



Code Enforcement Survey 2016 Results

November 6, 2016

City of Youngstown Code Enforcement Survey – 2016 Results

Between June 28 and July 11, 2016, the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech conducted a community survey to obtain impressions about Youngstown's code enforcement program. Community members had the option to fill the survey online or use paper copies. The team provided paid postage for those members that used hard copies. The team announced the survey during the June 28 community meeting and via email to a list of contacts provided by YNDC. In total, the team received 111 completed surveys. Of this total, 102 were online surveys.

The survey was divided into three sections and took an average of 20 minutes to complete. The first section aimed to obtain demographic information. The second and third sections provided the team with information on how to improve the City's communication related to the most pressing code enforcement issues.

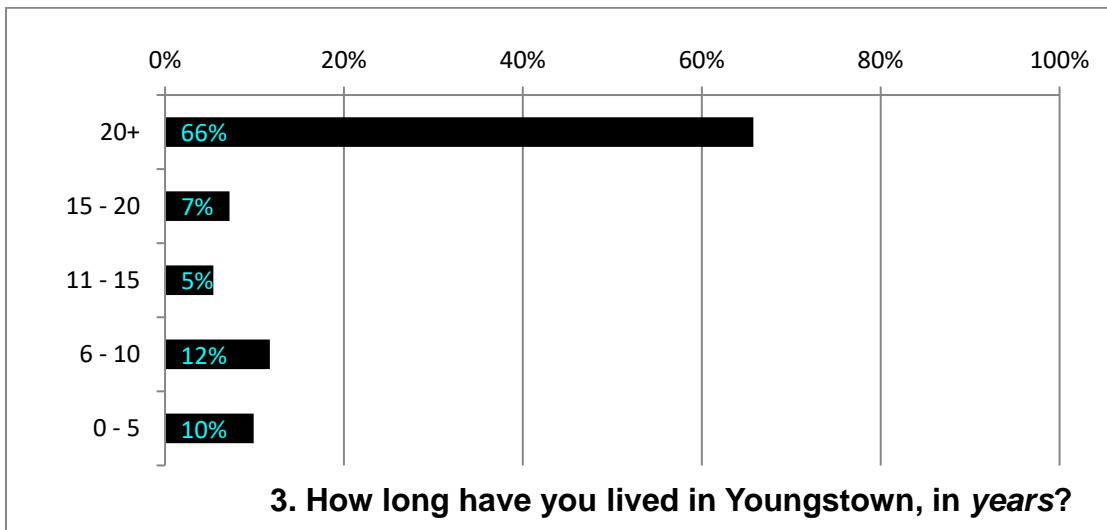
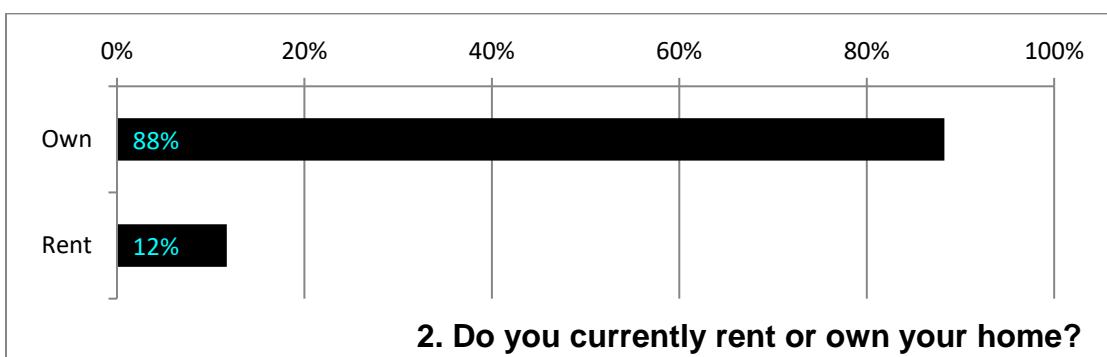
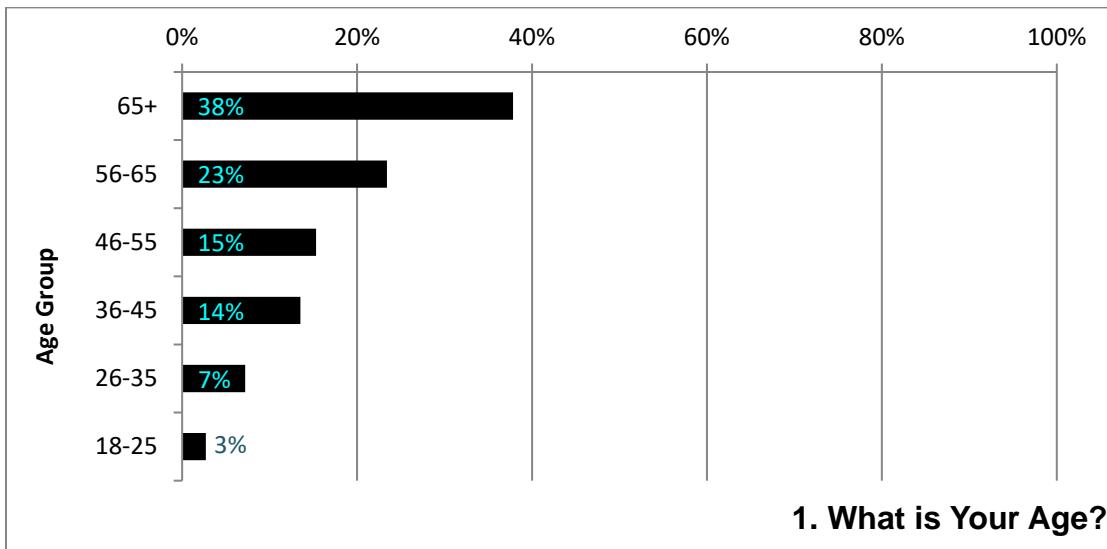
The preliminary results of this survey are summarized in the following document. The results of this survey are helping the team identify new ways of building greater capacity for Youngstown's code enforcement program. In addition, they have been instrumental in the development of the information brochures.

