

Questionnaire Results Summary

Aspinwall Borough Implementable Comprehensive Plan
May 17, 2021

Background

At the first meeting of the Aspinwall Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, the group provided direction to plan consultant Pashek + MTR on potential key issues and questions that should be asked of the community to help inform direction for the Borough of Aspinwall's future.

Pashek + MTR then developed a draft questionnaire in SurveyMonkey. The Steering Committee and staff reviewed the draft and provided feedback that is reflected in the final version. The questionnaire was open from March through April 2021 and promoted in multiple ways, including distribution of printed door hangers to resident homes, dissemination through Steering Committee networks and repeated advertising on social media. The questionnaire was also available via a link on the project website, AspinwallPlan.com.

Response rate

The questionnaire received a total of 622 responses. In validating the data, we flagged any IP address (the address of an individual device) associated with four or more responses, acknowledging that multiple members of a single household could respond using the same computer. However, a detailed review of the responses seems to indicate that all are unique and unlikely to be the result of any effort to unduly influence results. We also examined the 55 responses (9%) that indicated that respondents do not live in the Borough but work or own a business and/or property in Aspinwall. We reviewed these responses and decided that they were appropriate and included them in the questionnaire totals. A breakdown of responses by residents and non-residents can be completed by request on any question.

This questionnaire was not intended to achieve statistically valid results. We find value in qualitative information generated by the questionnaire, especially the responses to open-ended questions, and typically use this data to identify trends. That said, if this were a random sample distribution, the response rate of 567 (resident responses of 622 total responses) for 2,058 adults (residents age 18 and up, according to Census 2019 population estimates) would represent a 95% confidence level of accuracy within a 3.5% margin of error. The outreach efforts of staff, the Steering Committee and other volunteers helped deliver a large pool of responses that provides valuable insight on the questions asked.

Findings

Pashek+MTR summarized the most important responses to the questionnaire. For additional tabulations and much more detail in qualitative comments, see the full questionnaire printout.

Q1 Which best describes you? (622 responses)

Age range	Respondents as %
I live in a renter household in Aspinwall Borough.	11%
I live in a homeowner household in Aspinwall Borough.	75%
I live in Aspinwall and work or have a business in Aspinwall Borough.	6%
I do not live in Aspinwall, but I work or have a business in Aspinwall Borough.	7%
I do not live in Aspinwall, but I own property in Aspinwall Borough.	2%

Q2 How important are each of these aspects of the Aspinwall community to you today? (625 responses)

The highest-ranking five aspects were, in order:

1. Safe, healthy community to live in (85%)
2. Convenience of location (69%)
3. Schools (61%)
4. Availability of restaurants/bars/coffee shops (56%)
5. Shopping/services I need are local/convenient (53%)

The lowest-ranking five aspects were, in order:

1. Job or work opportunities
2. Public transportation options
3. Living close to the river
4. Schools
5. Family, friends are here

Open-ended responses included walkability, dog-friendliness, diversity, green space/greenery, trails, housing options and a kid-friendly community.

Q3 We hope to continue efforts to attract and retain businesses in Aspinwall. Which would you like to see moving into the Borough? (534 responses)

The highest-ranking five features were, in order:

1. More restaurants (64%)
2. Bakery (54%)
3. Micro-brewery (51%)
4. Hardware store (45%)
5. More specialty shops (44%)

“Other” responses included a library/community center, grocery/convenience store, coffee shop, ice cream shop (that is open in the evening), restaurants/establishments that are open later, bike repair shop, bar or liquor store, pet store/groomer, community pool or gym, farmers market and more diverse restaurants.

