynical Select Board might say “So what?” But a smart and responsive Select Board – one truly interested in bringing peace and healing to a community where the real division is between residents and the Select Board – would be more proactive in removing this corrosive impediment to equitability and fairness. Simply continuing to ignore this wound or forcing the majority of the taxpayers in Truro to live with it against their will is a strategy that will fail in the long term, especially without cooperation, consideration and compromise.

The Select Board should also consider whether it really sees part-time resident taxpayers as their citizens or as subjects upon whom they can impose targeted policies, fees and/or taxes. This in turn makes obvious the central underlying question: since we are part – and a majority part – of the community for which the Select Board is responsible, will that body listen to the majority of Truro’s residential taxpayers? Or will it continue to justify adherence to controversial policies and practices adverse to its majority base of residents when we can achieve the same goals in better ways on an equal basis?

Thank You!

We appreciate the time and thought respondents gave to the 2024 survey. Your feedback is enormously useful. TPRTA will continue to do all we can to be an accurate, informative, cooperative and effective voice for part-timers (and anyone else who requests our assistance) on the many other issues facing Truro’s entire community.

Addendum

Response Data by Question

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: 10.66% No: 89.34%

Q3. If no to Q2, did the recent voter challenges affect the likelihood that you will register to vote, if eligible?

Yes: 49.56% Not at all: 50.44%

Q4. If NO to Q2, are you or other member(s) of your Truro household planning to move to Truro full-time within the next five (5) years?

Yes: 17.70% No: 82.30%

TIME SPENT IN TRURO

Q5. In 2023-24, how much TOTAL time have you spent in Truro (# Weeks total or # Months total)?

If spending time periodically: Average = 15 Weeks – 50%

If spending time continuously: Average = 5.2 Months – 50%

NOTE: Of those reported

above, if spending time

continuously + periodically: Average = 7.01 Months – 17%

Q6. Has the amount of time you spend in Truro changed post-pandemic?

A great deal more 6.56%

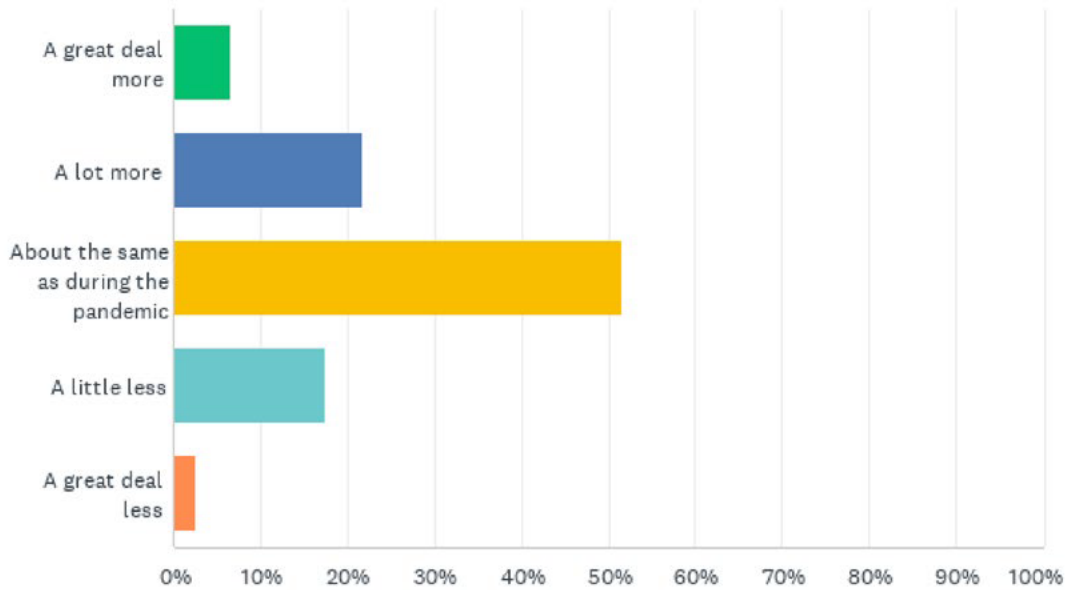
A lot more 2.95%

About the same 50.82%

A little less 17.21%

A great deal less 2.46%

Changes in Time Spent in Truro Since Pandemic



RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHICS

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

One	15.5%
Two	67.5%
Three	8.1%
Four or more	8.9%

(range: 4-12)

The reported range is from 1 to 12 persons per household; the mode was 2 persons per household and the average was 2.8 persons per household. Of larger households, average size was 10, accounting for Trusts and multi-generational use.

