

Sechelt Residents 50+ Survey: Report to the community
Sue Jackel, Project Leader
April, 2010

The Sechelt Residents 50+ Survey was conducted in November/December 2009 by a volunteer group of Sechelt residents, supported by a grant from UBCM's Age Friendly Community Planning program. The survey team consisted of Sue Jackel and Joanne Scanlan, volunteers, Vanessa Knox, project assistant, and Andre Boel, community planner for the District of Sechelt. Supporting partners in the project were Vancouver Coastal Health, Sunshine Coast Community Services Society, Capilano University and its Eldercollege program, Sechelt Seniors Activity Centre Society and the Seniors Network Advisory Group.

Background to the Project

The survey project arose in response to demographic information contained in the 2006 census, highlighting Sechelt's growing population of seniors. The most relevant points:

- Seniors (65+) in 2006 constituted 25.3% of Sechelt's then-8400 residents, compared to 14.6% for BC overall. Current total population is around 9200;
- Mid-life adults, aged 50-64, are approximately triple those aged 20-34, and make up 26% of the population;
- The median age of Sechelt residents in 2006 was 50.7 years, compared to 40.8 years for BC;
- Sechelt has more residents over age 85 (280) than preschoolers (270).

Added to this statistical information is broad local awareness that Sechelt has long been and continues to be a welcoming community to retirees, generally in their 50s and 60s but sometimes older. Planning for this demographic concentration of mid-life and older residents, while attending to the desire to attract and retain younger residents, is, in the words of the draft OCP, "a significant and immediate issue for Sechelt."

Reflecting the 2006 census profile, the Sechelt Residents 50+ Survey sought responses from an unusually broad age spectrum, 50% of Sechelt residents aged 50 and over. To capture the particular interests, preferences and needs of such a wide age spread, three separate but overlapping survey instruments were written: one for mid-life adults aged 50-64, one for seniors 65-79 and one for seniors 80+. Questions about age, gender, household income and household size and composition provided a baseline socioeconomic snapshot. More detailed questions on housing preferences and plans, transportation options and need for support services filled in the picture. Respondents were invited to comment on what they liked about living in Sechelt as an older person, and what in their view needed attention. The survey questionnaires are available online at www.seheltseniors.ca or www.district.sechelt.bc.ca.

Survey Method

Approximately 1500 printed survey forms were distributed at 6 public pick-up and drop-off locations (Sechelt Public Library, Visitor Information Centre, VCH Home Support office, Sechelt Seniors Activity Centre, Capilano University Sunshine Coast campus, District of Sechelt offices). In addition, volunteers met with seniors at the Seniors Activity Centre on several Fridays at lunch, and took survey forms to flu vaccination clinics, Eldercollege classes and other seniors-oriented groups and meetings.

The surveys were also posted online at the District of Sechelt website, and cross-linked to several other community websites, using SurveyMonkey as a platform. The survey was conducted from November 18 to December 19, 2009. The original deadline of December 12 was extended by a week to accommodate a late surge of interest.

Survey Responses

In all, 481 Sechelt residents filled out surveys, out of an estimated 4310 eligible to do so. Online responses numbered 194, while 287 were in print form. The overall return rate was 11.2%, and the rate among those aged 65-79 was 14.5%--a very good response. Still, given the relatively informal nature of the survey's construction and dissemination, the results should be taken as indicative rather than definitive. These are clues, flags, directions for further enquiry—a snapshot and baseline for planners, housing providers, small businesses, medical services, the library and Eldercollege, and others to draw on as Sechelt plans for its future.

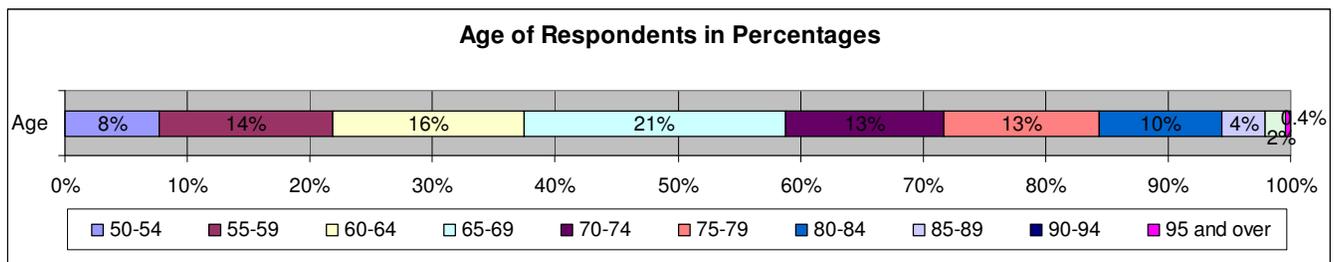
The raw data for the whole project are contained in a data base available from the planning department of the District of Sechelt. Various user groups may have particular questions to put to the data and are invited to contact the District of Sechelt.

