



**SKAGIT COUNTY 2025**  
Comprehensive Plan Update

# Climate Element Survey Summary

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December 13, 2024

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# Introduction

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Skagit County is adding a Climate Element into its Comprehensive Plan in response to [Washington State House Bill \(HB\) 1181](#), passed in 2023. The Climate Element will include goals and policies to reduce emissions and prepare for climate-intensified natural hazards. This survey aimed to inform the community and gather input on key policy areas for the Climate Element. The survey included six sections: Climate Awareness, Climate Concerns, Policies and Actions, Challenges and Opportunities, Your Connection to Skagit County, and Demographics.

The survey was hosted via SurveyMonkey and linked on the County’s webpage for the planning effort. It was promoted at the Climate Open House on October 1, 2024, Skagit County’s Facebook, and the project listserv account. The project team also reached out to agencies that participated in the stakeholder interview to share with their networks and to local agencies awarded the Commerce Public Engagement Grant for Community Benefit Organizations (CBOs) to provide public outreach and engagement to the community regarding local jurisdictions participating the period update. The survey was open from October 11, 2024, through October 31, 2024, and available in English and Spanish. The survey received 652 responses.

After the survey closed, results were analyzed to create this summary. Close-ended questions were reviewed using bar graphs, while open-ended responses were coded into 11-14 categories that captured main themes. Each open-ended response was assigned to one or more categories, as applicable. Key findings were then summarized by combining insights from all the question.

## Key Findings

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Here are the key findings from the Skagit County Climate Element Community Survey:

### 1. Climate Awareness and Concerns

- **High Awareness and Concern:** Most respondents reported being well-informed (53.15%) about climate change issues and thinking about climate change a moderate to a great deal (68.66%). A significant portion (63%) were moderately to extremely concerned about climate-related impacts in their community.
- **Top Climate Concerns:** The top climate concerns, when accounting for responses that reporting slight, somewhat, moderate, and extreme concern, were wildfire (90.53%), wildfire smoke (90.48%), and flooding (89.28%). Respondents identified these as threats to both personal safety and community assets, particularly agricultural lands, homes, and infrastructure.
- **Climate Change Skepticism:** In the open-ended responses, a small subset of respondents expressed doubt about the validity of climate change and saw it as exaggerated or politically motivated.

### 2. Challenges in Addressing Climate Impacts

- **Financial Limitations:** In open-ended responses, many mentioned that costs, such as expensive retrofits or high utility bills, limit their ability to adapt their homes or properties to climate risks.
- **Housing Risks:** Many respondents highlighted risks to homes and property, including being in the floodplain, difficulties obtaining insurance, and limited resources for protecting or maintaining homes against extreme weather.
- **Resistance to Government Regulation:** A smaller portion of individuals expressed concerns about government overreach, misuse of power, and inefficiency, feeling that policies could limit personal choice or impose economic burdens.

### 3. Support for Climate Resilience and GHG Reduction Policies

- **Strong Support for Resilience Measures:** A strong majority of respondents (70% or more) either somewhat or strongly favored all of the resilience solutions. Respondents showed high support for policies to promote land use strategies (85.96% strongly or somewhat favor) and enhance community preparedness and response to hazards and extreme weather events (80.04% strongly or somewhat favor).
- **Emission Reduction Priorities:** The majority of respondents (50% or more) either somewhat or strongly favored all of the GHG emission reduction solutions. Many respondents supported actions such as limiting tree loss, promoting sustainable land management, and working with local industries to reduce pollution from industrial processes. The solution that received the strongest opposition was facilitating the transition to electric vehicles (31.02% strongly or somewhat oppose). However, in open-ended responses, support for EVs, public transportation, and expanding walking and cycling paths was notable.
- **Concerns Over Economic Impact:** In open-ended responses, some respondents voiced caution, seeking assurances that climate policies would not harm local jobs or economic stability, especially in agriculture and small businesses.

### 4. Suggestions for County Climate Actions

- **Public Transit:** Open-ended responses frequently supported developing public transit options to reduce emissions and provide safe routes for alternative transportation options.
- **Land Use and Zoning:** Open-ended responses often mentioned the need for preserving green spaces and farmland, planting trees, limiting development in hazard prone areas and encouraging dense, mixed-use development.
- **Education and Public Engagement:** Respondents expressed a desire for more education on climate impacts and involvement in policy decisions, with an emphasis on transparent, science-based approaches. Some made calls to ensure policies address the needs of frontline communities and those disproportionately impacted by climate change.
- **Focus on Rural Access:** Some respondents highlighted the unique needs of rural communities, such as access to public transit and rural-specific resources, advocating for a more inclusive approach in policy development.

## 5. Demographic Insights

- **Older and More Educated Respondents:** The survey had respondents from various towns within Skagit County, including a diverse range of ages, income levels, and occupations. Survey respondents were predominately white (78.84%), which is reflective of the county’s predominantly white population (90%). However, respondents were generally older (55+) and more likely to hold a bachelor’s degree or higher when compared to the county’s overall population. This suggests that the survey responses may disproportionately reflect the views and priorities of older, formally educated residents. Future outreach efforts could aim to engage younger and more diverse groups to capture a broader spectrum of community perspectives.

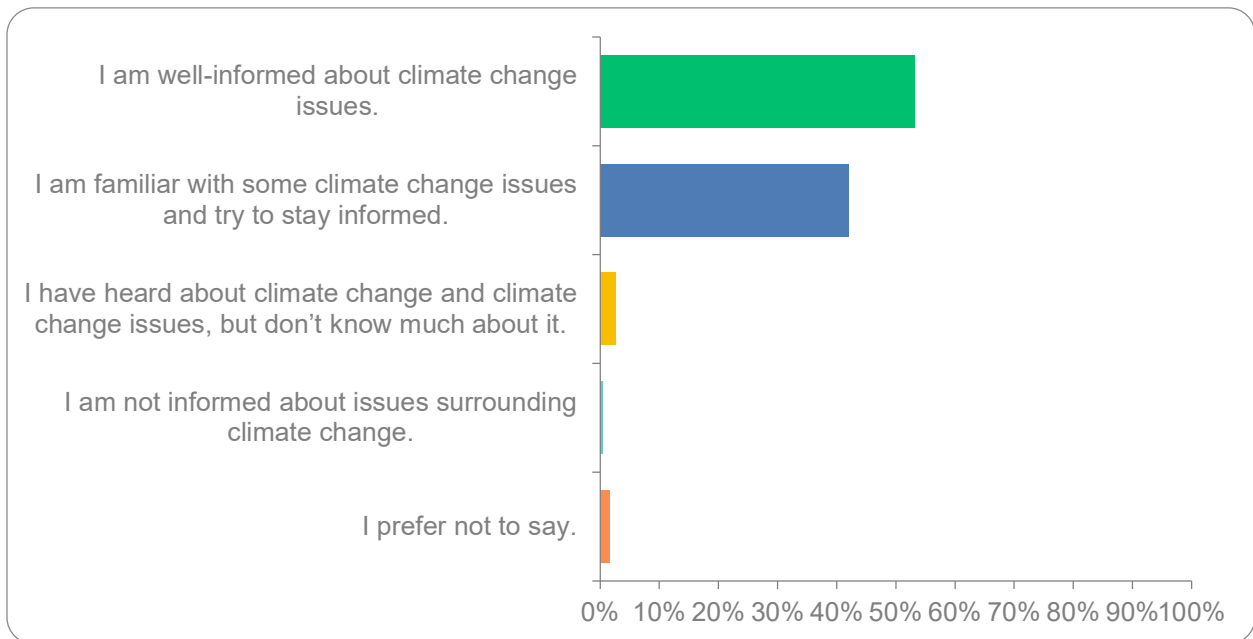
## Survey Responses

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### Q1: How would you best describe your awareness and understanding of climate change issues?