Q4 What do you like about Aspinwall’s business district? (402 responses to this question with almost 500 individual comments)

Almost half of responses mentioned the value of not having national chain stores. Other similar comments included:

- There’s a nice mix of stores and services
- Businesses support the community
- Owners and staff are friendly
- Great outdoor seating for restaurants

The next most frequently mentioned “like” was the easily accessible, walkable nature of the compact business district. This was mentioned by 157 people. Lots of the businesses were mentioned by name as being an asset to the community. Other comments included:

- Attractive storefronts
- Available parking
- Great special events held in the business district
- Business district space has street trees, nice decorative light fixtures, holiday decorations and wide sidewalks

Q5 Do you have any suggestions for Aspinwall’s business district? (291 individual responses)

The most frequently mentioned suggestions were:

- Types of businesses desired: brewery, bakery, ice cream shop
- Preference for more outdoor seating, more kid-friendly restaurants and those that serve breakfast and all-night service

- More parking
- Longer hours for the existing shops
- Upgrading building facades, especially along Freeport Road

There were lots of other opinions on how to improve the business district including:

- Cleanup of litter
- A market similar to Patty’s Farm Market (it was mentioned several times)
- More benches and bike racks
- More flower boxes and plants in general
- More special events

About 45 other suggestions included adding an electric charging station at the Municipal Parking Lot, more live music, transition from flea market to more of a fresh food market and a coordinated sale day among all the businesses.

Q6 What is your view on the quality of these services in Aspinwall? (541 responses)

Respondents were asked to rank services (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

The five highest-ranking services were, in order:

1. Fire
2. Snow plowing
3. EMS
4. Police
5. Street maintenance

The five lowest-ranking services were, in order:

1. Trash collection
2. Code enforcement
3. Trees (maintenance and rules/regulations)
4. Utilities
5. Recreation programs and opportunities

Q7 What do you like most about living here? (405 individual responses)

The top four most frequently mentioned reasons for living in Aspinwall included (from most preference to less):

- Walkable community
- The neighbors are great, lots of families
- People are very friendly
- The community feels safe

Also frequently mentioned were:

- Close to parks and the riverfront
- Great “sense of community” or “small-town vibe”
- Convenient
- Clean (including snow plowing)
- Great schools
- Good housing stock, front porches, well maintained
- Quality, close by business district

Q8 When you first enter Aspinwall, usually from Freeport Road, what would you like to see at these gateways? (516 responses)

	Respondents as %
More trees/plants	63%
Love the way it is	32%
Other	20%
Larger gateway signs	16%
Banners	2%

“Other” responses included greenery, even streets, pedestrian/slow down signs, signs that indicate business districts, trash clean-up, murals, renovated streets/crosswalks, lighting and a more welcoming sign.

Q9 Parking was a frequent comment at the May 2019 Visioning Workshop. What issues do you face regarding parking? (401 responses)

Almost half commented that they did not have a parking problem. The remaining 213 respondents offered an opinion regarding parking issues, usually with very specific detail.

The most frequently mentioned parking problems were:

- Business owners and employees parking in the residential areas
- Too many vehicles per housing unit, especially at rental buildings where tenants park on the street
- Poor parking enforcement by police
- Residents don’t use their off-street parking
- The current parking meters were not favored by some, preferring the ability to use credit cards and phone apps to change the time remaining on the meters

Twenty-six respondents reported challenges related to moving their vehicles during street cleaning day. Some suggested that the borough provide alternative parking, especially for those who might be out of town and cannot move their car during the summer months.

Q10 Recognizing that Freeport Road is a PennDOT-regulated road (changes can be challenging), would you recommend strategies such as narrowing travel lanes to slow traffic on Freeport Road? (522 responses)

	Respondents as %
Yes	23%
No	77%

Q11 Would you recommend speed bump outs, street gardens, or additional stop signs on Borough streets to calm traffic? (525 responses)

	Respondents as %
Yes	59%
No	41%

Q12 Are there any other traffic-related issues we should know about? (288 individual responses)

By far, the most mentioned concerns were:

- Speeding through the borough
- Rolling through stop signs
- Driving the wrong way on one-way streets
- Lack of enforcement.

Vehicle traffic

There were mixed views on the speed limit on Freeport Road, with some preferring to increase the efficiency of vehicle throughput and others preferring slower traffic. Some focused on traffic volume along Freeport Road and expressed a desire to discourage people from “cutting through Aspinwall” to get to adjacent neighborhoods or Waterworks Shopping Center.

Biking

Bikes and bike lanes also got mixed reviews, with some wishing the community were more “bike friendly” with safer routes, especially to Aspinwall Riverfront Park, and a few others indicating that they didn’t want any bike infrastructure. Some wanted to install speed bumps to slow traffic; others hated the idea of speed bumps. Several locations were suggested for street paving.

