

FUTURE OF THE WELLS COLLEGE CAMPUS: COMMUNITY INPUT SURVEY REPORT

Introduction

The Village of Aurora is exploring potential amendments to both its Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Law to address the gap left in the community following the closure of Wells College. The Wells College campus represents a significant portion of land and historic resources within the Village, and its future use has important implications for community character, economic activity, housing, and environmental stewardship.

As part of the planning process, the Village has undertaken several forms of community engagement to gather public input and better understand local priorities. One key component of this effort was the development and distribution of a community survey designed to obtain feedback from residents and other stakeholders.

This report summarizes the results of the “Future of the Wells College Campus: Community Input Survey.” The survey, conducted at the request of the Village of Aurora, reflects the perspectives of Village residents and nearby stakeholders regarding the potential future of the campus. The insights gathered through this process will help inform future planning discussions and guide potential amendments to the Village’s Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Law.

Methodology

The Village of Aurora, in partnership with the Cayuga County Department of Planning and Economic Development, developed and deployed a public survey to gather community input on key topics related to the future of the Wells College campus. Survey questions focused on topics such as preferred land use types, potential development benefits and concerns, infrastructure considerations, and protection of natural and environmental resources.

The survey was designed to be accessible and widely available in order to encourage participation from a broad cross-section of the community. The following sections summarize the methodology used to distribute the survey and collect responses.

Survey Distribution

The survey was distributed through a variety of outreach channels to maximize awareness and participation. These channels included Village departments, the Village office, community hubs, local social media platforms, working-group member networks, and in-person outreach efforts. This multi-channel approach was intended to reach residents and stakeholders through both digital and physical methods.

Survey Accessibility

To ensure broad accessibility, the survey was made available in both digital and paper formats. The online version was accessible via mobile and desktop devices, while paper copies were made available at the Village Office for individuals who may not have reliable internet access.

Target Audience

The survey was open to all residents of the Village of Aurora as well as nearby stakeholders who may be impacted by future decisions regarding the Wells College campus. The goal was

to capture a range of perspectives from individuals with varying connections to the Village and its future.

Timeline

The “Future of Wells College Campus: Community Input Survey” was open for responses from February 6, 2026 through February 27, 2026.

Response Management

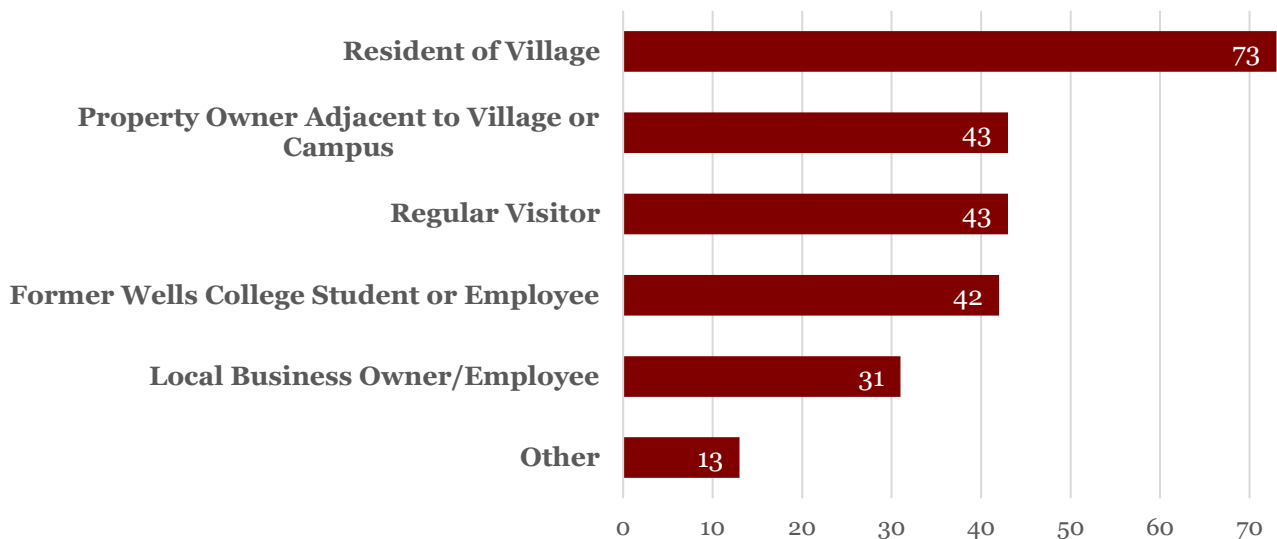
Survey responses were collected anonymously to encourage honest and candid feedback. Responses were compiled and analyzed to identify trends, areas of consensus, and key community concerns. Quantitative responses were summarized using percentages and graphical representations, while open-ended responses were reviewed to identify common themes.

As with most voluntary surveys, the results represent the perspectives of those who chose to participate and may not reflect the views of all Village residents or stakeholders.

Findings

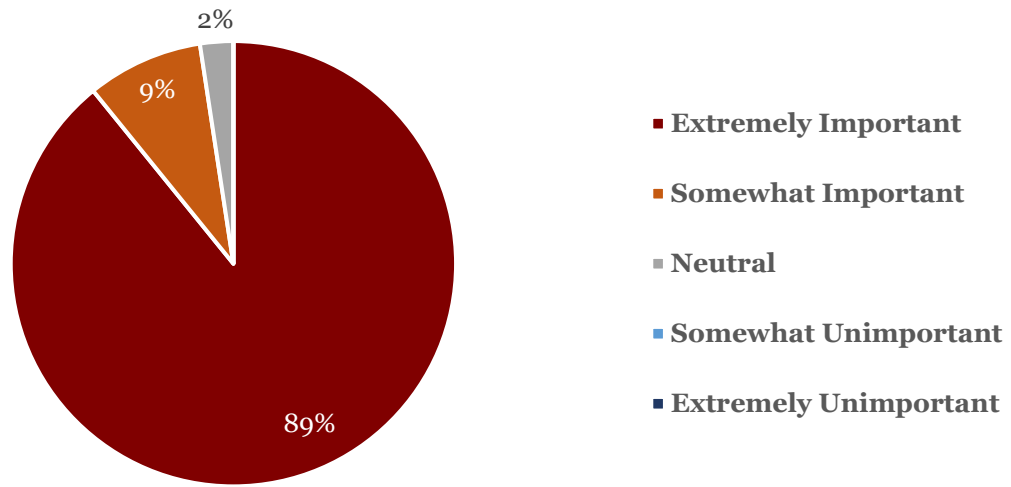
A total of 167 responses were received for the “Future of the Wells College Campus: Community Input Survey.” The data collected is summarized below and presented through charts, graphs, and other visual summaries to clearly illustrate key findings and trends identified through the responses. All responses included in this report are shown exactly as submitted, without any edits or alterations.