Highlights

Here are a few highlights that may be of interest to the general public, and to particular sectors in the community:

Age and gender

More females (297 or 62%) than males (183 or 38%) responded, yet the Sechelt population is gender-balanced in virtually all age groups, including older ones.



As for age, the largest single group clustered in the 65-69 age brackets (103 of 481). One hundred and eighty respondents were mid-life adults (50-64). In the 85+ bracket, there were 26

respondents, including two over 95. The oldest respondent (a woman) provided the information that she was 101.

Location

Sechelt is a spread-out municipality, and this dispersed pattern of settlement becomes an issue when seniors need in-home care and services, or can no longer drive. Among respondents, 136 (28.3%) live in the downtown village, 112 (23.4%) in West Sechelt, and smaller numbers reside in the remaining smaller communities.

Home ownership

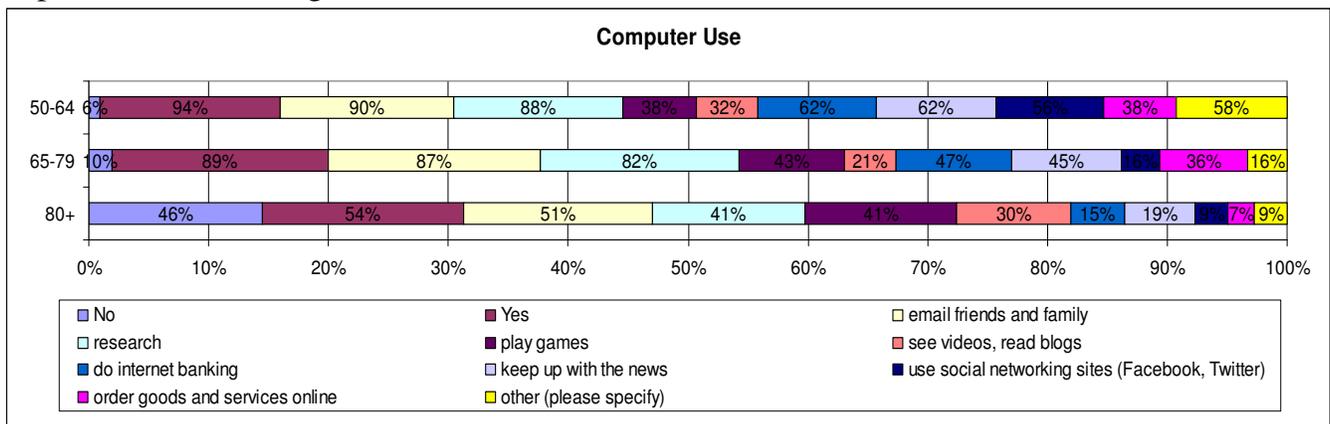
Of 478 respondents, 409 or 85.6% own their own homes, while 56 (11.7%) rent and 13 (2.7%) have some other arrangement. Home ownership is especially high in the 65-79 age category, just over 90%. For those 80+ it drops to about 78%--still a high proportion.

Household income

Some people did not answer this question, but of the 447 who did, the largest grouping (113 or 25.3%) occurred in the \$40,000-\$60,000 income bracket. At the lower end, 51 (11.4%) have household incomes below \$20,000. About 16% were above \$80,000.

Computer use

Nearly 86% (400 of 468 respondents) said they use computers, for a variety of purposes. Unsurprisingly, 94% of the 50-64 category use computers; 89% for those aged 65-79; and an impressive 54% among the 80+.