Section 1: Background Information

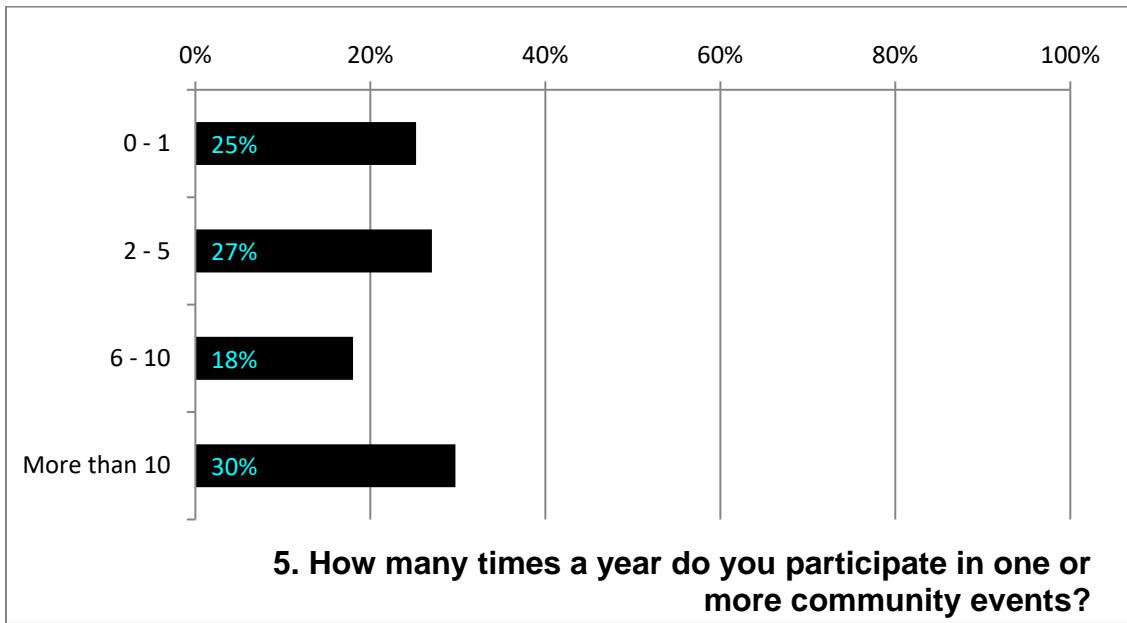
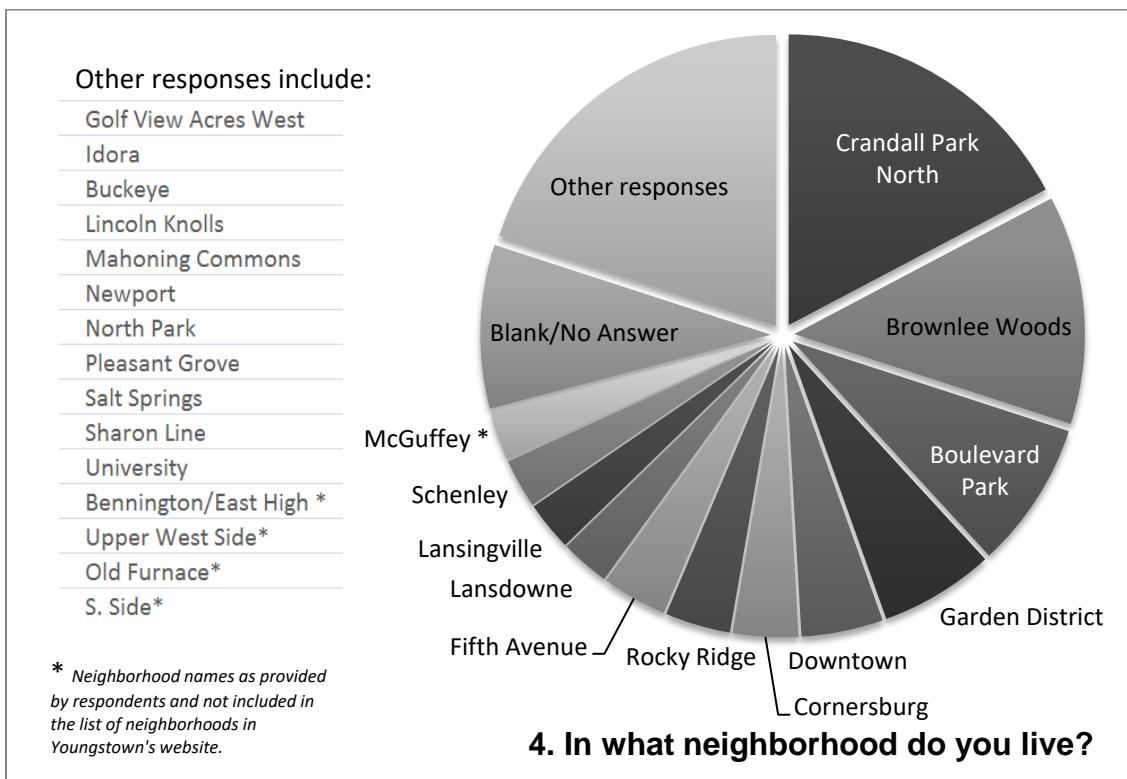
Results indicate that most of the survey participants are over 56 years of age, property owners, long-term residents of the City of Youngstown, and highly involved with community events (about 50 percent of participants attend six or more community or neighborhood meetings).

It is important to note, however, that the results of this survey are mainly representative of certain neighborhoods. About 50 percent of the respondents live in Crandall Park North, Brownlee Woods, Boulevard Park, Garden District, and Downtown. Many of these neighborhoods include active members of the YNDC Neighborhood Leaders Council who participated in the June 28 meeting with the team at YNDC. (Interestingly, Downtown was the only neighborhood that did not have respondents over 56 years of age; respondents' ages ranged between 18 and 45). As such, the team recommends reproducing this survey in other neighborhoods to obtain a more representative view of the community.

