



TOWN OF ATHOL

OFFICE OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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Re: Athol - Zoning Survey Overview - Results

Presented To: Board of Planning and Community Development (BPCD), Wednesday, October 2, 2019

Prepared By: Eric R. Smith, AICP, Director of Planning and Development

Date: Tuesday, October 8, 2019

This survey was undertaken by the Athol Department of Planning and Development in an effort to include the community at large as the BPCD works to develop amendments to the existing ground-mounted solar photovoltaic installations zoning bylaws during the moratorium period that was approved by Athol Town Meeting Voters 180-2 at the July Special Town Meeting.

1. Key Points:

- A. 80% of respondents believe that more focus should be on siting solar arrays on “brownfield” sites, parking lot canopies, existing commercial or industrial buildings and municipal-owned sites.
- B. 93% respondents indicated that Town Management and the BPCD represent the best way for the Town to address the concerns they have in updating Athol’s Zoning Bylaws related to the large scale ground-mounted commercial solar arrays.

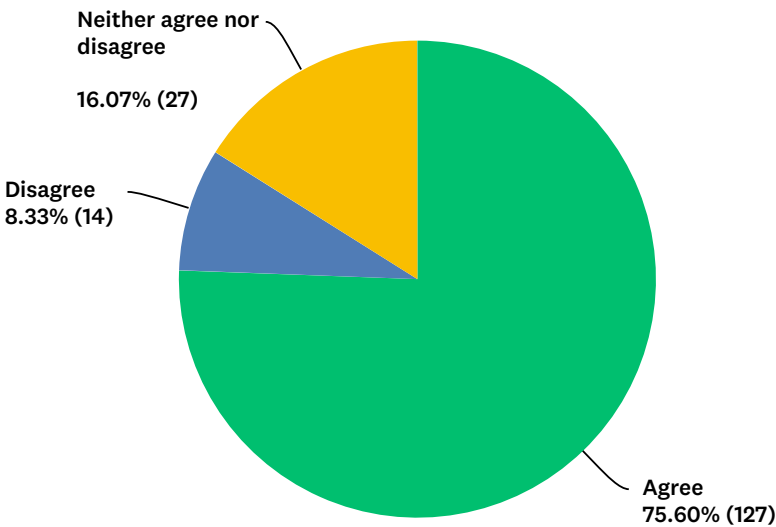
2. Athol Zoning Survey – All Responses
Large Ground Mounted Commercial Solar Arrays

- A. 171 Total Responses
- B. 154 Complete Responses
(Not all respondents answered all questions.)

The results from the set of questions for the Athol Solar Zoning Survey follow this cover sheet.

Q1 Do you agree with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' desire to produce more electricity with renewable energy sources in an effort to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels?

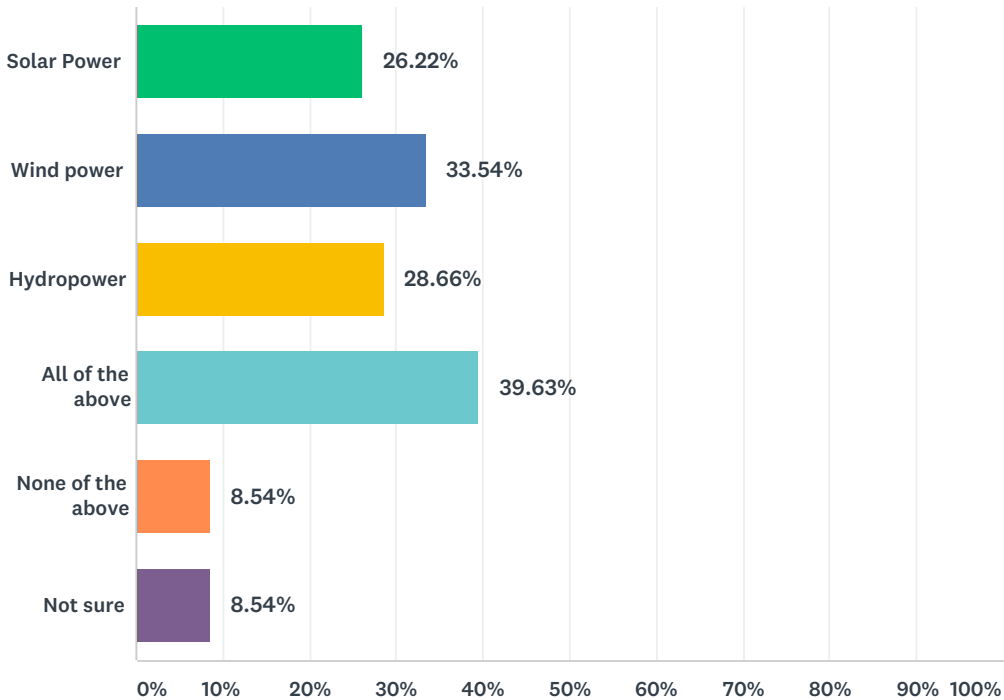
Answered: 168 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	75.60%	127
Disagree	8.33%	14
Neither agree nor disagree	16.07%	27
TOTAL		168

