



**TO** Interested Parties

**FROM** Curt Below, John Fairbank, and Lucia Del Puppo  
FM3 Research

**RE:** Voter Attitudes Toward the Proposed Downtown Housing Development

**DATE** June 7, 2023

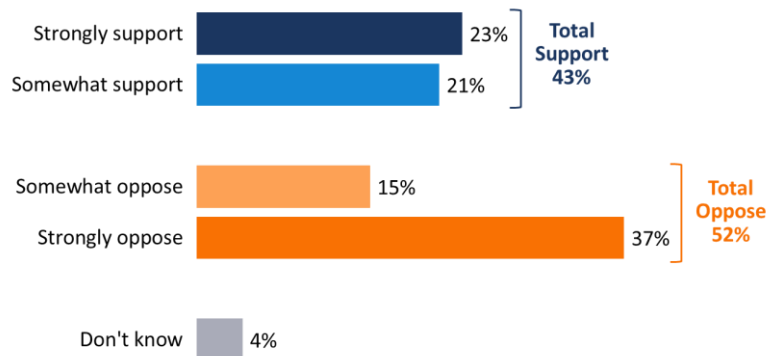
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a survey of 365 Eureka voters, to assess their views on the City of Eureka’s proposal to build new affordable housing on nine existing parking lots in Downtown.<sup>i</sup> The results show that voters are divided on the proposal. As they learn more about the issue, opposition grows, and a broad majority indicate support for an alternative site.

Key findings of the survey include:

- **A majority of voters oppose the City’s proposal to replace nine parking lots with affordable housing for low-income residents.** Only 43 percent of voters support the proposal and 52% oppose it. Additionally, opposition is much stronger—while only 23% strongly support the proposal, 37% strongly oppose it. In an open-ended follow-up question, the most common rationale for supporting the proposal was the need for more affordable housing, while opponents said that parking is needed, and this project will make it less available (**Figure 1** on the next page).

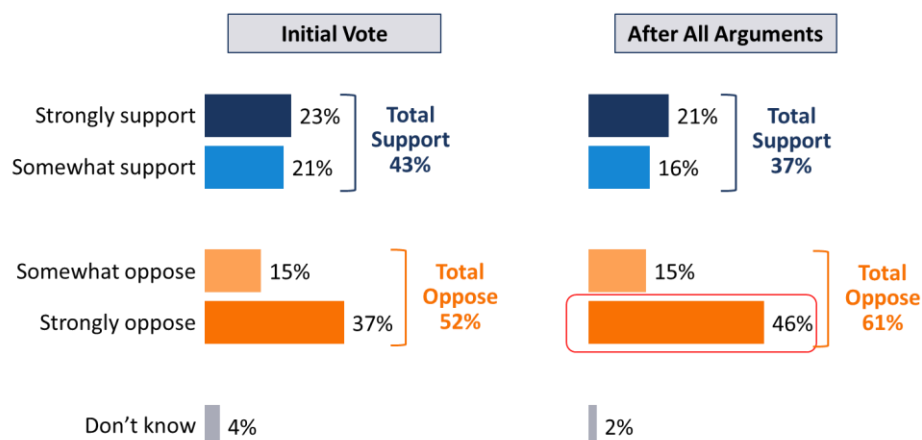
**Figure 1: Support for the Project**

*Some people have proposed building more subsidized affordable housing for very low-income residents in Eureka by eliminating 9 public parking lots in downtown. The proposed plan would: Replace the public parking lots located in downtown Eureka with low- and very low-income housing, eliminating 640 parking spaces; Provide 175 units for families with incomes of less than \$23,500 and 47 units for families with incomes of less than \$37,500; Not include any parking spaces for residents of the new housing; and not replace or relocate the existing public parking spaces.*



- **After an exchange of arguments describing the pros and cons of the project, opposition grows.** After hearing reasons to support the proposal (e.g., the unprecedented housing crisis; community input; prioritizing transit-oriented housing over cars; the state housing mandate; and concerns over a billionaire developer holding the City hostage) and to oppose the proposal (e.g., parking study conducted during COVID shutdowns; alternative sites that allow for both new housing and preserving existing parking; opposition from local businesses; and the negative economic impacts of losing parking), 61% of voters oppose it and 46% strongly oppose it (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Support After Pro/Con Arguments**



- **Voters find messaging in opposition to the proposal much more convincing than arguments in favor of it.** The top arguments against the proposal describe better, alternative sites for the housing development, the impact to downtown workers' safety, and the impacts of the plan's flaws both on local businesses and the development's new residents. Arguments in support of the proposal resonate less strongly and, as shown in Figure 2, do little to increase support; the strongest ones describe the city's need for housing, the negative influence of SNP owner Rob Arkley, and Eureka's values.