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Section 2: Code Enforcement Issues

Based on the survey responses, the community sees the value of housing code enforcement to maintain the neighborhood. Over 66 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that code enforcement was necessary to improve their respective neighborhood. In addition, results indicate that in average, participants saw some significant improvement in their neighborhood. Some of the neighborhoods that saw most improvement, according to respondents, were:

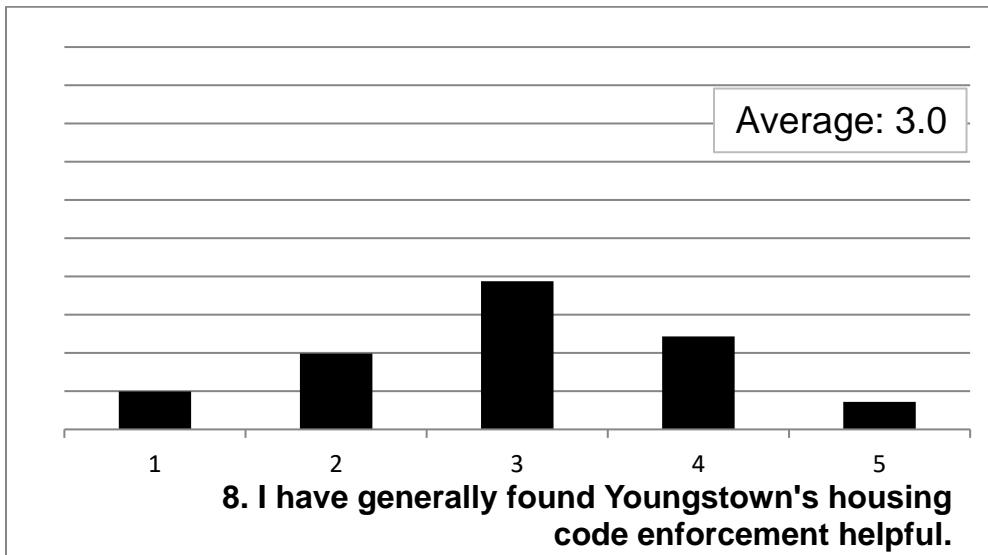
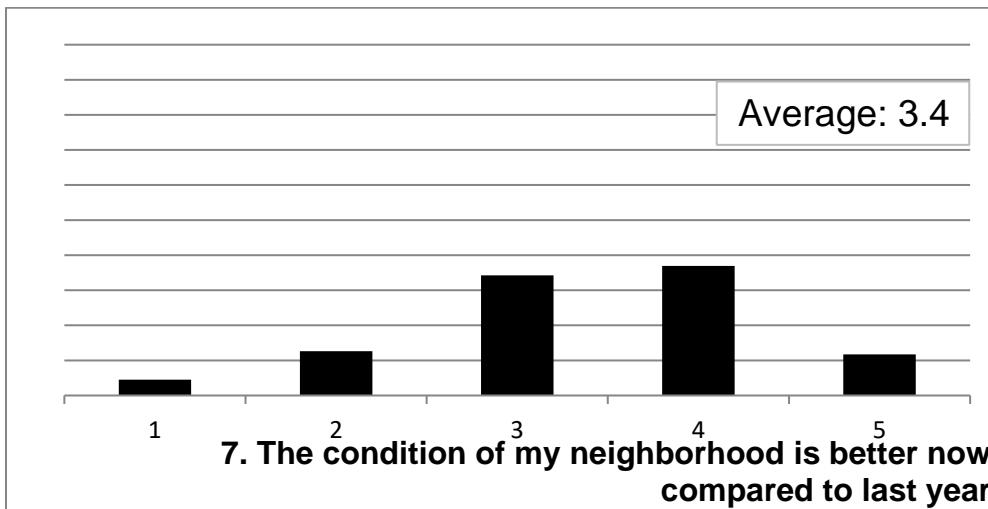
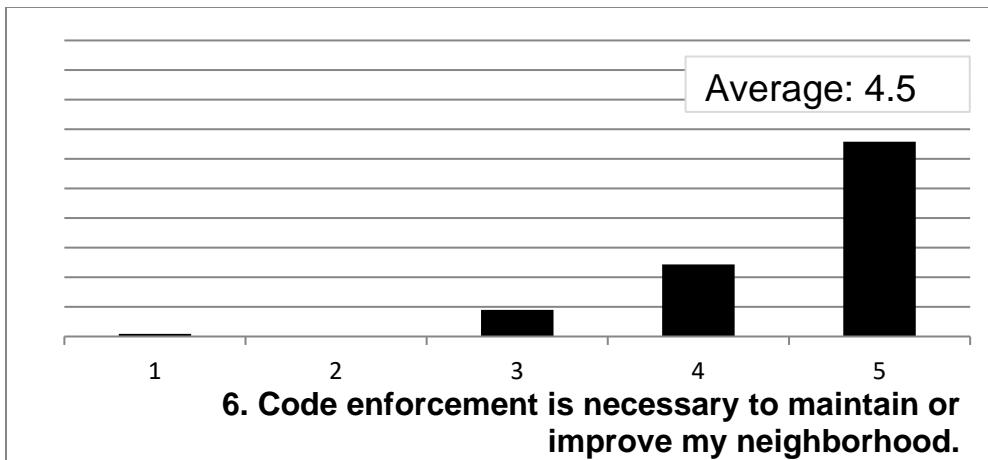
- Brownlee Woods
- Downtown
- Lansingville
- Idora
- Lansdowne
- Garden District
- Fifth Avenue
- Golf View Acres West
- Salt Springs

Interestingly, when asked about how helpful was Youngstown's code enforcement, respondents were evenly divided. About half of the respondents agreed the City was helpful or somewhat helpful, while the other half disagreed. These responses are consistent with the question regarding how particular properties were addressed by the City.