Q2 Of all the renewable resources available, which do you endorse for this area? [Select all that apply.]

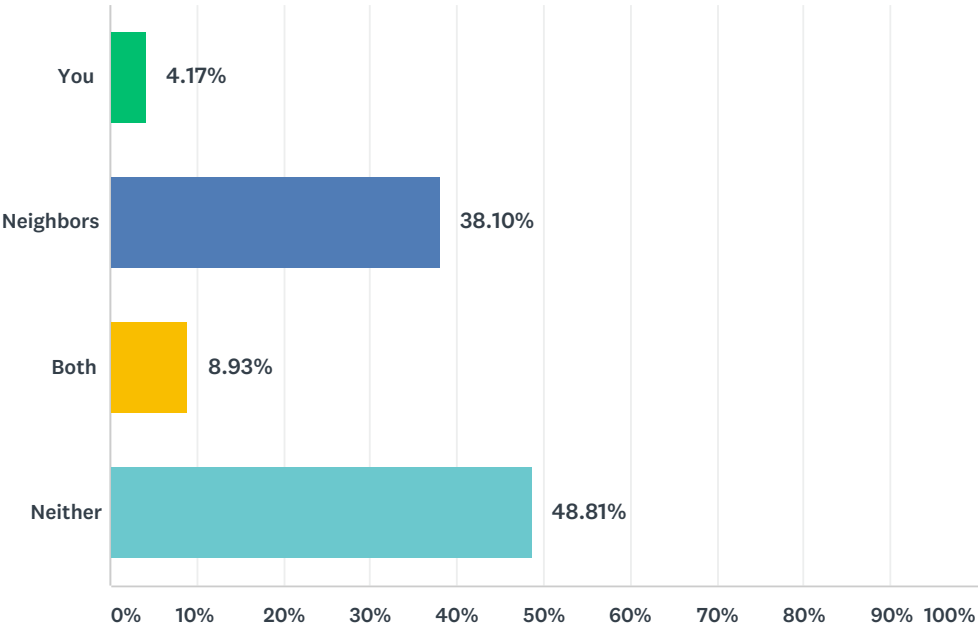
Answered: 164 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Solar Power	26.22%	43
Wind power	33.54%	55
Hydropower	28.66%	47
All of the above	39.63%	65
None of the above	8.54%	14
Not sure	8.54%	14
Total Respondents: 164		

Q3 Do you or your neighbors currently have rooftop or ground-mounted solar panels?