**Figure 3: Most Convincing Con Arguments**

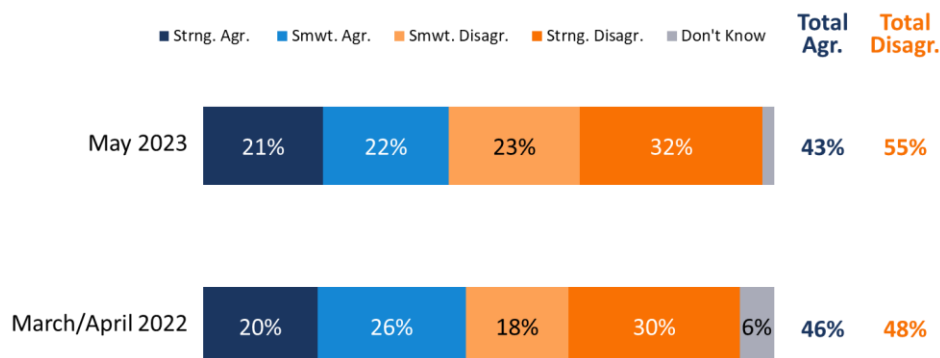
Opposition Message	Very Convincing
<b>(OTHER SITES)</b> There is a much better site available for Eureka to provide needed housing without disrupting downtown. The vacant 14-acre publicly-owned former Jacobs Middle School site on Utah Street would be perfect. It's adjacent to a transit stop, close to a park and is a short walk to grocery stores and shopping, which means these new homes will not be heavily reliant on cars. Also, this alternative can accommodate three times as much housing as is being planned for downtown.	54%
<b>(DOWNTOWN SAFETY)</b> Many people who work downtown are frequently exposed to harassment, crime, open-air drug use, and unsanitary conditions created by homeless encampments. Eliminating parking would put employees' safety at risk by forcing them to walk greater distances at a time when crime is on the rise. Additionally, this plan does nothing to address the fundamental public safety and public health problems in downtown Eureka.	45%

Opposition Message	Very Convincing
<p><b>(BAD PLAN)</b> This plan is for subsidized low- and very-low income housing only and does not include other amenities that are important to the Eureka community. It does not provide housing for middle-class and working families struggling to find housing. We all think Eureka needs more housing, but this proposal is flawed. It comes at the expense of our local businesses, stores, and restaurants; it doesn't provide services that new low-income residents would need to live comfortably in downtown, like an affordable grocery store; and it doesn't consider other viable sites in the city.</p>	<p><b>44%</b></p>

- Most people travel to downtown Eureka by car and a majority don't think there is sufficient parking in downtown.** While forty-three percent agree with a statement asserting that there is sufficient parking downtown, a majority (55%) disagree, including one-third (32%) in strong disagreement (**Figure 4**). In fact, most people who travel to downtown drive there; 87% indicated they get there by driving, 30% said they walk, 15% bike, and only 8% take the bus.

**Figure 4: Parking in Downtown**

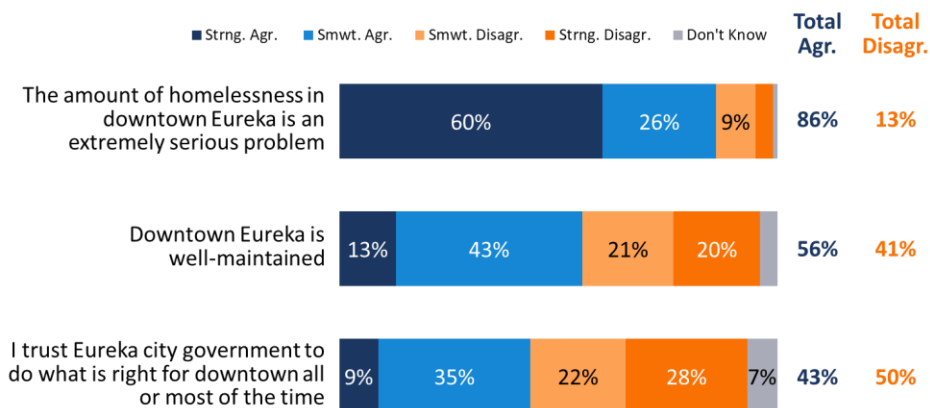
Next are some statements people have made about downtown Eureka. Please indicate whether you generally strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each: There is sufficient parking in downtown.



- Additionally, while a majority say downtown is well-maintained, they view homelessness as a very serious problem, and less than half say they trust city government to do what is right for downtown.** Eighty-six percent say homelessness in downtown is an extremely serious problem and only 43% trust city government to do what is right for downtown most of the time (50% do not). At the same time, 56% say downtown is well-maintained (**Figure 5** on the next page).

**Figure 5: Views on Downtown**

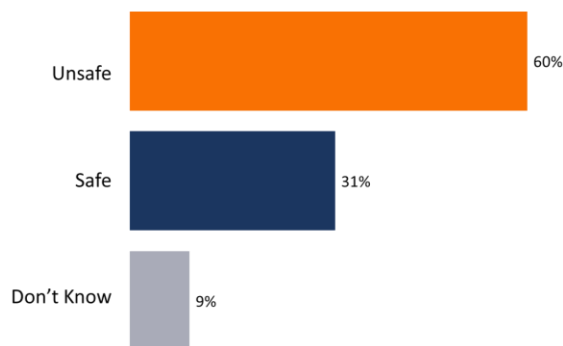
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- **Three in five feel unsafe walking in downtown at night.** When asked about their perceived safety in downtown, 60% said they felt unsafe walking at night. Only 31% of voters say they feel safe in downtown at night (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Safety Downtown at Night**

Do you feel safe or unsafe walking downtown at night?



Overall, the findings of the survey suggest that the community leans toward opposing the proposal to eliminate nine downtown parking lots to create more affordable housing. While many voters found arguments in favor of the proposal compelling on the grounds that bold action is needed to ensure that community members have access to affordable housing, many others expressed concern over trading away limited Downtown parking options for housing. However, a message proposing building affordable housing on an alternative location, the vacant Jacobs Middle School site, resonated with voters, suggesting that they want to preserve existing parking and see new affordable housing built.

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<sup>i</sup> **Methodology:** From May 7-14, 2023, FM3 completed 365 online and telephone (landline and wireless) interviews with Eureka voters. The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-5.1% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.