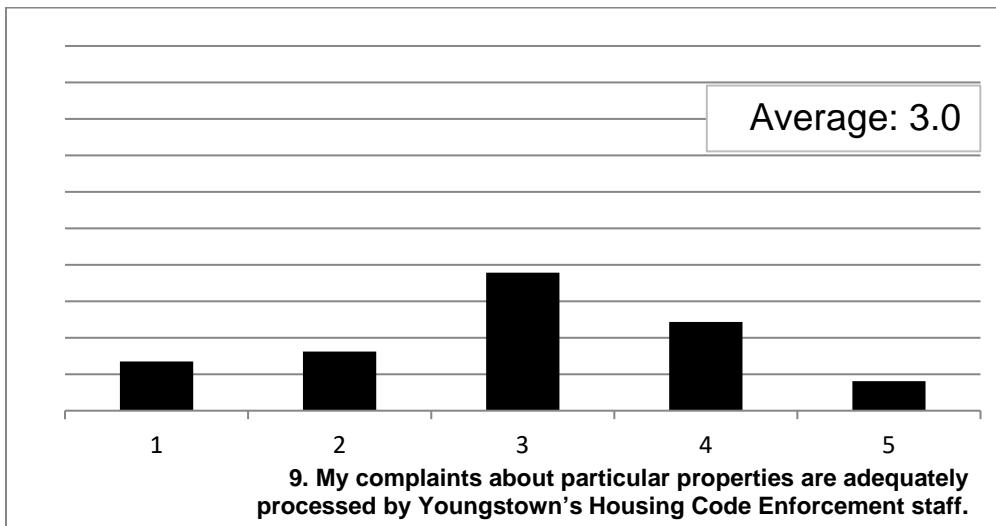
In general, respondents stated that Youngstown's Housing Code Enforcement Department consistently does a well job at lawn maintenance/grass cutting. Respondents were asked to provide suggestions too. Below are some of the most common responses regarding improvements.

- Have a more systematic and streamlined approach to code enforcement
- Meet with block groups in a more continuous basis
- Inspect, enforce and do follow ups
- Have other departments involved, for example, police
- Fine owners of problem properties and lessen penalties on those who are working to make improvement; support owners legitimately restoring historic houses and offer more financial programs or assistance for those who simply can't afford and trying hard not to lose their homes
- Enforce the city's laws/regulations on rental property licensing
- Better customer service and response from City staff
- Focus on problem properties
- Be more aggressive with rental properties
- Provide education and share information
- Provide list of homes on demolition

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10. In your opinion, what is one task that Youngstown's Housing Code Enforcement Department does consistently well?

The main answer was lawn maintenance and vacant houses.



10. In your opinion, what is one task that Youngstown's Housing Code Enforcement Department should do differently?

- Have a more systematic and streamlined approach to code enforcement
- Meet with block groups in a more continuous basis
- Inspect, enforce and do follow ups
- Have other departments involved, for example police

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- Fine owners of problem properties and lesson those who are working to make improvement; support owners legitimately restoring historic houses and offer more financial programs or assistance for those who simply can't afford and trying hard not to lose their homes
- Enforce the laws in rental properties
- Better customer service and response from City staff
- Focus on problem properties
- Be more aggressive with rental properties
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Section 3: Communication between Community and Code Enforcement Staff

The goal of section 3 was to understand and improve the City's communication with the community.

Most Pressing Issues

Results indicate that vacant and/or abandoned homes are the most pressing code enforcement issue followed by overgrown grass and dead vegetation, crime, and litter. Interestingly, a large percentage of the respondents answered “other” when asked what the most pressing issue was. Those that answered “other” stated that renters were a big problem.

Kind of Information

The results from question 12 (What are the most pressing code enforcement issue in your neighborhood?) are consistent with the aggregated results regarding the kind of information the community is interested in obtaining. Over 50 percent of the respondents stated that they currently access information on neighborhood cleanups. Additionally, over 50 percent of respondents stated that they are interested in getting information on the status of complaints/notices of violations, vacant/foreclosed homes, and demolitions.

Obtaining and Providing Information

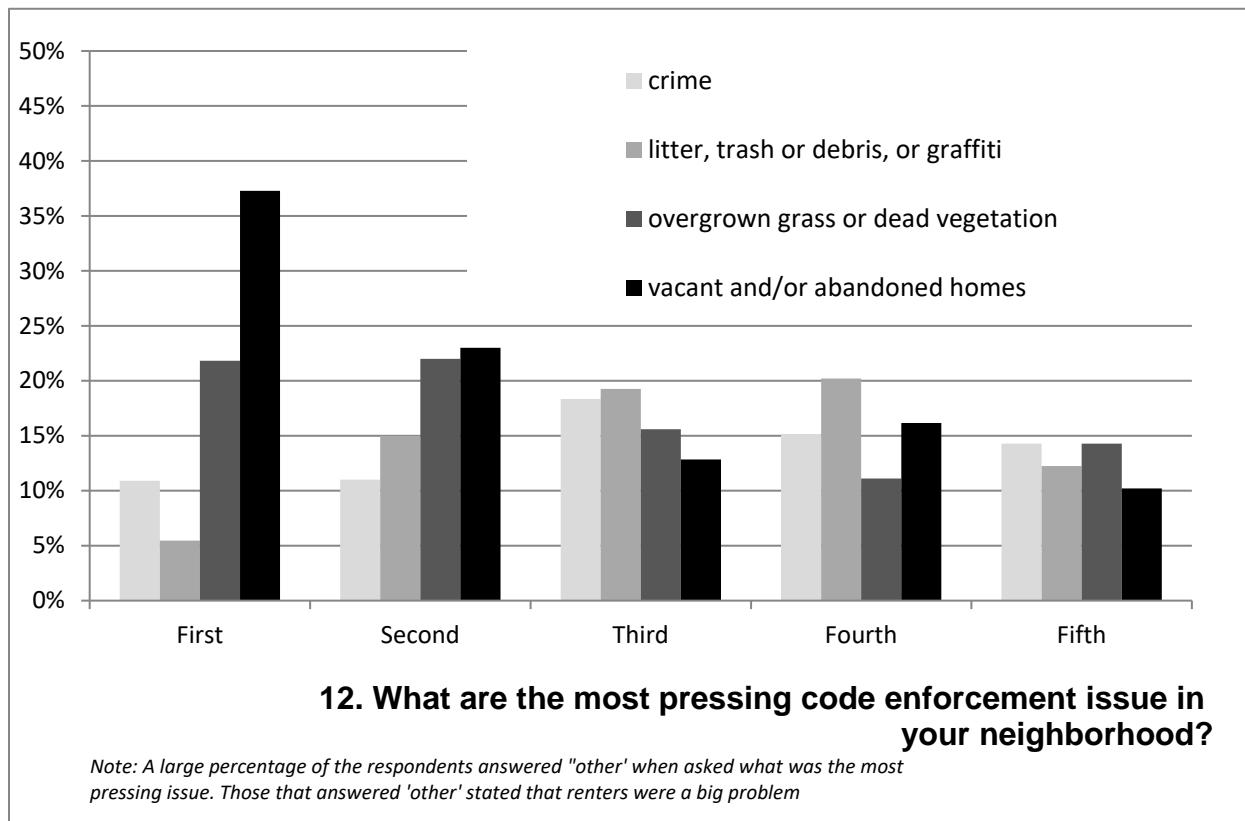
Results show the importance of meetings and conversations in the City of Youngstown to maintain communication with members of the community. About 80 percent of respondents stated that they obtain information from meetings and conversations with their neighborhood council, YNDC (or other nonprofit), and City staff. Additionally, 64 percent of participants provide code enforcement information during these settings. When asked the best ways to obtain code enforcement information, about 66 percent of participants answered meetings and conversations, making it the most popular option.