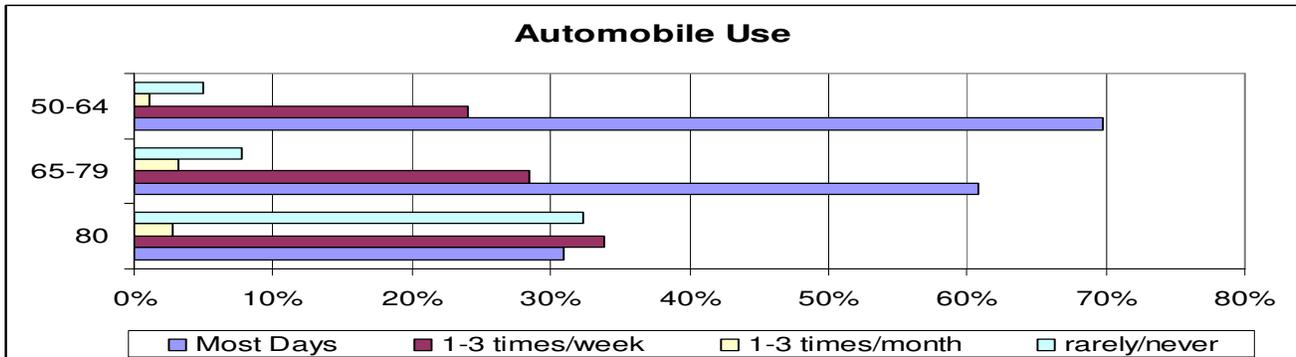


Pet ownership

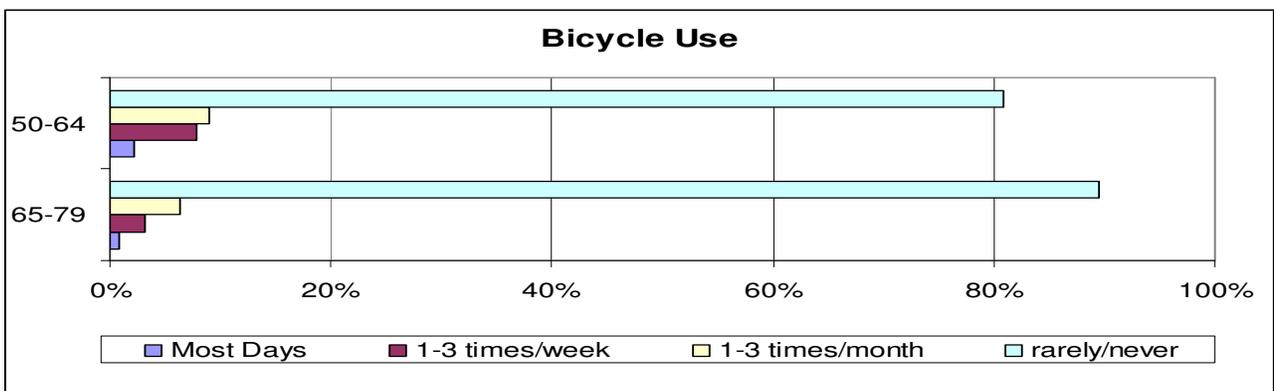
Veterinarians and pet-shop owners take note, about 40% of Sechelt older adults own pets.

Automobile ownership and use

Of 475 respondents, only 27 or 5.7% lived in a household without a car. A majority (52%) had one car, 37.5% had two cars. In comparison, 24.5% of households had one driver; more than 56% had two drivers. Most respondents in the age category 50-64 (70%) drove a car most days.



The two younger age groups were asked about bicycle use—a healthy 25% said they do ride a bike, most or some or a few days a month. Perhaps we should have asked the 80+ crowd this question too!



Getting around

Almost everyone answered this question, and only 11% said they had difficulty getting around. But some then went on to comment that they anticipated difficulties in the future, or were able to be mobile despite cranky knees, absence of scooter lanes, or discontinuous sidewalks. Over half (56%) of individuals in the 50-79 age category are concerned about getting around if they could no longer drive.

Getting out

This question was asked only of the two older age groups (65 and up). It demonstrated what we already knew, that Sechelt seniors are an active lot—81% get out most days, and only 1% answered 1-3 times a month (no-one said rarely or never, but keep in mind that complete shut-ins were unlikely to receive or fill out the survey).

