

SURVEY OF VIRGINIA-HIGHLAND RESIDENTS

Methodology

This report contains the results of a web-based survey of Virginia-Highland residents conducted by the Virginia-Highland Civic Association (VHCA). The survey was fielded November 30-December 10, 2016.

The survey was publicized in a variety of ways: posts on the neighborhood’s message boards (Nextdoor and VHList), the VHCA Facebook and Twitter sites, and the VHCA website; an article in the VHCA VOICE (e-newsletter); and an announcement in a regularly-scheduled safety update e-mailed by block captains to their neighbors. Several reminders were posted on the sites and e-mailed to VOICE subscribers. Postings and e-mails contained a direct link to the survey. The survey was completed by 393 Virginia-Highland residents who were age 18 or older.

The VHCA Communications Committee directed the project. Committee (and VHCA Board) member Kay Stephenson and public opinion analyst and Virginia-Highland resident Beth Schapiro, PhD developed the questionnaire, analyzed the data, and prepared this report. The questionnaire is attached in Appendix A.

Connection to the Neighborhood

- Sources of Information About the Neighborhood

Respondents use a variety of sources to keep up with what’s happening in the neighborhood. Word of mouth from neighbors and friends is the most common, followed by the VHCA VOICE, yard signs and banners, and the Nextdoor message board. The least used sources are VHCA’s Twitter feed and Facebook page.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION	YES	NO	DK
My neighbors/friends	89%	9%	2%
VHCA VOICE (e-newsletter)	79%	15%	5%
Yard signs and banners promoting local events	77%	21%	3%
Nextdoor message board	76%	20%	5%
Local media (tv, radio, newspapers)	61%	37%	2%
Neighborhood businesses	53%	42%	4%
My neighborhood watch street captain	49%	41%	9%
VHCA website	48%	47%	5%
Fight Back Against Crime (FBAC)	35%	56%	9%
VHList (Yahoo group)	27%	61%	12%
My child(ren)'s school(s)	21%	68%	11%
VHCA Facebook page	19%	72%	9%
VHCA Twitter feed	4%	83%	13%

- Amount of Neighborhood Information Received

Virtually three-quarters (74%) of respondents report that they have just about the right amount of information about what’s going on in Virginia-Highland. One-quarter feel that they don’t have enough, while 1% report having too much information about neighborhood activities.

- Importance of Keeping Up with What’s Going on in VaHi

Respondents believe it is important to stay informed about the neighborhood, as they rate that 4.31 on a scale of 1-5 (very unimportant to very important).

- History of Volunteering on Behalf of the Neighborhood

61% of responding residents have volunteered or are currently volunteering on a neighborhood project or committee, while 39% report no such involvement. Of those who have not volunteered, 59% would know who to contact if they wanted to get involved in a neighborhood issue or project, while the remaining 31% would not.

Virginia-Highland Civic Association

- Familiarity with and Job Performance of VHCA

On a scale of 1-5 (very unfamiliar to very familiar), the average is 3.62, indicating a moderately high level of familiarity with the organization. The respondents who are familiar with VHCA give it a solid job performance rating of 3.78 on a 1-5 scale (poor to excellent).

- Assessment of VHCA Activities

Respondents were given a list of VHCA activities and asked to rate the importance of each on a scale of 1-5 (very unimportant to very important). All are at least moderately important. Topping the list are some of the most challenging issues to address: public infrastructure, public safety, a healthy commercial district, and neighborhood parks.

ACTIVITY	RATING
Promote improved public infrastructure, including streets and sidewalks	4.42
Promote improved public safety	4.31
Promote a healthy commercial district	4.31
Support and enhance neighborhood parks	4.28
Provide expertise and advocacy on land use planning issues, including proposed development in the neighborhood	4.18
Provide expertise and advocacy on transportation and parking	4.08
Preserve the neighborhood's history (e.g. fire station renovation, history tours, newsletter archives)	4.08
Provide expertise and advocacy on zoning issues, including variances	4.02
Organize and promote Summerfest	3.92
Fundraise to support grants for neighborhood initiatives (e.g. tree plantings, PEDS, Atlanta Bicycle Coalition)	3.88
Organize neighborhood cleanups	3.79
Organize and promote Tour of Homes	3.57

- Importance of Engaging in These Activities

Respondents believe it is important to have an organization like VHCA engaged in these activities, assigning it a rating of 4.40 on a scale of 1-5 (very unimportant to very important).

- How VHCA Conducts Its Business

Respondents support a variety of practices for the organization as it conducts its business. Leading the list are policies and procedures related to transparency and communication. The least important is videotaping the monthly meetings.

PRACTICE	RATING
Publish agendas before meetings and minutes after monthly meetings	4.16
Use social media platforms such as Nextdoor and VHList to communicate and gather input	4.15
Publicize monthly planning meetings that review variance, zoning, and alcohol license requests	4.03
Conduct monthly VHCA meetings	3.98
Conduct regular surveys to solicit feedback from residents	3.94
Increase volunteer opportunities for residents to become more involved in neighborhood activities.	3.78
Videotape monthly meetings	2.74

- Interest in VHCA Providing Social Opportunities

There is some interest in having the organization provide social opportunities for getting to know other neighborhood residents. On a scale of 1-5 (very uninterested to very interested), respondents give this a 3.22 rating.