Answered: 651 Skipped: 1

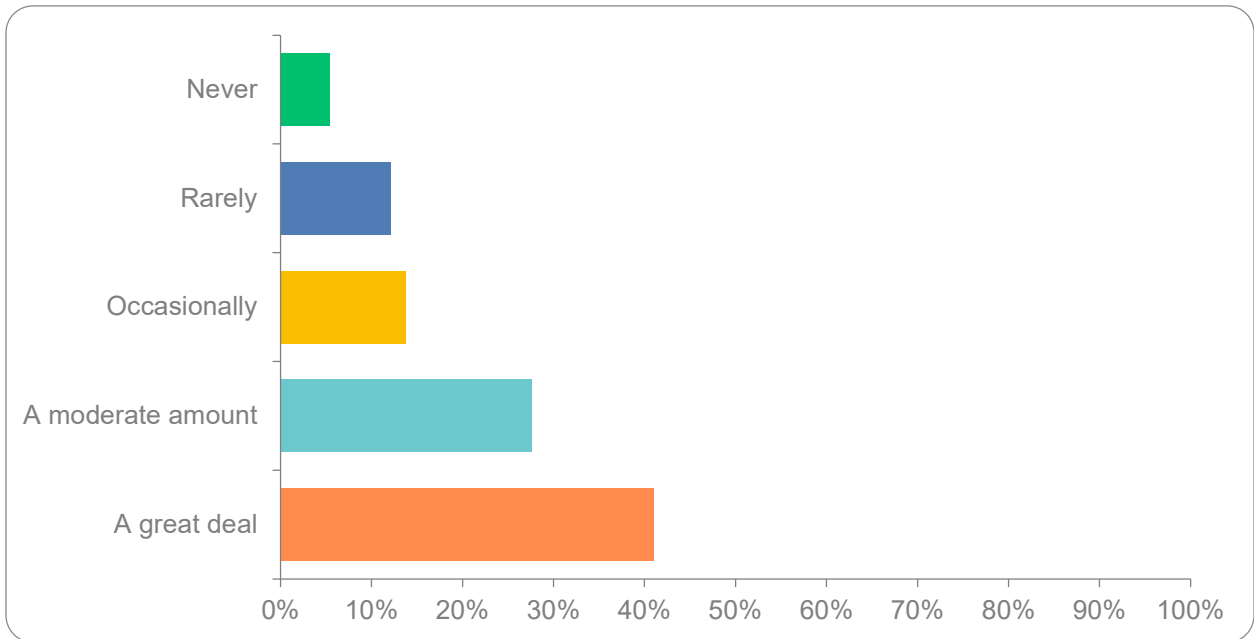
Most respondents feel well-informed (53.15%) or familiar with climate change issues (42.09%), with a smaller portion reporting limited (2.61%) or no knowledge. Only a few preferred not to answer (1.69%).



### Q2: How often do you think about climate change?

Answered: 651 Skipped: 1

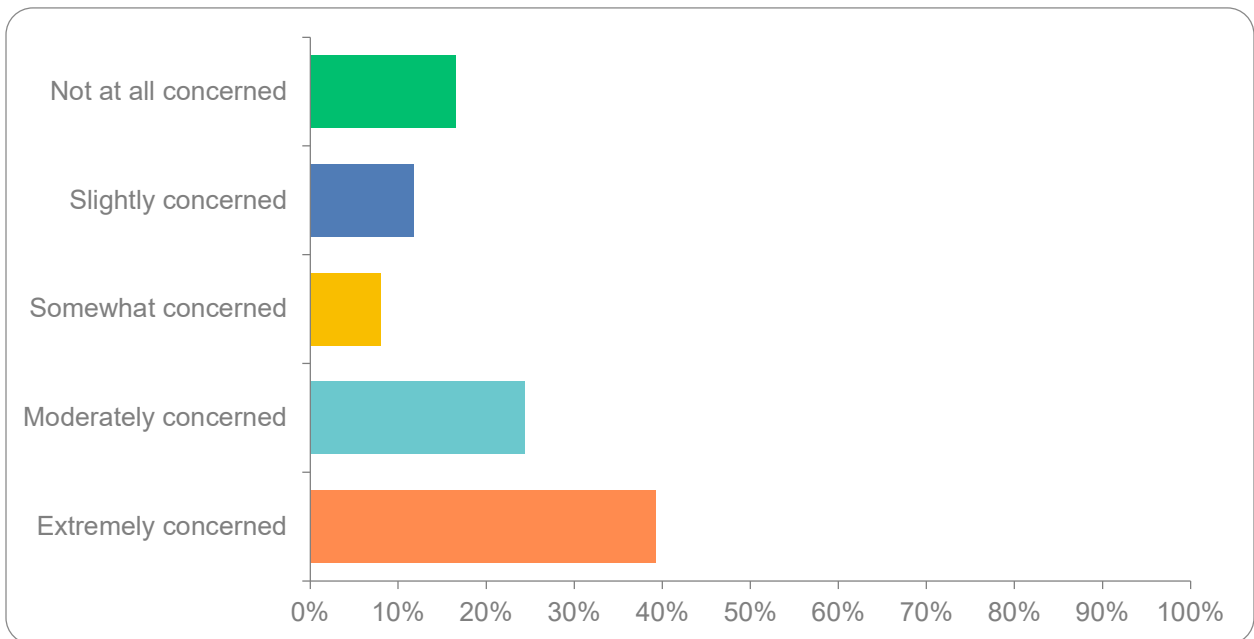
Most respondents think about climate change a great deal (41.01%) or a moderate amount (27.65%), with smaller portions reporting they only think about climate change occasionally (13.82%), rarely (12.14%), or never (5.38%).