And they do get around—from a long list of “usual destinations in Sechelt,” respondents most frequently identified Trail Bay Mall (88%), stores in the downtown (83%), medical services (82%), banks and pharmacies (both roughly 80%). Restaurants and hair salons attract over 60% on a regular basis, and Tsain-co Mall (Extra Foods), the public library and post office are right behind. Church was a regular destination for 17.1% or 51 individuals, and the same number identified Eldercollege at Capilano University.

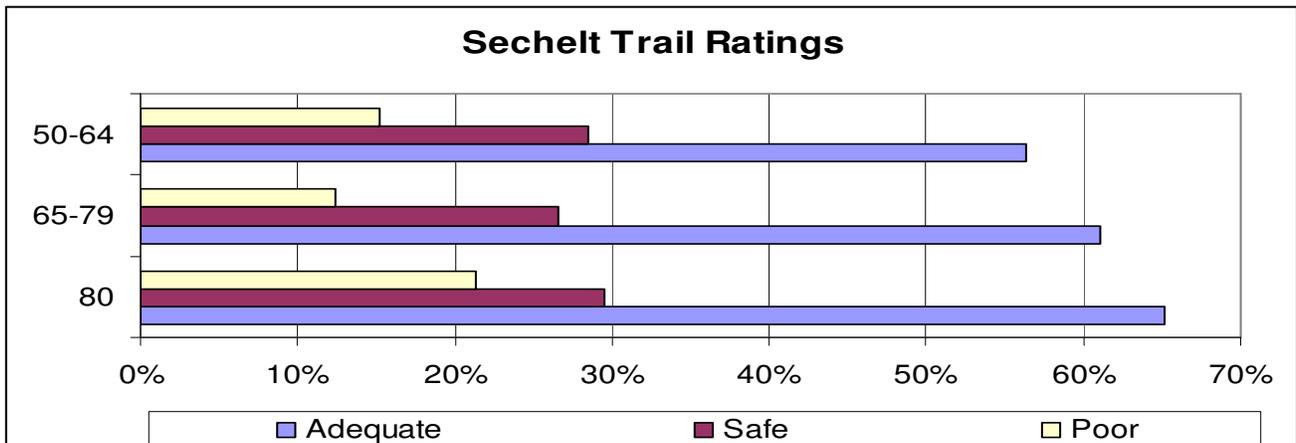
The waterfront walkways at Trail Bay and Davis Bay are attractive to significant proportions (50% and 41% respectively). From another question on trail use addressed only to those 50-79, nearly 80% said they hike or walk on Sechelt’s walking paths and trails, and a majority do so daily or weekly.

Top Five Destinations

	Most Frequent	2nd Most Frequent	3rd Most Frequent	4th Most Frequent	5th Most Frequent
80+	Office of doctor, eye doctor, dentist, other medical professional	Trail Bay Mall (Clayton’s)	Bank, accountant, financial advisor	Pharmacy	Stores in downtown Sechelt
65-79	Trail Bay Mall (Clayton’s)	Stores in downtown Sechelt	Office of doctor, eye doctor, dentist, other medical professional	Bank, accountant, financial advisor	Pharmacy