Email and the City’s website were also identified as some of the best ways to obtain information, while phone calls were identified as the second most popular way to provide information.

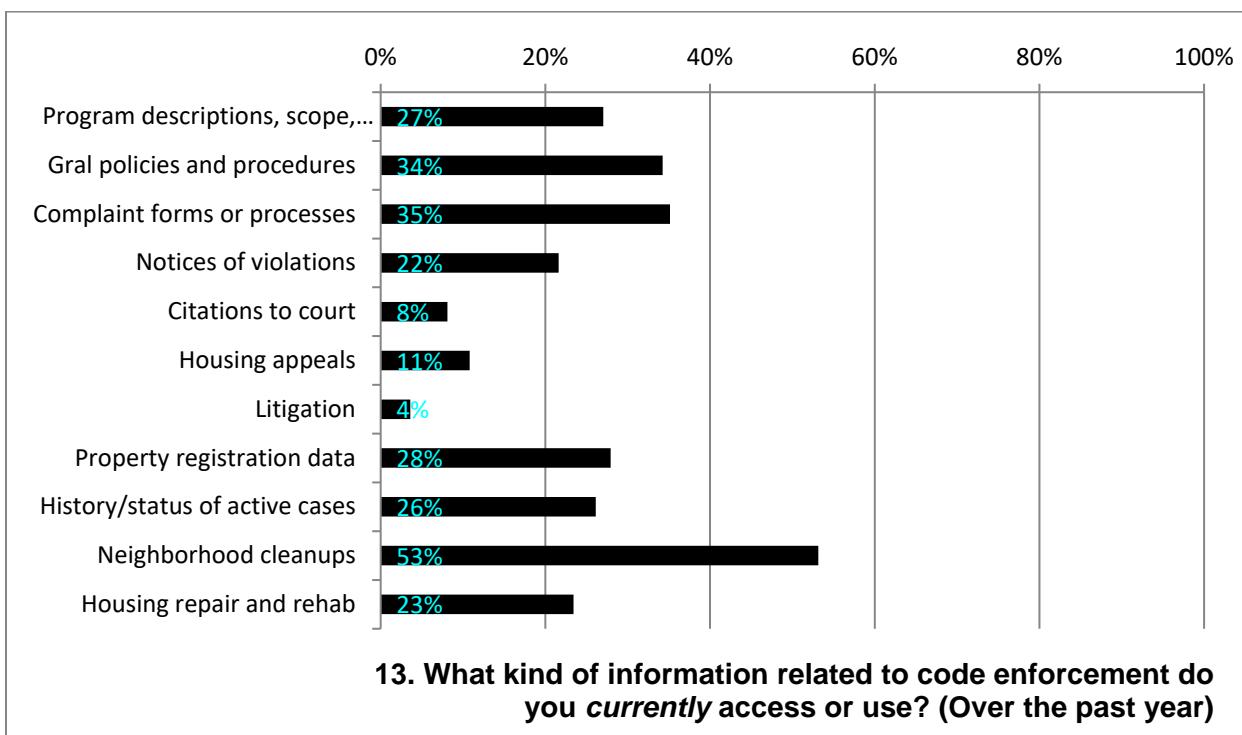
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Community's Role