**Q3: Generally, how concerned are you about extreme weather and climate change impacts in your community?**

Answered: 627 Skipped: 25

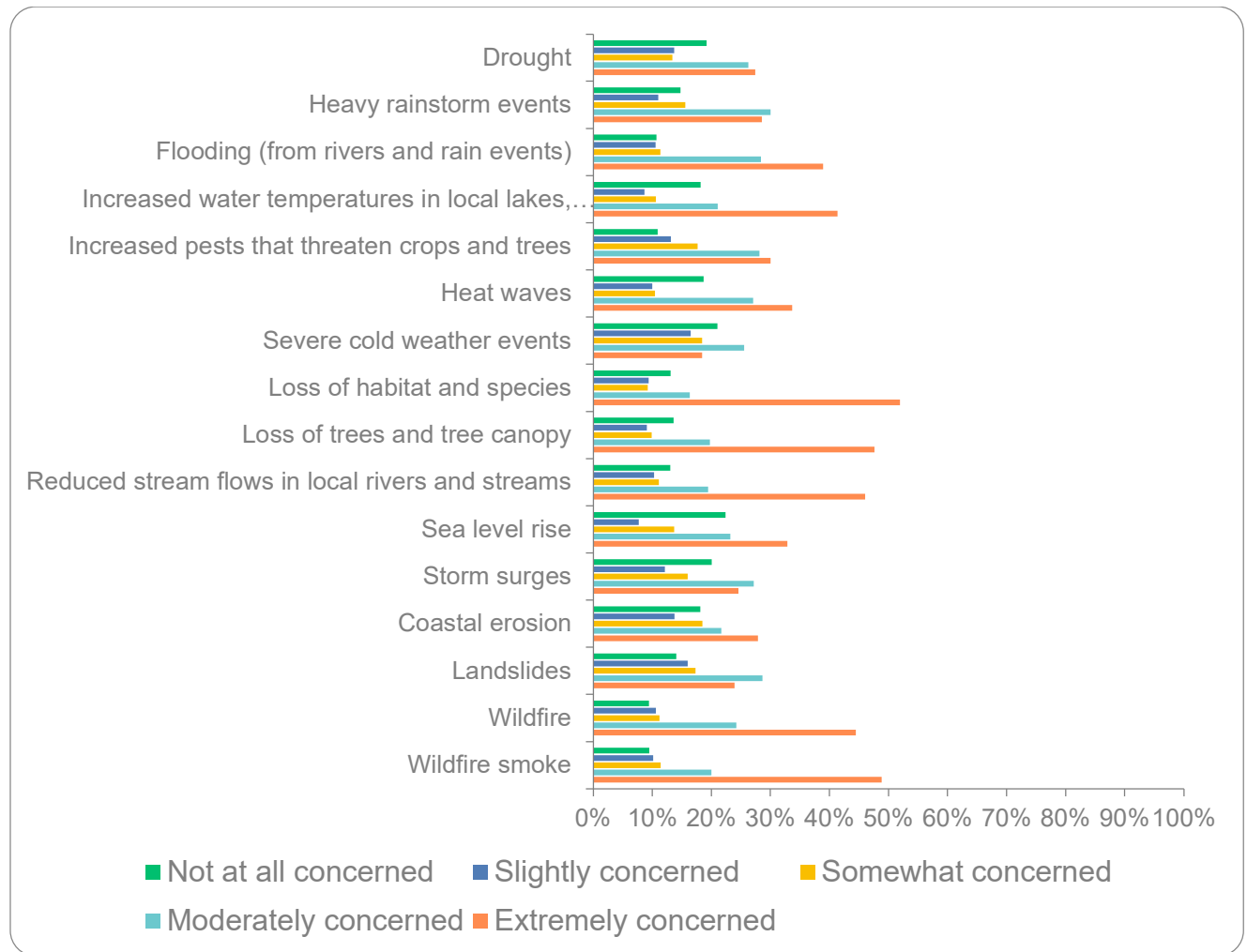
Most respondents report being either extremely (39.23%) or moderately concerned (24.40%) about extreme weather and climate change impacts, while some report being slightly concerned (11.80%) or not at all concerned (16.59%). The smallest portion of respondents report being somewhat concerned (7.97%).



**Q4: How concerned are you with the following extreme weather and climate change impacts in Skagit County? Please indicate your level of concern per impact.**

Answered: 624 Skipped: 28

The majority of respondents (over 50%) report being either extremely or moderately concerned with almost all the extreme weather and climate impacts. Severe cold weather events and coastal erosion were the two notable exceptions. When combining those who are either extremely or moderately concerned, the top climate impact concerns are wildfire smoke (68.87%), wildfire (68.70%), and loss of habitat and species (68.28%). The climate impacts with the least overall concern are severe cold weather events (44.02%), coastal erosion (49.60%), and storm surges (51.78%).



**Q5: Based on your responses to the previous question, tell us more about why you feel this way. Include if you've been personally affected by these climate impacts, and which community assets or members you anticipate being most impacted.**

Answered: 458 Skipped: 194

The following are themes and examples quotes from the 458 responses to question 5:

**Concern about Climate Impacts:** Many respondents expressed concern about climate impacts, particularly flooding (97 mentions), wildfire smoke (101 mentions), wildfire (82 mentions), drought (62 mentions), and extreme heat (56 mentions). Other noted impacts included reduced snowpack, sea level rise, habitat loss, and increased pests.

- *“As a fishing and logging family, I’m concerned about the long term sustainability and health of natural resources in our region in the face of heat, drought, etc, like forests and salmon. With other family members, I have concerns about heat waves and severe weather events and with older folks and kids with asthma, air quality issues from pollution and wildfire smoke has been an issue.”*

**Personal Experiences:** Many shared firsthand accounts of extreme weather, particularly heatwaves and flooding, and described challenges to their health, homes, and work, especially in agriculture.

- *“My house on Lafayette Rd flooded in Nov 2021 when the Skagit river flooded and my current home was threatened by an early brush fire in April of 2024.”*

**Vulnerable Communities and Critical Assets:** Respondents frequently highlighted risks to specific communities—such as youth, the elderly, farmers, Tribal/Indigenous populations, low-income groups, those with limited English proficiency, and those with respiratory issues—and to critical assets like agricultural land, salmon, forests, and shellfish. Concern for these groups and assets was mentioned 118 times.

- *“...I’m acutely aware of the negative implications of climate change on the valley. Farmers will be heavily impacted. Low- and middle-class families and individuals are at risk...Everyone will be impacted, right now the elderly are especially vulnerable.”*

**Climate Skepticism:** A subset of responses (74 mentions) reflected skepticism about climate change, ranging from doubts about its severity to views that it is politically motivated.

- *“Climate change is a hoax.”*
- *“Concern is overblown to facilitate political desires.”*

**Limited Concern or Irrelevance:** A small number of respondents (10 mentions) expressed no concern about climate change, while others (11 mentions) provided responses that did not fit into other categories or were too vague to categorize.

- *“Not worried.”*

In order to capture the key themes from question 5, responses were coded into 11 categories that captured the majority of themes. Each open-ended response was assigned to one or more categories, as applicable. The following table reflects the major themes and their instances in response to question 5:

