



The Views of Residents of the Barron Park Neighborhood on Issues Pertaining to the Proposed Closure of the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park

A Research Report by
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The Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, located in the Barron Park Neighborhood of Palo Alto, is the only mobile home park in Palo Alto. In 2012, the owners of the property on which Buena Vista is located announced plans to close the Mobile Home Park and sell the land to a commercial developer. As the controversy surrounding the proposed closure of Buena Vista grew following this announcement, we became aware of a number of issues that had not been fully addressed in the discussions surrounding the proposed closure.

The first of these issues had to do with the demographics of the residents of the Park, in particular the children. Initially there were almost no data about the children who live at Buena Vista, and how the closure of the Park might affect them. In response, we conducted a research study of the families with children aged 18 or younger who were living at Buena Vista. Working with Stanford students who were fluent in Spanish and who had been trained in research methods, we were able to conduct in-person interviews with at least one parent from each of the 67 families with children. We reported the results of this study in March of this year. A copy of that report is available at https://ed.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/buena_vista_research_report.pdf.

While we were conducting our study of the families at Buena Vista, an intense public debate took place regarding the proposal by the Palo Alto Housing Corporation to build the Maybell housing development. This project was to have been located in a neighborhood immediately adjacent to the Barron Park neighborhood. In the press, in multiple on-line forums, and in various public debates, a range of opinions were expressed, with a relatively small group of individuals being most vocal, both in opposition to and in favor of the Maybell proposal. At no time, other than the final vote of the City-wide referendum, did we see data reflecting a well designed survey of residents living in the areas adjacent to the Maybell site.

Since the defeat of the Maybell project in November 2013, increasing city-wide attention is being focused on issues surrounding the proposal to close down the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park. In order to inform public debate on policy options regarding Buena Vista, we extended our research to include an original survey of all residents living in the Barron Park neighborhood. In order to provide data that most accurately represents the views of these residents, we designed a survey to be mailed to every postal address in Barron Park. We are pleased to report on the results of that survey, and hope the information we provide here will be viewed as a valid and unbiased representation of the views of Barron Park residents regarding issues pertaining to the proposed redevelopment of Buena Vista Mobile Park.

The design of the survey instrument and the survey methods we used were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Stanford University.

Survey Methodology

We elected to include in the survey all recorded mailing addresses within the Barron Park neighborhood. Based on historical boundaries, we defined the Barron Park neighborhood as including all addresses between El Camino Real (including those on the west side of El Camino), Maybell Avenue (including those on the north side of Maybell), the Barron Creek diversion channel on the west, and the Matadero Creek diversion channel on the north. These are the most common geographic boundaries used in defining Barron Park, including those used by the City of Palo Alto. We requested from the City of Palo Alto a list of all mailing addresses in Barron Park. Using Santa Clara County data, the City of Palo Alto provided us with a list of these addresses. Since this was intended as a survey of the residents of Barron Park, we excluded addresses that were outside the 94306 zip code, which may have represented those who owned property in Barron Park but did not live there. As we planned to conduct a separate survey of residents living within the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, we also excluded these addresses. The final list included 1,706 addresses.

We mailed individual printed surveys to each address, including in the envelope a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey and the confidentiality of the survey results; a copy of the Executive Summary of our earlier survey of the Buena Vista families with children; the survey form; and a postage-paid return envelope. Of the surveys mailed, 56 were returned by the Post Office marked “undeliverable”, leaving a final survey sample size of 1,650 unique addresses.

Survey design and content

The survey asked residents of Barron Park to respond to an initial series of three questions:

- 1) “How familiar you are with the current situation in the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, in particular the proposal by the property owner to close the park.”
- 2) “How aware were you of the number of families and children living at Buena Vista?”
- 3) “How aware were you that nearly all the families at Buena Vista are categorized as ‘low-income’ or below, by federal income standards?”

For these questions, respondents were shown a series of four answers, ranging from “I was very aware [familiar]” to “I was not at all aware [familiar]”, and were asked to circle the response that best described their level of familiarity with or awareness of these issues.

We then brought up the issue of what level of responsibility (if any) the Palo Alto community has in regards to the residents of Buena Vista. We asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements:

- 4) “If the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park is closed, the Palo Alto community should work together to assist the families who wish to remain in Palo Alto to be able to do so.”
- 5) “If the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park is closed, the Palo Alto community should work together to assist the children who live there to be able to attend Palo Alto schools.”

For these questions, respondents were shown a series of four answers, ranging from “I strongly agree” to “I strongly disagree”, and were asked to circle the response that best described their level of agreement with these statements.

We then described for respondents what we understood to be the three principal options under discussion for the future use of the Buena Vista site. We described these options as show in the box below.

A. Park closure with relocation of residents: After review by the City of Palo Alto and certification that all the requirements had been met for reimbursement and other types of support for displaced residents, the park would close, and the owner would be free either to redevelop the property or to sell the property for redevelopment by others.

B. Residents purchase the property from the current owner for market value, and continue to operate the park as a mobile home park: The mobile home park residents have formed a non-profit owners' association. With legal support, they have proposed purchasing the park, but would need substantial financial support to be able to do so. The source of the financial support has not been fully identified.