Among the 142 respondents who express at least somewhat of an interest (a rating of 4 or 5), they are most interested in new fundraising types of events and informal social events in the neighborhood.

DESIRED ACTIVITY	RATING
New neighborhood events to raise funds for neighborhood improvement and increase community interaction (e.g. Oakhurst Porchfest, BeltLine Wine Stroll, Lantern Parade)	4.05
Informal social events at neighborhood establishments	4.01
Formation of affinity groups (e.g., running, knitting, new parents, woodworking, politics)	3.22

Living in Virginia-Highland

- Quality of Life

Residents are pleased with their overall quality of life, rating it a 4.35 on a scale of 1-5 (poor to excellent). On the same scale, they identify location, walkability, and proximity to the BeltLine as the most positive aspects of life in the neighborhood. Housing quality, parks and greenspace, schools, and bars/restaurants also earn high rankings. Housing cost and bicycle safety are the lowest-rated facets of living in Virginia-Highland.

FACET OF LIVING IN VIRGINIA-HIGHLAND	RATING
Location	4.77
Walkability	4.50
Proximity to BeltLine	4.43
Housing quality	4.14
Parks and greenspace	4.08
Schools	4.04
Restaurants and bars	4.01
Sense of community	3.74
Exciting events and activities	3.65
Overall safety	3.39
Commercial mix	3.37
Bicycle safety	2.94
Housing cost	2.88

Key Findings

- This is an informed and engaged community. These residents believe it is important to keep up with what's going on in their neighborhood, and their behavior bears that out. They get information from numerous sources, and a majority is satisfied with the amount of information received. A majority also are current or former volunteers on neighborhood projects or committees. Most non-volunteers would know who to contact if they wanted to become involved.
- VHCA is on solid ground. Neighbors are fairly familiar with the organization and give it a moderately high job performance rating. All of the tested activities are at least moderately important, and respondents express a strong belief in the importance of having an organization like VHCA engaged in these activities. These residents support a variety of organizational practices promoting transparency, communication, and community engagement.
- Respondents give their neighborhood's quality of life a high rating. They also give moderately high or high ratings to most facets of living here.
- The policy issues that stand out are public safety, the commercial district, public infrastructure, and neighborhood parks. In a slightly different order, these residents rate these as VHCA's most important activities. Although each received a slightly better than average rating in the quality of life ratings, overall safety and the commercial mix were toward the bottom of that list. They merit the continued focus of the organization. Walkability and parks/greenspace were toward the top of that list and provide opportunities for VHCA to protect important neighborhood assets.

Demographics

- Length of Time Living in Virginia-Highland

< 5 years	18%
5-10 years	20%
11-20 years	21%
> 20 years	41%

- Homeowner or Renter

Homeowner	95%
Renter	5%

- Age

18-30	4%
31-50	42%
51-65	36%
>65	19%

- Presence of Children Under 18

Yes	30%
No	70%

Appendix A: Questionnaire

SCREENING QUESTIONS

Do you currently live in Virginia-Highland?

Continue if “yes.”

Terminate if “no”.

Are you age 18 or older?

Continue if “yes.”

Terminate if “no”.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD

1. Indicate whether you use each of the following as a source of information about what’s happening in the neighborhood. Note that VHAC refers to the Virginia-Highland Civic Association.

(yes, no, don’t know/unfamiliar)

- a. VHCA website
- b. VHCA Facebook page
- c. VHCA Twitter feed
- d. VHCA Voice (newsletter)
- e. Nextdoor message board
- f. VHList (Yahoo group)
- g. Local media (tv, radio, newspapers)
- h. My public safety street captain
- i. Fight Back Against Crime (FBAC)
- j. My neighbors/friends
- k. My child(ren)’s school(s)
- l. Neighborhood businesses
- m. Yard signs and banners promoting local events
- n. Other (please specify)

2. Thinking about how much you know about what’s going on in Virginia-Highland, do you feel that you have

- a. Too much information
- b. Just about the right amount of information
- c. Not enough information

3. How important is it to you to keep up with what’s going on in our neighborhood?

(1-5, 1=very unimportant, 5=very important)

4. Are you currently volunteering or have you ever worked on a neighborhood project or committee (e.g. Summerfest, Tour of Homes, graffiti cleanup, neighborhood watch street captain)?

(yes, no, don’t know)

5. [IF NO] If you wanted to volunteer or become involved in a neighborhood issue or project, would you know who to contact?

(yes, no)

VHCA

6. [ALL] How familiar are you with the Virginia Highland Civic Association (VHCA)?
(1-5, 1=very unfamiliar, 5=very familiar)

7. [IF FAMILIAR] Overall, how would you rate VHCA's overall job performance?
(1-5, 1=poor, 5=excellent)

[ALL] VHCA's charter states that its purpose is "the promotion and furtherance of the common good, general welfare and interests of residents of Virginia-Highland." The association provides VaHi residents a way to effect a variety of issues and develop community efforts that have an impact on our quality of life. VHCA organizes two yearly events, Summerfest and the Tour of Homes, which earn revenue that make many of those efforts possible.