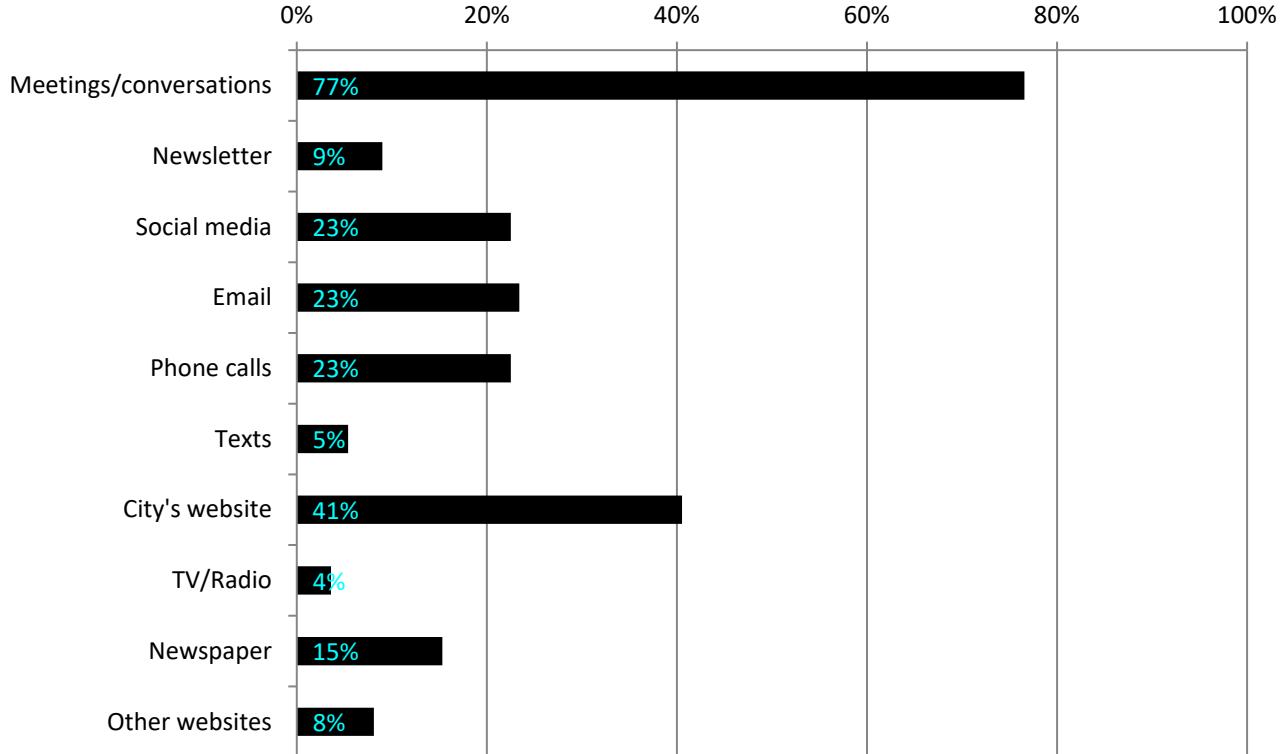
Results indicate that community members are aware of their role in the success of Youngstown's code enforcement program. They understand they need to report problems, maintain communication with city staff, get engaged, and keep neighborhoods clean and free of trash.



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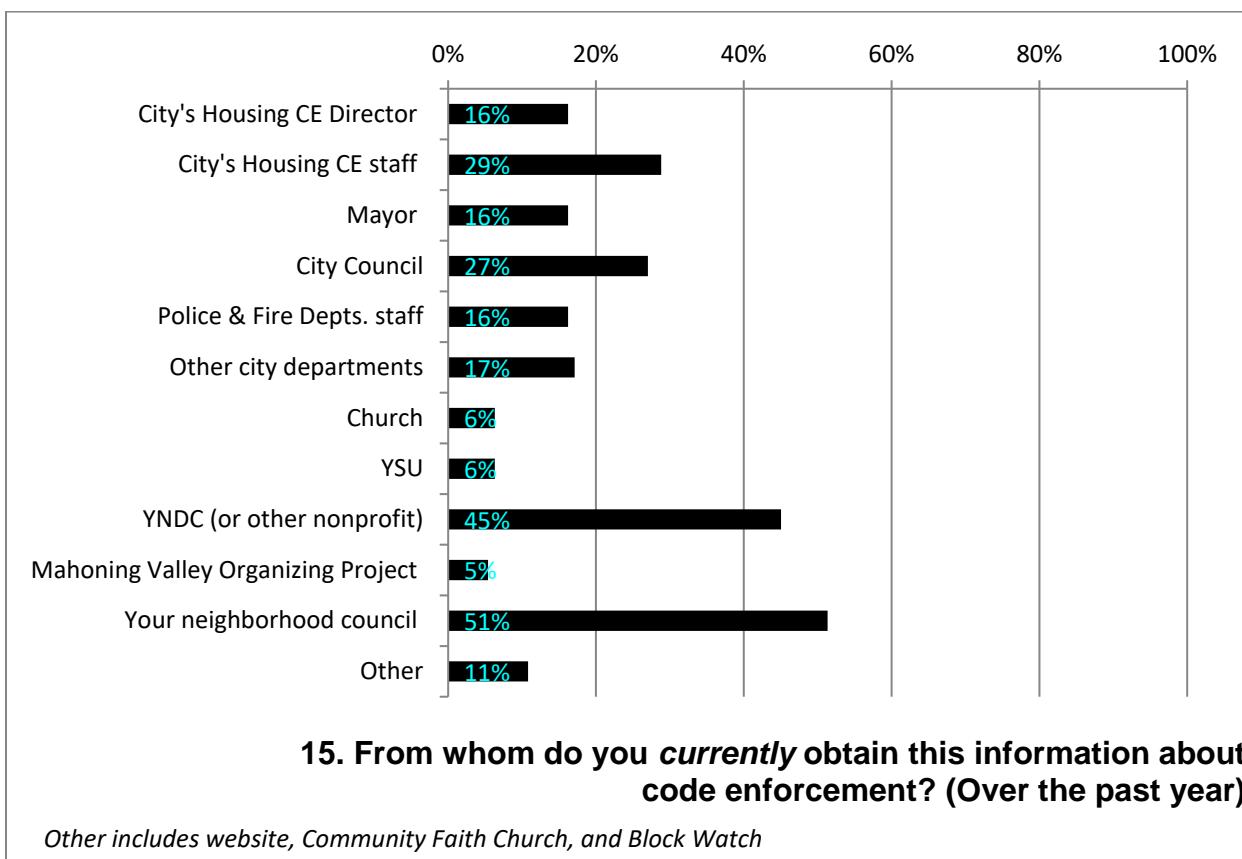