C. Owner and residents collaborate to redevelop the park, with a combination of newly constructed rental apartments that would be affordable for current residents, and newly constructed apartments for rental to others at prevailing market rates: This option would replace the current 115 dwelling units at the park with something in the range of 150-175 newly constructed rental apartments, with a non-profit housing organization owning and managing the affordable rental units, and a for-profit organization owning and managing the market rate rental units.

We then showed residents the following four statements, and asked them to circle the statement that best described their level of support for each of the options identified. Possible responses included:

- I strongly support this option
- I support this option somewhat
- I oppose this option somewhat
- I strongly oppose this option

For the final question, we listed each of the three options identified above in bold type, and asked respondents to rank-order these options using the numbers 1, 2, and 3, with "1 = the option you support the most, 3 = the option you support the least, and 2 = the option in between."

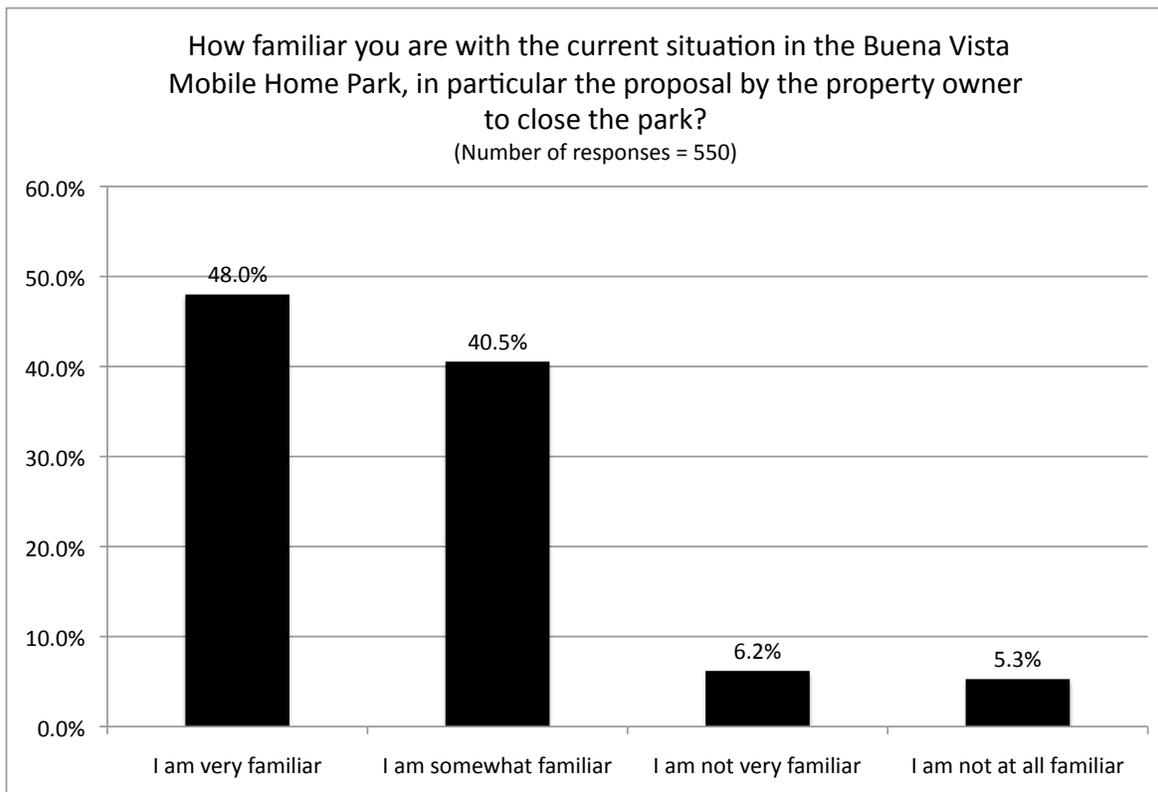
We labeled each survey with a unique identifying number, in order to assure that we received only one survey response from each address. These numbers were randomly assigned, and we kept no record linking the survey number with the address to which it was sent.

We mailed the surveys on March 31, 2014.