The most frequently mentioned intersection control issues were:

- Preventing left turns onto Freeport Road from Eastern Avenue (other non-controlled intersections with Freeport Road were also mentioned)
- The need for a stop sign at Center Avenue and Fifth
- Crossing Freeport Road to the Aspinwall Riverfront Park
- Safe walking path along Center Avenue from upper Aspinwall to lower Aspinwall

Q13 If the Borough were to invest in bike infrastructure, which of the following should be a priority? (461 responses)

	Respondents as %
Bike racks	51%
Painted markings and signs on Freeport Road	50%
Designated bike lanes on residential streets	31%
Other	31%

A majority of “other” responses indicated a reluctance towards bike lanes due to narrow streets and safety concerns. Additional “other” responses mentioned bike trails that connect to the Riverfront Park.

Q14 Aspinwall has a wonderful variety of owner-occupied and rental properties. A recent survey indicated that there are 67% owner occupied residential properties and 33% rental properties. What do you think of the current mix? (525 responses)

	Respondents as %
It's about right.	61%
The Borough should help expand opportunities for home ownership.	38%
The Borough should encourage more rental housing opportunities.	4%

Q15 If the medical building located next to the municipal parking lot became available, how would you like to see it be developed? (516 responses)

	Respondents as %
Mixed use with retail on 1 st floor and office of housing on upper floors	48%
Other	24%
Commercial development only	18%
Expansion of the existing parking lot	14%
Continue as it is today	9%
Denser housing for seniors	7%
A new medical office building of several stories	5%
Residential development only	2%

“Other” responses include mixed-use residential, a community center, a restaurant or micro-brewery, senior housing, and green space.

Q16 Food trucks are a growing business type. Would you support the Borough allowing food trucks? (533 responses)

	Respondents as %
Yes	89%
No	11%

Q17 Where would you recommend food trucks be allowed within the Borough? (440 individual responses)

Of the 440 people who responded to this question, 20 said that the borough should not have food trucks (citing their concern that the trucks would take business away from existing restaurants). Thirty-three residents said this was a great idea and the food trucks should go anywhere in the borough. Four areas were most frequently mentioned:

- In or near any of the Borough’s parks - 174
- In the Municipal Parking Lot - 166
- In the Commercial/Brilliant area of the business district - 151
- Aspinwall Riverfront Park - 104

Eighteen suggested that the food trucks be part of special events like festivals, street closings or block parties. Eleven thought that Alley A would be a good location for food trucks. Five other locations were mentioned by a few people.

Q18 Ben Killian Field and the Fifth Street Playground have provided wonderful experiences for generations. If the plan recommends an update to these facilities, what would they be? (517 responses)

	Respondents as %
More trees	46%
Picnic pavilions	44%
Community garden	43%
Multi-use fields such as soccer/lacrosse/etc.	38%
More playground areas	27%
Other	26%
Pickleball courts	24%

“Other” responses included a year-round dog park, benches, readily available bathrooms, a swimming pool and a running track.

Q19 How often do you, including family members, visit the following parks during warmer weather? (541 responses)

	Don't	1-5 Times/Year	6-10 Times/Year	11-20 Times/Year	Frequently
Aspinwall Fireman's Memorial Park	23%	37%	10%	8%	22%
Aspinwall Fifth Street Playground	34%	21%	10%	8%	27%
Aspinwall Recreation Area Ben Killian Field	21%	29%	14%	9%	27%
Dog Parks within Aspinwall	60%	9%	7%	5%	19%
Riverfront Park	10%	14%	14%	11%	50%

Q20 How often do you, including family members, visit the following parks during the winter? (538 responses)

	Don't	1-5 Times/Year	6-10 Times/Year	11-20 Times/Year	Frequently
Aspinwall Fireman's Memorial Park	56%	22%	7%	4%	11%
Aspinwall Fifth Street Playground	63%	16%	7%	4%	9%
Aspinwall Recreation Area Ben Killian Field	55%	21%	6%	4%	15%
Dog Parks within Aspinwall	66%	9%	5%	3%	17%
Riverfront Park	25%	23%	16%	8%	29%