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

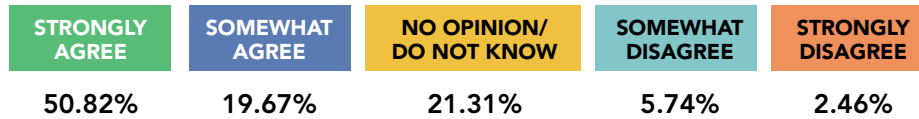
Age Range	Age Distribution
• Average = 72	In 90s < 1%
• Age Min = 42	In 80s = 18%
• Age Max = 93	In 70s = 37%
• Mode = 78	In 60s = 33%
	In 50s = 12%
	In 40s < 1%

RESIDENTIAL TAX EXEMPTION (RTE)

Q9. The RTE is now set at 30% and it looks like it will max out in the next year or two at 35%. Should TPRTA continue to oppose the RTE?



Q10. The Select Board should phase out the RTE beginning in FY25.

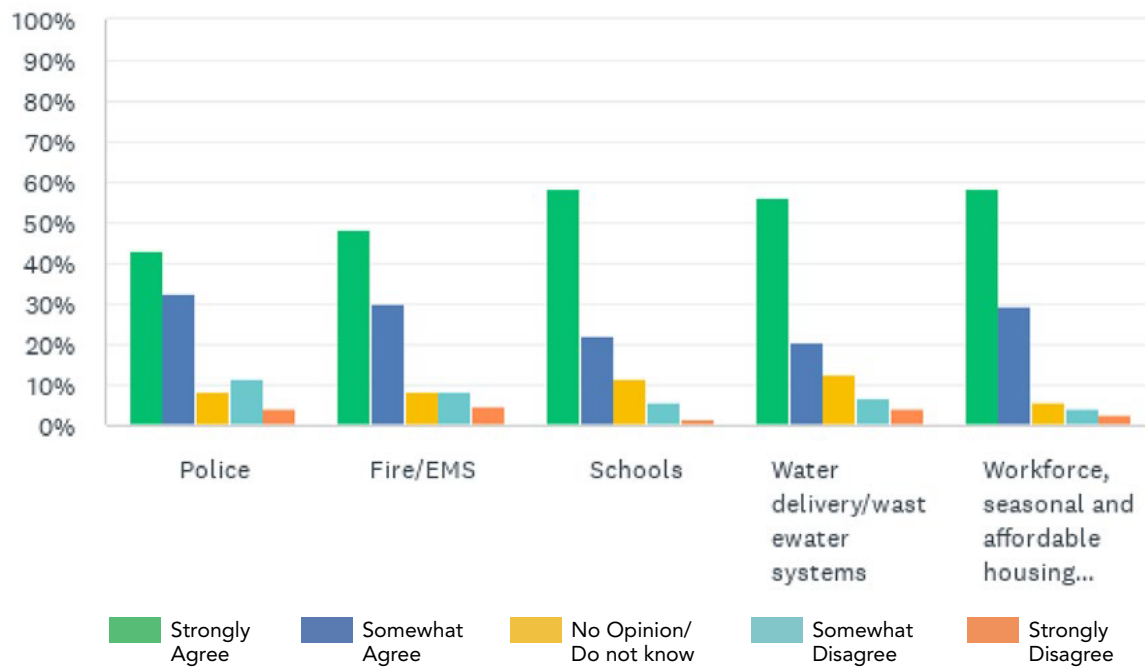


Q11. The Select Board should ensure all tax relief and benefits are applied on an equal basis to all Truro taxpayers (e.g., either all means-tested [needs-based] or all non-means-tested [regardless of need])

