

Hyattsville Residents Survey: Environmental Impacts, Opportunities, and Challenges

A report of the Saul I. Stern Civic Engagement Lab

By [Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz](#) and [Damian Maffioletti-Arratia](#)¹

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¹The students of PLCY 306 in fall 2025 helped collect this data. For their research projects, they also analyzed the data and made recommendations based on the responses. Several of their findings were used for this report. We would particularly like to note the research of Jack Henick, Yeva Yeghyan, and Gary Gibbs.

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Methodology in Brief: This survey was funded by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Prince George’s County Planning Department (M-NCPPC), in a partnership with the City of Hyattsville and the Saul I. Stern Civic Engagement Lab at the University of Maryland College Park. The survey was designed and implemented by Professor Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, along with graduate students Damian Maffioletti and Sonia Vargas based on guidance from the City and consultants from Stantec Architecture, Inc. Data collection was performed by Pearson-Merkowitz, Maffioletti, Vargas, Oliver Slade, Breana Stevens and the approximately 60 students enrolled in PLCY306 (“Policy Analysis in Action”, the School of Public Policy’s undergraduate research methods course) for Fall 2025. Survey data were collected Friday, October 17, to Tuesday, November 12, 2025.

The purpose of the survey was to support the development of Hyattsville's Climate Action Plan through resident engagement and data collection. The survey was developed by working closely with the city and project partners identifying key information that would best inform policy decisions, including public awareness of climate change, attitudes toward mitigation and adaptation strategies, and support for specific local actions. Based on these priorities, the survey team designed and administered a comprehensive resident survey that captured insights from residents to guide the city’s climate initiatives. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish to encourage broader participation and to produce data that is more accurate and representative of city’s population.

Key Findings and Suggestions

1. Residents identify lack of information and lack of financial support as the major barriers to implementing climate-resilient home upgrades. Across many of the questions, respondents expressed the need and desire for more information to help them make choices about their personal financial climate-related investments. They also desired more information about programs and resources from the city or other government. Between 40-45 percent of respondents noted they would like more information about energy-efficient, and weather (especially hail)-resilient housing upgrades, with information and guidance being particularly sought for rain gardens and stormwater management. In addition, 72 percent of respondents either didn't know or were not sure they knew where the County’s resilience hub is located

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within Hyattsville and many were unsure about their satisfaction with the city's policies, indicating a significant gap in awareness of city resources. These findings are consistent with results from surveys conducted by the research team in nearby jurisdictions, which document similarly low levels of awareness of government support programs for climate-related investments. The survey team concluded that residents would benefit from an information campaign about the benefits of home upgrades and what government and private financial supports are available to help residents afford them.

Between 37 percent and 52 percent expressed that financial assistance would be most helpful to energy-efficient and weather-resilient house upgrades, especially for insulation, weatherization and energy-efficient appliances, windows, and doors.

Although survey respondents indicated extreme heat was the issue that affected them most and weather resiliency would help decrease the impact of heat on households, they expressed more interest in energy-efficient than weather-resilient upgrades. About 16-19 percent of respondents reported having already installed insulation and weatherization, energy-efficient appliances, windows and doors, and heat pumps. Around 12 percent said they had installed solar panels, rain gardens, or stormwater management, and only 6 percent said they had installed hail-resistant exteriors and roofing. Excluding hail resistant upgrades, the results indicated that residents have a high interest in upgrading their homes, with only 7-19 percent of residents showing no interest. Depending on type of upgrade, between 21 and 32 percent of respondents reported that they would like to see more streamlined permitting.

