

Survey: Halifax residents ok with construction, concerned new buildings will hurt housing affordability

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A study found participants are okay with construction but concerned about housing affordability. (FILE)

Residents of the Halifax Regional Municipality are more accepting of changes to their city than most people realize.

A recent survey of Halifax residents on their perception of transformation within their community showed that the majority of survey participants pointed to changes to buildings, housing, and infrastructure as being by far the most common changes observed and the biggest modifications occurring in the city, which they tend to view as being for the better.

“It is hard not to notice all the construction that has gone on in the city, and the survey shows that Haligonians are open to it,” said Howard Ramos, sociologist at Dalhousie University and lead researcher on the project.

More than 70 per cent of participants noted the changes to the man-made environment in the city as the biggest changes to regional municipality in the last five to 10 years, and 99 per cent of participants observed some amount of new construction in the city in the last five to 10 years.

The majority of participants, 53 per cent, view such changes to buildings and homes in their neighbourhoods as being for the better.

Despite their openness to all the construction activity in the city, survey participants are concerned about housing affordability in the city, Ramos said. In an interview, he said, people in the Maritimes tend to view what is happening in Vancouver and Toronto and expect the same trends to come here.

People see all the growth in those two cities and observe the issues with affordability there and it seems logical that the same thing might happen here and they might eventually be priced out of the benefits that come with new construction, he said.

Only 14 per cent of survey participants believe their neighbourhoods had become more affordable in the last five to 10 years.

The Dalhousie researchers working on the perceptions of change project are trying to better understand how people feel about the changes they see in several dimensions — economic, social and cultural diversity, physical, and environmental — Ramos explained in an interview Wednesday.

The researchers conducted a telephone survey of 465 Halifax residents to determine what changes they observed in the city and their neighbourhood over the last five to 10 years. The survey has a 95 per cent confidence level, or 19 time out of 20, with a plus or minus 2.5 per cent margin of error.

While there might have been some things in the survey results, which may be considered surprising, Ramos said, a similar study was conducted two years ago with similar findings, so the results in the latest survey mainly confirm what was uncovered in the previous survey.

Most people questioned by the study acknowledged that they have seen improvements to the city's economy and there has been increased social and cultural diversity. Seventy-one per cent noted more employment in the city, and 85 per cent believe the population had become more diverse in the last five to 10 years.

The economic and social changes were generally viewed favourably, especially at the neighbourhood level, said Ramos — 90 per cent of participants believed that, overall, the economy was about the same or better than five to 10 years ago, and 96 per cent said the same about social and cultural changes.

Perceptions of change in the city's natural environment were mixed, however, with 38 per cent of participants noticing fewer green spaces compared to five to 10 years ago.

Ramos said although there is environmental awareness in the larger national or global context, but it appears that people are confused about environmental changes that can be made at that city or neighbourhood level.

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