

# Rental Sector Attitudes Towards Energy Efficiency for the Town of Amherst

Authors:

Nicole Perry, Stephanie Ciccarello

*Collaboration with the University of Massachusetts Amherst Clean Energy Extension*

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## 1. Introduction

The Town of Amherst received a \$25,000 Empower Grant from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC) to collect feedback from tenants/renters and building owners in Amherst with respect to energy efficiency. The survey was conducted over a one month period between June and July, 2023. Its purpose is to inform and provide insight to the town on building comfort and energy performance as experienced by tenants as the town looks to meet its climate goals through increased electrification of heating systems. The information will also be used to inform the design of innovative programs or policies in Amherst. A total of 339 survey responses were collected. This report provides analysis and summary of the collected data.

## 2. Methods

The Town of Amherst partnered with Family Outreach of Amherst which oversaw the development and execution of the rental survey and its dissemination within the community. They were tasked with the development of a tenant/renter outreach campaign which included the following:

- Design a survey to collect feedback from tenants/renters
- Identify outreach schedule
- Recruit and interview captains at four housing complexes
- Recruit one “at-large” community captain
- Hire and train captains to conduct tenant/renter outreach
- Launch tenant/renter outreach campaign and administer survey
- Hold public tenant meetings and one landlord & building owner meeting

Francine Rodrigues served as the Family Outreach representative who assembled a team of five ‘Community Captains’ and supervised the overall project. Each Community Captain received a stipend. One member of the team, hired as the ‘at-large’ community captain, was tasked with managing and coordinating the outreach efforts of the community captains. The “at large” captain met weekly with the town’s staff liaison to provide updates on the project’s progress.

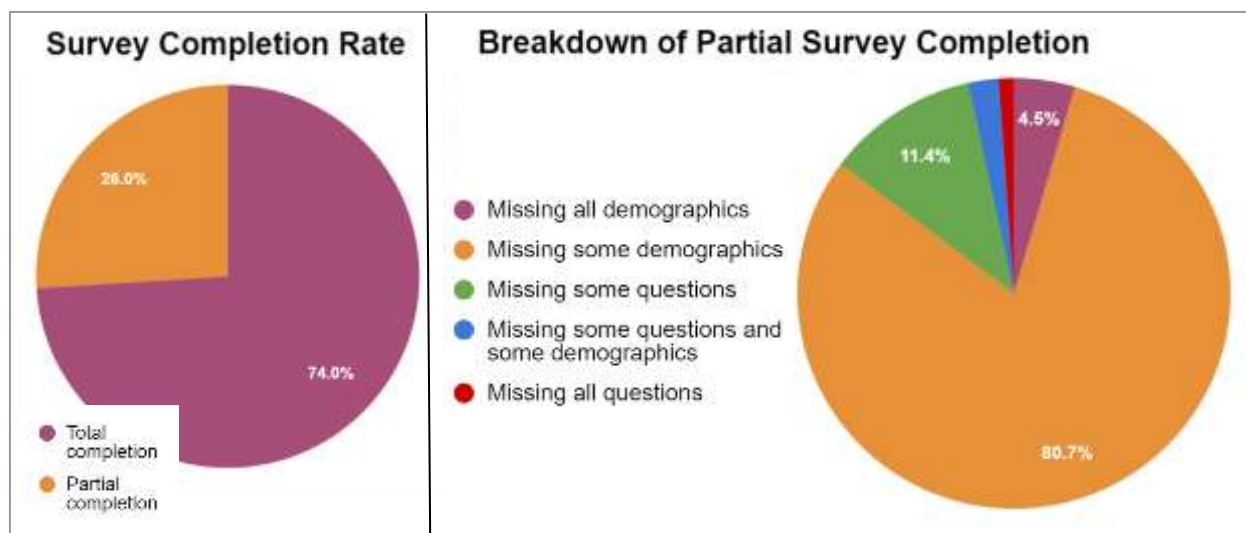
### Timeline:

- *February 7, 2023 Community Captains meet with the At Large Community Captain – Begin to develop survey questions*
- *February 14, 2023 Captains developed a draft survey with 30 questions to be reviewed by Town staff liaison*
- *March 2, 2023 Staff provided feedback to survey draft*
- *March 8, 2023 Family Outreach, At Large Community Captain and staff meet to discuss the draft survey revisions and next steps*
- *March 20, 2023 Family Outreach continues to work directly with the At Large Community Captain on developing an introduction to the survey*

- *March 22, 2023 Family Outreach and the At Large Community Captain meet to finalize the survey questions, survey introduction and discuss outreach targets. The At Large Captain worked with outside support on survey design. The Community Captain group created a survey/gift card tracking system and brainstormed outreach strategies.*
- *April 4, 2023 revised/formatted survey sent to town staff. Staff provided feedback via email and requested additional edits as well as posed questions regarding next steps and record keeping.*
- *April 5, 2023 Final draft of survey received to get translated into Chinese and Spanish.*
- *April 5- April 11<sup>th</sup> staff coordination on survey translation*
- *April 14, 2023 translated surveys sent to At Large Community Captain and Family Outreach*
- *April 18, 2023 Community Captains coordinate their survey outreach.*
- *April 27, 2023 At Large Community Captain and staff meeting for weekly check-in. Gift cards unavailable. Survey printed in three languages. Discussed survey/gift card dissemination strategy. Captains have met weekly from 2:30 – 4 PM.*
- *May 4, 2023 Family Outreach, At Large Captain and staff liaison met to discuss outreach specifics. Gift cards anticipated to be in receipt the week of 5/8/23.*
- *May 8, 2023 Captains group convene to assemble survey packets; pick dates for survey outreach/tabling at complexes and door to door outreach; create flyers for/schedule two community events. Flyers translated by the staff liaison.*
- *June, 2023 –gift cards purchased and attached with printed surveys*
- *Posters developed for June 30<sup>th</sup> July 27<sup>th</sup> and July 28<sup>th</sup> tabling events*
- *June – July 2023 -community captains conducted outreach*
- *July 31<sup>st</sup> 250+ surveys completed*
- *August 16<sup>th</sup> – final receipts submitted to CHD*
- *August 30<sup>th</sup> - Final meeting between CHD and staff to collect materials*

### **3. Results**

Of our 339 survey responses, we observed a 74% rate of total completion, meaning that all questions were answered and all parts of the demographics section were completed. The remaining 26% of participants partially completed this survey, and were missing a combination of answers and demographic information, as broken down below in [Figure 3.0](#).