Q5	Instances
Concern for Specific Assets or Groups	118
Other Climate Impacts	115

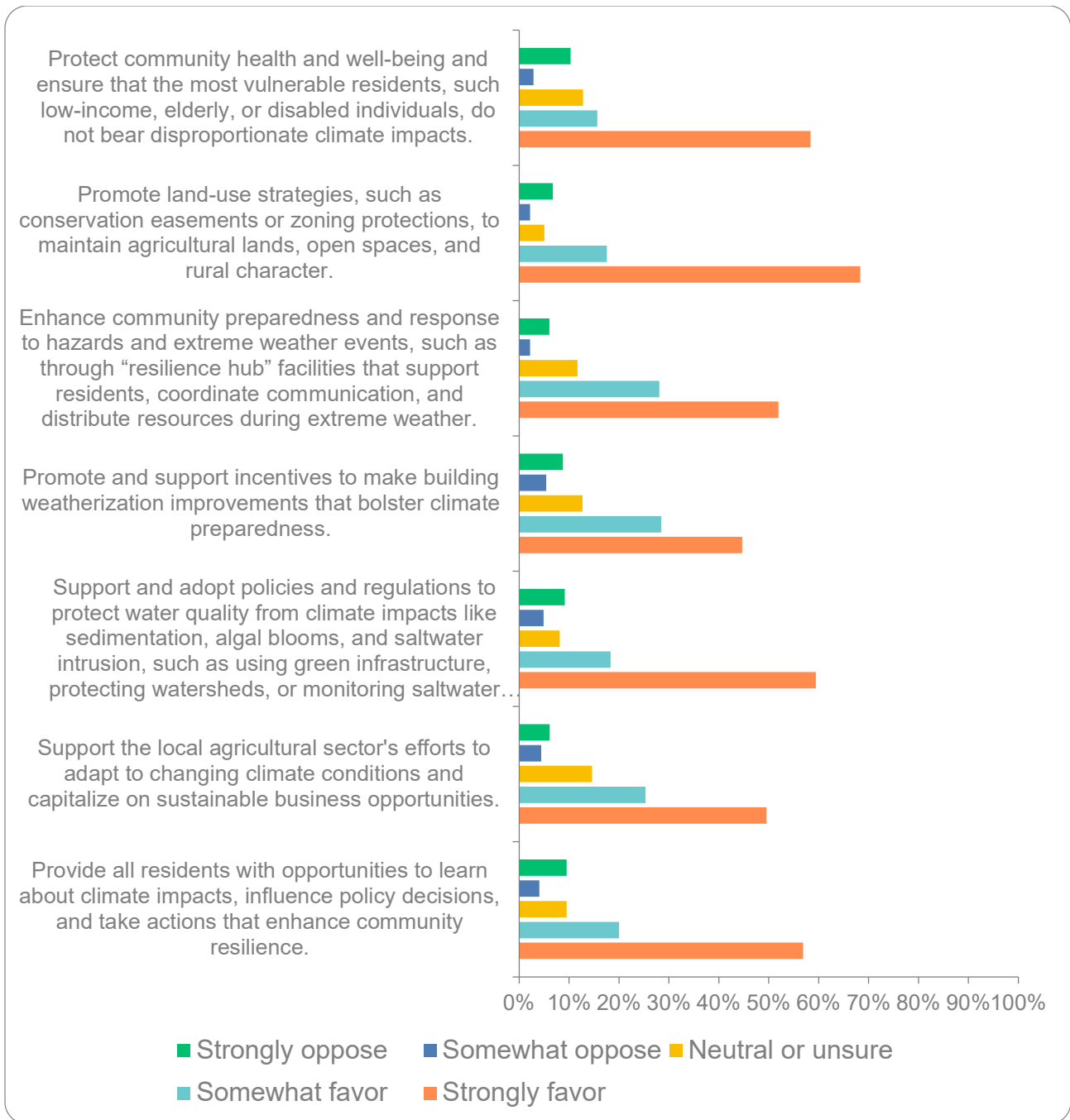


Wildfire Smoke	101
Flooding	97
General Concern	87
Wildfire	82
Climate Skepticism	74
Drought	62
Extreme Heat	56
Miscellaneous/Other	11
Not concerned	10

**Q6: Please indicate your level of support for each of the following types of resilience solutions intended to prepare Skagit County for extreme weather and climate impacts.**

Answered: 593 Skipped: 59

All the resilience solutions received strong support from survey respondents (over 70% either somewhat or strongly favor). The solutions that received the most support were promoting land use strategies (85.96% strongly or somewhat favor) and enhancing community preparedness and response to hazards and extreme weather events (80.04% strongly or somewhat favor). The solutions that received the strongest opposition were incentives to make building weatherization improvements (14.21% somewhat or strongly oppose) and policies and regulations to protect water quality (14.09% somewhat or strongly oppose).

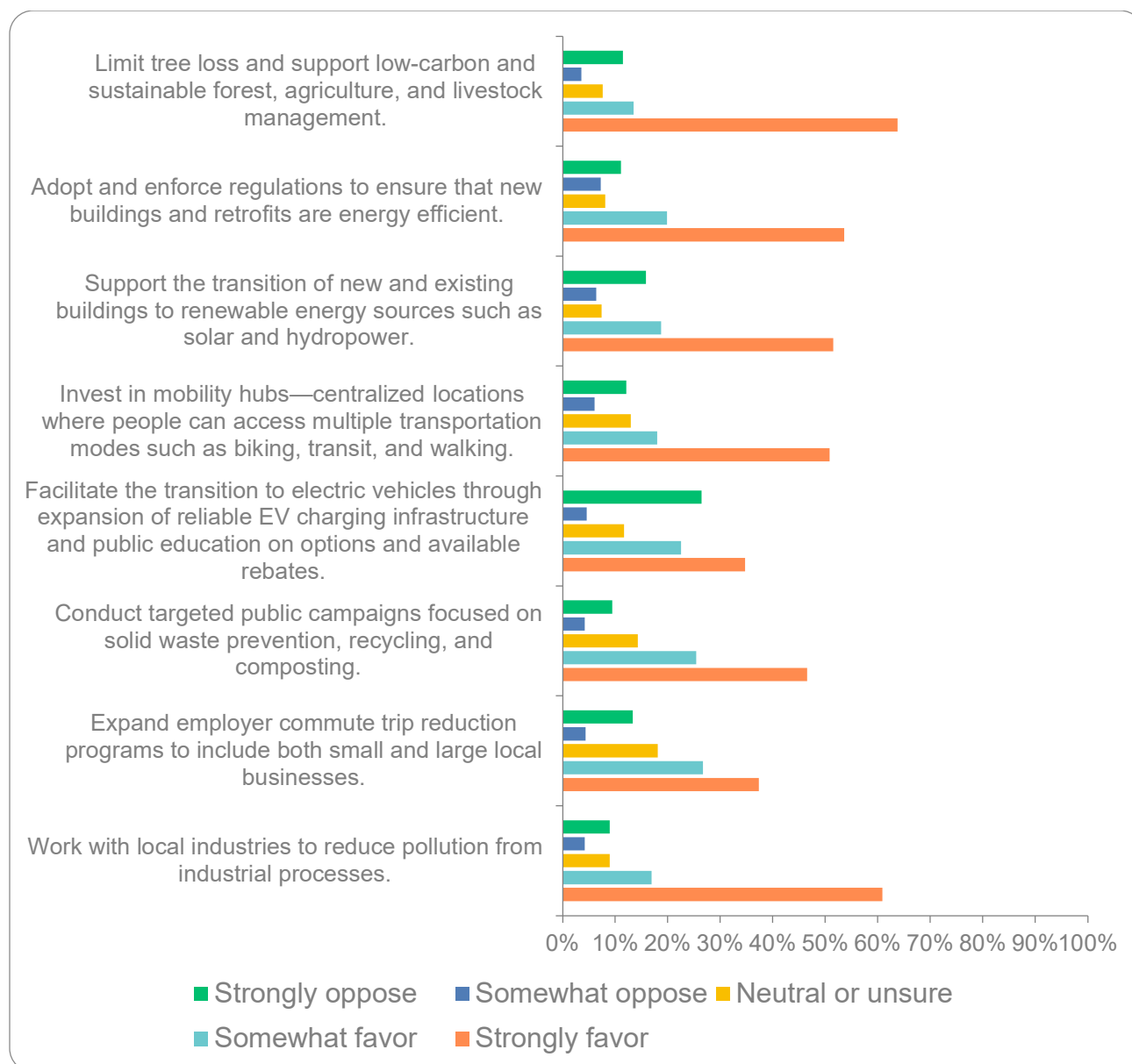


**Q7: Please indicate your level of support for each of the following types of GHG emission reduction solutions intended to reduce Skagit County’s contributions to climate change.**

Answered: 594 Skipped: 58

The majority of respondents either somewhat or strongly favored all of the GHG emission reduction solutions. The solutions with the most support included working with local industries to reduce pollution from industrial processes (77.83% strongly or somewhat favor) and limiting tree loss and supporting low-carbon and sustainable forest, agriculture, and livestock management

(77.33% strongly or somewhat favor). The solutions that received the strongest opposition were facilitate the transition to electric vehicles (31.02% strongly or somewhat oppose) and support the transition of new and existing buildings to renewable energy sources (22.30% strongly or somewhat oppose).



**Q8: Please describe any challenges or barriers you and/or your household/family may face in addressing extreme weather and impacts from climate change.**

Answered: 334 Skipped: 318

The following are themes and examples quotes from the 334 responses:

**Financial Barriers:** The most frequently mentioned challenge (97 mentions) was the high cost of resilience measures, such as heat pumps, home retrofits, or flood insurance. Many noted these costs were prohibitive, even with subsidies or assistance.