2. Extreme heat is the most pressing weather-related concern, affecting mental and physical health across all groups. Extreme heat was chosen as the weather-related event that affected people most across all groups. In general, this weather event was chosen by one in every four respondents. For example, almost 30 percent of residents identifying as Hispanic said that heat affected them the most, though extreme rain and flooding were also highly rated as problematic weather-related issues. Mental and physical health were the top-cited problems when weather-related events occur. About 30 percent of all respondents, 35 percent of white residents, 30 percent of homeowners, and 30 percent of young people noted that their mental health suffered when weather-related events affected them. Physical health impacts were noted particularly among renters and those over the age of 65. Hispanic respondents were also much more likely to say that weather-related events made them feel unsafe or insecure in their living situations and that their social connections suffered, with 25 percent of Hispanic respondents choosing these impacts. Furthermore, respondents who identified extreme heat as the weather event that affects them the most were more likely to report both mental and physical health impacts. Although relatively few respondents selected "cannot afford basic necessities" as a direct impact of weather-related events, the open-ended responses reveal that financial strain is an important concern. For example, one respondent volunteered "Higher maintenance costs, time spent on cleanup and repair" and another noted that weather related issues made them

“Financially strained but can still afford basic things.” Many respondents also described impacts related to repairing weather-related damage, addressing problems related to vegetation and outdoor maintenance, and maintaining comfort during extreme temperatures. These qualitative responses suggest that, even if the financial impacts of weather-related events do not typically rise to the level of threatening basic necessities, they nevertheless represent a meaningful burden for many residents.

3. Residents say building more bike lanes and making existing bike and pedestrian pathways safer would help them drive less frequently. The two most commonly cited factors that would encourage respondents to drive less were safer bike lanes and pedestrian paths (36 percent) and more connected bike and pedestrian networks (39 percent). Renters show the highest responsiveness to these incentives, with 43 percent-47 percent indicating that these improvements would influence their travel behavior. Safety of the bike lanes and pedestrian paths was cited by 47 percent of white respondents, 40 percent of non-Hispanic respondents, 47 percent of renters, and 45 percent of those under the age of 65. One-fifth of respondents expressed that if they owned an e-bike or scooter, they would drive less frequently.

Many other cities comparable in size to Hyattsville have launched mass-purchasing programs or similar to bring down the cost of e-bikes to help low-income residents purchase them. For example, Charlottesville, Virginia operates a quarterly lottery program that provides \$1,000 vouchers and also runs an e-bike lending library that allows residents to test bikes before purchasing. Hopkins, Minnesota has recently launched its own local voucher program, and similar programs exist in jurisdictions across New England, Texas, and California. Many of these programs use income-based eligibility and tiered rebate structures to target those most in need. For instance, Bentonville, Arkansas limits eligibility to households below 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, while Alameda, California and the state of Colorado provide substantially higher rebates for cargo and adaptive e-bikes than for standard models, recognizing their higher cost and greater utility for families and people with mobility needs. Other programs incorporate equity and accessibility goals: Denver, Colorado offers enhanced rebates of up to \$1,400 for adaptive e-bikes for people with disabilities, and San Antonio, Texas targets people without access to a car for mobility subsidies. Many of these programs are funded through partnerships with utilities, counties, or external grants, suggesting that a similar program could be a realistic and useful policy option for Hyattsville.³

Investment in additional bicycle lanes connected to public transportation hubs and commercial centers would benefit Hyattsville. However, it is important to separate bicycle infrastructure from pedestrian pathways. Research indicates there are significant safety concerns for

³<https://connect.charlottesville.gov/charlottesville-e-bike-voucher-program>
<https://hopkinsmn.com/1152/HCSF-EligibilityRebate-Amounts>
<https://311.sanantonio.gov/kb/docs/articles/transportation/e-bike-vouchers>
<https://www.bentonvillear.com/1808/E-Bike-Rebate-Program>
<https://avaenergy.org/go-electric/e-bikes/bike-electric/>