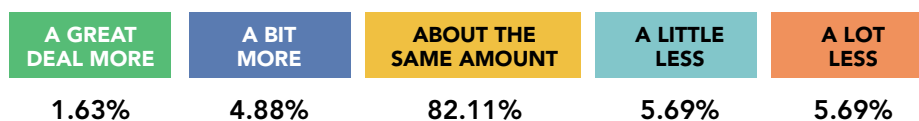


TOWN SERVICES

Q12. Given changing Town demography (i.e., slowly increasing population, shifting senior), the Town of Truro should proactively work with neighboring Towns to reduce tax burden by regionalizing and cost-sharing big-ticket items such as:



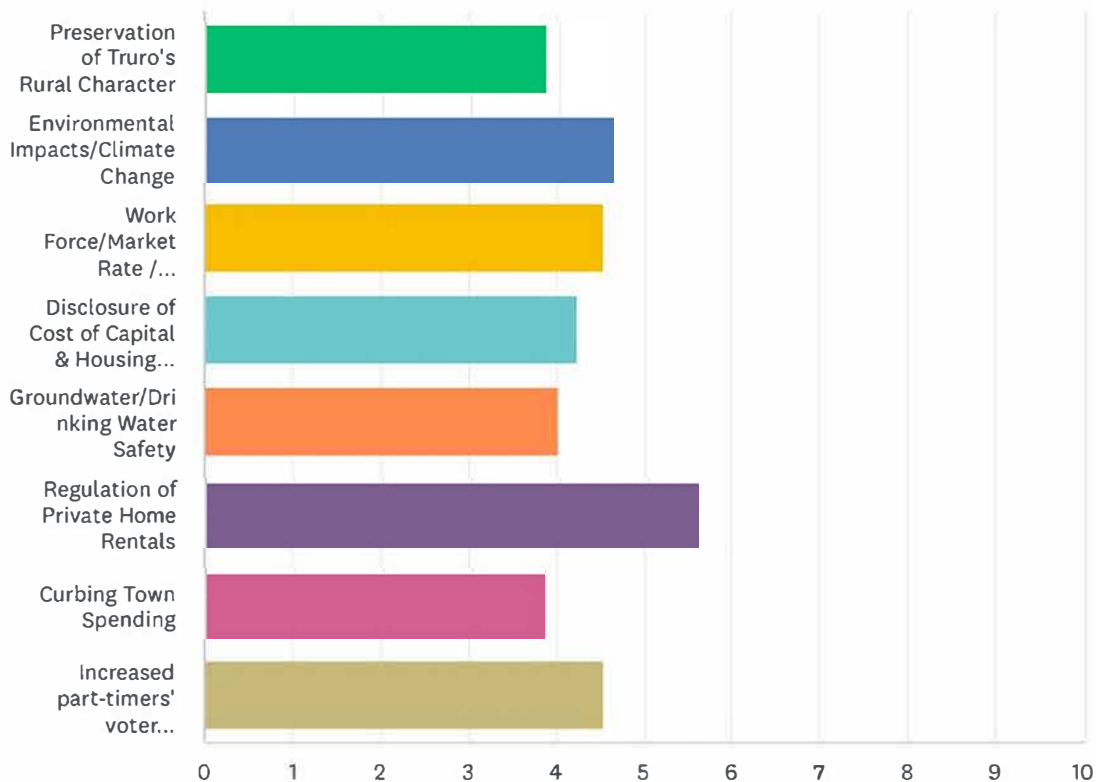
Q13. Did your household use more Town services in 2023-24 than in prior years since 2020?



