

A Citizens' Survey on Maple Avenue Commercial Zoning in Vienna VA

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Executive Summary

In late October 2018, a letter was mailed to 400 randomly selected Town of Vienna residents inviting them to take an on-line survey about Maple Avenue Commercial (MAC) zoning. The survey can be viewed at www.surveymonkey.com/r/citizens. Forty individuals took the survey (10% response rate). A further 30 “volunteers” also took the survey but were not part of the random sample.

This report summarizes those survey responses with ten tables, one table per page. This executive summary page lists the ten topics and the conclusions drawn from respondents in the random sample. Click the topic to move to the page with the detailed data.

[1: Awareness of MAC zoning and specific projects.](#)

While the majority of Vienna residents are aware that MAC zoning exists, the overwhelming majority of Vienna residents are unaware of new buildings at the time they are under review by the Town.

[2: General opinion of MAC zoning and five MAC buildings.](#)

Not all MAC buildings are liked or disliked equally. The 444 Maple West project is widely disliked, most MAC projects are disliked by a more modest margin, but the Chick-fil-A is more liked than disliked.

[3: Distance from Maple and opinion of MAC zoning.](#)

The negative effects of MAC zoning are perceived most strongly by those living near Maple Avenue.

[4: Projects that were particularly liked or disliked.](#)

Using this separate approach, 444 Maple West was strongly singled out as the most widely disliked of the MAC projects. But Chick-fil-A again scored relatively well, as did the Sunrise assisted living facility.

[5: Importance of advantages and disadvantages of MAC zoning.](#)

The majority of Vienna residents thought that all of these concerns were important – both positives and negatives – except for the idea of bringing in destination retail and better restaurants.

[6: What would citizens change about MAC zoning?](#)

Residents want MAC zoning to result in smaller buildings and they particularly want to see more green and open space than MAC zoning is currently providing.

[7: Common activities on Maple Avenue.](#)

Maple Avenue appears to be reasonably walk-able and bike-able now, based on the significant fraction of survey respondents who report walking and biking on Maple on at least a weekly basis.

[8: Impact on future behavior.](#)

The one clear message here is that significant MAC development will, in the eyes of the average survey respondent, disturb Vienna’s small-town atmosphere.

[9: Impact on voting behavior.](#)

Survey respondents report that their votes in the Town Council election will be affected by council members’ votes on MAC projects. This appears particularly true for those who dislike MAC zoning.

[10: Change in opinion before and after survey.](#)

Discussing MAC in detail led to a slight downward shift in average opinion about MAC zoning.

1: Awareness of MAC zoning and specific projects.

Table 1: Were you aware of MAC zoning, and were you aware of these specific proposed buildings?

	Random Sample	Volunteer Sample
MAC Zoning	65%	87%
1 Chick-fil-A/Car Wash	79%	100%
2 Tequila Grande/444 Maple West	67%	92%
3 Wade Hampton office building/380 Maple West	28%	54%
4 Marco Polo/Vienna Market	59%	81%
5 Maple and Center/Sunrise Assisted Living	33%	54%
Memo: Number of respondents	40	30

1.1 Just under two-thirds of individuals who responded to the survey request were aware of MAC zoning (Table 1, top line).

1.2 One-third or fewer had heard about the last two MAC proposals, 380 Maple West and Sunrise Assisted Living (Table 1, highlighted).

Conclusion: While the majority of Vienna residents are aware that MAC zoning exists, the highlighted figures suggest that most Vienna residents are unaware of what is being proposed *at the time new buildings are under review by the Town.*

2: General opinion of MAC zoning and five MAC buildings.