- *“Updating our home to withstand climate change is expensive. We are not low income so we don’t qualify for many programs and out of pocket and home loans would be our only way to ensure our home is ready and energy efficient.”*

**Housing and Property Risks or Limitations:** Respondents (71 mentions) highlighted risks to homes and property, including being in the floodplain, difficulties obtaining insurance, and limited resources for protecting or maintaining homes against extreme weather.

- *“Our house is 112 years old and has little insulation, no air conditioning, and the summers are getting very tough during smoke season.”*
- *“We live near the coast just above sea level. Given the housing market, we can’t afford to move farther inland to avoid impacts of flooding even if we wanted to.”*

**Emergency Preparedness and Safety:** Challenges included concerns around emergency preparedness (36 mentions), such as from power loss, availability of emergency supplies, and evacuation challenges.

- *“Flooding on access roads so we cannot leave to get to safe areas or emergency vehicles cannot get to us.”*

**Infrastructure Limitations:** Respondents also mentioned infrastructure limitations (31 mentions), such as a lack of bike paths, poorly maintained dikes, and limited access to alternative energy for multifamily homes.

- *I bicycle but Skagit County needs to plan for and build safe routes from rural areas into the cities/towns and make safe routes/bike paths in the cities/towns so I can bicycle to get groceries, etc without fear of vehicles running me down.”*

**Natural Resource and Environmental Management:** 21 respondents mentioned concerns with natural resource and environmental management, such as water, dike, and forest management.

- *“Lack of active and effective forest management is detrimental to the County and WA generally. It unnecessarily endangers people, livestock and industry.”*

**Lack of Community or Government Support:** A lack of adequate community and government support (32 mentions) was frequently cited, with concern around climate skepticism in the community and calls for more government intervention.

- *“So far, the primary barrier to addressing impacts from climate change has been the lack of county leadership on this issue.”*
- *“Climate denial and misinformation in general are the biggest threats we have in my view.”*

**Climate Skepticism and Distrust in Government:** As previously noted, a subset of respondents (16 mentions) expressed skepticism or denial of climate change, questioning its validity or framing it as politically motivated. 18 responses reflected distrust of government policies, with concerns about overreach, inefficiency, or burdensome regulations.

- *“There are no barriers. Climate Change is a farce.”*

- *“The only challenge we have with climate change is that the government, both local and federal, makes mandates that are pointless and simply stand to be a drain on the citizens of this country.”*

**Health and Aging:** Health-related barriers (13 mentions) such as asthma and challenges associated with aging and mobility (12 mentions) were highlighted.

- *“Challenges for me are my advancing age and the slow downs that come with that and the fact I have a rare disease limiting me.”*

**No barriers:** 32 respondents reported facing no barriers at all.

- *“I have not had any challenges or barriers due to climate change.”*

To capture the key themes from question 8, responses were coded into 12 categories that captured the majority of themes. Each open-ended response was assigned to one or more categories, as applicable. The following table reflects the major themes and their instances in response to question 8:

Q8	Instances
Financial	97
Housing/Property Risks and Limitations	71
Emergency Preparedness and Safety	36
Lack of Community or Government Support	32
No barriers	32
Infrastructure Limitations	31
Natural Resource and Environmental Management	21
Government Distrust	18
Climate Skepticism	16
Miscellaneous/Other	16
Health	13
Aging and Mobility Issues	12

**Q9: What specific actions or changes do you think would most help Skagit County reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to climate change impacts?**

Answered: 378 Skipped: 274

The following are themes and examples quotes from the 378 responses:

**Transportation and Transit Improvements:** The most frequently mentioned actions (140 responses) included expanding public transit, improving bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and providing electric vehicle (EV) incentives to reduce emissions from transportation.

- *“Expand and encourage public transportation, EV conversion of ALL county vehicles, and construction of SAFE bicycle lanes from high density residential areas to city centers. Provide bicycle racks, lockers or other secure areas in specific destinations (libraries, Big Box Stores, Municipal Buildings) to encourage bicycling by county residents.”*

**Land Use and Zoning:** 78 respondents advocated for land use and zoning changes, such as prioritizing dense, mixed-use, transit-oriented development and preserving natural areas and farmlands to minimize emissions and protect ecosystems.

- *“More compact development in cities supported by stronger bike/ped networks and public transit; less development in rural areas subject to floods, wildlife, etc.”*

**Renewable Energy and Waste Infrastructure:** 73 responses suggested increasing solar, wind, and other renewable energy projects, as well as updating waste infrastructure to support emission reductions.

- *“In order for the County to reduce its GHG emissions, it should invest in the production of renewable energy in Skagit County”*

**Building Efficiency and Electrification:** 53 respondents encouraged improving energy efficiency in buildings and transitioning to electric appliances and systems.

- *“Retrofit buildings with electric heating and cooling. Stop allowing new buildings to use fossil fuels for heating and cooling and promote solar on large energy users.”*

**Agriculture and Forestry Practices:** 56 responses focused on sustainable farming, forestry practices, and carbon sequestration initiatives to reduce emissions and promote resilience.

- *“Focus on supporting farmers to be resilient in the face of a changing climate - building soil organic matter, reducing run off, diversifying operations, research for best practices, etc.”*

**Education and Public Awareness:** 37 respondents emphasized the need for community education on climate action and its importance in addressing emissions and resilience.

- *“Educate the public about the realities of how climate change affects us locally - droughts, more coverage of wildfires and smoke.”*

**Emergency Preparedness and Resilience Planning:** 34 responses highlighted the importance of preparing for natural disasters and building resilience to climate hazards.

- *“I think the best course of action is for our County's Emergency System (Fire, Ambulance, Hospital/Medical, Police) Departments to be as fully trained and ready as possible for any and all catastrophic events, so they need to be adequately funded. I also am a firm believer in neighbor helping neighbor so it would behoove this County to encourage folks, who are willing, to volunteer to receive training in emergency response should the need ever arise for their assistance.”*

**Regulating Industry:** 23 respondents suggested regulating or closing refineries and other polluting corporations to reduce industrial emissions.

- *“Shut down the refinery.”*

**Distrust and Skepticism:** As previously noted, some respondents criticized government overreach and inefficiency (30 mentions). 19 respondents expressed doubt about climate change or its human causes. On occasion, these sentiments were voiced together.

- *“Hopefully common sense will prevent the waste of taxpayer’s money being spent on “green” agenda items that ultimately accomplish nothing beneficial.”*

To capture the key themes from question 9, responses were coded into 12 categories that captured the majority of themes. Each open-ended response was assigned to one or more categories, as applicable. The following table reflects the major themes and their instances in response to question 9:

Q9	Instances
Transportation and Transit Improvements	140
Land Use and Zoning	78
Renewable Energy and Waste Infrastructure	73
Agriculture and Forestry Practices	56
Building Efficiency and Electrification	53
Education and Public Awareness	37
Miscellaneous/Other	37
Emergency Preparedness and Resilience Planning	34
Government Distrust or Desire to Limit	30
Regulate Industry	23
Climate Skepticism	19
Equity and Inclusion	3

**Q10: Is there anything else you would like us to consider for the development of the Climate Element as part of Skagit County’s Comprehensive Plan update?**

Answered: 302 Skipped: 350

The following are themes and examples quotes from the 302 responses:

**Land Use and Zoning:** 50 mentions emphasized concerns about farmland preservation, urban planning, and limiting development in sensitive areas.

- *“Focus on sustainable development and growth, with an emphasis on high density building strategies in urban areas and high traffic corridors and medium to lower density the further you are from those areas.”*

**Urgency and Action:** 38 mentions called for immediate action and acknowledgment of the climate crisis as a pressing issue.