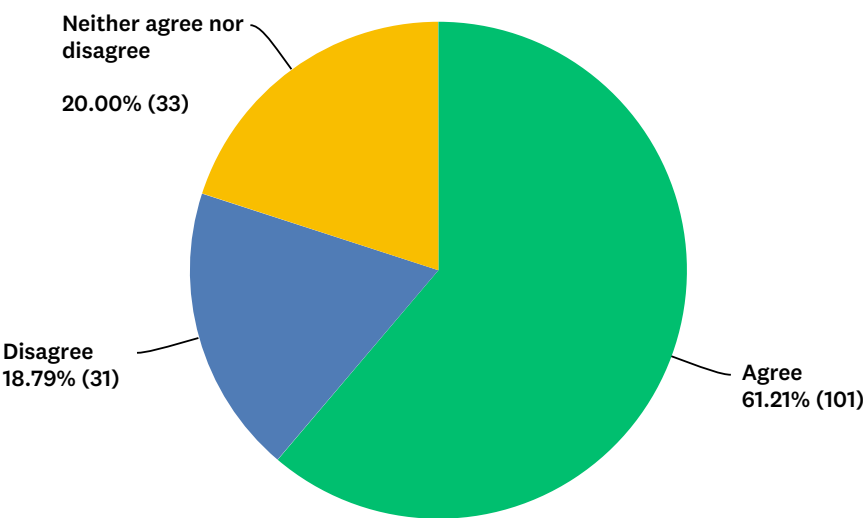
Answered: 168 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
You	4.17%	7
Neighbors	38.10%	64
Both	8.93%	15
Neither	48.81%	82
TOTAL		168

Q4 Do you agree with the Town's current exemption of commercial solar projects on rooftops and parking lots from the site plan review permitting process?

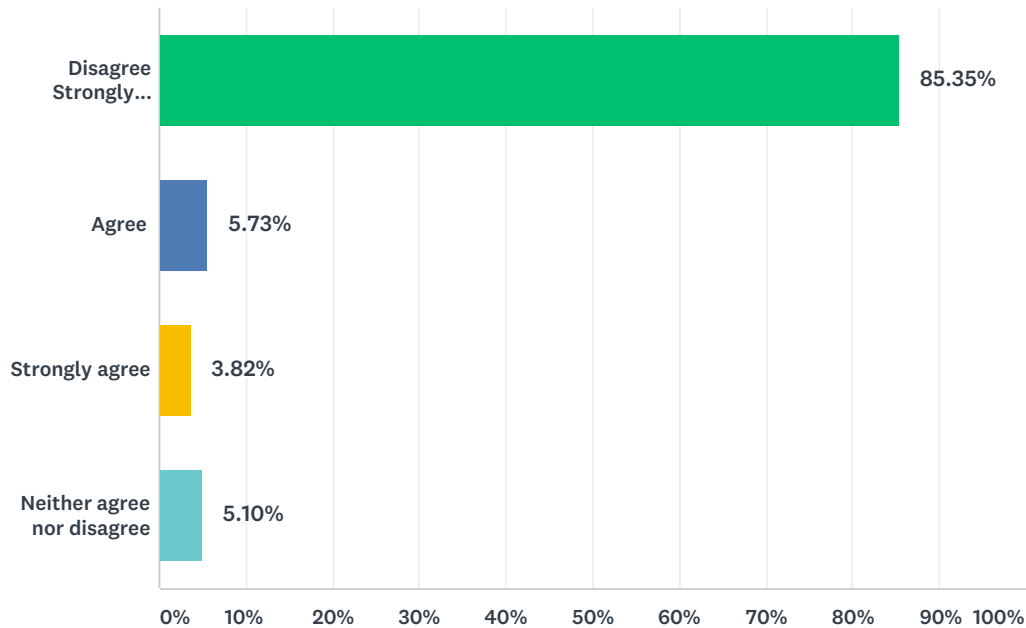
Answered: 165 Skipped: 6



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Agree		61.21%	101
Disagree		18.79%	31
Neither agree nor disagree		20.00%	33
TOTAL			165

Q5 Currently 78% of all land in Athol is zoned 'Residential C.'Do you agree or disagree with allowing large ground-mounted commercial solar arrays to be sited in Residential C zoned areas?