	Hate	Dislike	Neutral	Like	Love	Summary:	
						Dislike or Hate	Like or Love
Random sample							
MAC Zoning	25%	23%	18%	20%	15%	48%	35%
Chick-fil-A/Car Wash	10%	21%	31%	21%	18%	31%	38%
Tequila Grande/444 Maple West	46%	15%	10%	23%	5%	62%	28%
Office building/380 Maple West	33%	18%	10%	26%	13%	51%	38%
Marco Polo/Vienna Market	33%	18%	15%	21%	13%	51%	33%
Sunrise Assisted Living	23%	23%	18%	21%	15%	46%	36%
Memo: Current Maple Avenue	8%	31%	23%	36%	3%	38%	38%
Volunteer Sample							
MAC Zoning	50%	37%	0%	3%	10%	87%	13%
Chick-fil-A/Car Wash	31%	8%	15%	35%	12%	38%	46%
Tequila Grande/444 Maple West	73%	15%	0%	0%	12%	88%	12%
Office building/380 Maple West	46%	27%	4%	12%	12%	73%	23%
Marco Polo/Vienna Market	46%	23%	15%	8%	8%	69%	15%
Sunrise Assisted Living	23%	27%	27%	12%	12%	50%	23%
Memo: Current Maple Avenue	4%	40%	28%	28%	0%	44%	28%

2.1 Individuals who disliked or hated MAC outweighed those who liked or loved it by 48% to 35% (Table 2, top line, right side).

2.2 The 444 Maple West project is the most widely hated/disliked MAC project, with well over half of respondents hating or disliking it (Table 2, highlighted data).

2.3 Chick-fil-A was the only project for which like/love outweighed dislike/hate (Table 2, second line).

2.4 Ratings of Maple Avenue as it now stands were much less extreme, with few individuals either loving or hating it. Respondents were evenly split between dislike/hate and like/love (Table 2, Memo line).

Conclusion: Not all MAC buildings are hated or liked equally. The 444 Maple West project is widely disliked, most MAC projects are disliked by a more modest margin, but the Chick-fil-A is more liked than disliked.

3: Distance from Maple and opinion of MAC zoning.

Table 3: Opinion about MAC zoning by self-reported distance from Maple Avenue.

Self-reported location of residence	Random sample	Volunteer Sample
Percent who dislike or hate MAC zoning.		
Not near Maple	27%	80%
Near Maple	59%	90%
Percent who like or love MAC zoning.		
Not near Maple	55%	20%
Near Maple	22%	10%

3.1 Unsurprisingly, individuals who reported living “near Maple Avenue” were far more likely to hate or dislike MAC zoning, and far less likely to like or love it.

Conclusion: The negative effects of MAC zoning are most apparent to those living near Maple. These are likely the individuals most directly affected by the new MAC projects.

4: Projects that were particularly liked or disliked.

Table 4: Count of the number of times projects were singled out as being particularly disliked or particularly liked.

	Random Sample			All responses pooled		
	Particularly Like	Particularly Dislike	Hate/like ratio	Particularly Like	Particularly Dislike	Hate/like ratio
Chick-fil-A/Car Wash	7	2	0.3	11	4	0.4
Tequila Grande/444 Maple West	1	13	13.0	2	25	12.5
Office building/380 Maple West	1	1	1.0	3	4	1.3
Marco Polo/Vienna Market	2	2	1.0	6	3	0.5
Sunrise Assisted Living	6	2	0.3	11	3	0.3

Respondents were given two free-form questions, asking them to identify any one project that they particularly liked, and state why, and any one they particularly disliked, and state why.

4.1 The 444 Maple West project again stood out as being particularly disliked. In the random sample, the ratio of dislikes to likes was 13:1. Pooling all observations, the ratio of hates to likes was still in that neighborhood (Table 4, highlighted data).

4.2 By contrast, both Chick-fil-A and Sunrise Assisted living were more likely to be singled out for “likes” than for “dislikes” (Table 4, top and bottom lines, hate/like ratio.)

Conclusion: Using this separate approach, 444 Maple West was again singled out as the most widely disliked of the MAC projects. Chick-fil-A again scores relative well, as does the Sunrise facility.

5: Importance of advantages and disadvantages of MAC zoning.