14. How do you *currently* obtain this information about code enforcement? (Over the past year)

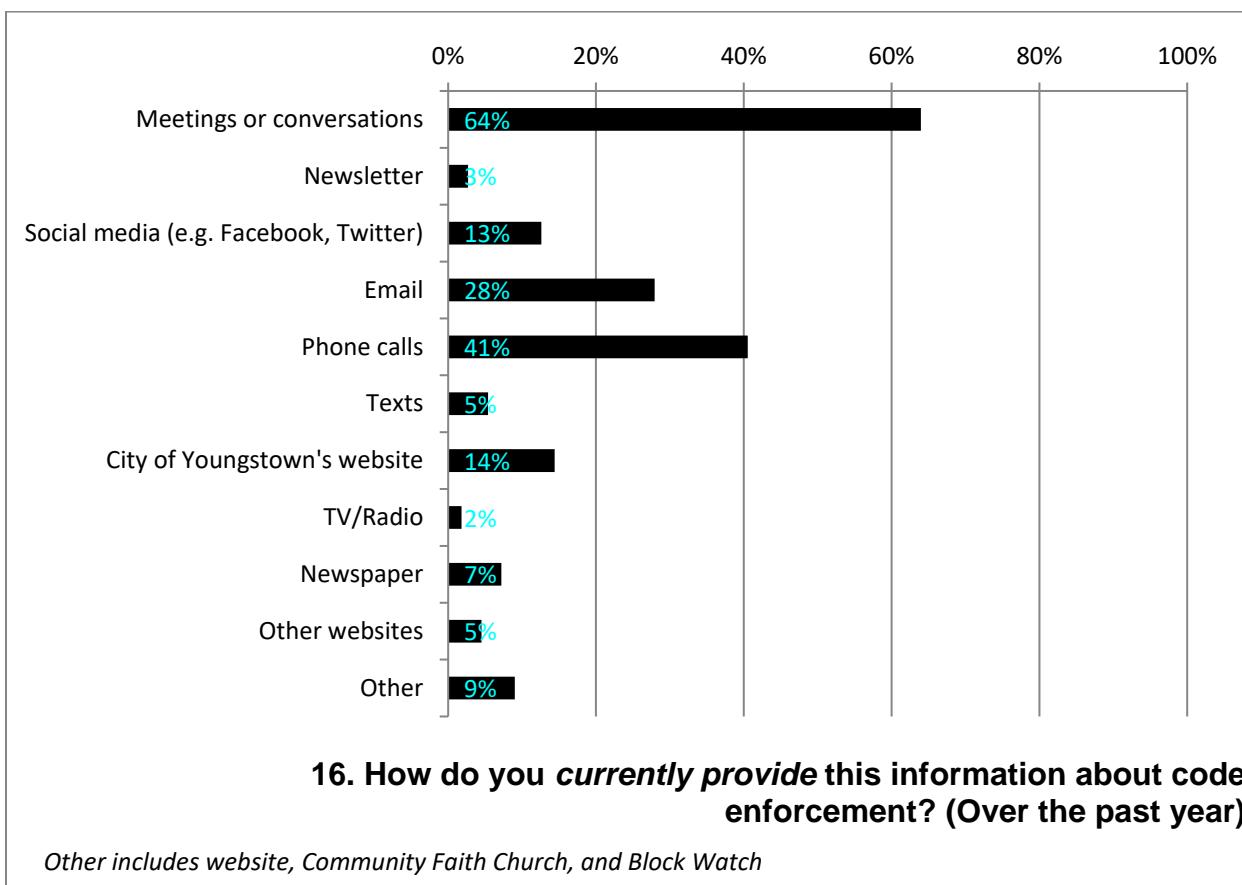
Note 1: Other sources listed by respondents include online neighborhood group YNDC & Green Youngstown, Cochran Park & Hnades website, HUD website and state of Ohio housing code information

Note 2: Newsletters listed include :Brownlee Woods Newsletter, YNDC, The Vindicator, 7th Ward Citizen Coalition Monthly Newsletter