*Figure 3.0: Total completion rate (left) and a breakdown of what was missing from surveys that were only partially completed (right). The vast majority of surveys were completed answering all questions and the entire demographics section*

Of those surveyed who submitted partially incomplete responses, 80% chose to not answer one or more of the demographic questions, which included a fill-in question for race, a fill-in question for age, and a checkbox-style question for household type. This could be due to the personal preference to withhold this information for privacy or anonymity, language barriers, or could be related to community captains not following standardized procedures. The second largest group chose to skip one or more of the six main survey questions, which were presented in a checkbox-style format.

### 3.1: Survey Results Summary

Question 1: How concerned are you about the environment?			
Not concerned		50	15%
A little concerned		101	30%
Very concerned		186	55%
Blank		2	<1%

Question 2: What do you know about energy savings?			
Not much		105	31%
A little		156	46%
A lot		75	22%
Blank		3	1%

<b>Question 3: Do you think your building is energy efficient?</b>			
No		116	34%
Not sure		139	41%
Yes		81	24%
Blank		3	1%

<b>Question 4: How concerned are you about paying your utilities?</b>			
Not concerned		48	14%
A little concerned		117	34%
Very concerned		172	51%
Blank		3	1%

<b>Question 5: Would you support your landlord putting heat pumps in your building to move away from using fossil fuels such as oil or gas?</b>			
No		29	9%
Not sure		89	26%
Yes		216	64%
Blank		5	1%

<b>Question 6: If a rating system (A-F or 1-10) was created disclosing a unit's energy efficiency, would that help you decide where to rent?</b>			
No		38	11%
Not sure		92	27%
Yes		205	61%
Blank		4	1%

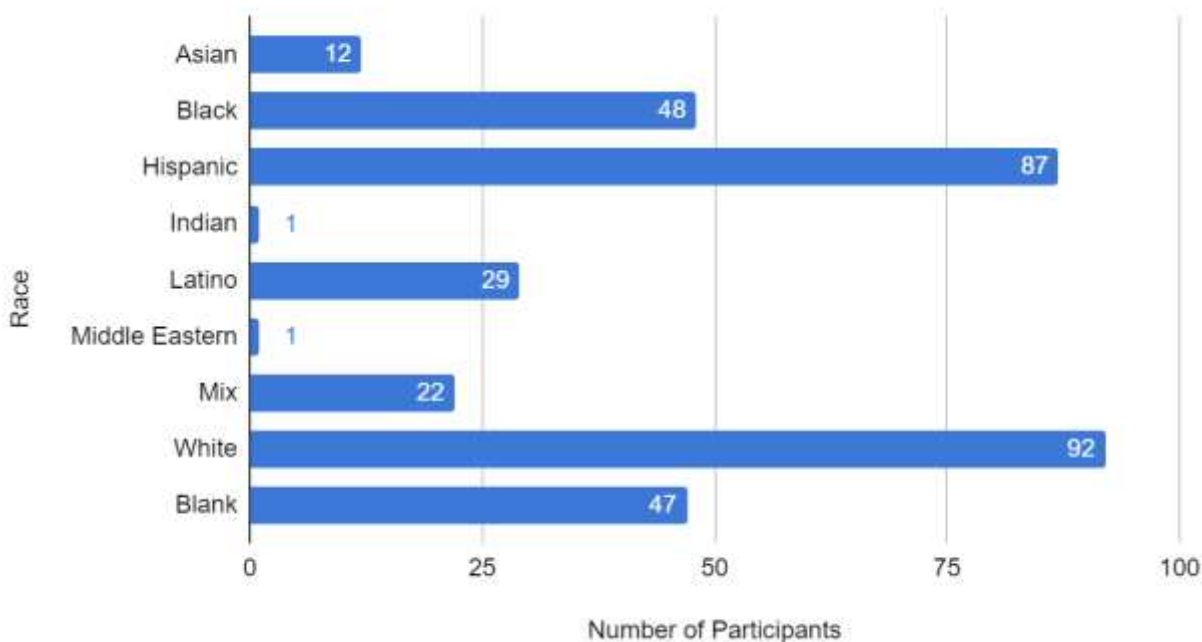
## 3.2: Demographics

### 3.2.1: Race

Renters were asked to report their race in a fill-in-the-blank style format, with 8 separate races being reported. Within our 339 participants, 92 participants identified themselves as White, 87 participants identified themselves as Hispanic, 48 participants identified themselves as Black, 29 participants identified themselves as Latino, 22 participants identified themselves as Mixed Race, 12 participants identified themselves as Asian, 1 participant identified themselves as Indian, 1 participant identified themselves as Middle Eastern, and 47 participants left this question blank. It is important to note the distinction between Latino and Hispanic, as well as between Middle Eastern and White, as people may feel strongly about identifying with one over the other. As participants were

able to self-report, we felt that it was important to maintain these distinctions that may typically be combined into one category.