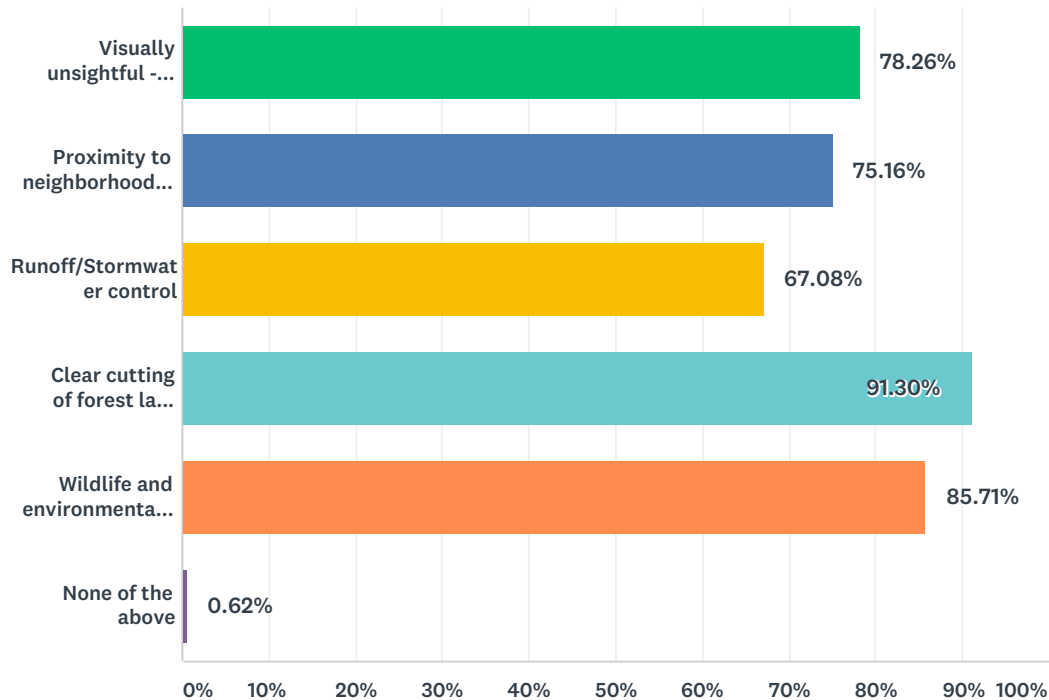
Answered: 157 Skipped: 14



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Disagree Strongly Disagree	85.35%	134
Agree	5.73%	9
Strongly agree	3.82%	6
Neither agree nor disagree	5.10%	8
TOTAL		157

Q6 What are your major concerns, if any, in the placement of large ground-mounted commercial solar array developments in residentially zoned, forested, or scenic view areas? [Select all that apply.]