Table 5: Rating the theoretical advantages and disadvantages of projects built under MAC zoning.
(Only the random sample is shown for this table.)

							Summary:	
	Totally unimportant	Some-what unimportant	Neutral	Some-what important	Extremely important		Unimportant	Important
Six potential advantages								
Prevent deterioration/revitalize downtown	5%	5%	16%	39%	34%		11%	74%
Attract “destination retail”/ better restaurants.	18%	24%	16%	21%	21%		42%	42%
Housing options/places for seniors to downsize	11%	18%	13%	32%	26%		29%	58%
Broad sidewalks, public areas adjacent to Maple	3%	8%	11%	34%	45%		11%	79%
More attractive/better landscaping/bury power lines	5%	8%	8%	24%	55%		13%	79%
Generate more tax revenues.	10%	15%	23%	36%	15%		26%	51%
Six potential disadvantages								
Create more traffic on Maple Avenue.	0%	5%	8%	21%	66%		5%	87%
Eliminate small-town look, create “urban canyon” effect	11%	8%	14%	19%	49%		19%	68%
Generate school overcrowding/school redistricting	0%	11%	25%	19%	44%		11%	64%
Strain town infrastructure	3%	11%	17%	28%	42%		14%	69%
Replace local business with national chains	0%	11%	19%	8%	61%		11%	69%
Create “cut-through” traffic/disturb neighborhoods	6%	14%	3%	19%	58%		19%	78%

5.1 In general, people thought that the ideas behind MAC were important, other than the notion of bringing in destination retail (Table 5.1, top half, highlighted data).

5.2 Having housing options and bringing in tax revenues were deemed less important than having an attractive and vital downtown area.

5.2 That said, people thought the disadvantages were also important, particularly those related to traffic.

Conclusion: The majority of Vienna residents thought that all of these concerns were important, other than the notion of bring in destination retail and better restaurants.

6: What would citizens change about MAC zoning?

Table 6: What, if anything, would you change about MAC zoning?		
Potential changes	Percent of persons asking for each change	
	Random Sample	Volunteer Sample
Nothing – I like MAC zoning as-is.	8%	7%
Get rid of it entirely -- I don't want any more MAC buildings.	18%	10%
Lower the height limit -- make the buildings shorter	48%	63%
Raise the height limit -- make the buildings taller	10%	0%
Move the buildings further away from Maple Avenue	43%	40%
Move the buildings close to Maple Avenue	5%	0%
Require smaller footprint/cover less of the lot	50%	63%
Allow larger footprint/cover more of the lot	3%	0%
Require more green space/open space/landscaping	83%	63%
Require less greens space/open space/landscaping	3%	0%
Allow buildings all housing/no retail or commercial	15%	3%
Require buildings all commercial/retail, no housing	23%	27%
Allow only housing appropriate fo elderly/retirees	25%	30%
Allow only housing appropriate for young families	8%	7%

6.1 A significant subset of respondents clearly wanted smaller buildings not directly adjacent to Maple – shorter, with smaller footprint, and farther from the road (Table 5, highlighted data).

6.2 An overwhelming majority wanted more green and open space (Table 5, highlighted data).

Conclusion: Town of Vienna residents want MAC zoning to result in more green and open space than it is currently providing.

7: Common activities on Maple Avenue.

Table 7: What activities did you do last week on Maple?		
Activity	Percent of persons asking for each	
	Random Sample	Volunteer Sample
Driven/ridden in a car/truck/motorcycle.	90%	80%
Walked or one block or more.	48%	43%
Ridden a bicycle.	15%	7%
Eaten in a restaurant or bought fast food.	68%	70%
Bought groceries or drug store items	88%	73%
Bought other services (doctor, dentist, dry cleaner, hair salon ...)	43%	33%
Bought other goods (gas, clothes, household goods ...).	53%	57%

7.1 Almost all Vienna residents drive and buys groceries on Maple on at least a weekly basis (Table 7, top line, fifth line).