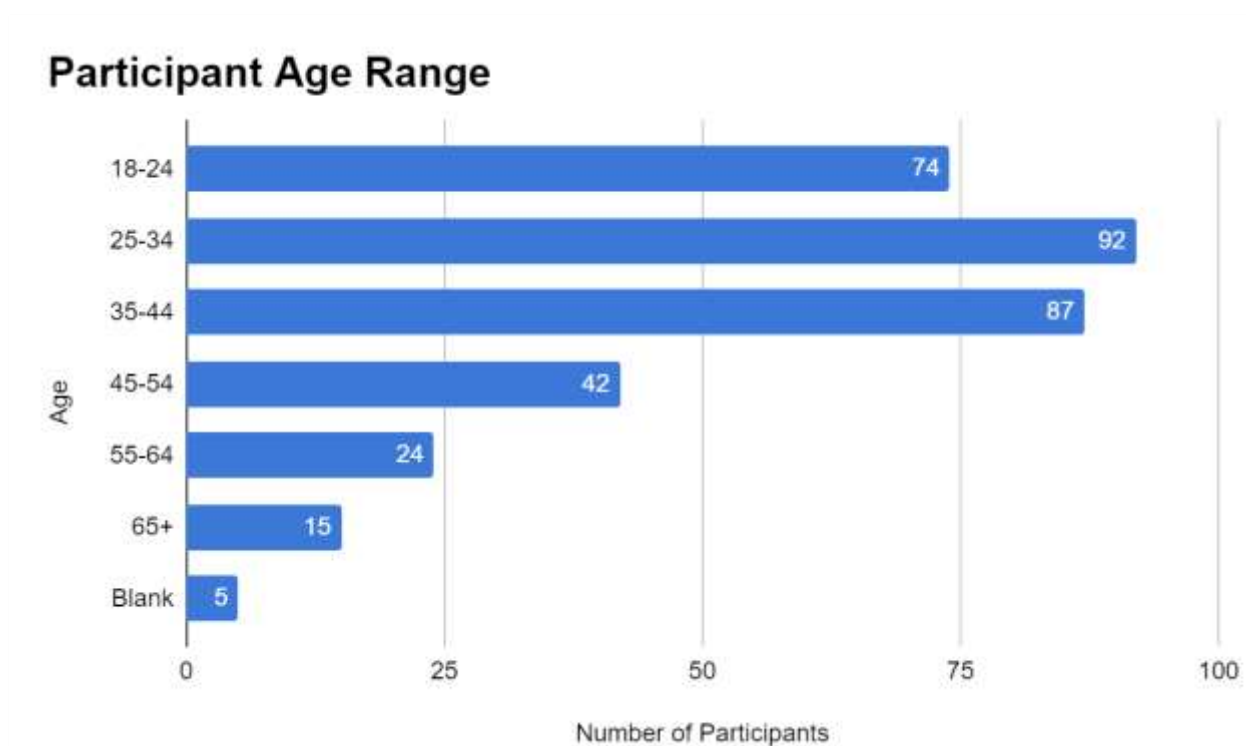
### Breakdown of Participant Races



*Figure 3.2.2: Survey participants were given a space to self-report their race. According to this race data, most survey participants identified themselves as White or Hispanic, and a slightly smaller number of participants identified themselves as Black or African American, or chose to leave this section blank.*

### 3.2.3: Age Range

For this survey, we received responses from individuals between the ages of 18 and 85, with the **large majority of participants falling within the range of 18 to 44**. Within our 339 participants, 74 participants fell between the ages of 18 to 24, 92 participants fell between the ages of 25 to 34, 87 participants fell between the ages of 35 to 44, 42 participants fell between the ages of 45 to 54, 24 participants fell between the ages of 55 to 64, 15 participants were ages 65 and above, and 5 participants left this question blank. Most participants were young adults or middle-aged adults, while there was a significantly lower number of elderly adults who participated.



*Figure 3.2.4: This bar graph shows the proportion of survey participants that fall under each given age range. Data on the graph is concentrated to the left side, which indicates the majority of participating Amherst renters are young adults or middle-aged adults, while a smaller group of participants are older adults.*

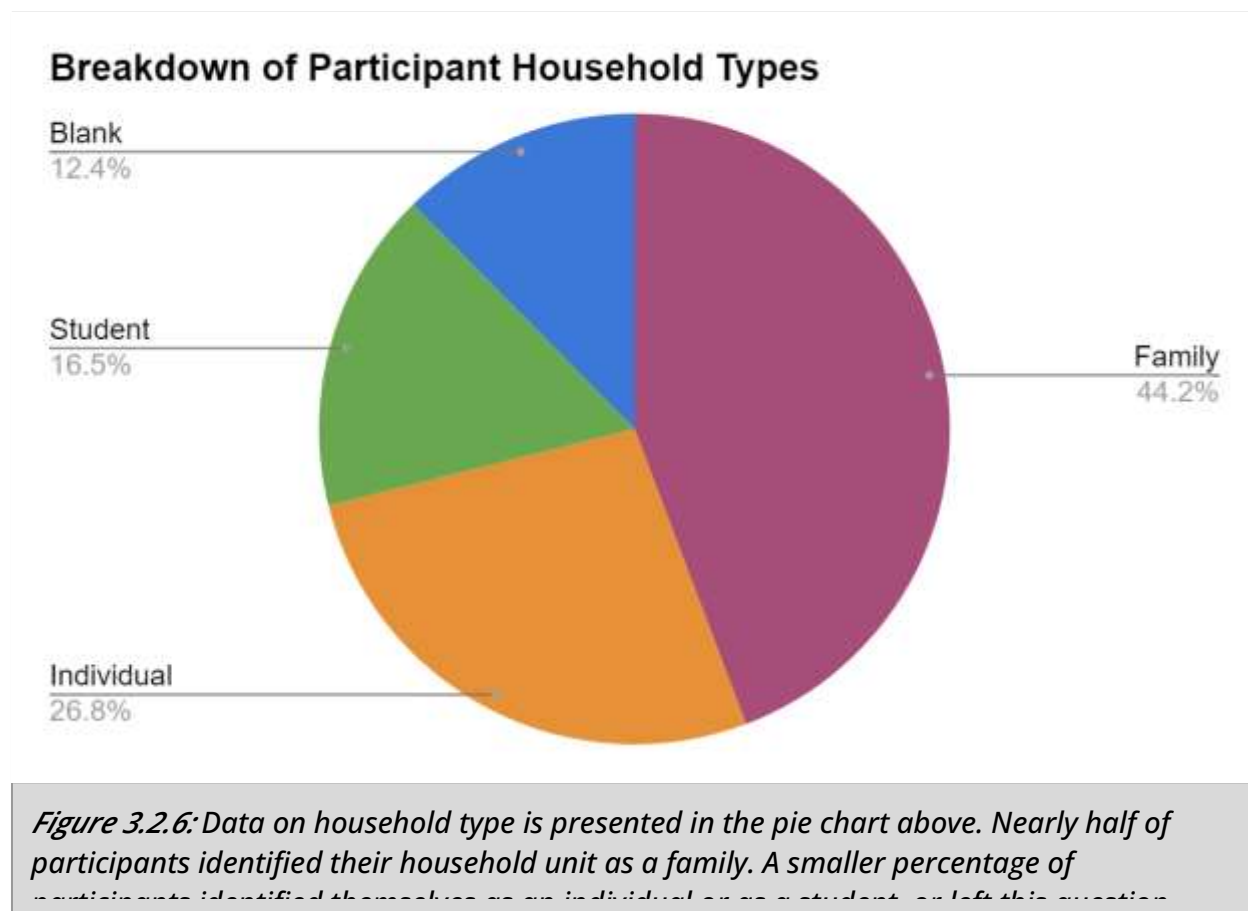
### 3.2.5: Household Type

With the Town of Amherst being the home of both Amherst College and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, there is a high number of students residing in the town. UMass Amherst has a student population of around 32,000, and while there is housing made available to students, on-campus housing is not guaranteed. UMass houses around 14,000 students in on-campus residence halls, leaving about 18,000 students with the option to rent in the area, commute from another location, or attend classes remotely. Many students choose to rent in Amherst and the surrounding towns, which is why this designation of housing type is important.