pedestrians regarding operating micromobility devices, particularly e-bikes and e-scooters. This was reinforced in the survey. As one survey respondent noted, “We need separate pedestrian only paths. The increase in scooters, e-bikes, e-scooters, and cargo bikes makes walking on the sidewalk or path almost as dangerous as walking in the street.” Implementing dedicated, separated infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians directly addresses these safety concerns. In addition, adequate nighttime lighting along these pathways would increase perceived or actual safety and usage. A few respondents volunteered lighting as a safety need in the open-ended responses. Finally, several respondents noted issues of crosswalks to and from the West Hyattsville Metro station. As one noted, “Make pedestrian paths to Metro safer! The crosswalks from the West Hyattsville Metro to the Queens Chapel community are dangerous as there are no traffic lights at these crossings. Safer crosswalks will encourage more people to take public transportation!”

Maryland announced \$8.2 million in funding this year to expand safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.⁴ This is an opportunity for Hyattsville to leverage some state resources.

4. While respondents feel fairly safe using most forms of active transportation, concerns remain. Overall, survey respondents reported feeling fairly safe walking, biking, using public transportation, going to the park, and visiting the Emerson Street Food Forest (4515 Emerson Street, Hyattsville, MD, 20781); (only 15 percent of respondents said they felt “not at all safe.”) Scootering was by far the lowest rated for safety, with few people feeling safe; however, whether this is due to the scooters themselves or the infrastructure in Hyattsville is unclear. Two other activities present some opportunities for the city to invest in learning more about safety concerns. For example, 14 percent of respondents noted they did not feel safe at all riding a bicycle in Hyattsville and only 23 percent said they felt very safe.

5. Respondents rely on different information sources during weather emergencies, with notable demographic variations. Overall, the local government website is the most frequently cited source of information, followed by social media and neighbors. However, where people would turn in a weather-related emergency differs by demographic group. For example, respondents over 65 were most likely to use a local government website (44 percent) and most likely to turn to neighbors (25 percent). Social media was very unlikely to be utilized by those over 65 (9.9 percent). However, 47 percent of Hispanic respondents reported that they would turn to social media, whereas 41 percent of non-Hispanic residents said they would go to local government websites. This distribution is similar when comparing white to non-white residents or owners to renters.

6. Respondents prioritize funding for climate resilience upgrades and pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure. Respondents were asked to divide \$100 over six programs. On average,

⁴<https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/newsroomdetails.aspx?newsId=970&PageId=38>

respondents devoted 30 percent of the money—the largest of any category—to assisting homeowners and landlords in upgrading their residences to be more resilient to floods and other climate-related issues; this category received stronger support from older residents who devoted an average of \$37. The other largest-spending category was increasing the number of pedestrian and bicycle lanes, to which residents committed 25 percent the spending. The service that received the least support was providing public electric vehicle charging stations, with only approximately 9 percent of the funds devoted to this category. Providing information services to residents, expanding compost and recycling programs, and purchasing new electric vehicles all received an average of about 12 percent of the budget.

7. Respondents support mixed-use development but want balance between environmental protection and affordability. Looking to the future, respondents overwhelmingly supported development that focused on a mix of single-family and multifamily homes. This varied to some extent by group, with a majority of Hispanic respondents prioritizing single-family homes and limited respondents prioritizing multifamily apartment buildings exclusively. When it comes to making policy that regulates home and business building and renovation, respondents emphasized that they want the city to balance environmental and cost concerns. Over 60 percent of respondents in almost every category selected that they would like this balance to occur, and 25 percent on average selected minimizing costs to property owners and renters. Only about 15 percent of respondents (more or less depending on the category) said that they would like the city to maximize environmental protection.