Survey results

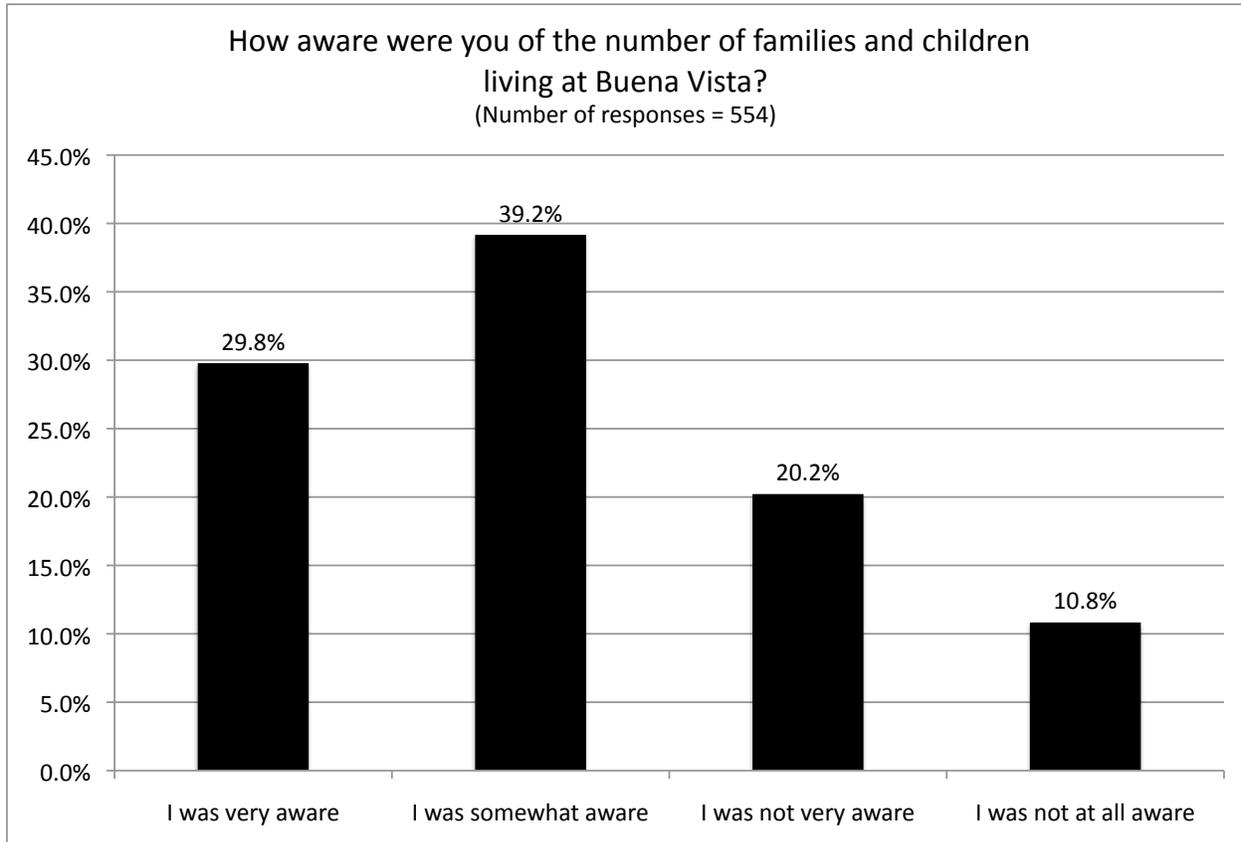
By May 1, we had received 554 returned surveys. Based on the 1,650 surveys we sent, this represents a response rate of 33.6%. Using generally accepted standards of survey methodology that utilizes a single mailed survey, this represents a strong rate of response, and suggests that the distribution of the responses we received accurately reflects the overall views of the residents of Barron Park.

Question 1 – Familiarity with the situation in Barron Park



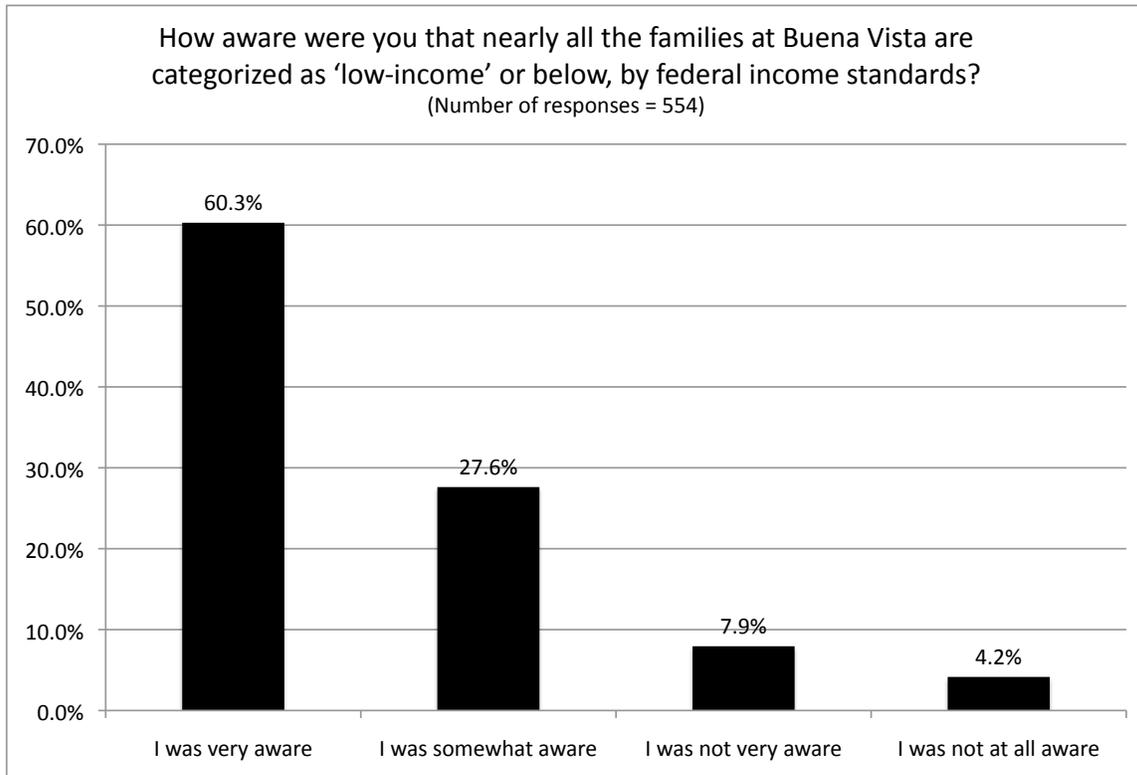
These results indicate that 88.5% of Barron Park residents had some level of familiarity with the current situation in Buena Vista. Nearly half of respondents indicated that they were “very familiar” with the situation there, while one resident in twenty (5.3%) were “not at all familiar” with the Buena Vista situation. These results suggest that those living in the neighborhood surrounding Buena Vista were generally familiar with the issues we addressed in the survey, as those issues were being addressed frequently in the public discourse surrounding Buena Vista.