1-Which best describes your relationship with the Village of Aurora? (select all that apply)

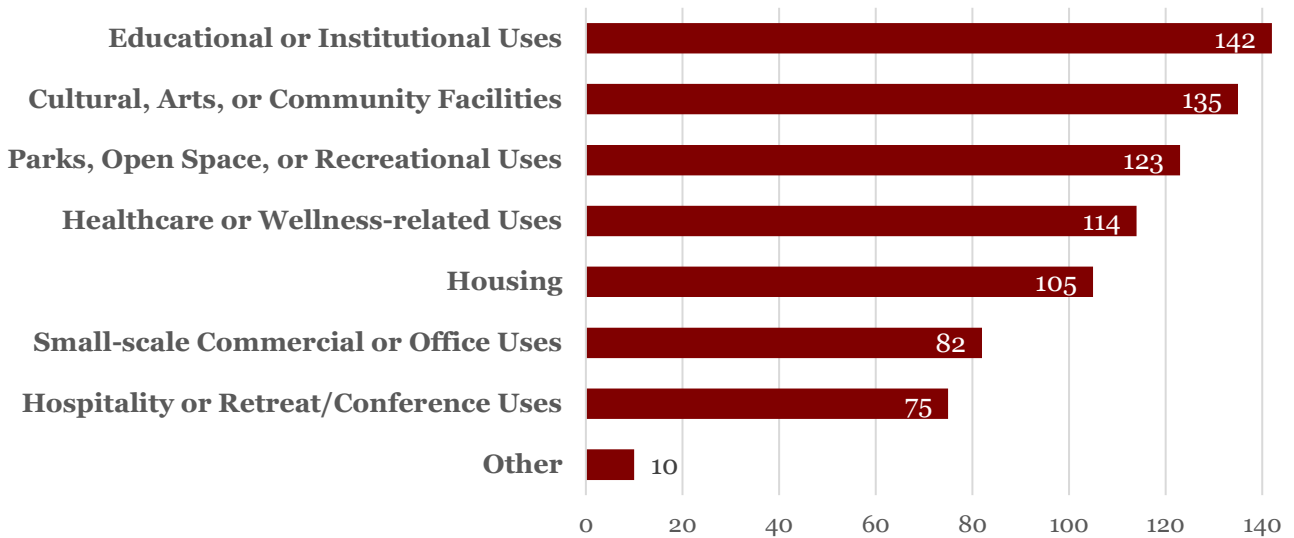


Other Responses:	
Seasonal/Summer Home	3
Former resident of Aurora	3
Resident of Southern Cayuga	2
Serve w/ the Fire District	1
Active bid for the campus	1
Property owner in village	1
Aurora Farmers Market Management Team	1
Interested friend, former 20 year resident of the Finger Lakes	1

2-How important is the reuse or redevelopment of the former Wells College campus to the future of the Village of Aurora?

