



CENTER FOR ETHICS IN BUSINESS AND GOVERNANCE

Saint Anselm College

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SURVEY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE VOTER ATTITUDES

Finds that More Affordable Housing is Needed in the State

MANCHESTER, NH – The Center for Ethics in Business and Governance at Saint Anselm College released its first statewide survey of voter attitudes toward New Hampshire’s housing crisis today.

In addition to gathering opinions about affordable housing, planning and zoning regulations, new housing developments, and possible state legislative action to speed up approval of new housing permits, the survey asked voters whether the COVID-19 crisis is likely to change where they want to live in the future.

Of the nearly 500 people who took part in the phone interviews, 96 percent said the pandemic would not influence where they would want to live in the future. Three percent said they will now want to move to a more rural community and one percent said they will now want to move to a more urban community.

“These results suggest that the supposed trend of moving from cities to suburbs after the pandemic, which a number of national newspapers have covered, is either overblown or simply not a factor in New Hampshire,” says Center for Ethics Director Jason Sorens, who is leading the research under its Housing We Need initiative. The initiative is funded in part by New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority.

New Hampshire voters also support building more affordable housing, with 63 percent agreeing that “My community needs more affordable housing to be built,” and only 21 percent disagreeing.

When asked why they agreed with this statement, Granite Staters said that the top reasons were:

- Letting seniors downsize (90%)
- Fairness to the less fortunate (89%)
- Keeping young people in the state (87%)
- Reducing homelessness (85%)

Further, 84 percent of those who want more affordable housing said that helping the economy grow was a reason to support building affordable homes and 71 percent said that accommodating a growing workforce was a reason to do so.

“The results of the survey reflect an awareness of the connection between an adequate supply of housing and a strong state economy. If employees have an adequate range of affordable housing options near where they work, the state’s businesses will be able to attract and retain the workers



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needed to keep our economy thriving,” noted Dean Christon, executive director of New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority.

Other key insights show that New Hampshire voters are:

- Strongly in favor of a state law setting a “hard limit on how long planning and zoning boards can take to review permits to build housing.”
- Less convinced that towns and cities should relax planning and zoning regulations to allow more housing to be built.
- Skeptical of the idea that communities should do more to prevent development and “keep the state the way it is.”

“We designed the survey to be as scientific as possible with neutral language and questions that probe both pro- and anti-housing opinions,” Sorens says. “Even with the most appealing anti-housing framing we could think of – keeping the state we love the way it is – New Hampshire voters rejected anti-housing positions and supported pro-housing ones on the majority of questions.”

Housing Action New Hampshire Director Elissa Margolin added that “these results show that Granite Staters endorse state and local action to address the affordable housing shortage in New Hampshire.”

Voter trends showed:

- Partisanship plays a variable role in housing attitudes, with Republicans and partisan neutrals less likely than Democrats to agree that their own communities needed more affordable housing.
- Homeowners were more likely than non-homeowners to disagree with building more affordable housing in their community.
- Belknap County voters were far more likely than others to agree that the state should do more to prevent development and keep the state the way it is (it was the only county where the majority of respondents agreed).
- Coos and Strafford County voters had opposing views on relaxing zoning regulations: Coos voters were generally for it, while Strafford voters were heavily opposed.

Methodology: A random subset of 478 New Hampshire registered voters were interviewed by landline and cell telephone between May 11 and 15. Respondents were weighted by sex, educational attainment, homeownership status, party registration, and county to match the characteristics of the population of New Hampshire registered voters. The survey margin of error is 5.1% and includes the design effect of weighting. Callers were instructed to randomize the order of questions Q4, Q5, and Q6. (See all questions and results below.)

About Center for Ethics in Business and Governance

The Center for Ethics in Business and Governance was founded in 2017 as a forum for research, discourse, and education about pressing ethical issues in New Hampshire’s communities and organizations. For more information, go to www.anselm.edu/ethics.