To identify participating individuals' household types, three options were provided: "family", "individual", or "student". Participants were able to identify themselves under one of these categories by checking off the box under the most fitting option. Within the 339 renters that were surveyed, 150 identified their household unit as a family, 91 identified themselves as an individual, 56 identified themselves as a student, and 42 left this question blank. It is important to note that although we instructed participants to check only one



box, several participants checked off two or all boxes, identifying themselves under multiple categories\*.

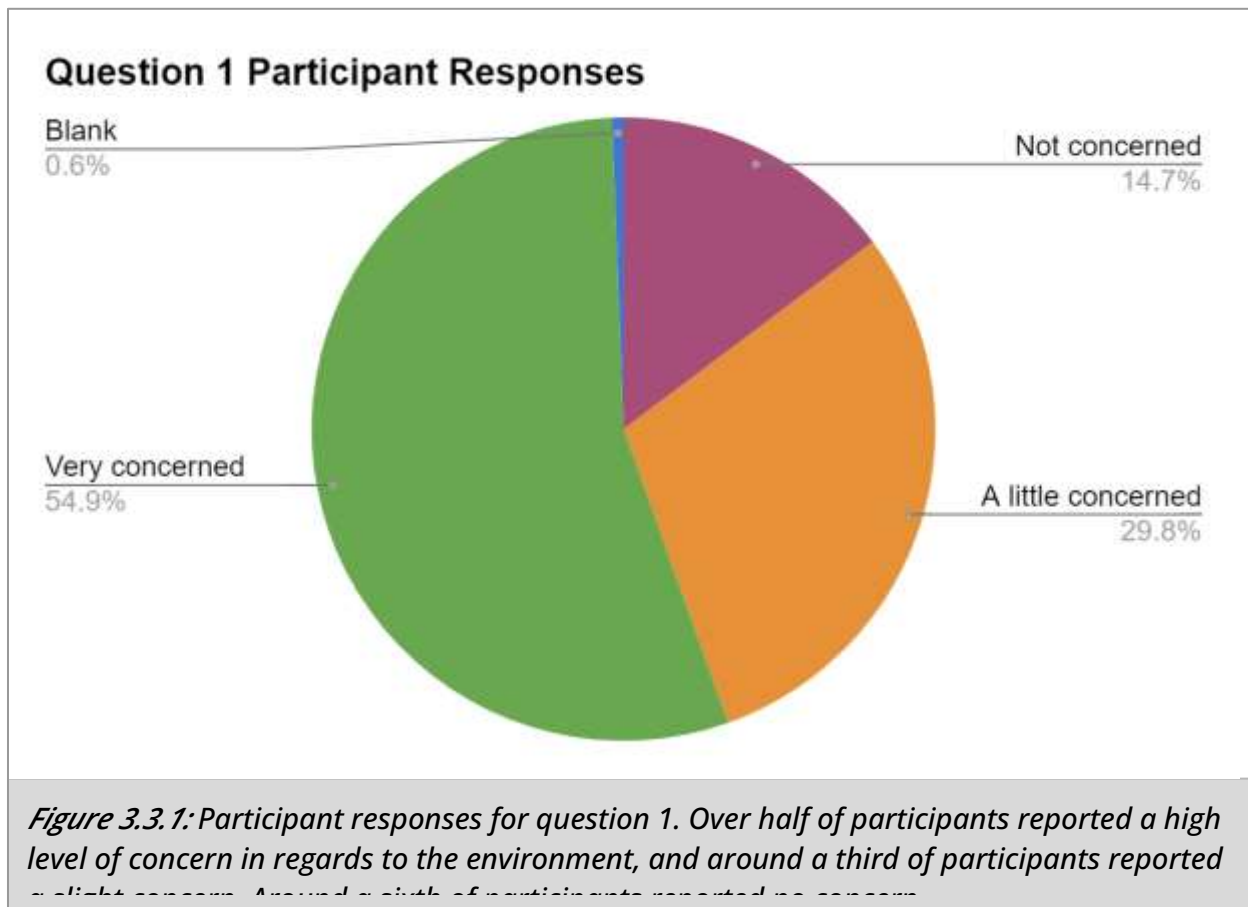


\*For participants that self-reported their household type as both student and family or as both individual and family, "family" was recorded for their household type. For cases where participants self-reported as both individual and student, "student" was recorded for their household type.