Question 2 –Awareness regarding the number of families with children living at Buena Vista



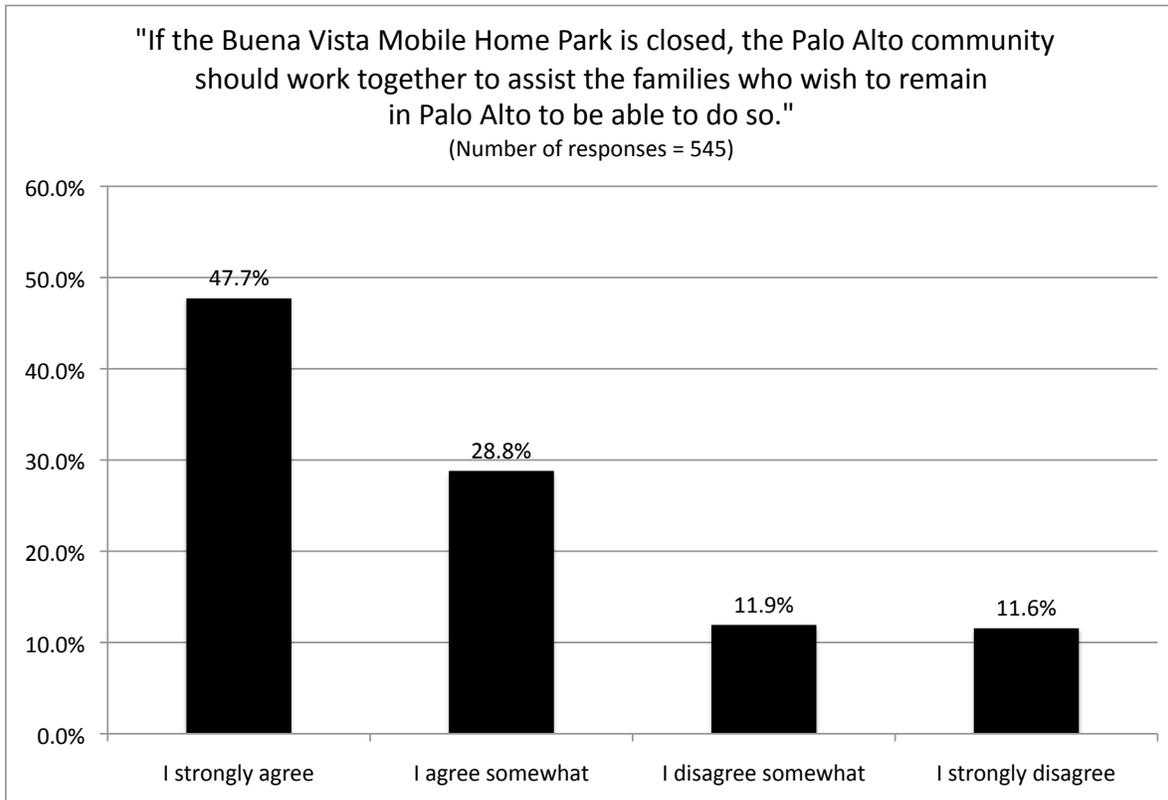
These results indicate that 69% of respondents had some awareness of the number of families with children (67), and the numbers of children (129) living at Buena Vista. While responses to the previous question indicated a broad general familiarity with the Buena Vista situation, somewhat fewer respondents were aware of the family demographics at Buena Vista. While 29.8% of respondents were “very aware” of the number of families with children, 10.8% were “not at all aware” of these numbers.