- *“Act fast. Not every solution will be right. But lack of action is an action and it is likely to be deadly. Perfect is the enemy of good here. We need to take good actions quickly.”*

**Economic Concerns:** 32 mentions raised concerns about costs, affordability, and potential economic impacts of proposed actions.

- *“All of this is expensive. We need to develop accounting systems that measure upstream and downstream costs and ensure that unintended actions and decisions are paid for by the polluters.”*

**Renewable Energy and Waste Infrastructure:** 32 mentions suggested increasing renewable energy such as solar and wind, and improving waste infrastructure to reduce emissions.

- *“Focus on renewable energy and allowing wind and solar farms.”*
- *“Assist and incentivize consumers to recycle and reuse.”*

**Community Involvement and Education:** 26 mentions suggested greater collaboration with local residents or organizations and enhancing public education efforts.

- *“Get more people informed and involved.”*

**Transportation and Transit Improvements:** 22 mentions included suggestions to reduce vehicle emissions, improve public transit, and expand alternative transportation options like cycling and walking.

- *“Increase bus routes and increase incentives (including low or no cost service) to reduce single occupancy vehicle use.”*

**Addressing Climate Impacts:** 16 mentions highlighted specific impacts, like flooding and sea level rise, as critical considerations for resilience planning.

- *“Identify areas where retreat from relative sea level rise may be the most cost effective approach and plan accordingly for those areas.”*

**Agriculture and Forestry Practices:** 11 mentions focused on sustainable farming and forestry practices to reduce emissions and promote resilience.

- *“Please please please take care of our forests. They deserve it. They are the means of our survival.”*

**Increase or Enforce Government Regulations:** 12 mentions called for better enforcement of current regulations and suggested increasing government regulations and resources.

- *“Enforce building codes. Don’t allow exceptions.”*

**Distrust and Skepticism:** Some respondents criticized government overreach and inefficiency, and voiced concerns about spending taxpayers’ money (38 mentions). 16 respondents reflected



skepticism about climate change, ranging from doubts about its severity to views that it is politically motivated.

- *“Stop looking for ways to spend taxpayer money. Look for ways to save taxpayers money.”*
- *“Look into the possibility that the whole climate change agenda is political and a power grab.”*

**Scientific Basis:** 6 mentions urged grounding decisions in science and called for a broader review of data sources.

- *“Consider all sources of scientific knowledge on the topic of climate.”*

**Equity and Inclusion:** 6 mentions emphasized ensuring that climate actions address the needs of frontline communities and Tribes.

- *“Center the needs and voices of those furthest from climate justice and those most impacted by climate change - farmworkers, immigrants & refugees, people of color, people living in poverty.”*

In order to capture the key themes from question 10, responses were coded into 14 categories that captured the majority of themes. Each open-ended response was assigned to one or more categories, as applicable. The following table reflects the major themes and their instances in response to question 10:

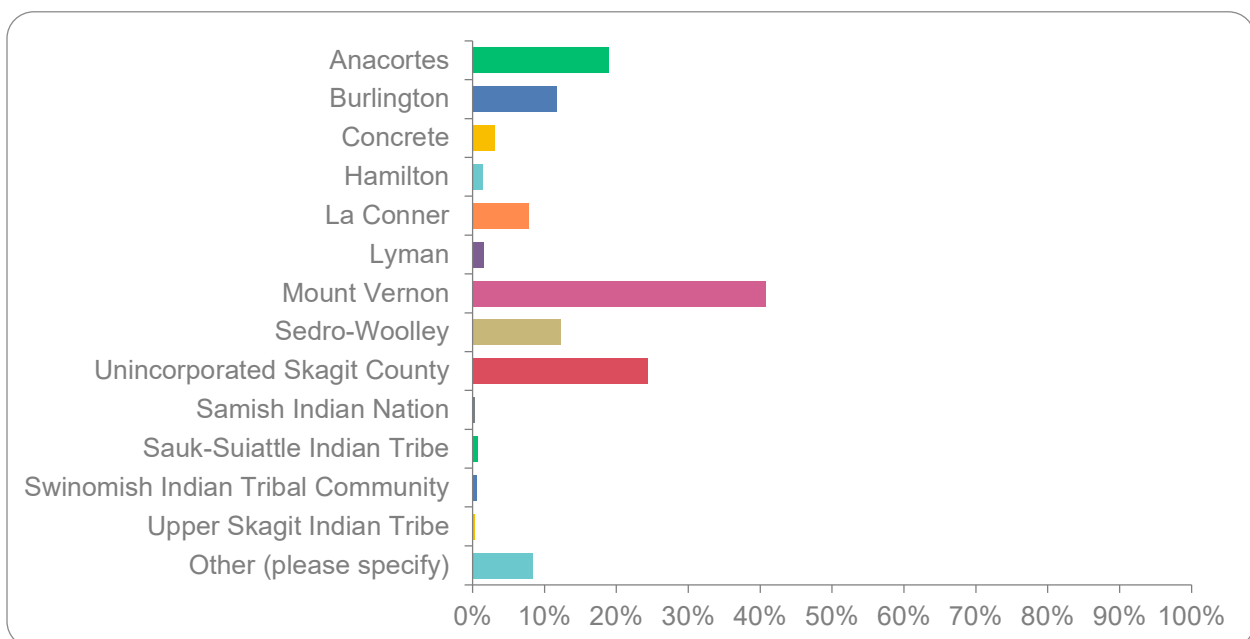
Q10	Instances
Land Use and Zoning	50
Government Distrust or Desire to Limit	38
Climate Urgency and Action	38
Miscellaneous/Other	33
Economic Concerns	32
Renewable Energy and Waste Infrastructure	32
Community Involvement and Education	26
Transportation and Transit Improvements	22
Climate Skepticism	16
Addressing Climate Impacts	16
Increase/Enforce Gov. Regulations and Resources	12
Agriculture and Forestry Practices	11
Scientific Basis	6

## Connection to Skagit County and Demographic Survey Responses

### Q11: Please tell us where you live or work in Skagit County and/or provide your Tribal affiliation. (Select all that apply)

Answered: 576 Skipped: 76

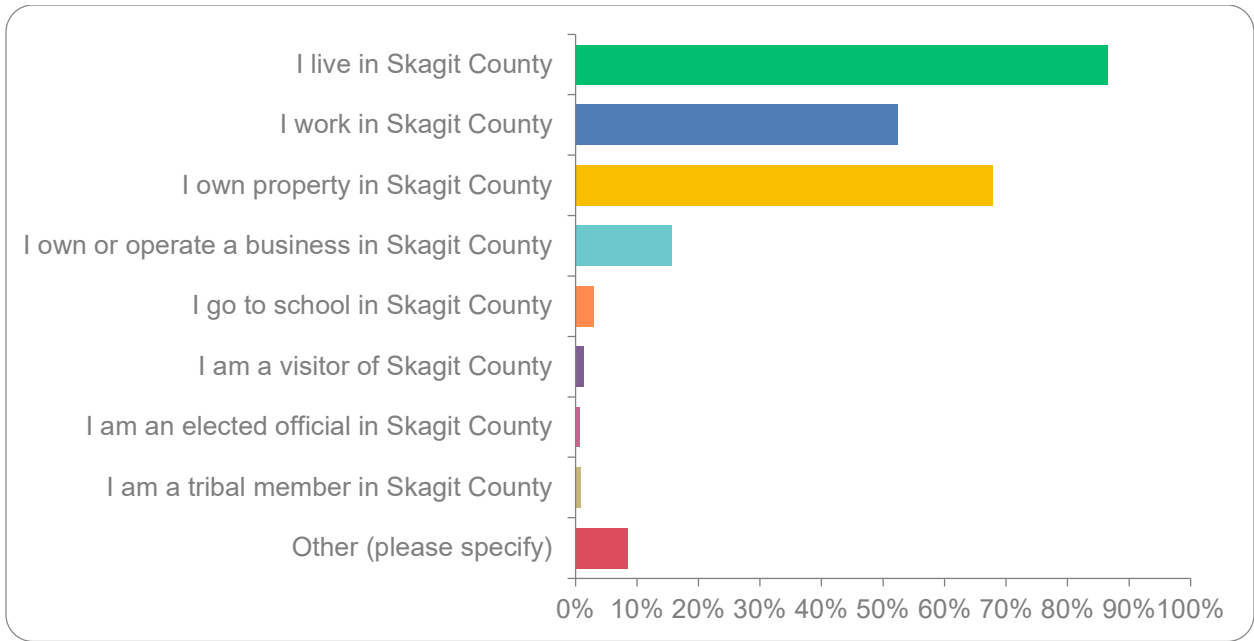
A significant portion of respondents (40.80%) report living in Mount Vernon. Following Mount Vernon, 24.31% of respondents report living in unincorporated Skagit County.