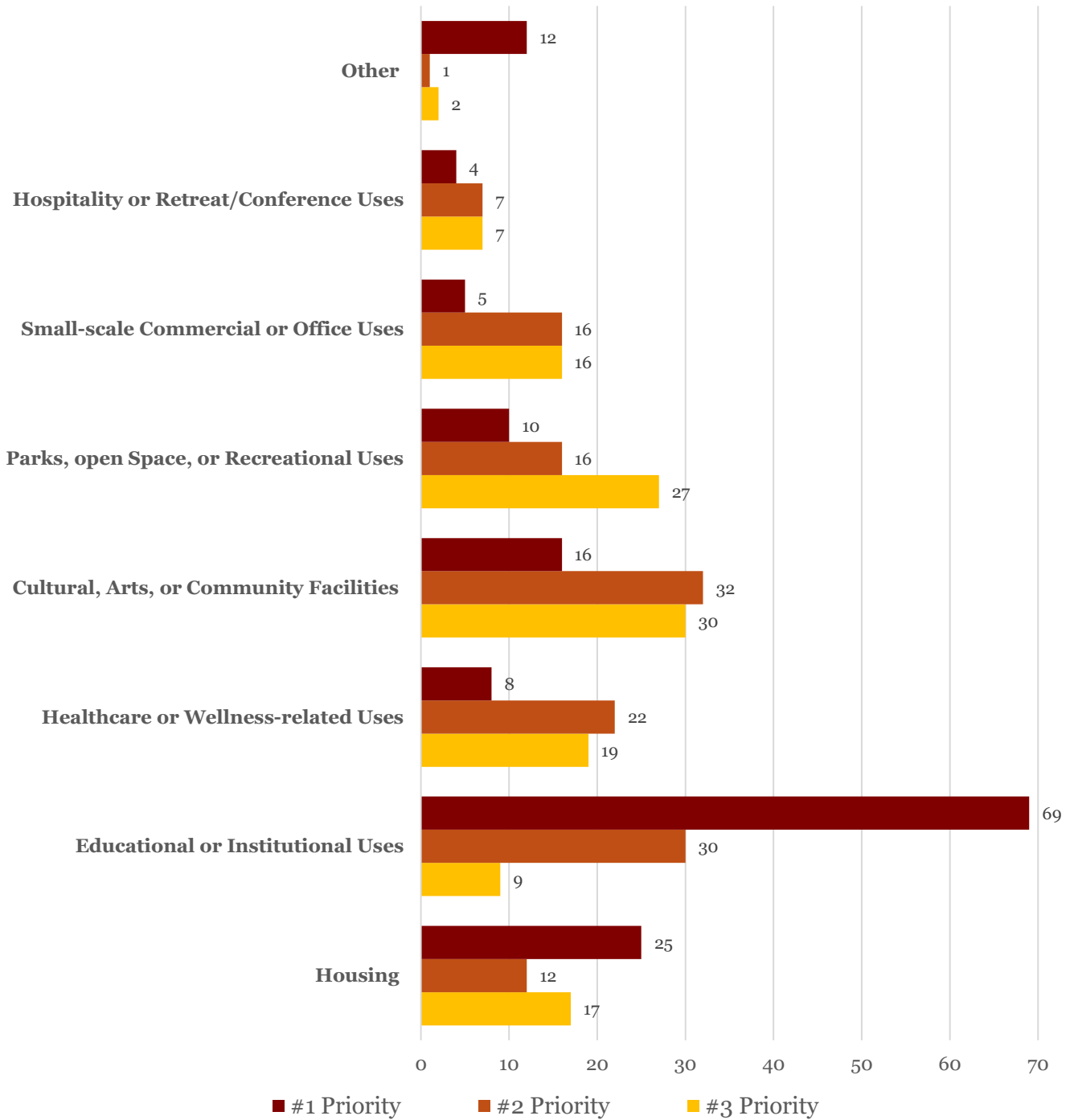


3-What types of uses would you most like to see considered for the former Wells College campus? (select all that apply)

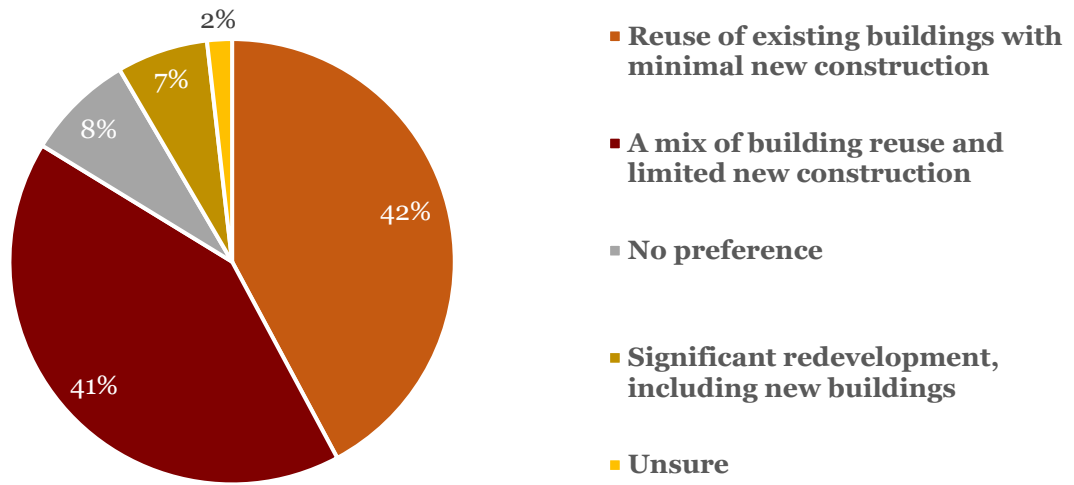


Other Responses:	
Senior Housing	2
Aurora Farmers Market, Community Fitness facilities	1
Boat House access to Lake and Lawn	1
I would like to see the grounds and buildings maintained and not allowed to be neglected by the new owners.	1
Basketball court, gym, swimming pool access for community members	1
Preservation of environmentally-sensitive areas	1
Technology school	1
Peachtown School	1
I think a small scale, local community conference would be benefical, especially if the commercial space is built out enough. I assume Pleasents first right of refusal is void since the agreement was with Wells, either way I think she would waste the space and when the inns inevitably go under we would be best to diversify our businesses in the area.	1

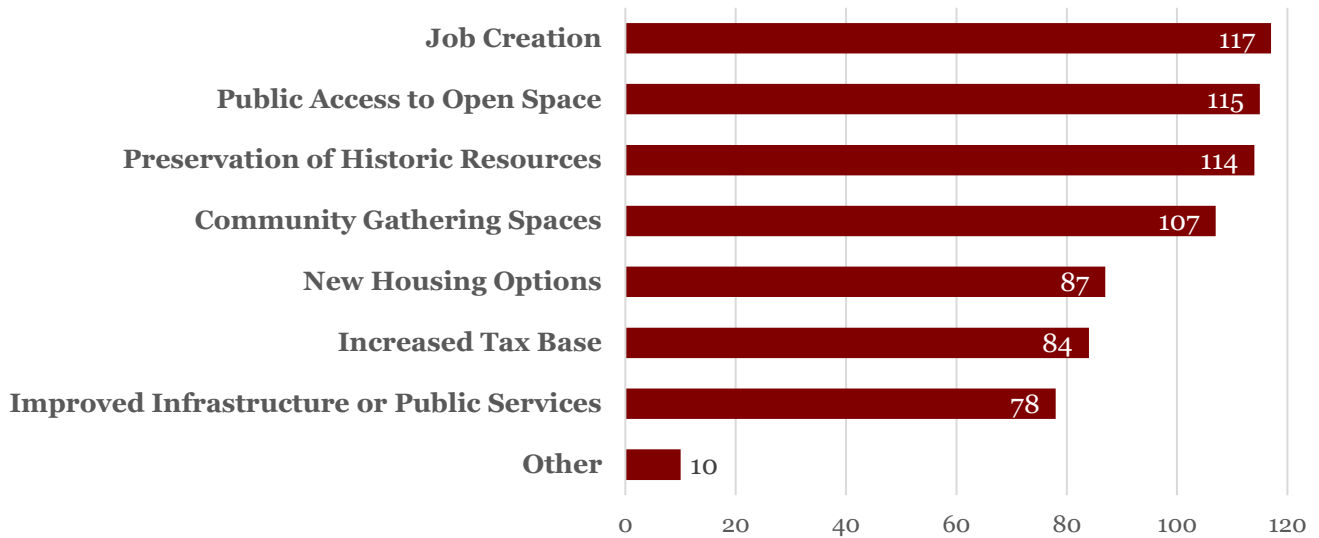
4-Based on the options listed in question #3, please select your top 3 preferred uses for the former campus, and list them below in order of priority for the community. (1=highest priority)



5-Which statement best reflects your preference for future development on the campus?