Q21 In what age range do you fall? (533 responses)

	Respondents as %
31 to 50	51%
51 to 64	23%
65 or older	14%
19 to 30	7%
Younger than 18	0%

Q22 How long have you lived in, worked in or had a business in Aspinwall? (534 responses)

	Less than 5 Years	6-15 Years	More than 15 Years
Lived Here	26%	32%	41%
Worked Here	44%	33%	22%
Owned a business here	60%	24%	16%

Q23 What is one thing you would be willing to do to improve Aspinwall? (507 responses)

	Respondents as %
Work at clean-up day	14%
Improve the appearance of my property	13%
Pay slightly increased taxes to fund new initiatives coming from the Comprehensive Plan	12%
Help to promote Aspinwall	9%
Help to implement some specific elements of the comprehensive plan, once it is completed	9%
Other	9%
Serve on a committee or board	8%
Volunteer with the schools or a non-profit organization	8%
Attend council or commission meetings	6%
Maintain a flower garden in a public space	5%
Plant a tree	4%
Run for elected office	1%

“Other” responses included planting or clean-up days, all of the above and planning events.

Q24 If you would like to add comments that would help us better understand issues, or suggest ways of improving Aspinwall, please add them below. (176 responses)

Many of the 176 responses to this question were thoughtful and lengthy. Main issues have been clustered under topics below for possible consideration for the comprehensive plan.

Zoning

- Regulation of temporary signs
- Maintenance of rental properties
- Noise ordinances
- Discourage conversion from single family to multi-family
- Parking requirements for multi-family units

Communications

- Address perception that zoning is not enforced fairly
- Address perception that police do not enforce regulations
- Getting the word out better, a “central spot” for information, a “one-stop website shop”
- Letting people know periodically about construction on Route 28

Future Land Use

- Consider developing marina area for waterfront properties
- How to encourage positive improvements in the R47 development
- Uses for the former Patty's Farm Market at Delafield and Freeport Road
- Rental properties

Connectivity

- Non-motorized connection between upper and lower Aspinwall
- Safe route to Aspinwall Riverfront Park, entrance off Freeport Road specifically improved
- Share the road signage on Freeport Road
- Connection from Municipal Parking Lot to Aspinwall Riverfront Park over Freeport Road and RR
- Enhance pedestrian connections to reinforce destination for walkability
- Continue discussions about the potential for use of the RR bridge from Aspinwall to Pittsburgh

Parks and Green Space

- Preserve existing green space/parks
- Add planters and flowers in the Commercial/Brilliant business area and at the corner of Delafield/Freeport Road
- Year-round dog park; eliminate large ballfield
- Keep adding shade trees wherever possible, especially along Freeport Road
- Continue to support the Aspinwall Riverfront Park
- Provide shade canopies in the parks
- Convert the roller hockey rink
- Try "Open Streets" concept several times through the summer
- Encourage adult recreation opportunities
- More special events other than National Night Out, maybe block parties
- Community Garden

Sustainability

- Composting area
- Use of renewable energy by borough
- Electric charging stations
- Invest in clean water infrastructure
- Be a leader in "Eco/Green initiatives"
- Recycling drop off area, especially for renters to use
- Consider a solar array on borough property or on a municipal rooftop
- Consider aspects of EcoDistricts that Sharpsburg, Etna and Millvale have created that might apply

Infrastructure

- Paving of roads/alleys, some want bricks, others don't
- Repair sidewalks

Commercial Development

- Be wary of new commercial development that might appear to bring in more tax revenues but could negatively impact the residential neighborhood

Identity

- Focus on the residential areas as this is what makes Aspinwall so special
- Add hanging flower baskets on light poles to reinforce the attractive features of the community
- To continue to be a thriving community we should try to attract young people and families

Transportation

- Safer RR crossing
- Speeding on neighborhood streets, traffic calming measures
- Discourage through traffic

Housing

- Affordable Housing

Public Safety

- Traffic safety including speeding, running stop signs and wrong way travel on one-way streets

Finally, 222 people provided a contact email address for further information regarding the plan.