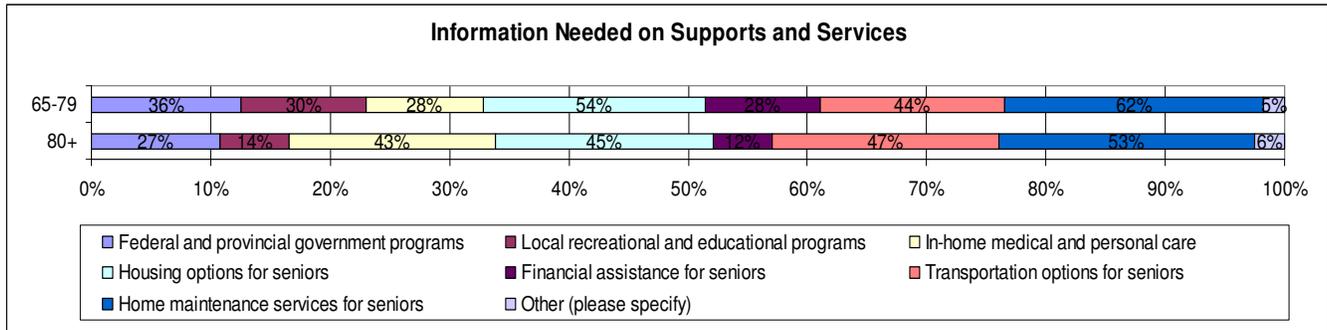
Rating Sechelt’s infrastructure

Again, almost everyone (468 in total) answered this question, and there were definite concerns: 130 respondents thought the sidewalks were poor, 115 identified problems with intersections and crosswalks, and even roads (67) and trails (56) had their critics. Fewer respondents found difficulty accessing public spaces, with the District of Sechelt offices topping the list at 20. Pedestrians and scooter users commented about the safety of getting across intersections, while drivers suggested that rules and signs at intersections were confusing.



Obtaining supports and services

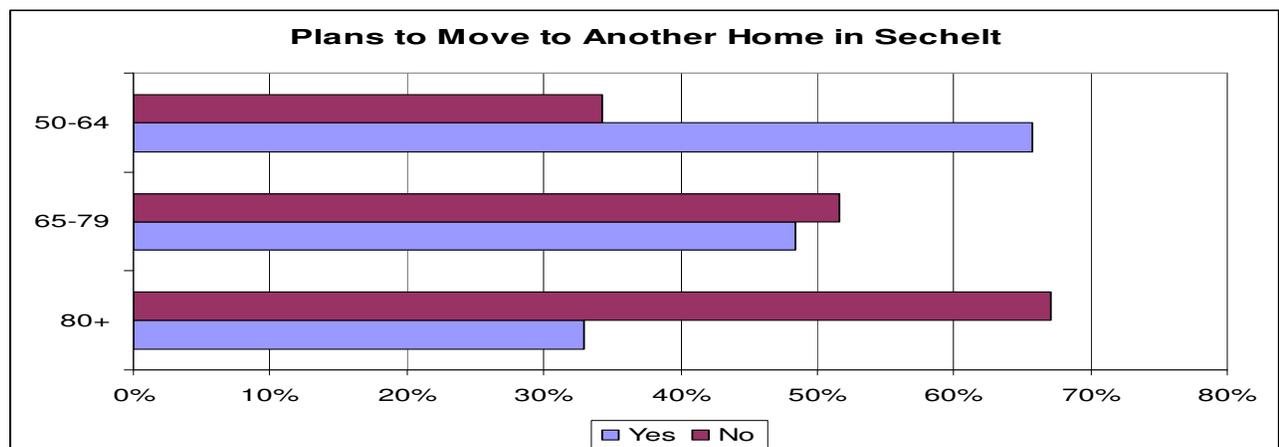
This area of seniors' daily lives needs more detailed exploration; the survey just skimmed the surface. Generally, a majority of older residents get help from some source with yardwork and other outdoor maintenance, and 39% get help with routine housekeeping. Among those 80+, 55% pay for services and a majority aged 65 and up said they would pay for services if workers were trustworthy and reliable and fees moderate.