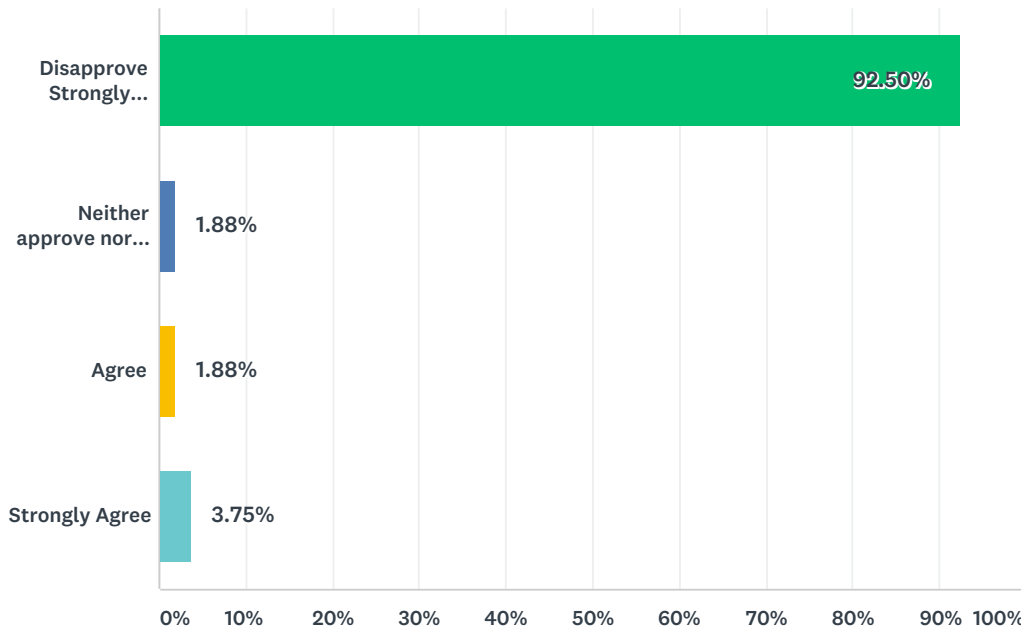
Answered: 161 Skipped: 10



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Visually unsightful - Able to see them from roadways; loss of scenic vistas; ridgelines, etc.	78.26%	126
Proximity to neighborhoods; effect on property values	75.16%	121
Runoff/Stormwater control	67.08%	108
Clear cutting of forest land; loss of prime agricultural areas; effects on wetlands, streams and lakes.	91.30%	147
Wildlife and environmental impact	85.71%	138
None of the above	0.62%	1
Total Respondents: 161		

Q7 Given that Athol is primarily zoned Residential C - Do you approve or disapprove of clear cutting large areas of forest land specifically for the use of ground-mounted commercial solar arrays in residential neighborhoods, ridgelines and scenic view areas?

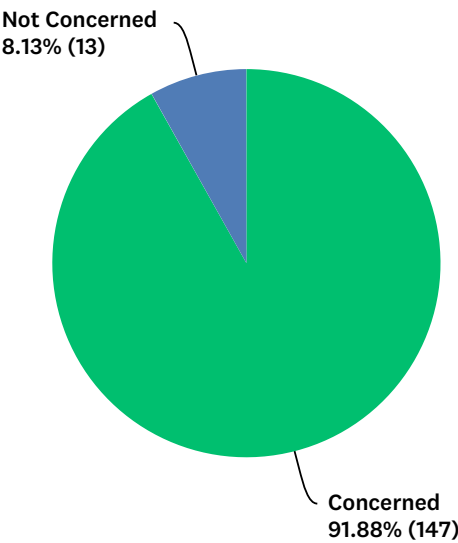
Answered: 160 Skipped: 11



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Disapprove Strongly Disapprove	92.50%	148
Neither approve nor disapprove	1.88%	3
Agree	1.88%	3
Strongly Agree	3.75%	6
TOTAL		160

Q8 If a large-scale ground-mounted commercial solar installation was planned in your neighborhood, would you be concerned? If so, why?

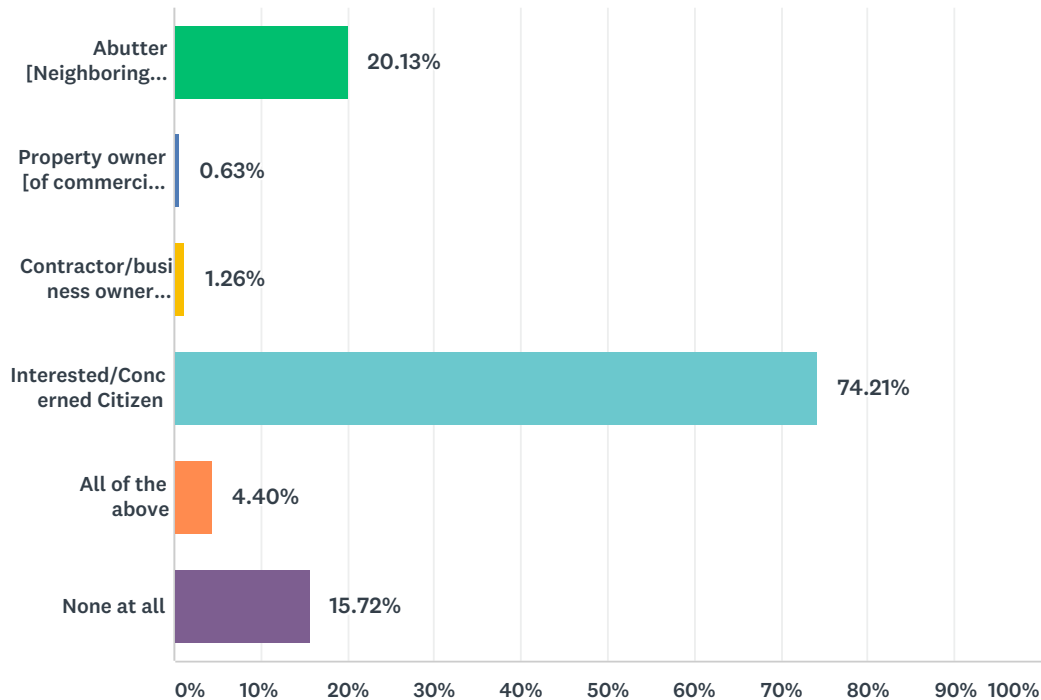
Answered: 160 Skipped: 11



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Concerned		91.88%	147
Not Concerned		8.13%	13
TOTAL			160

Q9 What, if any, are your experiences with the development of large ground-mounted commercial solar array installations in Athol? (Select all that apply.)