### 3.3: Question 1 – How concerned are you about the environment?

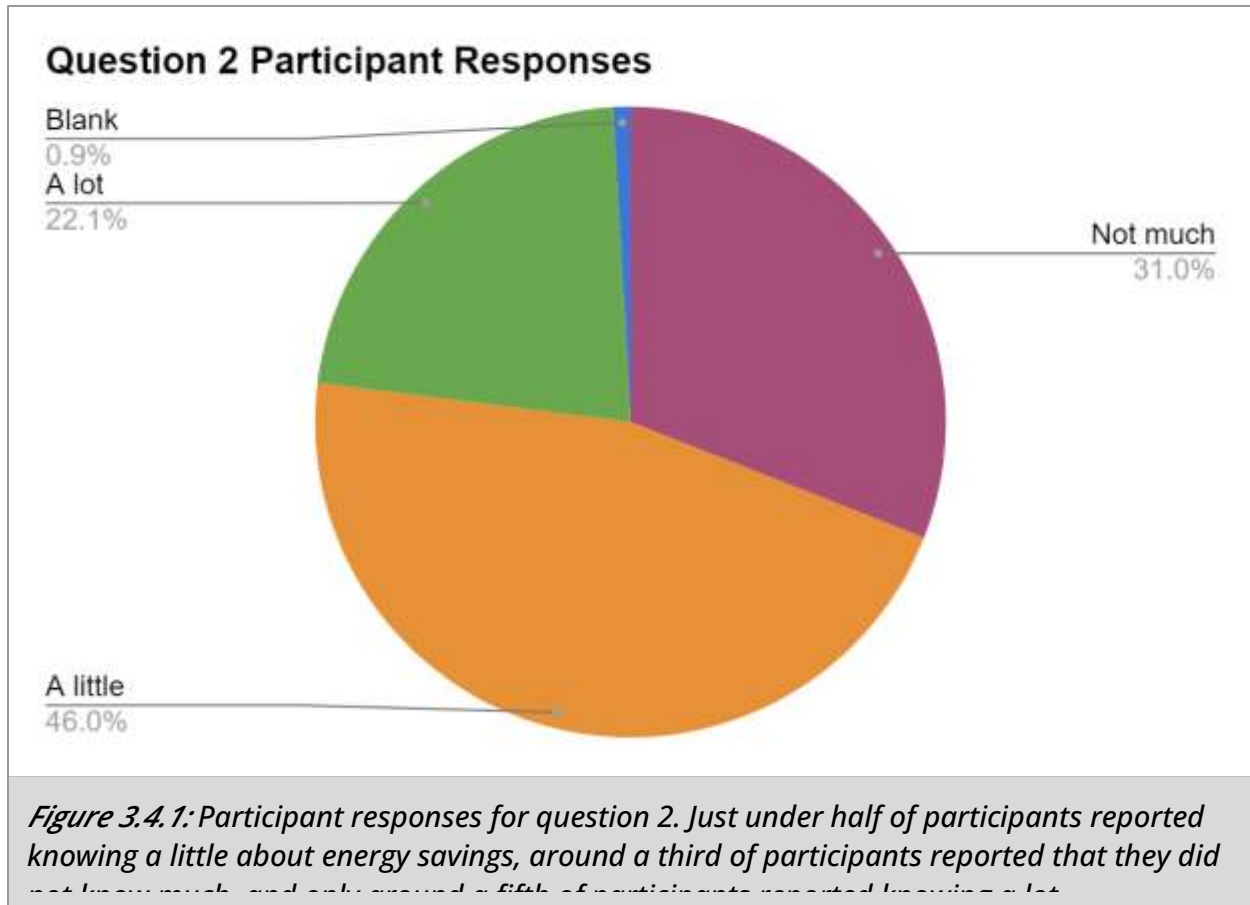
The first question asked participants their level of concern about the environment, and we received feedback from 337 of 339 participants. In response to this question, participants had three answer options that they were able to choose from in a check-box format. Participants identified their level of concern as "not concerned", "a little concerned", or "very concerned". Of our 339 participants, 50 reported back as "not concerned", 101 reported back as "a little concerned", 186 reported back as "very concerned", and 2 left this answer blank. **The vast majority of participants have some or a lot of concern about the environment, with 85% reporting slight or great concern.** This would suggest that

within the town of Amherst, most renters possess some level of concern or care about the environment, with over half sharing a high level of concern.



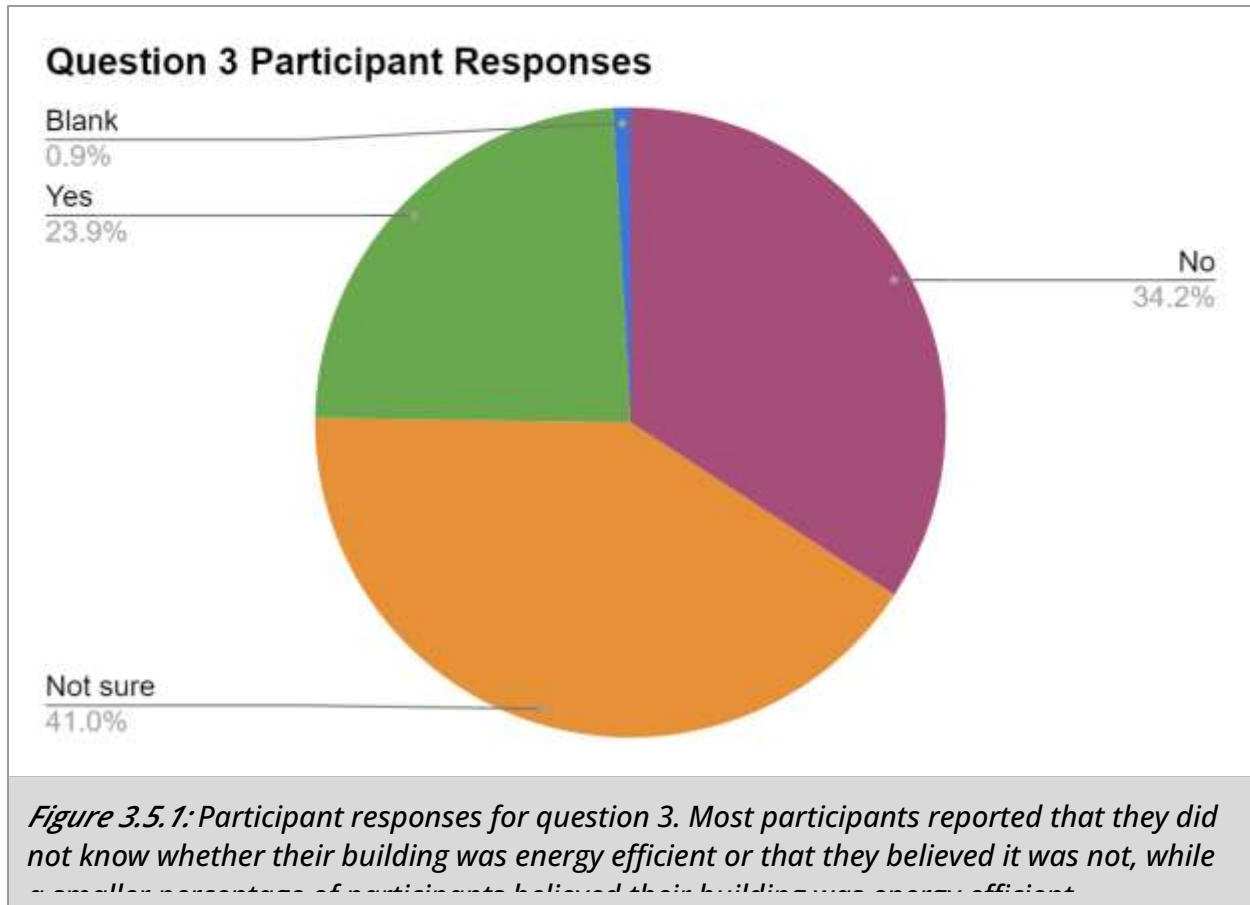
### 3.4: Question 2 – What do you know about energy savings?