Question 3 - Awareness regarding the number of low-income families living at Buena Vista



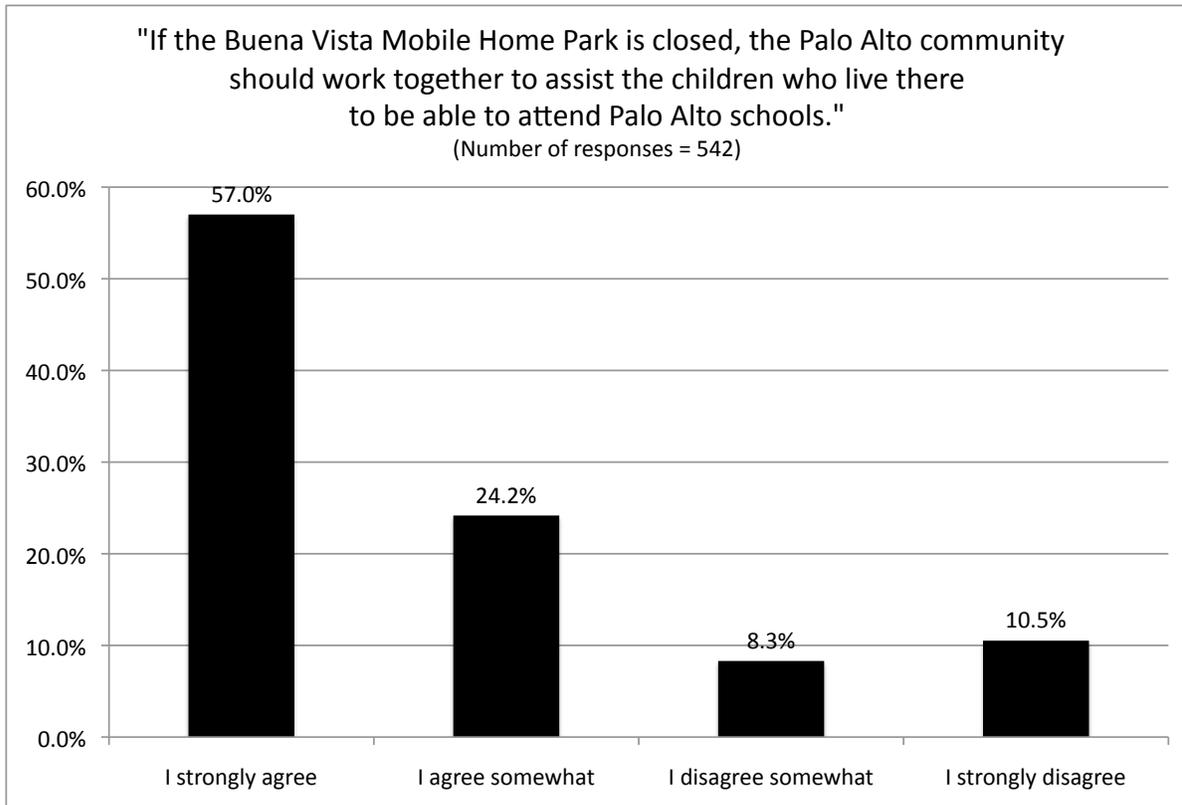
While some respondents were not aware of the numbers of families with children living at Buena Vista, a substantial majority of respondents were aware, at least to some extent, that nearly all the families at Buena Vista are categorized as either “low income” or below, using income standards published by the U.S. government. 60.3% of respondents were “very aware” of this situation, while only 4.2% were “not at all aware.” There seems to be a generally broad awareness within the Barron Park neighborhood that Buena Vista provides housing for low-income individuals and families in what has become one of the highest income communities in the area.

Question 4 – Opinion regarding community responsibility to assist those Buena Vista families who wish to stay in Palo Alto to be able to do so