6-What benefits would you most like future development of the campus to provide to the community? (select all that apply)



Other Responses:	
Increased tourism, new restaurants and shopping	1
Aurora Farmers Market back to Boathouse	1
Summer Farmers Market	1
Childcare facility	1
Places to stay that aren't \$1k/night	1
Preservation of Wells' history; alumnae access for reunions, continued ed; alum association business and events. Also to keep vulture developers away and safeguard Aurora's unique character.	1
The Athletic Hall open to the public	1
Something to encourage young families to move to the area	1
Preservation of environmentally sensitive areas	1
should allow public music in boat house lot & farmers market! in lot!	1

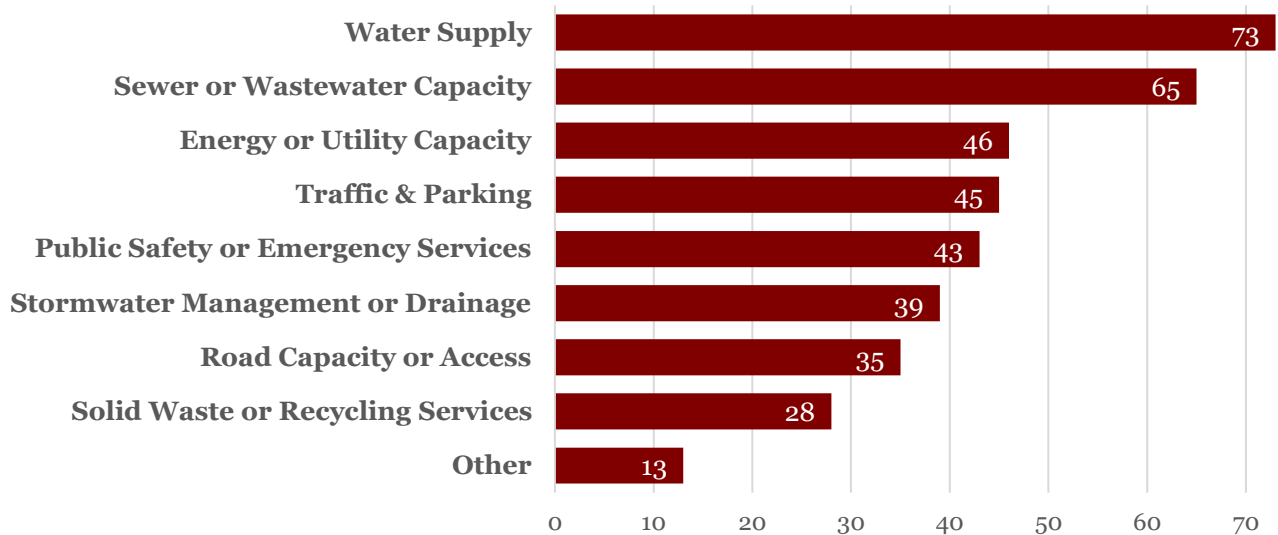
7-Are there any types of development or impacts you would NOT like to see on the former Wells College campus?

Key Themes Identified



Themes were identified through thematic analysis of open-ended responses. Individual responses may reference multiple themes.

8-What concerns, if any, do you have about how future development of the campus could affect Village infrastructure and utilities? (select all that apply)

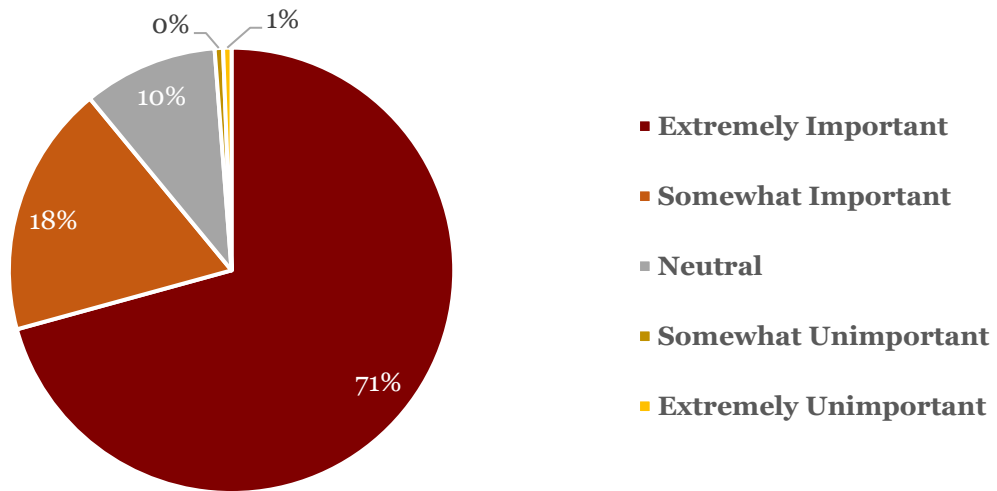


Other Responses:

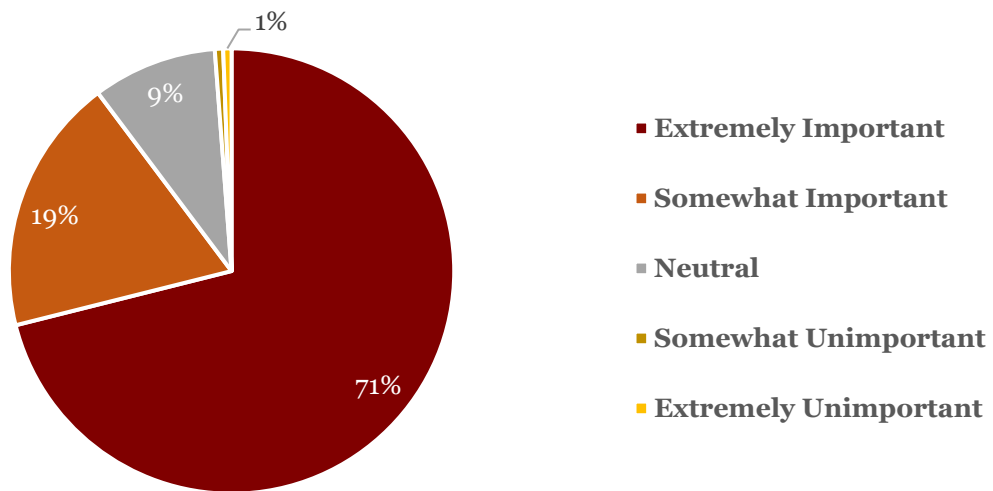
Decline in the village. Don't want it to look like all the other small towns in upstate New York that are full of empty homes and businesses. Need something that keeps the aurora inn successful	1
Shoreline access, historic preservation, beautification	1
Erosion of Village character	1
Energy capacity would only be a concern if it relates to my question 7 answer.	1
Noise and light pollution would be a concern.	1
Worst case is disuse of the campus	1
All of the above must be taken into consideration and can be effectively planned for and should not be seen as road blocks for development	1
Lack of access and loss of health services and Peachtown Elementary	1

need redevelopment to maintain and increase usage of utilities so we don't lose them	1
has already got one good big lot at & near dorm. parking already there. traffic no problem used to be a colonge.	1
renovations state gov should help! department of architecture. Super + -local preservation. Preservation!	1
loss of public access to lakefront	1
All of these will have to be addressed- its manageable	1
Access to Restaurant at the Golf Course	1

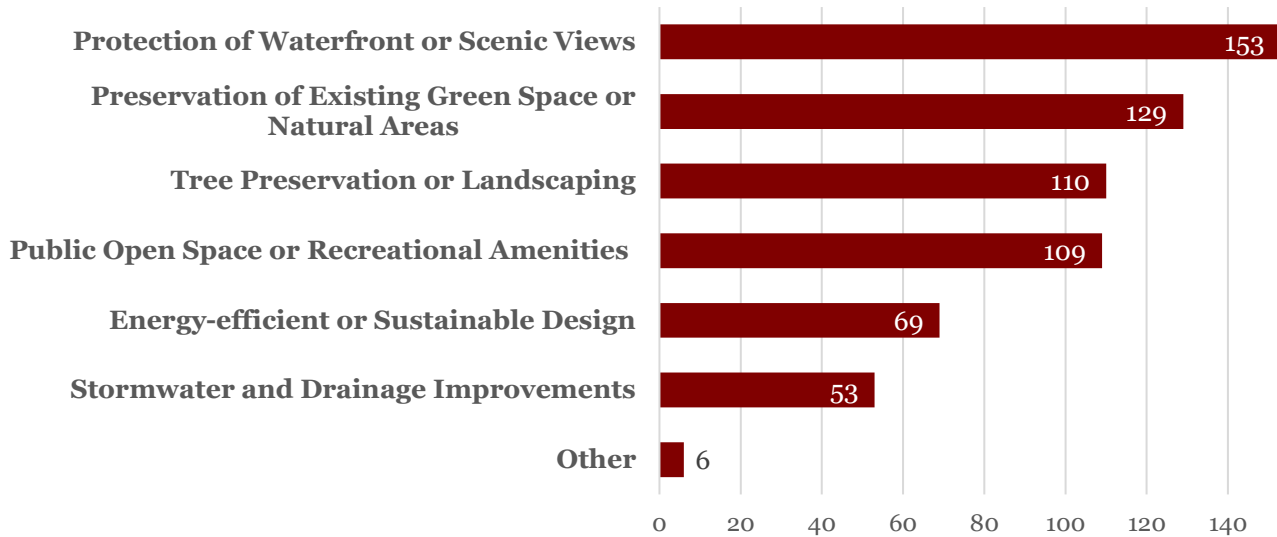
9-How important is pedestrian access and connectivity as part of future redevelopment of the former Wells College campus?



10-How important is it that future uses on the former Wells College campus include facilities or spaces that are open and accessible to the public?



11-Which environmental or open space features should be protected or emphasized as part of future redevelopment? (select all that apply)