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Saint Anselm Center For Ethics First New Hampshire Housing Poll Released 5-19-2020

Full Results

Q1. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as being closer to the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, or neither? (N=464)

Democratic – 36.5% ±5.0%

Republican – 27.9% ±4.7%

Neither – 34.6% ±4.9%

Don't know – 1.0%

Q2. Is the COVID-19 crisis likely to change where you want to live in the future? (N=468)

Yes, I will probably now want to move to a more rural community – 3.2% ±1.8%

Yes, I will probably now want to move to a more urban community – 1.0% ±1.0%

No, the crisis probably will not change where I want to live in the future – 95.8% ±2.1%

Now I would like you to think about housing. I will ask you some questions about how state and local governments can affect the building of new houses and the cost of housing for New Hampshire residents.

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. [SAY THE NUMBER AND THEN THE TEXT OF EACH STATEMENT]

Q3. “My community needs more affordable housing to be built.” Do you...[SAY THE TEXT OF EACH OPTION] Or don't you know? (N=463)

Strongly agree – 23.1% ±4.4%

Agree – 39.8% ±5.1%

Neither agree nor disagree – 14.7% ±3.7%

Disagree – 15.5% ±3.8%

Strongly disagree – 5.4% ±2.3%

Don't know – 1.5%

Combined Agree + Strongly agree – 62.9% ±5.0%

Combined Disagree + Strongly disagree – 20.9% ±4.2%

Q3a. [ONLY TO RESPONDENTS WHO ANSWERED “AGREE” OR “STRONGLY AGREE” TO Q3] To follow up on your answer, which of the following reasons best describe why your community needs more affordable housing? I will read each option and you can say “yes” or “no” after each.



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Accommodating the growing workforce: Yes – 71.3% No – 28.7% (N=313)

Keeping young people in the state: Yes – 87.2% No – 12.8% (N=311)

Letting seniors downsize: Yes – 89.5% No – 10.5% (N=312)

Fairness to the less fortunate: Yes – 89.2% No – 10.8% (N=304)

Helping the economy grow: Yes – 83.6% No – 16.4% (N=309)

Reducing homelessness: Yes – 84.7% No – 15.3% (N=307)

Q4. The next statement is “New Hampshire towns and cities should relax their planning and zoning regulations in order to allow more housing to be built.” Do you... [SAY THE TEXT OF EACH OPTION]? Or don’t you know? (N=465)

Strongly agree – 5.3% $\pm 2.3\%$

Agree – 23.4% $\pm 4.4\%$

Neither agree nor disagree – 23.4% $\pm 4.4\%$

Disagree – 33.2% $\pm 4.9\%$

Strongly disagree – 8.5% $\pm 2.9\%$

Don’t know – 6.2%

Combined Agree + Strongly agree – 28.7% $\pm 4.7\%$

Combined Disagree + Strongly disagree – 41.7% $\pm 5.2\%$

Q5. The next statement is “New Hampshire communities should do more to prevent development and keep the state the way it is.” Do you... [SAY THE TEXT OF EACH OPTION] Or don’t you know? (N=447)

Strongly agree – 7.8% $\pm 2.8\%$

Agree – 23.5% $\pm 4.5\%$

Neither agree nor disagree – 20.4% $\pm 4.3\%$

Disagree – 40.7% $\pm 5.2\%$

Strongly disagree – 4.8% $\pm 2.3\%$

Combined Agree + Strongly agree – 31.3% $\pm 4.9\%$

Combined Disagree + Strongly disagree – 45.7% $\pm 5.3\%$

Q6. The next statement is “The New Hampshire legislature should set a hard limit on how long planning and zoning boards can take to review permits to build housing.” Do you... [SAY THE TEXT OF EACH OPTION] Or don’t you know? (N=449)

Strongly agree – 14.0% $\pm 3.7\%$

Agree – 44.3% $\pm 5.3\%$

Neither agree nor disagree – 17.3% $\pm 4.0\%$

Disagree – 14.5% $\pm 3.7\%$

Strongly disagree – 3.4% $\pm 1.9\%$

Combined Agree + Strongly agree – 58.3% $\pm 5.3\%$

Combined Disagree + Strongly disagree – 17.9% $\pm 4.0\%$