7.2 Nearly half of respondents reported walking a block or more along Maple (Table 7, highlighted data).

7.3 Fifteen percent reported bicycling along Maple in the past week.

Conclusion: Maple Avenue appears to be reasonably walk-able and bike-able now, based on these responses. Large fractions of the population walk and bike on Maple on at least a weekly basis.

8: Impact on future behavior.

Table 8: If most of Maple Avenue consisted of MAC-type buildings, how would that change the likelihood of these events?

	Much less likely	Less likely	Neutral	More likely	Much more likely	Summary:	
						Less Likely	More Likely
Random Sample							
Recommend Vienna to friends as a place to live	26%	21%	16%	32%	5%	47%	37%
Plan to live the rest of my life in Vienna.	26%	21%	21%	24%	8%	47%	32%
Enjoy Vienna's small-town atmosphere.	36%	28%	10%	26%	0%	64%	26%
Spend money shopping/dining on Maple Avenue	13%	16%	34%	21%	16%	29%	37%
Walk or bicycle along Maple Avenue	24%	13%	39%	21%	3%	37%	24%
Volunteer Sample							
Recommend Vienna to friends as a place to live	36%	44%	12%	0%	8%	80%	8%
Plan to live the rest of my life in Vienna.	44%	32%	20%	4%	0%	76%	4%
Enjoy Vienna's small-town atmosphere.	60%	28%	4%	4%	4%	88%	8%
Spend money shopping/dining on Maple Avenue	28%	28%	24%	16%	4%	56%	20%
Walk or bicycle along Maple Avenue	44%	16%	32%	4%	4%	60%	8%

8.1 Among survey respondents, it is quite clear that they do not consider MAC buildings to be “small town” buildings. Almost two thirds said that a MAC-redeveloped Maple would make it less likely that they would enjoy Vienna’s small-town atmosphere. (Table 8, highlighted data).

8.2 With one exception, respondents on average reported they would be less likely to undertake these positive actions toward Vienna.

8.3 The sole exception is spending. For that category, those who believed they would be more likely to shop and spend money on Maple outweighed those who thought they would be less likely.

Conclusion: The one clear message here is that significant MAC develop will, in the eyes of the average survey respondent, disturb Vienna’s small-town atmosphere.

9: Impact on voting behavior.

Table 9: Voting behavior and MAC zoning.		
"If a Town Council member votes to approve a large MAC building such as 444 Maple West, would that make you ..."		
	Random Sample	Volunteer Sample
Extremely likely to vote against his or her re-election	46%	76%
Likely to vote against his or her re-election	18%	12%
Have no effect on my vote/don't care/don't know	23%	8%
Likely to vote for his or her re-election.	3%	0%
Extremely likely to vote for his or her re-election.	10%	4%
Summary		
Vote against their re-election	64%	88%
Vote for their re-election	13%	4%

9.1 About two-thirds of respondents said they would be less likely to vote for a Town Council member who voted in favor of a large MAC building such as 444 Maple West (Table 9, highlighted data).

9.2 About 13 percent said the opposite – they would be more likely to vote for a Town Council member who voted in favor of a large MAC building such as 444 Maple West (Table 9, highlighted data).

9.3 Refer back to Table 2, and see that that this does not exactly match the overall opinion of MAC. This suggests that those who oppose MAC are more likely to let Town Council votes affect their voting behavior.

Conclusion: Survey respondents report that their votes in the Town Council election will be affected by council members' votes on MAC projects. This appears particularly true for those who dislike MAC zoning.

10: Change in opinion before and after survey.

Table 10: For individuals rating MAC zoning initially and then again at the end of the survey, how did their rating change?

	Random sample	Volunteer sample
1:Got worse	23%	16%
2:No change	67%	68%
3:Got better	10%	16%

Finally, this question compares each respondent's rating of MAC zoning at the start of the survey, to the same question asked at the end of the survey.