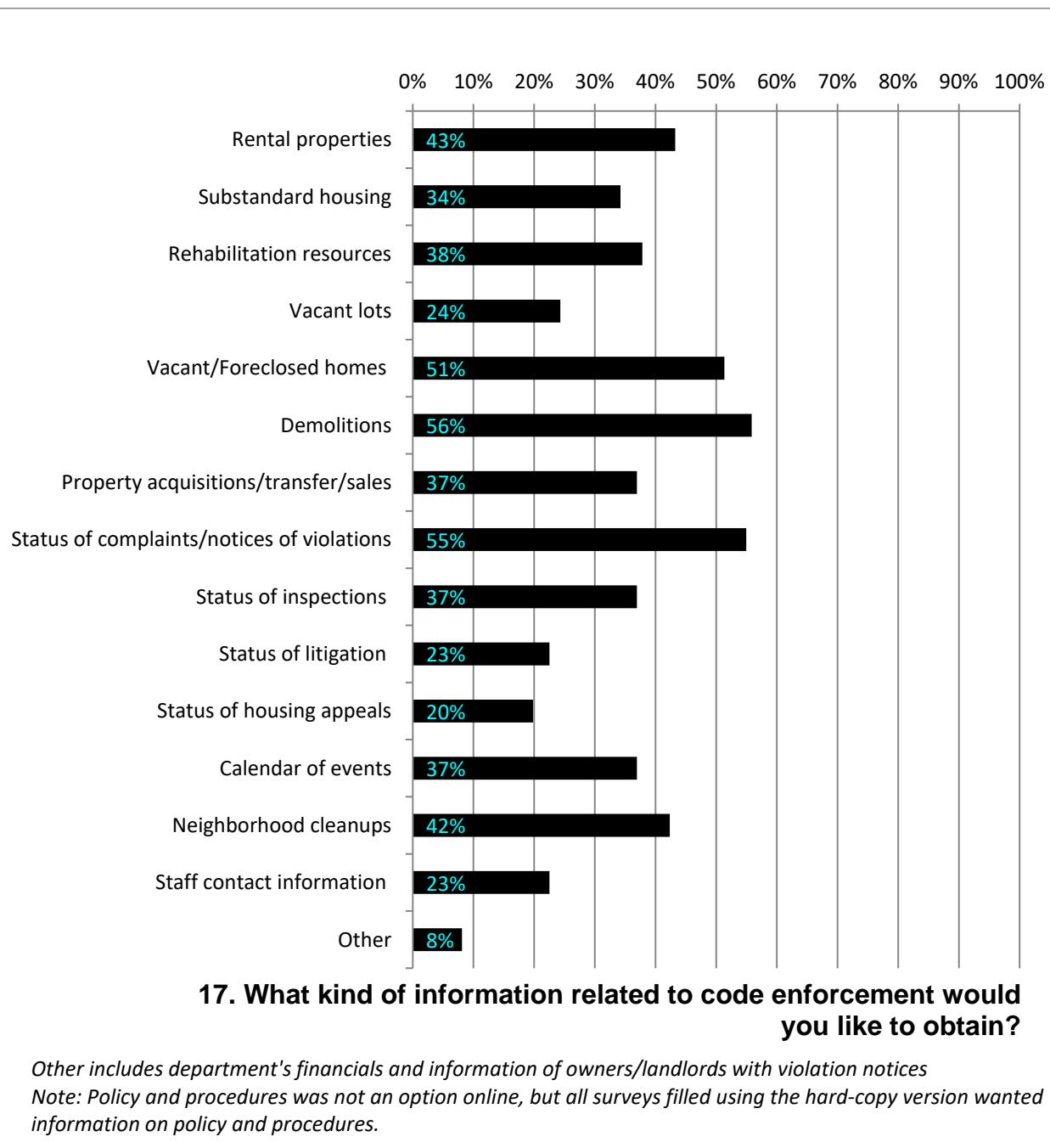
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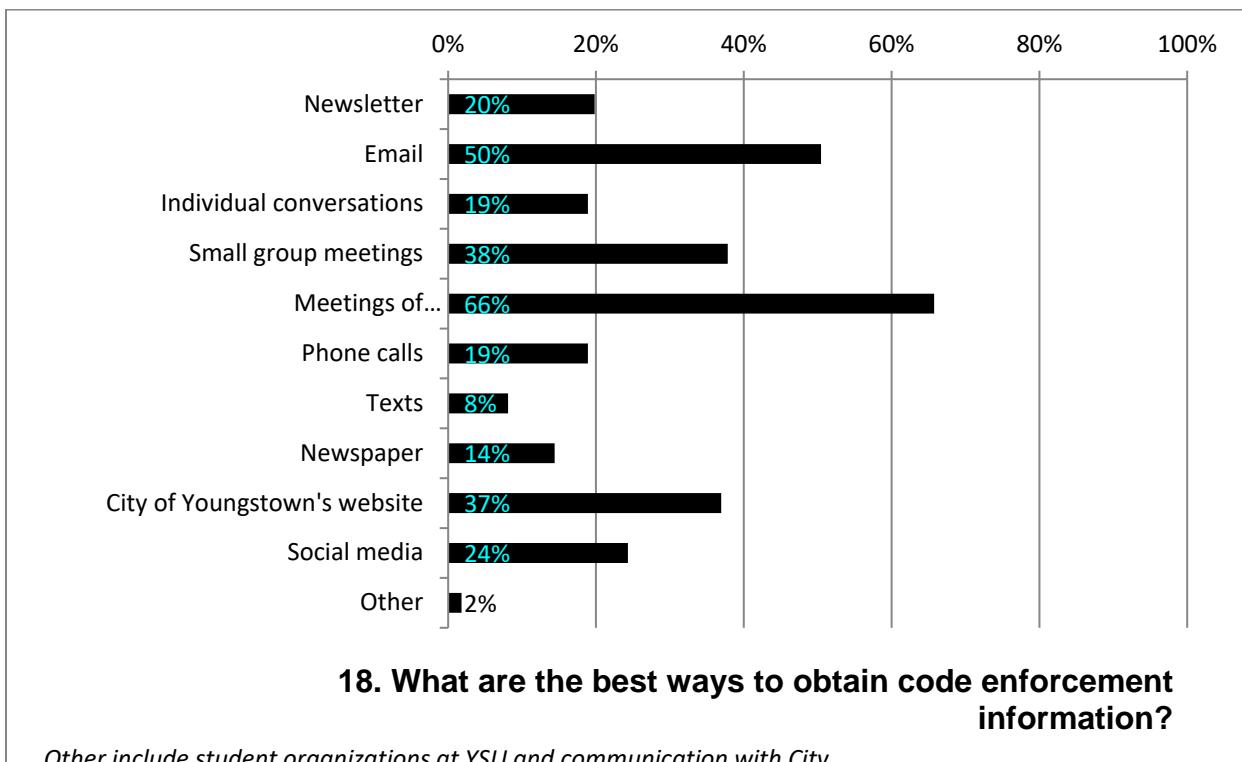
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19. In your opinion, what are the two things that community members can do to help the code enforcement program?

1. Report problems and maintain conversation with City Staff
 2. Get engaged
 - a. Attend meetings
 - b. Volunteer during cleanups
 - c. Stay informed
 3. Maintain neighborhoods clean and free of trash
 4. Meet and educate other neighbors.
- Work together



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Many respondents understood that the Department was under staffed.

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20. Any other suggestions?

1. City should communicate/coordinate constantly with all interested stakeholders: neighborhood groups, citizens, landbanks, etc.
2. Educate citizens about policies and procedures.
3. Provide accessibility to various resources, including codes, policies and procedures: *"I've lived in BW neighborhood for almost three years and have NOT been offered a book or link to the codes. They say you can purchase, but they do not have at meetings. If people don't have access, they don't know. Landlords and/or owners should have this information as well and be held accountable even if outside of the state or US"*
4. Provide more information on City's website (e.g. status of complaints and violations)
5. Make website more user-friendly to find information to access and provide information
6. Monitor → Citizens want accountability
7. Provide reports about the department's progress
8. Hire more code enforcement staff. Important to note that many residents applauded the City's efforts
9. Establish a campaign to reduce litter
10. Be reasonable regarding violations. Acknowledge that some homeowners are struggling financially but are trying to improve their properties.
11. Individual concerns



This department has done an awesome job! It is a never-ending job but anytime I have called I was given assurance there would be follow up



Section 4: Next Steps

The following section outlines next steps and future recommendations.

1. The assessment team will be back in Youngstown on November 7, 2016 to present the new Policy and Procedure Manuals to city staff and community leaders.
2. A new funding request has been issued to fund Phase III (Fall 2017) of this project and continue improving Youngstown's code enforcement program. Note that the Metropolitan Institute will be stepping aside. The Urban Institute will become the project manager and team leader.
3. If funding request is successful, the team recommends conducting a new survey similar to this one. The survey will be more comprehensive and reach out to other stakeholders, for example: code enforcement staff, city staff, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood leaders, and underrepresented communities.