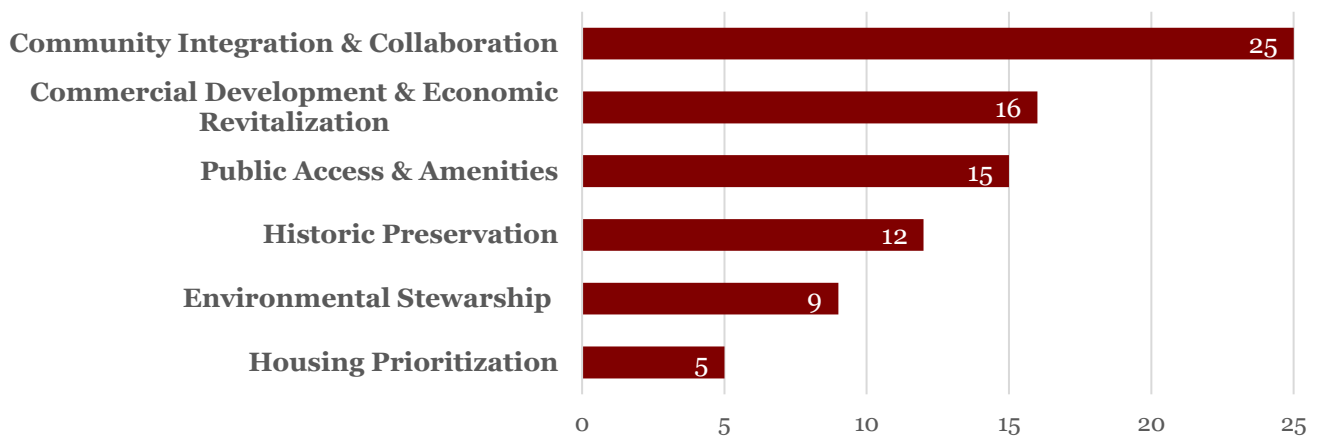


Other Responses:

Boathouse and dock preservation and access to lake for swim program and Aurora farmers market	1
front lawn, sycamore tree	1
Resident of Southern Cayuga	1
Of course, all of the above are an important aspect of careful planning	1
Note: Trees and landscaping are not the same; open space and \"recreation amenities\" are not the same; \"green space\" and natural areas are not the same.	1
of village- not campus	1
spiritual. Native Place! instution!	1

12-Please share any additional thoughts, ideas, or concerns regarding the future of the former Wells College campus.

Key Themes Identified



Themes were identified through thematic analysis of open-ended responses. Individual responses may reference multiple themes.

Maintaining a strong connection between the campus, residents, and business owners should be a priority.

do not want to see the property carved up and expensive homes built on the campus or waterfront. the new owner needs to pay their share of the water and infrastructure costs of the village so that the small homeowners are not saddled with it. Would like to see parks developed with the boat house and water front area for the community.

The Village of Aurora has a chance now to reinvent itself and move forward. Holding onto a former vision of Aurora is not sustainable; time to think new ideas to build something completely different from the "old" Aurora.

Future ownership of the Wells campus should be with the understanding that the campus is integrated into the village community and that they have shared and supported interests (ie medical facility, athletic facility, arts, recreation, open/shared community spaces). The Inns of Aurora operates as a separate, non-inclusive entity. That is their right however I would strongly oppose a second owner that operates like the Inns

Best wishes!

Create a viable area that is financially successful

With out some mega rich person with crazy ambition I see this being a hodgepodge project so being discerning in what can and can't move into the space is important. The Village needs to weight the pros and cons of potential residents when issuing liceneses.

I love this campus and hope it remains and educational facility that adds jobs to the community

We want the best for the Village of Aurora — especially locals who make Aurora an amazing and welcoming community. We place our trust in the Village Board and local community to work with whomever purchases the campus to forge a positive future for the Village and Cayuga County. We can do it! Thank you for your service.

I've been a local resident for over 40 years. The village of Aurora & the very existence of the Wells College campus are near & dear to me. My greatest concerns is that all the T's are crossed & the I's are dotted when finalizing the agreement, and not set aside with eyes on the final big number. Needed will be so many concerns starting with the commitment to upkeep the campus with both constant building rehabilitation and grounds as so previously well cared for. If construction work is performed, it should & will be presented for approval to the village with the original plan always kept in mind. Tons of stone, concrete & dump trucks littering & possible destroying the village roads and timely clean up should be considered. Regarding the campus, I understand that a steady income from outside business's making their home on campus is a plus. I'm hoping that this new thought process will be a plus for a new trend in local storefront for local & tourist shopping alike. I could go on & on but I'm sure there will be many other concerns from participants. One last request if at all possible. Allow the already established and very well loved WELLS GOLF COURSE and restaurant to post a nicely designed sign so that interested travelers to our beautiful Aurora can easily find their destination!!! OR. Let's do the best we can for two local small business's by opening up the entrance off of Fry Road for their own entry to play golf and enjoy an awesome meal.

The campus is very versatile and could certainly be used for a variety of coexisting purposes. I loved having access to the Swartz Athletic Center to swim, workout & play pickleball. The Med center is a must. I would love to see the art & music buildings and theaters put up. Good use as well.

From my responses it has to be clear that I have been closely related to Wells College over the years (employee for 11 years) and to the Aurora Farmers Market, which operates in the summer. It has done so for 10 years, and the managers and vendors would like for the market to continue. The Aurora Village Board and Staff have been extremely generous in helping us to continue after the closing of the College. The market is scheduled to continue in the Village lot behind the Firehouse during the summer of 2026. However, as we are seeking vendors for 2026, people ask regularly whether the market will ever reopen on the lake. The lake setting gives the Aurora Farmers Market a unique characteristic. I believe I speak for a number of residents, vendors, and customers who would like to continue in that setting. I know this is a generalized survey; however, this specific item has come up over and over again, and I wanted to mention it. Having been involved in several major developmental plans for small colleges in my career over the years, I think successful results for big projects may result when small requests are fulfilled. Thank you.

The north end of town has been privatized. The new development should be entirely for the benefit of the general public regardless of status. A general store and pharmacy architecturally consistent with historic

buildings would be a boon. Create separated pedestrian and bike access from the village, as added traffic would be polluting and unsafe.

I am very concerned that if the Indian nation purchases it we will lose a significant tax base. Please ensure this does not happen!! Oppose any tax exempt status purchasers !!

This is an exciting development for the village and for the area as a whole. Especially exciting is the new owners' interest in welcoming the community to the space and partnering with us as they are able to establish a working relationship. Of concern is the cost and responsibility of protecting the new institution from fire, and providing emergency medical needs. I would hope they will be supporting the fire/ambulance service.