PRIORITY ISSUES FOR SB AND TPRTA

Q14. Please RANK the importance and priority of the following issues facing Truro (rank your top priority = 8 down to lowest priority = 1; if NOT a priority = 0

Chart of Average Priority Ranking By Item



TPRTA PRIORITIES

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



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

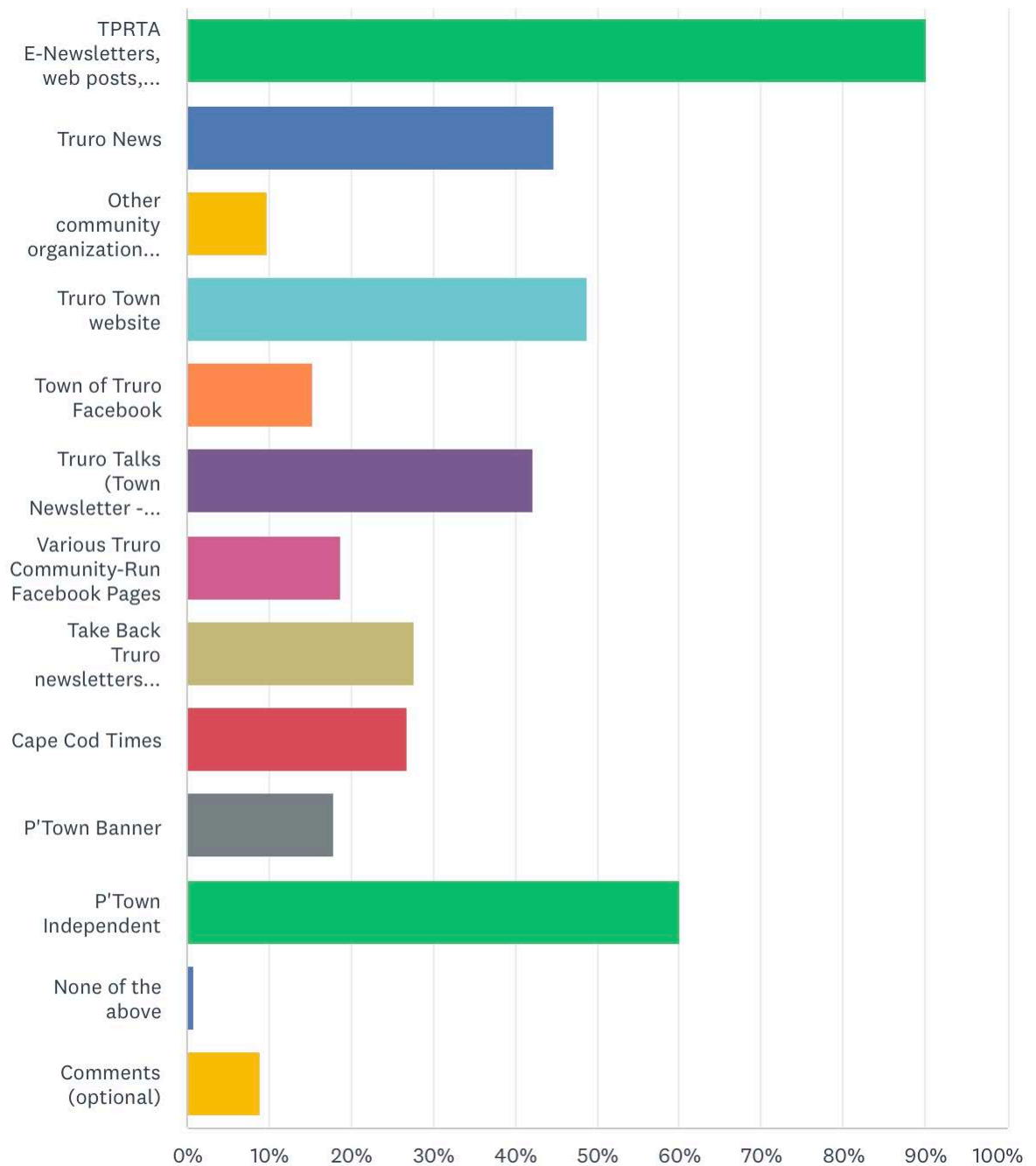


COMMUNICATIONS WITH PART-TIMERS

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



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



OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN

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?

Comments (394) amplified Town priorities as reflected in the summation of this item in the text.

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

Additional comments received (75), reflecting these as non-ranked (all equal) priorities, as reported upon in text

For more information or to make comments,
please contact us at tprta@tprta.org.

Thank you!