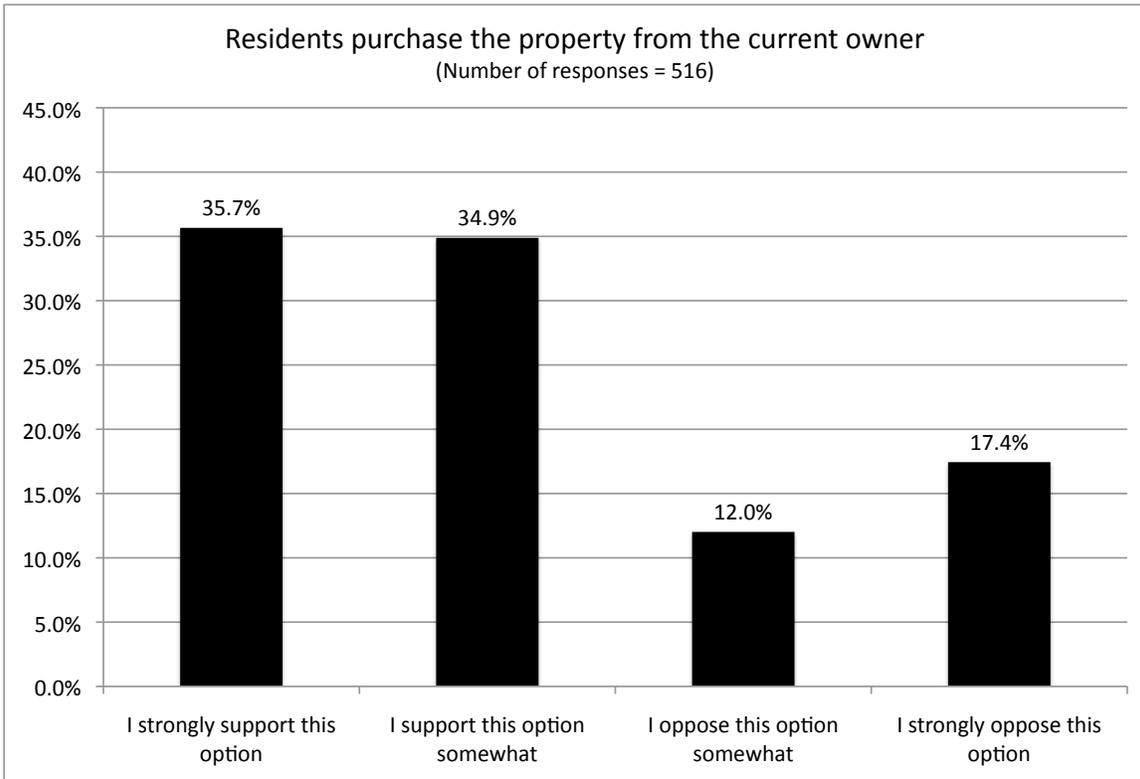
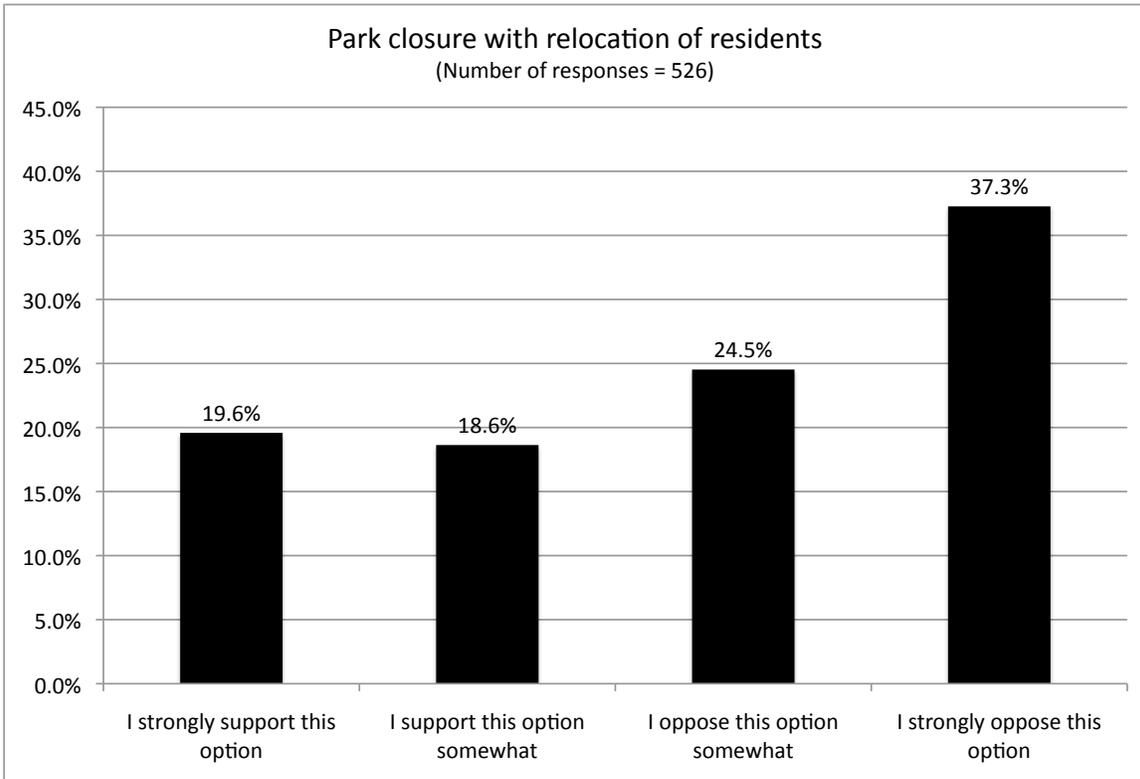
Given the generally broad level of awareness on the part of Barron Park residents of the situation with the families and children of Buena Vista, their opinions regarding issues of community policy pertaining to the Buena Vista residents take on added significance. The first question asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the concept that the “Palo Alto Community” – a phrase intended to indicate residents of all neighborhoods throughout Palo Alto – should work in support of finding a policy solution that will allow Buena Vista residents to remain in Palo Alto, and to remain as part of the Palo Alto community. It is readily apparent that there is broad support among Barron Park residents for this concept. More than three-fourths (76.5%) of respondents agree with the statement above, with nearly half of all respondents (47.7%) indicating that they “strongly agree” with this concept. 11.9% of respondents “disagree somewhat” with this concept, while 11.6% “strongly disagree.”