I would love to see some form of childcare and recreation for the area

Very excited to see the space get a new life. Huge opportunity to make the space locally focused

Would like to see Cayuga County or other local government take over operation. Upgrade costs could be countered by using the buildings for commercial events such as Trade shows, Home shows, Food events, Wine tasting events, Fishing events, Winter sport shows, Boat shows, RV shows, etc. Use buildings for educational system training that may not be available elsewhere; Create a historical building/museum for earlier uses of the land in this area; Use buildings for DEC office (?) Charge Day-Use fees for use of a new park & tennis or pickleball courts. Bring people into Aurora for the beauty. Housing or full-time Commercial use of this property would create additional tax-based revenue but I believe would detract from the real value it gives to the village.

My concern has been in regards to the energy-sector background that Les Lo Baugh spent his career in and what that might mean for his long-term plans for this property. We've had a good, reassuring conversation, he mentioned being part of writing the Clean Water Act and caring when clean energy didn't equal dollar signs. However, with the trend of Cordelio Energy (owned by Canada Pension Plan) swindling landowners into leasing their property for 30 year terms in our area, Blackrock purchasing all AES Corp NYS solar projects, ORES being an opaque and unreachable entity while protecting massive corporations from abiding by environmental regulations, and talks of Terawulf's data center plans less than 10 miles down the water, ensuring that zoning for large scale energy-harnessing (unless it's powering the facilities) or anything to do with a data center is not possible for this scenario is crucial. I would love to see its continued use for education, better access for community members for recreation, and partnerships that align with the goals.

The most important thing for me is rehabbing the pool and athletic facilities to share with the community. I'd like to be able to walk/ski the campus again, see the grounds and buildings kept up well.

No more high end hotels or spa's. Too exclusive. That space should be accessible to everyone.

I would encourage the buyer to separate and sell unused or unnecessary parts of the campus in order to focus their efforts on what can be maintained with financial responsibility. The former campus was too expensive souly in upkeep for the college to manage, don't make the same mistake.

I love that Wells is going to have a future again!

It needs to be a group that has the money to maintain it, and who cares about it, not just tear it all down. Someone who cares enough to have public access, to the boat house and sycamore tree. A purpose that respects the environment, and respects what it was. People that will integrate with the community. Hopefully something that will bring people to the shops and restaurants.

I hope HIIK gets their act together to have a real, detailed, viable, and sustainable plan for a full college, and that they can do it without twisting and bending to try to fit in stupid developer plans.

To erase Wells is to erase a history that is inexplicable from the Village's history. No entity that seeks to do that should gain control of the campus.

excited and hopeful about Hiawatha's plans

What the village lacks is a mix of small retail businesses. The Inns of Aurora have a stranglehold on the commercial space in the village due to the very limited commercial space in town. This really constrains the economic development of the village and puts it in peril if that business collapses. I hope it does not happen as there is great value added to the village by that business. However, redevelopment of the campus area focused on meaningful economic development would be service to the village and its residents. The campus is historic and reuse and preservation of many of the buildings and public access to open space is very important. Many historic downtown areas are able to preserve these elements and while also offering some commercial activity. The former college campus could be thought of as a mixed-use space like a "downtown". The co-existence of a village downtown and a "campus" business district are not mutually exclusive. Some economic development funding from the State of NY would help achieve this in a public-private partnership of some sort. We really need to find growth opportunities to ensure a future for the village. Although I really wish there was still a college in village, the state of higher education and small liberal arts colleges across the country today suggests those days have passed. So we must make the best of the situation for the good of the village. Some creative redevelopment could be a draw to entice people to the Village. This is a vexing problem and one that I know the Village is struggling with. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback. I appreciate all the hard work of the residents on the various boards and the hard work of the village employees to keep the village running.

The village should do whatever it takes to make the campus thrive and contribute to the community and finally pay some property taxes. We should do something soon to get the place up and running again. The Hiawatha project seems like a great opportunity

Limiting uses risks preventing economically viable options. Open mindedness and an acknowledgement that there will be changes to the campus that are needed for future viability is key.

This survey seems to focus on the former Wells campus. This time of planning can be a time to approach whole community needs and to heal historical divisions. Please ask some questions about strengths of all present and future people who will live here and ways in which we can encourage healthy relationships.

I am hopeful that HIIK will be a good steward for this historic and significant property

With the pending purchase of the College by the Hiawatha Institute, it is extremely important that the village and the buyer of the campus work together on a collaborative plan for the sustained success of the village and the Institution.

I wish the best outcomes for local residents, without raising their taxes on property.

It would be wonderful to have a complete plan of building use, so all buildings have a purpose and do not fall into further deterioration. Given our rural nature, the more access the community has for a variety of uses from commercial, to the athletic facilities, to the waterfront, to art/cultural experiences, even wedding/event/summer conferences would be ideal.

I encourage all those involved in decision-making related to possible changes in zoning to be flexible and open to change. While I understand the motivation to preserve the past, I hope that perspective will not impede positive growth and revitalization of our cherished village.

I would like to see the campus remain as original as possible.

With all the student housing already in place. I think a large share should be low income housing. There is a housing shortage from what I have read in the news. All the facilities are already in place. I wouldn't take millions of dollars to do it. The medical center is right on the campus. It would be a win for everybody

It is important that if the village community/extended community at large wants shared space and programming with whatever entity owns and operates the campus, that the community has (monetary contribution) skin in the game to help support and sustain the community's participation.

Please refer to the website www.minervaurora.org.

We cannot live in the past- It's a new era- it's time for a new vision.

Med ctr, Peachtown, and gym spaces are essential to our small communities.

We believe that a mixed used plan would be best for the Village. Something that includes an educational component (Hiawatha Institute or other satellite campus), the preservation of an undeveloped waterfront, community access to sports & performance space and capitalizes on the beautiful historic buildings on the campus. We would like to see more housing options in Aurora, additional retail and businesses that would create jobs. We believe that it is important to work with existing Village institutions such as the medical center, Peach Town School and Inns of Aurora.