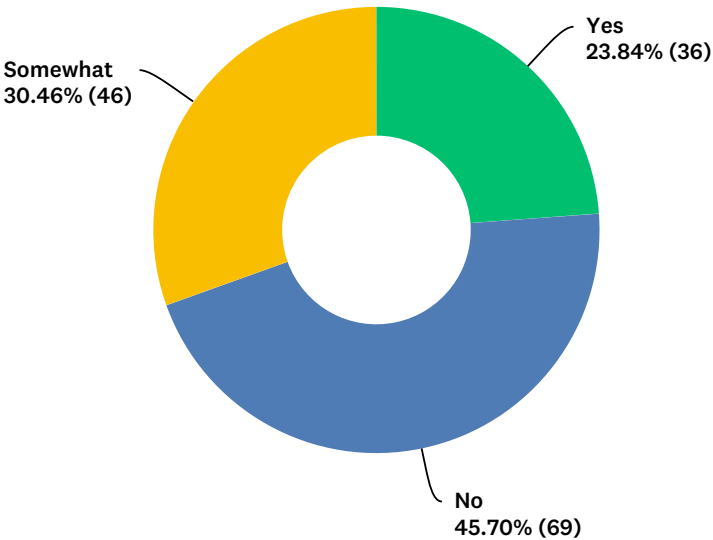
Answered: 159 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Abutter [Neighboring property]	20.13%	32
Property owner [of commercial solar project]	0.63%	1
Contractor/business owner [involved with development of commercial solar project(s)]	1.26%	2
Interested/Concerned Citizen	74.21%	118
All of the above	4.40%	7
None at all	15.72%	25
Total Respondents: 159		

Q10 Are you familiar with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts's SMART (Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target) solar array development incentive credit program?

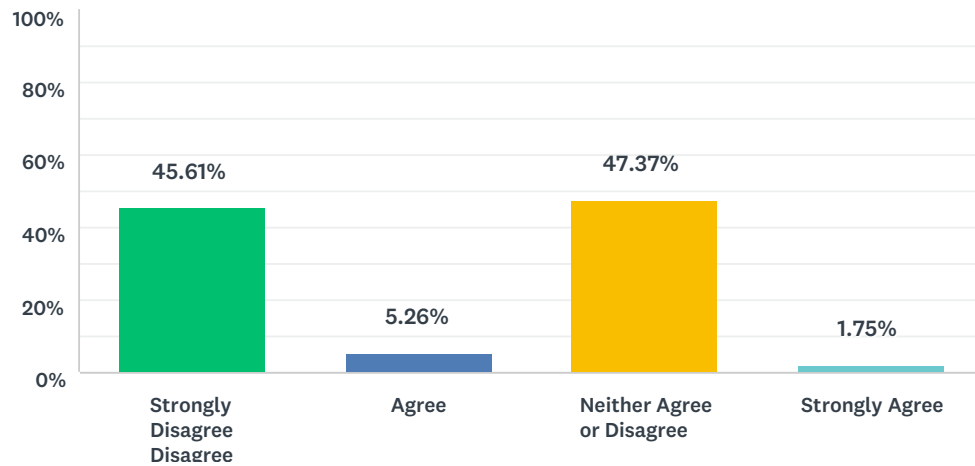
Answered: 151 Skipped: 20



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		23.84%	36
No		45.70%	69
Somewhat		30.46%	46
TOTAL			151

Q11 If Yes: Do you feel the SMART program has been effective in regulating how large ground mounted commercial solar arrays are sited?