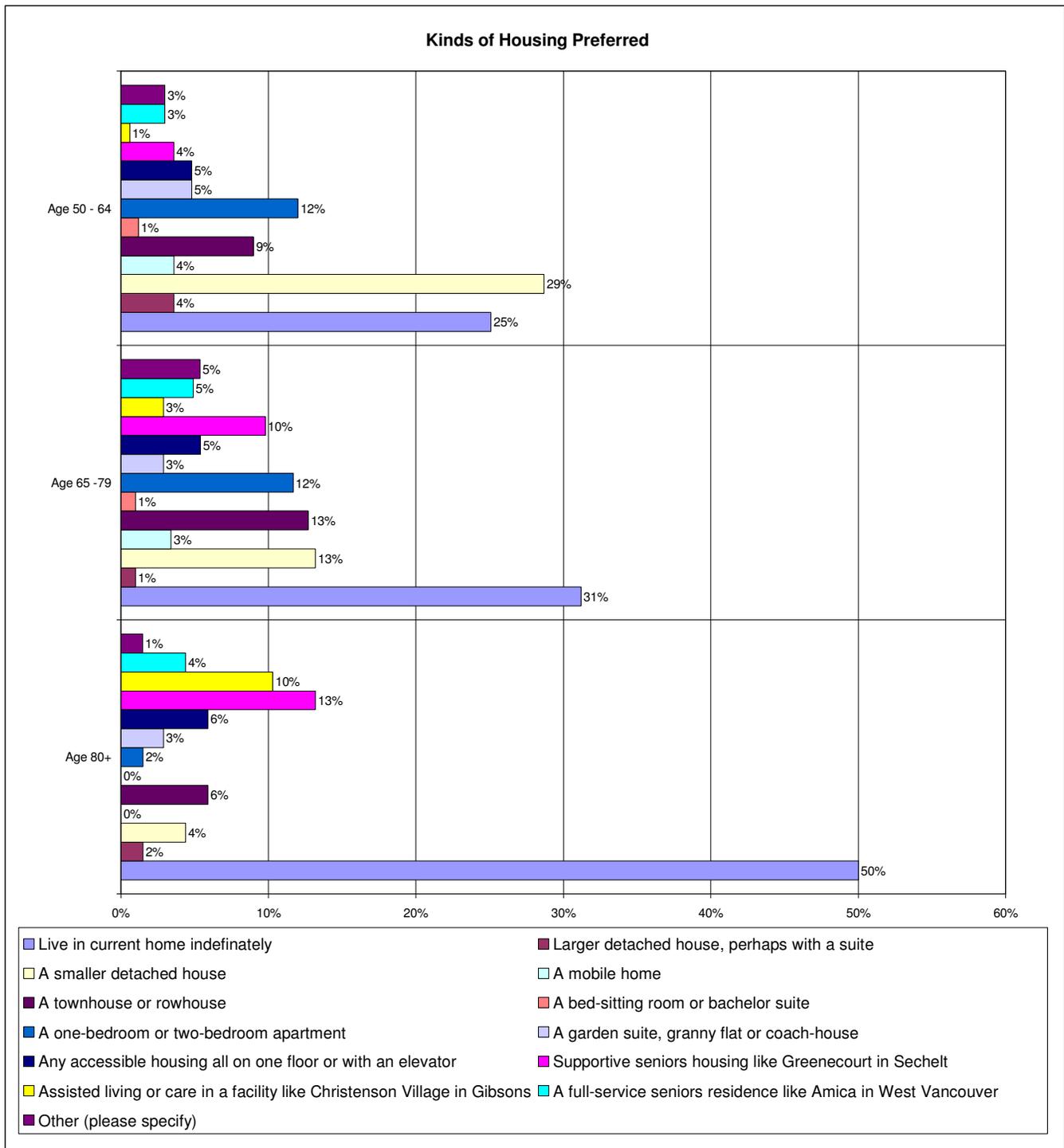
Current and prospective housing options

Currently, a strong majority – 70%--of Sechelt residents 50 and over are to be found in single detached homes. The remaining respondents are almost evenly spread between mobile homes, townhouses and apartments. One-quarter live on their own, 67% with a spouse or partner, and 5.3% with other family members.

More than half (52.7%) have thought about moving sometime in the future, but they're not in a hurry: of the 256 people who expressed this intent, just over half chose 5 years or longer as the probable timeframe for a move.



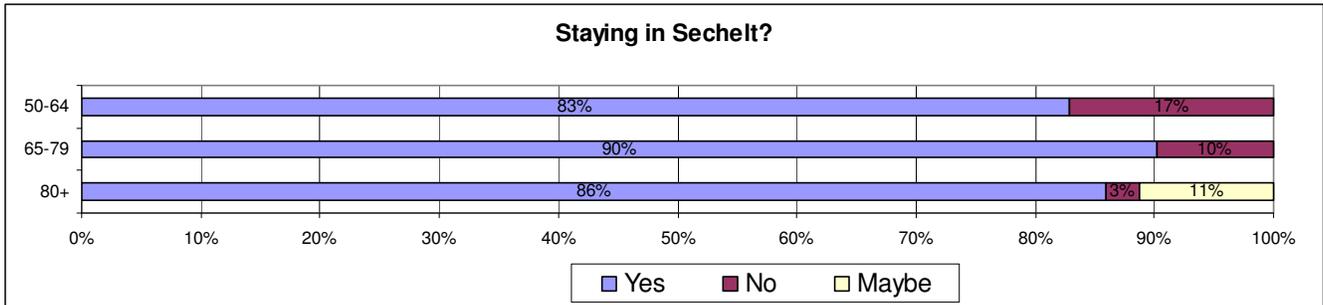
Respondents were given a list of 13 options around preferred future housing, including the option of staying put. Almost one third - 32% - said they planned to live in their current home indefinitely. Not quite one fifth - 17.7% - said they would look for a smaller detached house, 10% opted for a townhouse or rowhouse, and the same number chose a one or two bedroom apartment. About 15% identified some form of congregate seniors housing complex or facility.