The second question asked participants how much they currently knew about energy savings. Participants were able to choose from three answer options, describing their level of knowledge regarding energy savings as “not much”, “a little”, or “a lot”. We received feedback from 336 of our 339 participants. 105 participants reported that they didn’t know much, 156 participants reported that they knew a little, 75 participants reported that they knew a lot, and 3 participants left this question blank. **An overwhelming majority of participants (78%) report knowing little to nothing about energy savings.**



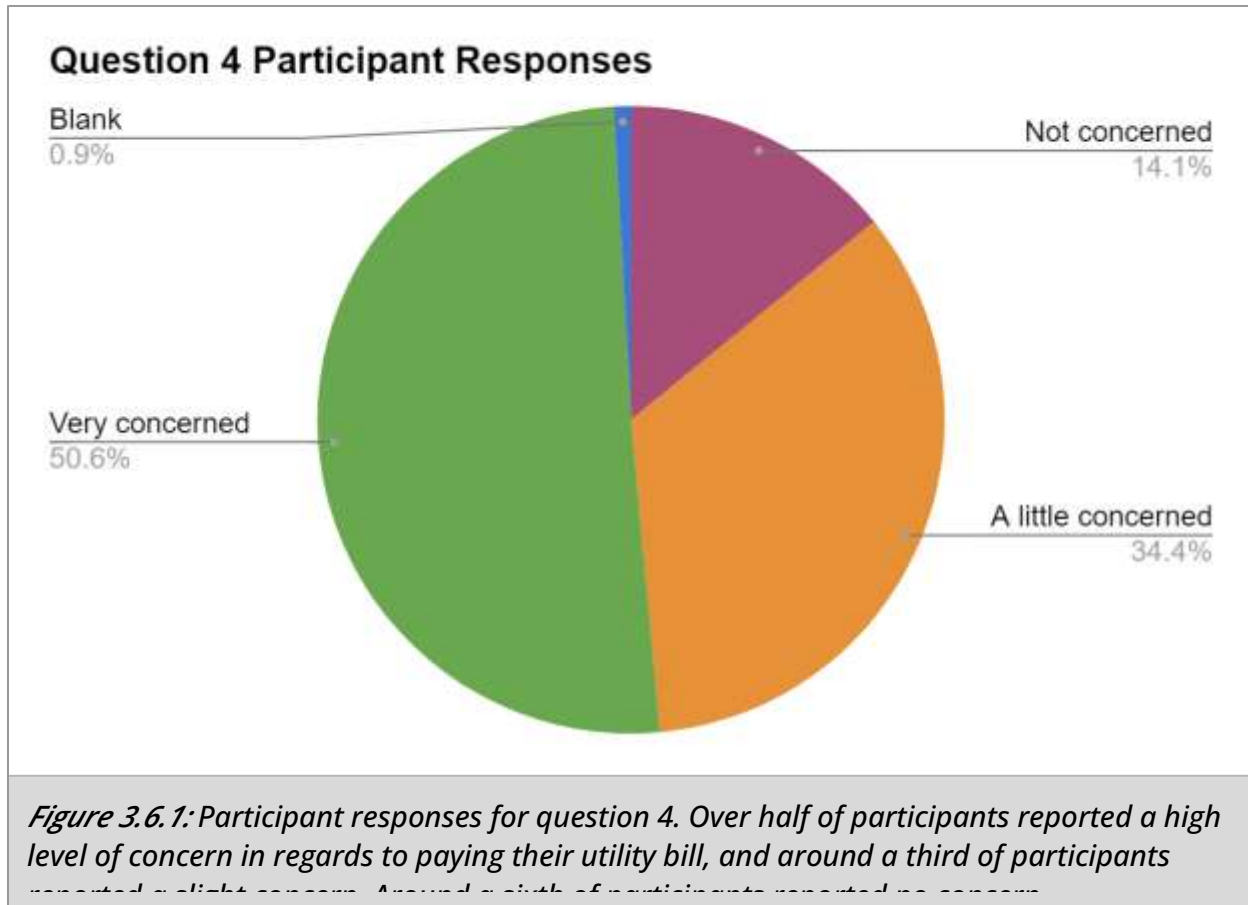
### 3.5: Question 3 – Do you think your building is energy efficient?

Question 3 asked participants whether or not they thought their building was energy efficient, and we received feedback from 336 of 339 total participants. In response to this question, participants had three answer options that they were able to choose from: “no”, “not sure”, or “yes”. Of our 339 participants, 116 participants reported that they did not believe their building was energy efficient, 139 participants reported that they were unsure whether or not their building was energy efficient, 81 participants reported that they believed their building was energy efficient, and 3 participants left this answer blank. There were 10% **more participants who reported that they did not believe they lived in an energy efficient building when compared to those who did believe they lived in an energy efficient building. An even greater number of participants were unsure** of whether or not their rental unit was energy efficient.