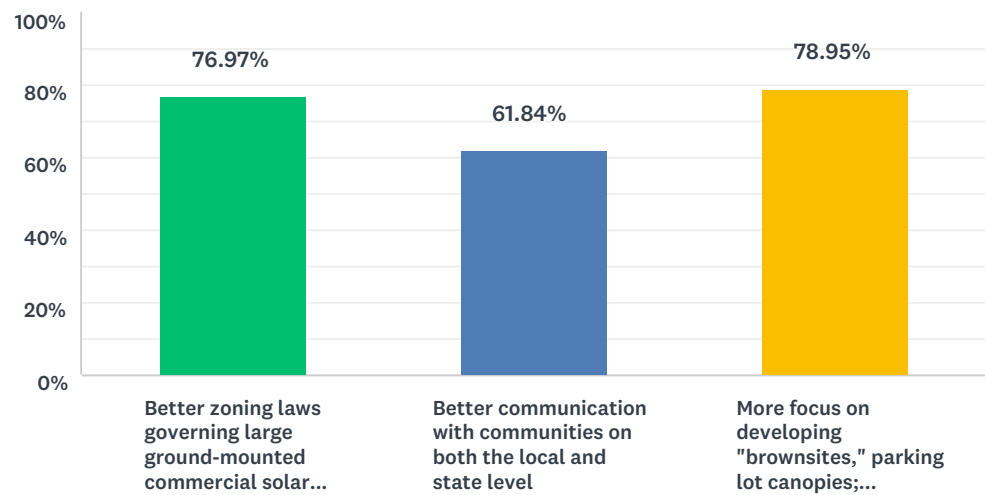
Answered: 120 Skipped: 51



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	45.61%	52
Agree		5.26%	6
Neither Agree or Disagree		47.37%	54
Strongly Agree		1.75%	2
TOTAL			114

Q12 What changes would you like to see to the solar siting process of such large commercial solar projects, both at the Town Zoning Level and the State Credit System - SMART program? (Choose all that apply.)

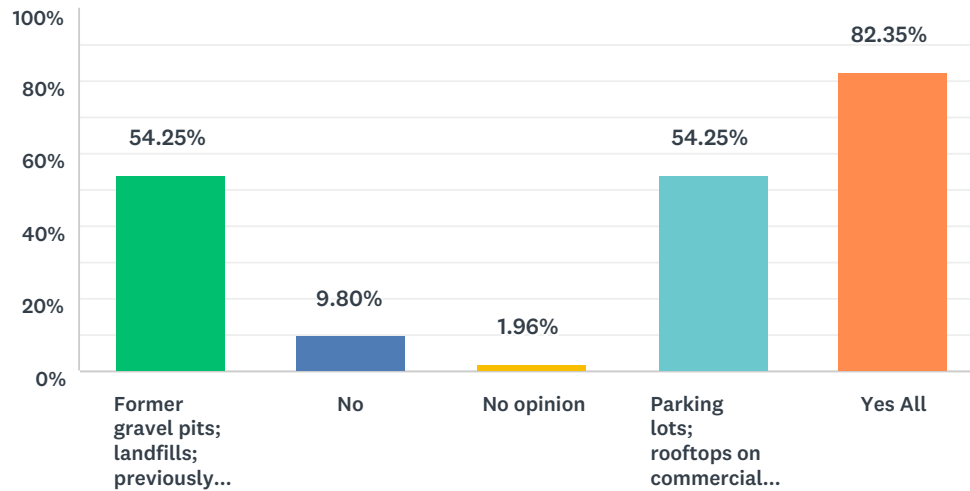
Answered: 152 Skipped: 19



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Better zoning laws governing large ground-mounted commercial solar arrays, (especially in residential and scenic view areas.)	76.97%	117
Better communication with communities on both the local and state level	61.84%	94
More focus on developing "brownsites," parking lot canopies; exsiting commercial or industrial buildings, and municipal owned sites first.	78.95%	120
Total Respondents: 152		

Q13 Should Athol's zoning encourage large ground-mounted commercial solar installations to focus on already developed sites first, rather than forested areas, ridge lines, scenic view sites, etc? [Select all that apply.]