8. Satisfaction with city services varies sharply, revealing one clear strength and several areas that appear either underperforming or poorly understood by the public. Curbside recycling and waste management stands out as major successes, with a very large positive gap between satisfied and unsatisfied respondents, indicating strong performance and broad public approval. Tree preservation and green space protection also show a clearly positive net rating, though much more modest. In contrast, most other climate and sustainability related services, especially energy efficiency programs and standards, climate action planning, and public participation, show very small net satisfaction values combined with very high levels of uncertainty. This pattern suggests that, beyond any performance issues, many of these programs suffer from low visibility and limited public understanding. Overall, the results indicate that while core service delivery is performing very well, most sustainability initiatives would benefit from clearer communication, stronger outreach, and, in some cases, substantive improvements. Finally, bike lanes, paths, and sidewalks stand out as an exception, showing low net satisfaction combined with relatively low uncertainty, which suggests that dissatisfaction in this area is more likely driven by policy or implementation gaps rather than lack of awareness.

Other Key Findings:

1. Barriers to participation in city recycling programs are not evenly distributed across groups.

White respondents are consistently substantially less likely to report facing barriers to recycling than non-white respondents, and homeowners report fewer barriers than renters across all four city services. Lack of information emerges as the primary barrier to electronics recycling, and is the second most frequently cited barrier among homeowners and older respondents. Across all services except electronics recycling, a majority of respondents report having no barriers to participation, suggesting that while access is generally high, the remaining obstacles are concentrated among specific groups and activities.

2. There are notable differences by race and ethnicity in which incentives are most motivating, and these differences point to complementary policy approaches.

Non-white and Hispanic respondents are more likely than white and non-Hispanic respondents to report that lower-cost public transit passes and increased availability of carpooling or ride-sharing options would encourage them to drive less. This aligns with broader trends in some U.S. cities that are experimenting with free or reduced-fare public bus service as a strategy to reduce transportation inequities and car dependence. While Hyattsville does not control regional transit pricing, these findings suggest an opportunity for the city to partner with Prince George’s County or the state on pilot programs, or to advocate to expand low-cost transit options.

3. Awareness of the resilience hub is extremely low, particularly among key vulnerable populations.

Although Prince George County has recently launched a resilience hub within the city of Hyattsville, awareness of its location remains low. A majority of respondents—especially renters, those under 65, and nonwhite residents—reported that they did not know where the hub was located, with an additional 15 percent indicating uncertainty. Overall, approximately 70–75 percent of respondents lacked clear knowledge of the hub’s location. Correspondingly, very few respondents indicated that they would seek information or shelter at a resilience hub during an emergency weather event.

4. Most citizens feel they have little influence over environmental decisions made in Hyattsville.

Over a quarter of all respondents in every category and over 30 percent of nonwhite and Hispanic respondents said they have “no influence at all” on Hyattsville’s environmental planning; and over 60 percent say they have either no or very little influence on Hyattsville’s planning decisions. Research suggests that those who feel they are influential are also more likely to adopt climate friendly behaviors.⁵ As a result, it would be useful to increase community engagement in climate planning. Many cities have been experimenting and finding positive results in models such as participatory budgeting for environmental spending. For example, the West Humboldt Park community of Chicago used participatory budgeting to allocate \$2 million toward community-selected projects, including the installation of green roofs that absorb stormwater, reduce heat, and lower energy costs on four neighborhood properties.⁶ Other cities like Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Durham and Greensboro, North Carolina, as well as many other cities across the country have used participatory budgeting to determine their climate

⁵<https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/collective-political-efficacy/>

<https://www.ovid.com/journals/envab/fulltext/10.1177/00139165221131002~relationships-among-environmental-attitudes-environmental>

⁶https://www.pbcan.org/issues/climate-resilience/?utm_so

infrastructure and programming investments.⁷ Intentional participatory budgeting, especially when designed with inclusion and equity in mind, can help bring in the voices and decision making powers of historically marginalized communities and raise feelings of political efficacy among them.⁸ While participatory budgeting is the best-known form of community decision-making, there are also several other models that promote deliberative engagement, such as Equity-Based or Racial Equity Budgeting.⁹ These approaches can be applied not only to budget decisions but also to broader policy and planning processes.