### Q12: Which of the following best defines your role in your community? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 576 Skipped: 76

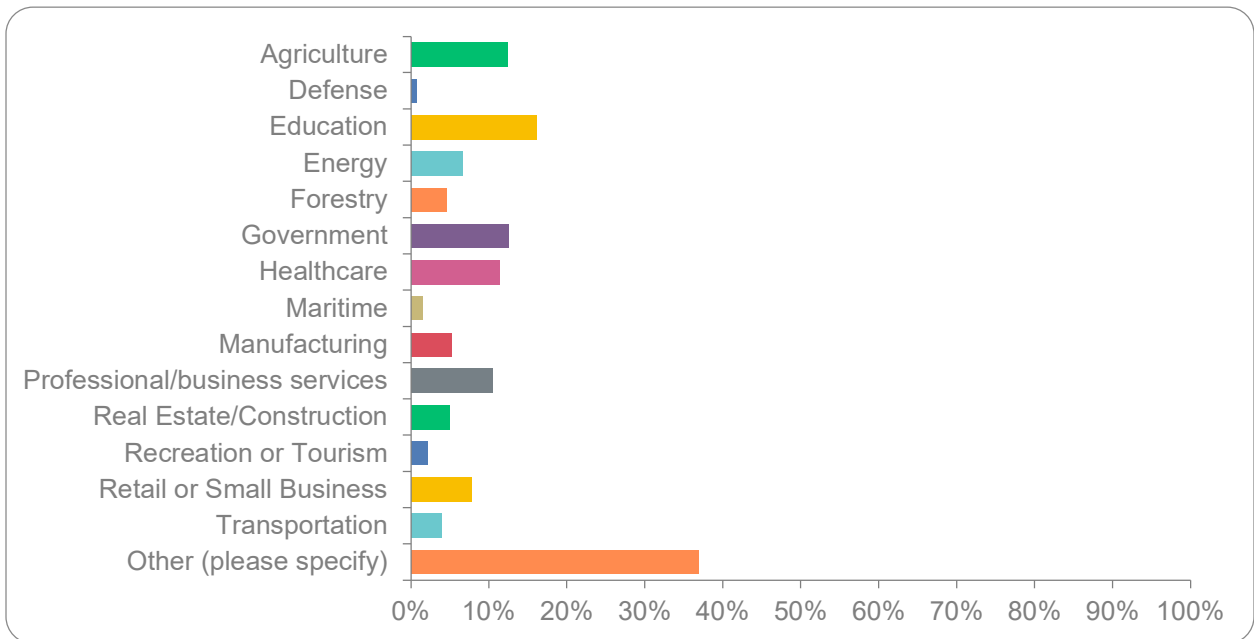
The majority of respondents live (86.63%) work (52.43%), and own property (67.88%) in Skagit County.



**Q13: What industry do you work in? (Select all that apply)**

Answered: 542 Skipped: 110

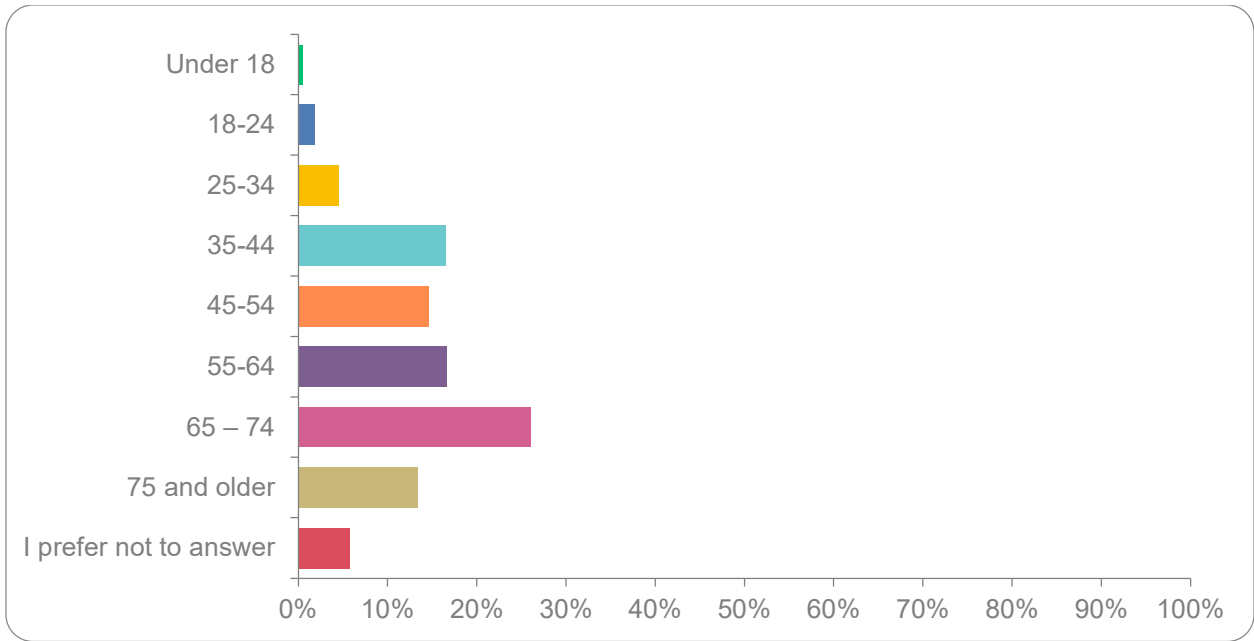
The industry with the highest percentage was other (36.9%), followed by education (16.05%). Individuals who marked other report working in fields like journalism and nonprofit. 17.8% of respondents reported being retired.