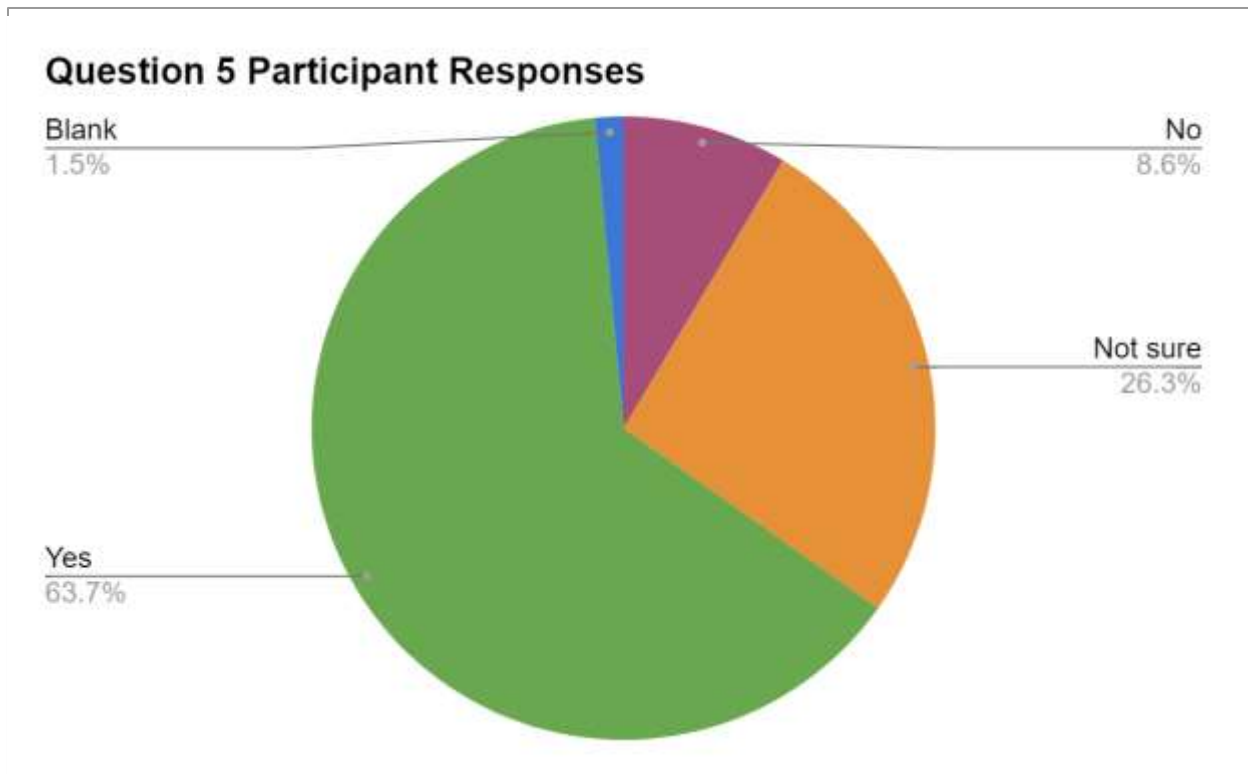
### 3.6: Question 4 – How concerned are you about paying your utilities?

Question 4 asked participants their level of concern regarding paying their utilities, and we received feedback from 337 of 339 total participants. In response to this question, participants had three answer options that they were able to choose from: “not concerned”, “a little concerned”, or “very concerned”. Of our 339 participants, 48 participants reported that they were not concerned with paying their utilities, 117 reported that they were a little bit concerned with paying their utilities, 172 reported that they were very concerned with paying their utilities, and 2 participants left this answer blank. **Half of respondents reported a high level of concern surrounding their utility bill**, while slightly less had moderate concerns and many less had no concern.



### 3.7: Question 5 – Would you support your landlord putting heat pumps in your building to move away from using fossil fuels such as oil or gas?

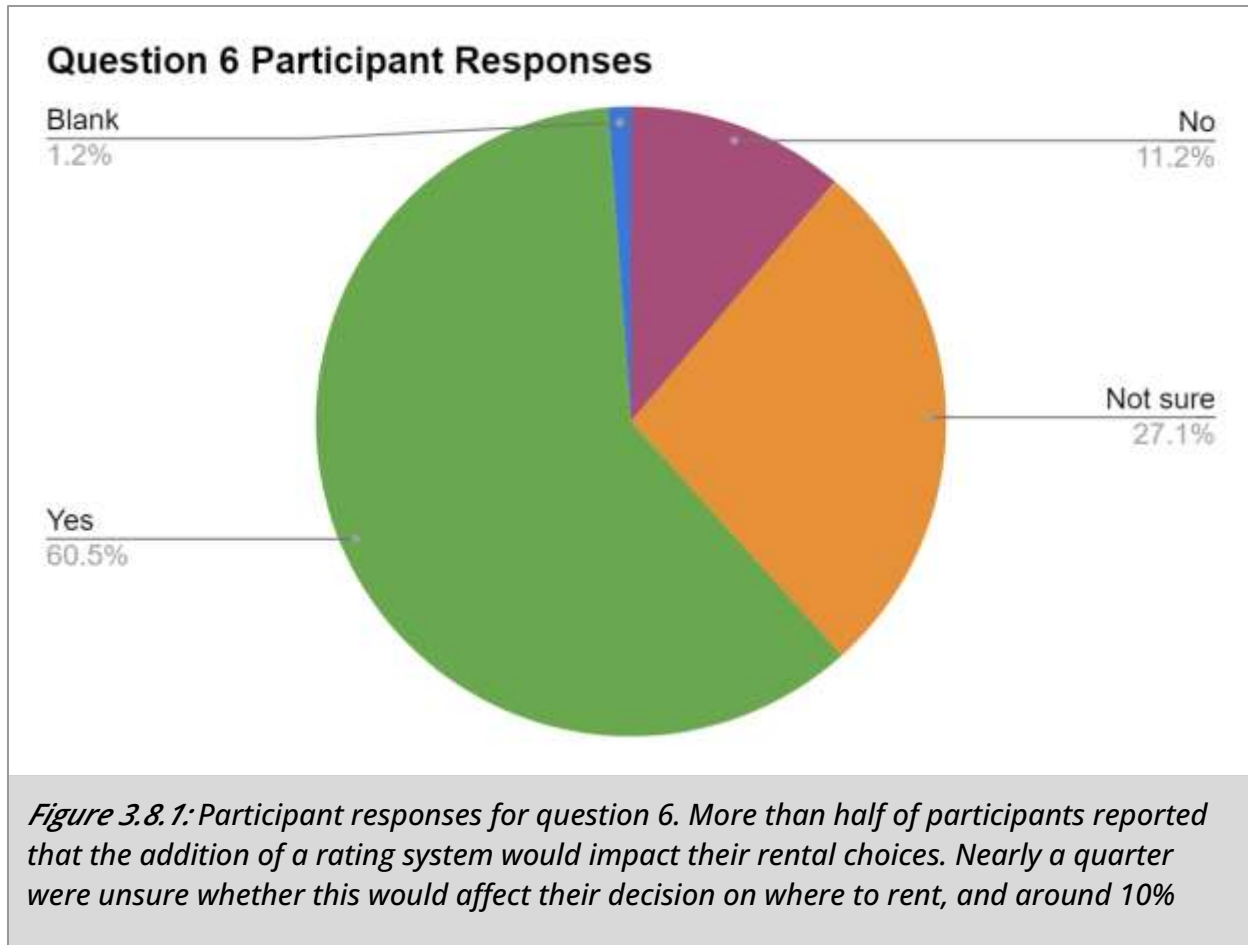
Question 5 asked participants if they would support the installation of heat pumps in their building for the purpose of shifting away from fossil fuel use. We received feedback from 334 of 339 total participants. In response to this question, participants had three answer options that they were able to choose from: “no”, “not sure”, or “yes”. 29 participants reported that they would not support the installation of heat pumps, 89 participants reported that they were unsure, 216 participants reported that they would support this, and 5 participants left this question blank. **Over half of the responses had a favorable attitude towards the idea of heat pumps being installed in their buildings,** while a much smaller percentage of respondents were against this idea.