Policy Innovations in other jurisdictions to consider

As part of this project, students in the class identified several programs being utilized by cities and states across the U.S that could serve as inspiration or models for Hyattsville. Below is a list of programs that build on the responses of residents:

- Connecticut's Smart-E Loans are a financing program offered by the Connecticut Green Bank, a quasi-public corporation established in 2011 by the Connecticut Legislature, that provides low-interest loans (6.99 percent-7.99 percent APR) with no money down to help Connecticut homeowners make energy-efficient and resilience-related home improvements. Available for owner-occupied homes with 1-4 units, the loans can finance up to \$50,000 for over 90 eligible upgrades including insulation, windows, heat pumps, solar panels, and water heating systems, with up to 25 percent usable for non-energy measures like appliances or roof repairs. The application process involves selecting a participating contractor, applying for pre-approval with a Smart-E Lender, obtaining technical approval from the Green Bank, and completing the project with payments disbursed in stages, making energy efficiency improvements accessible through flexible terms ranging from 5 to 15 years.¹⁰
- The Portland, Oregon Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund (PCEF) is a government-run program operated by Portland's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability that invests in community-led projects to reduce carbon emissions, create economic opportunity, and build climate resilience in the city. The fund provides grants through multiple programs including Community Grants for nonprofits and quarterly Mini Grants for smaller organizations, all guided by a five-year Climate Investment Plan that outlines strategic funding priorities and programs. The PCEF is overseen by the PCEF Committee and includes advisory councils like the High Road Advisory Council that helps shape workforce and contractor development to ensure climate investments create equitable economic opportunities, with all programs focused on supporting community-driven climate justice initiatives throughout Portland. Importantly, landlords who receive PCEF funding for energy efficiency upgrades are required to limit rent increases, ensuring that PCEF-funded

⁷<https://pbstanford.org/durham2023-vote-pb> <https://www.cambridgema.gov/participatorybudgeting/> <https://www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/budget-evaluation/participatory-budgeting/about>

⁸https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355646224_Impacts_of_Participatory_Budgeting_on_Education_Learning_Research_Brief

<https://budgetequity.racepowerpolicy.org/case-studies-policy-briefs/participatory-budgeting>

⁹If this is of interest, there are two experts on Equity Budgeting in the UMD School of Public Policy (Juan Pablo Martinez Guzman and Phil Joyce)

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/02750740251332944?casa_token=DMpZBtpv4EAAAAA%3AovO10dX4DGKxt4ZOedG0TmzXhz_IfJZGxEPECpgfYjHs96VgoGWLf4IUbribLdi60BOA8WuPQPc

¹⁰<https://www.ctgreenbank.com/home-solutions/smart-e-loans/>

improvements cannot be used as a basis for raising rents, so that the benefits of reduced utility costs go to tenants rather than being captured through rent hikes, particularly protecting low-income and rent-burdened residents from displacement.¹¹

- As mentioned, previously, a growing number of cities and counties around the U.S. have implemented e-bike incentive programs. Most programs combine income-based eligibility with tiered rebate structures in order to target households most in need and to reflect the higher costs and greater utility of certain types of e-bikes. For example, Bentonville, Arkansas limits eligibility based on income thresholds, while programs in Alameda County, California and the state of Colorado provide substantially higher rebates for cargo and adaptive e-bikes than for standard models, recognizing their importance for families and people with mobility needs. Other jurisdictions have complemented rebates with additional features: Charlottesville, Virginia operates an e-bike lending library that allows residents to test bikes before purchasing, and Denver, Colorado offers enhanced rebates for adaptive e-bikes for people with disabilities. Importantly, many of these programs are financed through partnerships with counties, utilities, or external grants rather than general municipal revenues, suggesting that a similar initiative could be fiscally feasible for Hyattsville. Taken together, these experiences indicate that an e-bike incentive program could be a flexible and scalable tool to reduce car dependence while advancing both climate and equity goals.

¹¹<https://www.portland.gov/bps/cleanenergy>