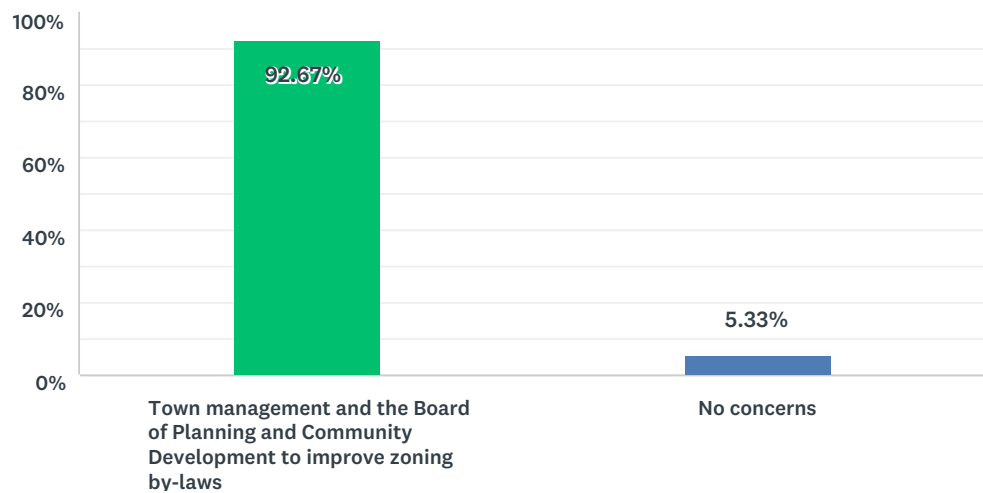
Answered: 153 Skipped: 18



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Former gravel pits; landfills; previously developed sites, commercial or industrial buildings	54.25%	83
No	9.80%	15
No opinion	1.96%	3
Parking lots; rooftops on commercial sites; town owned sites to be developed	54.25%	83
Yes All	82.35%	126
Total Respondents: 153		

Q14 What do you think is the best way to address any concerns you may have in updating Athol's zoning by-laws related to such large scale ground-mounted commercial solar arrays? [Select all that apply.]

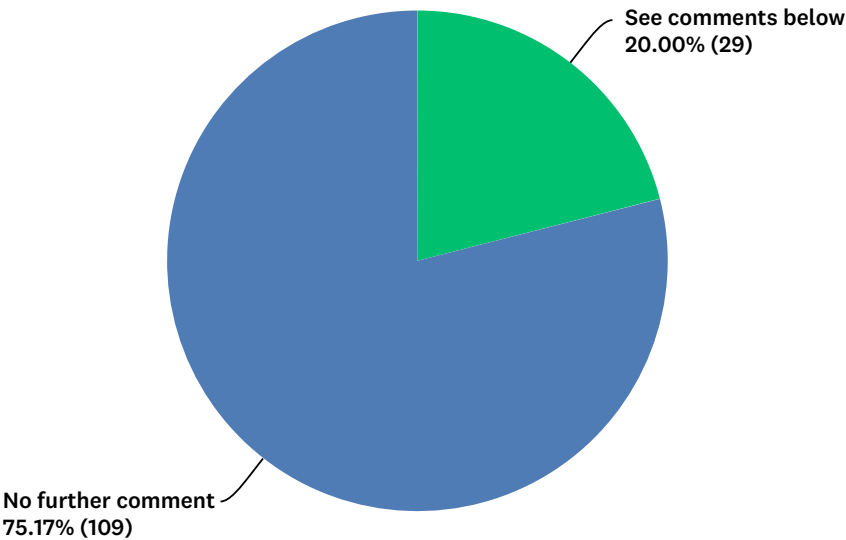
Answered: 150 Skipped: 21



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Town management and the Board of Planning and Community Development to improve zoning by-laws	92.67%	139
No concerns	5.33%	8
Total Respondents: 150		

Q15 Based on your previous responses, what additional comments/opinions do you wish to share related to zoning of large ground-mounted commercial solar arrays in Athol?

Answered: 145 Skipped: 26



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
See comments below	20.00%	29
No further comment	75.17%	109
TOTAL		145