*Figure 3.7.1: Participant responses for question 5. The vast majority of participants reported that they were in favor of landlords installing heat pumps in their building while a quarter of participants reported that they were unsure. Less than 10% of participants were*

### **3.8: Question 6 – If a rating system (A-F or 1-10) was created disclosing a unit’s energy efficiency, would that help you decide where to rent?**

Question 6 asked participants whether or not the implementation of an energy efficiency rating system would influence their choice in renting a unit. We received feedback from 335 of 339 total participants. In response to this question, participants had three answer options that they were able to choose from: “no”, “not sure”, or “yes”. 38 participants reported that this would not have an impact on their choice of a rental unit, 92 participants reported that they were unsure, 205 participants reported that this would impact their decision, and 4 participants left this question blank. **Most participants felt that establishing this system would have an impact on their personal rental decisions.**



### 3.9: Landlord Feedback

In addition to gathering feedback from renters, we reached out to landlords from various apartment complexes and property rental groups via email. 5 landlords in Amherst were contacted for feedback, but they will remain anonymous. Unlike the survey sent out to tenants, we asked landlords a set of open response questions. The first question asked landlords if they felt their building's energy efficiency needed to be improved. The second question asked landlords for their input on the town implementing a rating system for rental units. Both questions were presented to landlords as following:

1. *Do you feel that you need to improve some of your unit's energy efficiency? i.e., double pane windows, insulation etc...*
  - 1a. *If you answered yes to question #1. What are the barriers you face?*
2. *What are your thoughts on the possibility of the Town implementing a rating system which would disclose a building's energy efficiency?*

Of these 5 landlords, we received only one response that will remain anonymous, as we disclosed when reaching out for their input.

Respondent	Question	Response
Anonymous #1	Question 1	"We replaced all windows 2015"
Anonymous #1	Question 2	"They already charge us to inspect our apartments and no other towns I have even managed properties in do that. It is so invasive for the residents. We get inspected all the time by HUD, our lenders, housing authority and other entities. We certainly do not need to pay the town \$3600 bi-annually to inspect. I think the more they put their hands in our business the worse."

Having only received one response, not much can be said regarding general attitudes within this group. The single response we received **expressed a negative attitude towards moving in the direction of energy efficiency in the rental sector**, our anonymous landlord seeing the town's current role as overbearing in its regulations and required inspections. **There is concern that with the creation of a rating system, any additional inspections and property visits may be a nuisance to tenants.** In addition to issues around interference and privacy, concerns regarding costs to landlords were highlighted in this response.

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1: Limitations

This survey was conducted with the aim of identifying attitudes around energy efficiency in the Amherst rental community, and while this survey was successful in collecting preliminary opinions, various factors were present that may have contributed to inaccuracies in the data we received. While there was a certain level of organization and communication between community captains, there was no standardized procedure for administering these surveys, which may have led to discrepancies in the data. While some captains handed out surveys for participants to fill out independently, offering a sense of anonymity, others interviewed participants and physically filled out their surveys for them. Through filling these surveys out on behalf of survey participants, data may not accurately and completely reflect the actual beliefs of renters, as there is an added pressure of answering in a way that reflects the beliefs of the community as a whole, which is in favor of energy efficiency. This may have also contributed to discrepancies in reported race. During the data-reviewal process, we noticed that under surveys administered by one captain nearly all Latinx/Hispanic participants were identified as Hispanic, while other



surveys administered by a different captain identified nearly all Latinx/Hispanic participants as Latino.

While this survey serves as a good starting point for working towards energy efficiency in the Amherst rental sector, it was limited in its scope. With only 6 check-box style questions, renters were unable to expand upon their thoughts, which may have been more complex than a simple yes or no answer. Landlord engagement was very limited, with only one response, and with only a few landlords receiving requests for feedback. In addition to this, this survey is not fully representative of Amherst renters due to the fact that it was mostly administered in certain rental complexes and was unable to reach many renters of smaller property companies/independent landlords.

#### **4.2: Recommendations**

Due to the limitations above, the Town of Amherst should continue to collect feedback from renters on environmental issues and should continue looking for feedback from landlords, who are underrepresented in this survey, before moving forward with any sort of plan for a rating system or other energy-efficiency related regulations. This preliminary report provides a good starting point for moving forward with energy efficiency plans in rental buildings in the future, and helps to identify the overall attitude of renters when it comes to issues surrounding energy efficiency. The majority of renters in the Town of Amherst are highly concerned about the environment and would support their landlords making changes in their units to move away from the use of fossil fuels like gas and oil, showing that the environment is a priority to many. While there seems to be a lot of support for the environment, many people are not fully educated on energy savings. The Town should work on educating renters on potential savings, as many do not know much in this area and a majority of renters reported a high concern for paying their utility bills, which could be lessened through the energy savings. The majority of responses also indicated support for a rating system for energy efficiency, and many were also unsure of whether or not their building was energy efficient. The Town of Amherst should proceed by educating the public on energy efficiency, continuing to meet and discuss the potential of implementing this system for rental buildings, and continuing to collect feedback from the community.

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