I hope the guiding philosophy of the Village or any board it creates to review this topic will be that ANY use of the property, for any reasonable purpose, by an entity willing to risk their capital for such purpose, is better than no use at all. The Village should be an advocate for and a partner of any organization that can help transition the former Wells College property to its new use(s). The existing Village laws and zoning cannot be used to limit or restrict the evaluation of any potential or suggested use. Any discussion of the "character" of the Village must be weighed against the "character of half a village" (or in the worst case, the character of the defunct Village of Aurora) should the former Wells College infrastructure be allowed to deteriorate further.

There should be an emphasis on making Aurora more attractive to young families and permanent residents. More outdoor recreation, lake accessibility, local jobs or resources for remote workers, opportunities for socialization within the community, etc. Right now Aurora feels isolated, jobs are few and far between and the high median age of the community makes Aurora feel like it's on the verge of a never ending decline. It has so much potential that can be realized with the right framework.

Expressed above/ Add to tax base and water usage

The Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Law are both recent. They should still be valid expressions of public sentiment (the former) and its practical expression (the latter). The Zoning Law includes orderly mechanisms for making full use of Mixed Use Zoning and Variances to accommodate various uses with opportunities for public input. Several of these questions are either too indefinite ("housing": what kind?) or present different options as if they are equivalent (examples in #11). Simply compiling responses will not be as informative as desired. The new owner of the Wells Campus is not for residents to decide. It still looks as if it will be Hiawatha, an educational institution. Where residents can play a role is with commercial enterprises, and the Zoning Law allows for commercial uses in the Mixed-Use Zone and elsewhere by variance(s). The owner of an educational institution will likely seek as many commercial uses that can be listed as "auxiliary enterprises" as it can - just as Wells did and any other educational institution does. The former Wells houses will immediately be added to the tax base. So might other properties by subdivision of the campus, if that course is sought. In the above, "environmentally-sensitive areas" refer to those mapped in the Zoning Law by application of DEC requirements. Critical areas of the lakeshore are now a Scenic Landmark and listed in the same law. Remember: most residents are, by their own wish, mostly ignorant about the Zoning Law and that it already contains provisions for the priorities to which they contributed in the Comprehensive Plan.

Would love to see Wells College become the home of a prep. school. A second idea is a boutique type hotel to add more hotel rooms in the village for weddings and events at the inns. A more affordable option for some of the guests coming into town who cannot afford a room at the inn. Another casual restaurant and coffee shop in addition to the boutique hotel would be nice too with an exercise facility open to inn and hotel guests as well as the villagers of Aurora (for a fee)

This is probably not the correct forum but since the Hiawatha Institute is only planning to use 20% of the campus it would seem to make sense that they would combine forces with the group that wants to reinstitute a small liberal arts college. Even if that was the case, it is unlikely that the entire campus would be needed in which case it would be great to see a multi-use development which seems to be becoming more prevalent in various locations. I would envision some spaces being used for educational purposes such as classrooms and the library. Peachtown and the Medical Center would stay as they are. Reopen the fitness center and offer reasonably priced community memberships, as well as fitness classes and open swims. Relocate the village office to one of the unused buildings. Maintain the boathouse lawn as a park and open space. Renovate some of the unused dorms into senior housing- residents would have access to the medical center, meals at the dining hall, use of the fitness center, access to on campus lectures and activities, and could be encouraged to volunteer with Peachtown and the pre-school. Offer space for small independent local business including a coffee shop. Provide access to sports facilities to local schools and groups. Open the campus to walkers and use of facilities by community members. As a village we are somewhat isolated and lacking amenities but a creative use of the campus could be a win-win for the new school and the village residents and visitors. But my concern is that the village tends to quash innovative ideas instead of supporting them. I would prefer that the Inns of Aurora not be involved – they already own most of the village and virtually nothing they do is in the interest of the residents and while I want them to be successful, I don't think they need to take over any more of the properties. I would completely oppose turning over the property on campus for a large-scale residential development of large "McMansions" or for a casino.

I believe the space should be preserved as much as possible but also offer things that would generate income for the community and not take away from it. The main issue should be catering to the existing community while generating a sizable income to keep the community afloat and allowing it to thrive

village needs to be a partner not the opposition

Get here done!!

should keep the historical buildings and have the college dock open to the public

Education is important, used and the place kept up. Recreation too. Housing for faculty and staff.

When it comes down to it, the Residents will not have as much control on whoever uses the campus. The investors will make the major decisions.

NO SOLAR FIELDS! NO WIND TURBINES!

Preserve historical buildings. Keep the "feel" of the atmosphere i.e. - no neon or McDonalds. No traffic lights.

Access to the lakefront is important and the availability of the health center.

My thoughts are of only one family, mine, I hope it helps. It would be sad to see this beautiful community get ruined because of financial opportunities that may benefit a few.

Thank you for providing this survey to those of use who pay the bills and taxes!

The village needs a reason for people to visit. Rezoning part of the campus for commercial use would allow for shops & restaurants while maintaining the aesthetic of the village main street.

How can we help?

The historic nature of the campus should be preserved and the character of the village, to which the campus is so central, should ideally be respected and preserved. Aurora has a uniquely welcoming family spirit that can only be maintained through a continuing commitment to thoughtful management of change and growth.

The village needs to be willing to work with any buyer/developer rather than impeding the usage of the campus.

I hope that Wells can be used and preserved as an integral part of the community. It is very depressing to see it empty and deserted.

Sustainability

sustainable use

Excited!

I love the idea of a shop and coffee shop. It would be nice if the waterfront would be open to people to walk. If there is a lot more housing, some thought about access would be nice (could there be campus access from another street than only route 90?)

The village needs the campus to be used, cared for, generating jobs, and providing residences to expand the village's permanent residence base.

The tennis and pickle ball courts should be available for the community. The athletic center should be available for the community. There could be a membership fee. The Wells dock and surrounding beach and lakeside area should be available for the community.

Would it be feasible to reach out to Wells Fargo? Perhaps they would invest as a nod to their cofounder and help preserve the location or offer ideas.