The attractions of living in Sechelt as an older adult

Respondents who took the trouble to jot down answers to this open-ended question identified a familiar list of attractions: the beautiful surroundings, being close to the ocean and to nature, a quiet and slow-paced life, the friendliness of neighbours and residents in general, the wealth of activities and interests, the small-town atmosphere, and the night skies. A number mentioned proximity to Vancouver, while others celebrated the distance from Vancouver. A

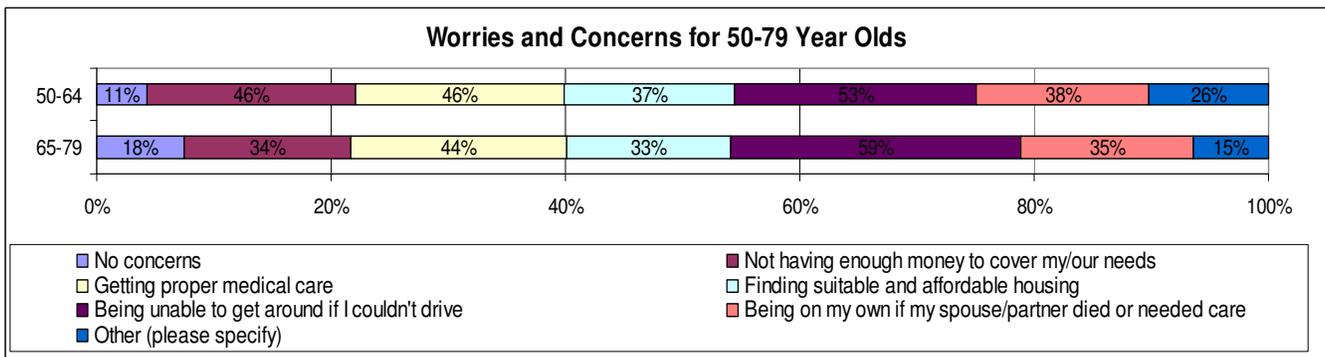
large number commended the courtesy, attention and friendliness of Sechelt shop-owners, and just about everyone had good things to say about the staff at St. Mary’s hospital and in medical clinics and pharmacies. A few even had good things to say about B.C. Ferries!



Worries and concerns

A surprising number said they had no worries or concerns, and the proportions were highest in the over-80 category. Sechelt seniors are generally active, satisfied with their lives, and happy with their location in a beautiful village-like community. In general, Sechelt seniors seem to be a self-reliant, stoic lot. Whether their boomer children will be so forbearing is a question for future surveys to answer.

For some, affordability of housing and care was a worry; for others, simple availability of appropriate facilities and services and getting proper medical care was a concern. A number expressed concern over being on their own if a spouse become ill or died, and losing driving abilities was likewise worrisome.



Once again, it needs to be stressed that these data are suggestive only, and point the way to more in-depth and detailed exploration of the needs, preferences and concerns of Sechelt’s 50+ residents.

Follow up on Results

The results of the Sechelt Residents 50+ Survey will be shared with participating organisations. It is the intent of the survey team that the results be used by the participating organisations to plan and prepare for seniors needs now and in the future.

While satisfaction levels seem to be high, it is suggested that we consider future work to address the short list of issues which seniors identified as having the potential to improve the overall well-being of residents. These are:

- traffic patterns, signage and other transportation issues for car travel throughout the city where a high proportion of the population is aging and where so many of them continue to drive;
- the interaction of cars, electric wheelchairs and scooters, and pedestrians all using the roads, along with bicycles, long boards and young families with baby strollers;
- desirability of more affordable housing for seniors (and also for other lower-income residents).