10.1 There was a modest downward shift of opinion about MAC zoning after taking this survey (Table 10, highlighted figure).

Conclusion: Discussing MAC in detail led to a slight downward shift in average opinion about MAC zoning.

Appendix: Summary of methods.

The sample frame for the random sample was a commercially-available mailing list of all households in ZIP code 22180, purchased from Information Please, Inc. A sample of 400 addresses was chosen via random numbers generated in Excel. A letter was addressed to the occupant of each address, as named on the mailing list, with a second address line of “Or Any Vienna Citizen at: “. The letter invited the recipient to take a brief survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/citizens regarding Maple Avenue Commercial (MAC) zoning. The text of the letter is given on the next page. We made it clear both in the letter and in the survey that this was not associated with Town of Vienna government.

The text of the survey can be read in its entirety at the URL cited above. Briefly, the survey summarized the main aspects of MAC zoning and presented brief descriptions (with pictures and charts) of the five MAC proposals. Individuals were asked to rate the proposals, and then were asked further questions about MAC zoning.

We obtained slightly more than 40 responses from the random sample, for a crude response rate of just over 10 percent. While low, this is typical of a mail survey without follow up. E.g., the 2016 Town of Vienna Community Survey Final Report (page 2) shows that they expected a 7.5 percent response rate (“... a random sample of 4,000 households ... The goal was to obtain ... 300 completed surveys.) The actual response rate to the Town’s survey was 22 percent.

We also obtained just over 30 “volunteer” responses – that is, individuals not in the random sample who took the survey. These individuals would have found out about the survey primarily from a postcard sent to all addresses in the Town of Vienna.

A handful of responses were deleted for cause. Anyone completing the survey in less than one minute was deleted. Serial (one-after-another) responses from the same IP address were assumed to be multiple responses by the same person, and all but the initial response was deleted.

With the low response rate, nonresponse bias is an obvious concern. There is no way to know what the degree of nonresponse bias is. We can say, however, that the *volunteer* sample was likely motivated by dislike of MAC zoning, and so provides a sort of benchmark for nonresponse bias. To the extent that average opinion in the random sample is less extreme than that of the volunteer sample, this demonstrates that the random sample did, in fact, pick up more than just individuals who were motivated to respond by dislike of MAC zoning.

With just 40 responses, we did not calculate statistical tests for these answers. With just 40 responses, all the mean values have large associated standard errors, and few of the differences shown in this report would pass standard (95%-confidence-interval) tests of statistical significance. That said, the consistency of the answers, across different questions, shows that we are in fact looking at true differences of opinion, and not merely statistical noise.

Text of letter of invitation:

Dear Fellow Vienna Resident,

I live in Vienna, and I am writing to ask you to take an on-line survey about Maple Avenue (Route 123). This survey should take about ten minutes.

This survey is about Maple Avenue Commercial (MAC) zoning. In 2014, Vienna changed the zoning on Maple to allow much bigger buildings. The structure going up next to McDonald's (just past Nutley and Maple) is the first one built under the new law. There are four more "in the pipeline". For better or worse, these big new buildings will change Vienna. We think the Town Council ought to hear what the average citizen thinks about it, in a systematic way. Hence this survey.

This survey is sponsored by a group of Vienna residents. We don't even have a name because it's just a bunch of people who are concerned about this. To be clear, this survey is not affiliated with Town of Vienna government in any way.

Other details? Your address was chosen totally at random. The survey is anonymous. The results will be posted on my website (www.savemaple.org) and will be sent to the Town Council.

To participate in the survey, please go to this internet address: surveymonkey.com/r/citizens

You'll have to enter the random code on the sticker below. The code does not identify you, it just assures us that you are part of the random sample. Only one survey per household (per random code) will be counted in the random sample.

Thanks for taking the time to read this, and thanks again if you take the survey.

Sincerely,

Chris Hogan
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