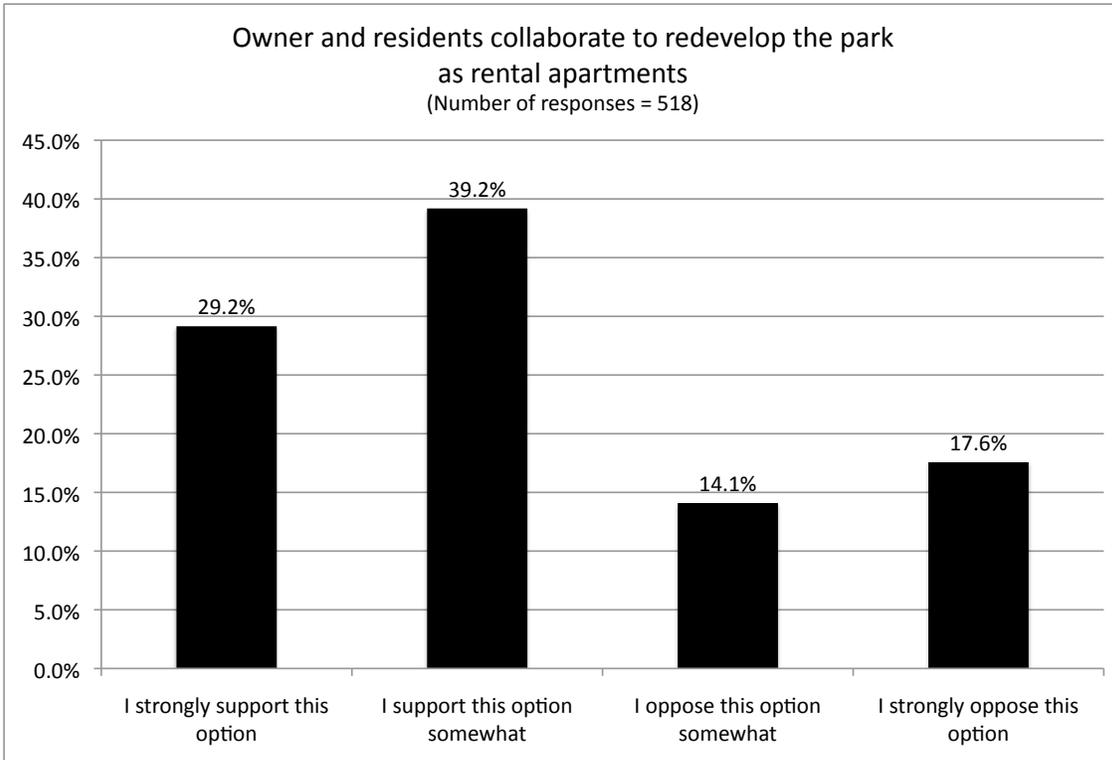
Question 5 – Opinion regarding assisting Buena Vista children to be able to remain in Palo Alto schools



This question addresses the specific issue of continued access to Palo Alto schools for children who live in Buena Vista, in the event the Park is closed as proposed by the property owner. In discussions before the Palo Alto School Board as well as in other public forums, this issue has been raised on a number of occasions. It is apparent that respondents support continued access to Palo Alto schools for Buena Vista children, with 81.2% indicating some level of agreement with this concept: 57.0% indicate that they “strongly agree”, while 24.2% “agree somewhat.” By contrast, 10.5% of respondents indicated that they “strongly disagree”, while 8.3% “disagree somewhat.”