**Q14: What is your age?**

Answered: 575 Skipped: 77

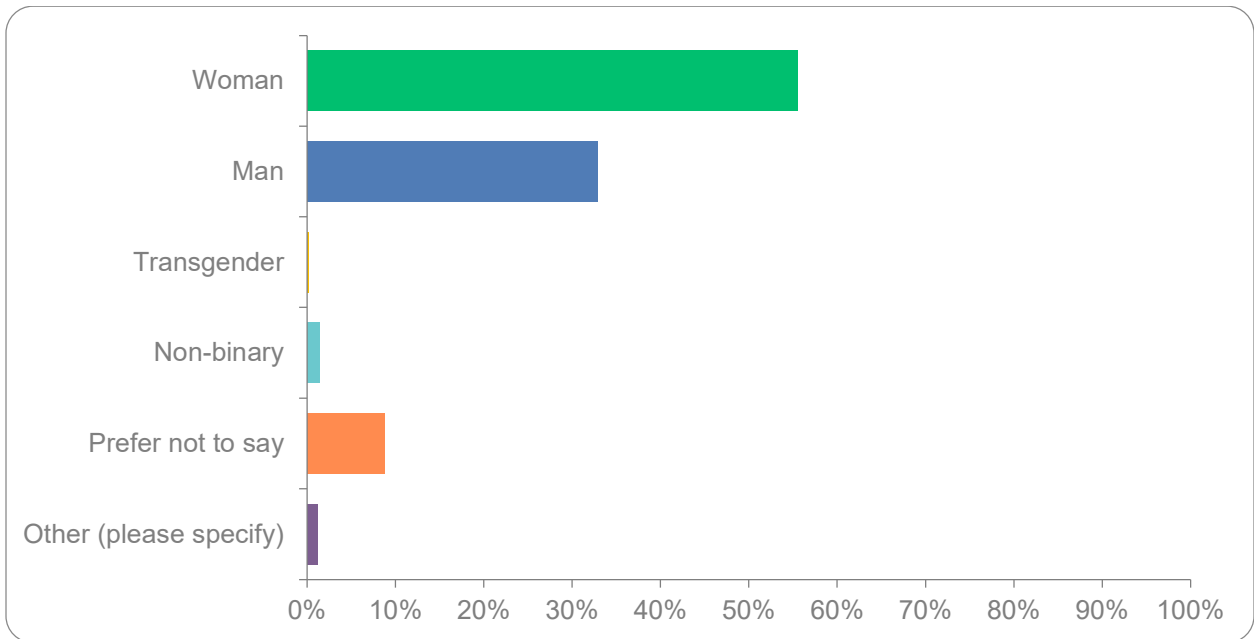
The majority of respondents were 55 years and older (56.18%).



**Q15: What is your gender?**

Answered: 569 Skipped: 83

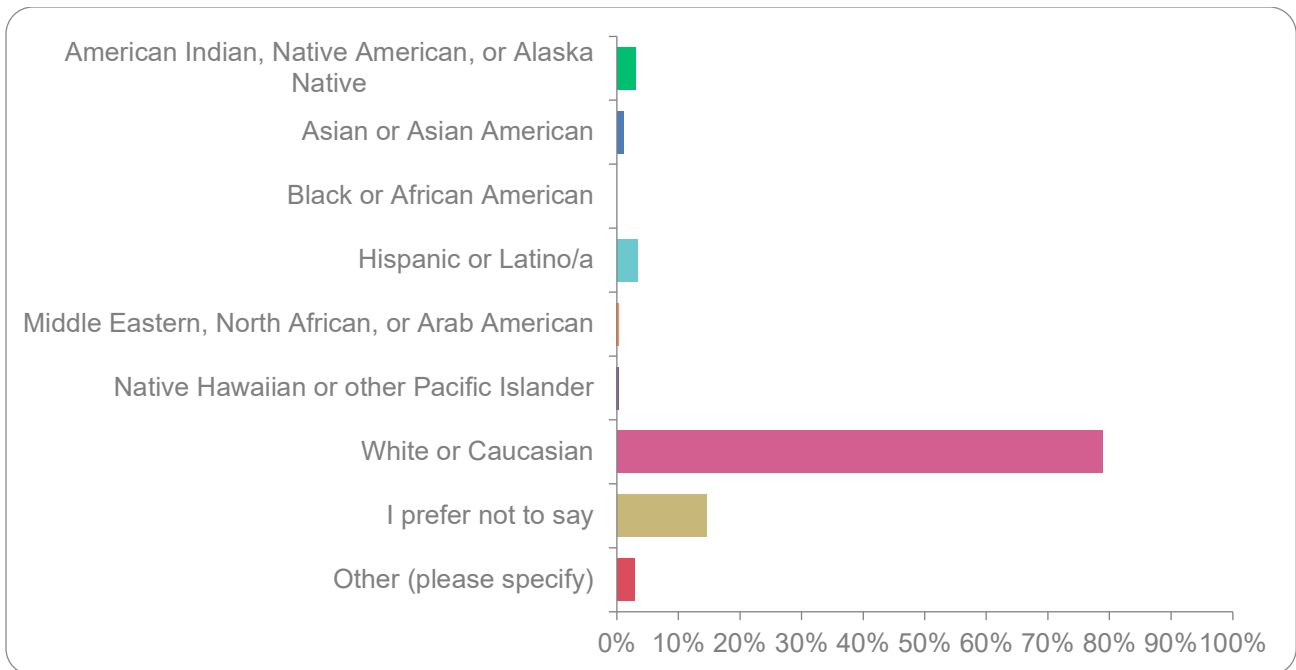
A slight majority of respondents identified as women (55.54%).



**Q16: What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)**

Answered: 567 Skipped: 85

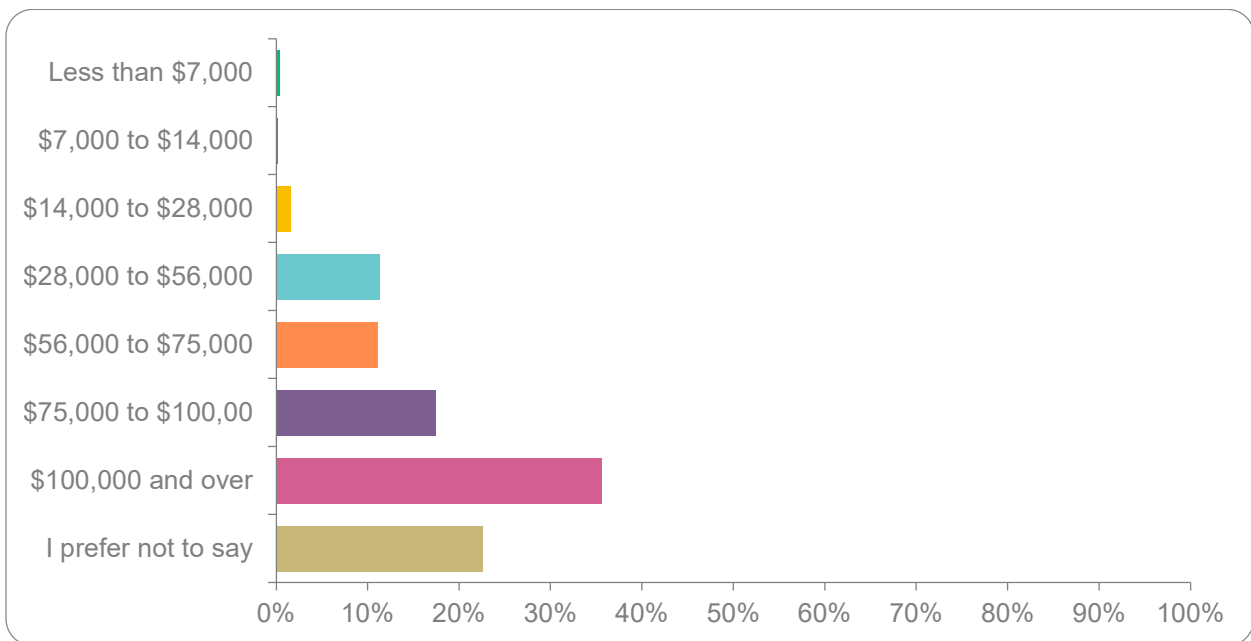
A majority of respondents identified as white or caucasian (78.84%).



**Q17: What is your approximate household income?**

Answered: 568 Skipped: 84

A majority of respondents report a household income of \$75,000 or more per year (52.99%).



**Q18: What is your highest level of education?**

Answered: 573 Skipped: 79

A strong majority (67.89%) report having a 4 year or advanced degree.