Questions regarding possible policy options

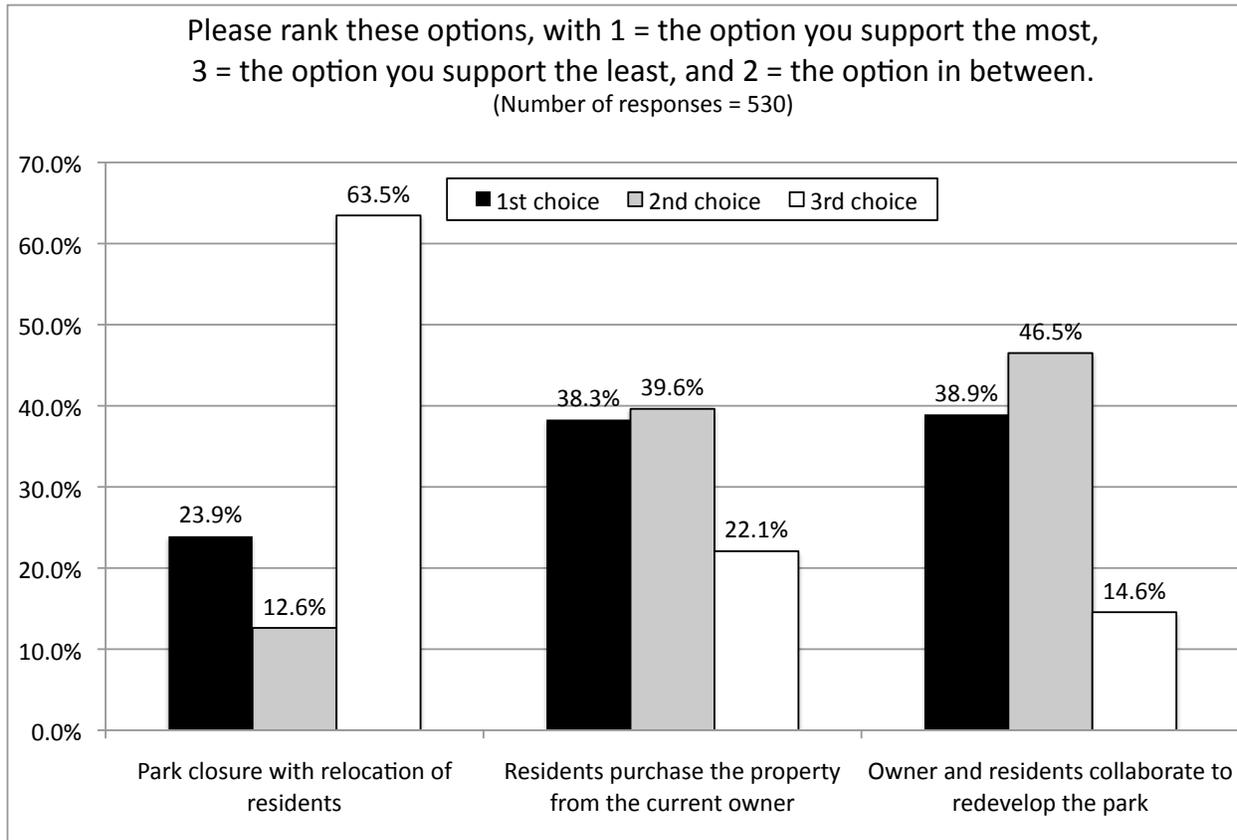




As described above in the section on Survey Design and Content, we were able to identify three potential policies regarding future ownership, use, and occupancy of the property on which Buena Vista is located. These included sale to a developer with Park closure, sale to the residents so as to enable continued operation as a mobile home park, and joint redevelopment of the park as rental apartments, with the collaboration of an affordable housing developer and a market-rate developer. From the charts above, it is apparent that a minority of respondents support park closure, as proposed by the owner: 37.3% “strongly oppose” this option, while 24.5% “oppose...somewhat” this option, for a total of 61.8% of respondents in opposition. By contrast, 19.6% of respondents “strongly support” the closure option, while 18.6% support the option “somewhat.” By contrast, 70.6% of respondents support the option of the residents purchasing the park, and 68.4% support joint development as rental apartments, with a mixture of affordable rental units and market rental units. The level of support is slightly stronger for the residents’ purchase option.

We then asked respondents to rank-order these options, with “1” being the option they support the most and “3” the option they support the least. The result of this rank-ordering is shown in the following chart.

Rank-ordering of policy options



Consistent with the responses to the individual questions about these policy options, approximately equal numbers of respondents ranked collaborative redevelopment as their first preference (38.9%) or purchase by residents as their first preference (38.3%). Slightly more respondents ranked joint redevelopment as their second choice (46.5%) than ranked residential purchase as their second choice (39.6%). By contrast, 23.9% ranked park closure as their first choice, and 12.6% ranked it as their second choice.

Summary and Conclusions

With 554 surveys returned to us, we were able to obtain a response rate of 33.6% from the 1,650 surveys we mailed to addresses in the Barron Park neighborhood. This represents a relatively high response rate for a one-time mailed written survey of this type, and suggests that the pattern of responses we observe accurately represents the overall views and opinions of the Barron Park neighborhood.

The respondents demonstrated a generally high level of awareness of three broad issues: the ongoing discussions about possible closure of the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, the numbers of families with children who live in the Park, and the high number of Park residents who are categorized as “low-income” or below by federal standards. Based on these findings, we believe that the views expressed in the questions that followed were reasonably well thought out, and were not generated on the spur of the moment by receipt of our survey.

A substantial majority of respondents agreed that the broad Palo Alto Community has a responsibility to support Park residents by helping them to remain in Palo Alto, and helping their children to continue to have access to Palo Alto schools, even if the park is closed. Consistent with these opinions, a substantial majority of respondents (61.8%) oppose closure of the park as proposed by the owner. By contrast, approximately 70% of respondents support the two options that have been proposed for providing the continued availability of housing on the current site for most or all current Park residents. When asked to rank order their preferences for these options, respondents expressed a slight preference for joint development of rental apartments over purchase of the Park by current residents. Substantially fewer respondents ranked park closure as their first preference.

The overall conclusions we are able to draw from the pattern of these responses are that:

- a) the Barron Park neighborhood, which includes 1,650 residential addresses, views the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park and the people who live there as an important part of the broader Palo Alto community, and
- b) the Barron Park neighborhood widely supports policy options that would allow current Buena Vista residents to remain as part of the neighborhood, even if it means redevelopment of the Park as rental apartments, so long as a substantial portion of those new apartments are made available to current Park residents on an affordable basis.