8. VHCA engages in a variety of activities. How important is each of the following?
(1-5, 1=very unimportant, 5=very important)

- a. Promote improved public safety
- b. Provide expertise and advocacy on zoning issues, including variances.
- c. Provide expertise and advocacy on land use planning issues, including proposed development in the neighborhood.
- d. Organize neighborhood cleanups
- e. Provide expertise and advocacy on transportation and parking
- f. Organize and promote Summerfest
- g. Organize and promote the Tour of Homes
- h. Promote a healthy commercial district
- i. Fundraise to support local initiatives (e.g., tree plantings, PEDS, Atlanta Bike Coalition)
- j. Support and enhance neighborhood parks
- k. Preserve the neighborhood's history (e.g. fire station renovation, history tours, newsletter archives)

9. How important is it to you personally to have an organization like VHCA engaged in these activities?
(1-5, 1=very unimportant, 5=very important)

10. Thinking about *how* VHCA conducts its business, how important is it for the organization to do each of the following?
(1-5, 1=very unimportant, 5=very important)

- a. Use social media platforms such as Nextdoor and VHList to communicate and gather input
- b. Publish agendas before meetings and minutes after meetings
- c. Conduct monthly VHCA meetings
- d. Publish agendas before meetings and minutes after monthly meetings
- e. Publicize monthly planning meetings that review variance, zoning and alcohol license requests.
- f. Conduct regular surveys to solicit feedback from residents
- g. Increase volunteer opportunities for residents to become more involved in neighborhood activities

11. How interested are you in VHCA providing social opportunities for getting to know other VaHi residents?
(1-5, 1=very uninterested, 5=very interested)

12. [IF INTERESTED] In what types of opportunities would you be interested?
(1-5, 1=very uninterested, 5=very interested)

- a. Formation of affinity groups (e.g., running, knitting, new parents, woodworking, politics)
- b. Informal social events at neighborhood establishments
- c. New neighborhood events to raise funds for neighborhood improvement and increase community interaction (e.g., Oakhurst Porchfest, BeltLine Wine Stroll, Lantern Parade)
- d. Other (please specify)

LIVING IN VAHI

13. [ALL] How would you rate the overall quality of life in VaHi?
(1-5, 1=poor, 5=excellent)

14. How would you rate each of these facets of living in Virginia-Highland?
(1-5, 1=poor, 5=excellent)

- a. Walkability
- b. Bicycle safety
- c. Location
- d. Schools
- e. Restaurants and bars
- f. Commercial mix
- g. Parks and greenspace
- h. Proximity to BeltLine
- i. The people who live here
- j. Overall safety
- k. Housing quality
- l. Housing cost
- m. Sense of community
- n. Exciting events and activities

DEMOGRAPHICS

Now just a little more about you.

15. How long have you lived in VaHi?
(< 5 years, 5-10 years, 11-20 years, > 20 years)

16. Are you a homeowner or renter?
(Homeowner, Renter, don't know)

17. How old are you?
(18-30, 31-50, 51-65, >65)

18. Do you have children under the age of 18?
(yes, no)

19. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the neighborhood and/or VHCA?

Thank you for taking to time to help VHCA serve you better. If you're interested in learning more about VHCA and ways to become involved, please contact us at board@vahi.org.

Appendix B: Summary of Responses to Q19

Q19: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the neighborhood and/or VHCA?

This open-ended question provided respondents the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas and concerns in areas they felt were not addressed in the preceding questions. Of the 393 respondents to the survey, 127 elected to respond to this question with varying levels of detail. For example, one response simply read, “nope”, and another read, “I love my neighborhood”.

Open-ended questions do not lend themselves to quantitative analysis. Even when the responses are categorized it is difficult to present meaningful findings. That being said, we can make a few broad generalizations.

Twenty-four respondents expressed concern about our **commercial nodes** including the mix of businesses and empty storefronts. Others expressed the perception that Virginia-Highland businesses are facing stiff competition from Old Fourth Ward and Inman Park with Ponce City Market and Krog Street Market, and the VHCA, VHBA (Virginia-Highland Business Association) and the city need to do more to help. Suggestions included improving the streetscape especially on the south end of N. Highland, and creating bike lanes and signage that direct visitors from the BeltLine to the N. Highland corridor. In addition to competition, blame is assigned to parking and landlords who want unreasonable rents. On the flip side, two individuals suggested that VHCA needs to spend less resources on the commercial districts and focus solely on residents.

We had a modest write-in response on topics that can generally be classified as **community building**. A few liked the idea of affinity groups – especially for those that don’t have children, who are seniors, and who may be single. A few endorsed the idea of smaller events for neighbors or to draw visitors to the neighborhood, and for community service opportunities.

Safety was mentioned by many with the primary concern being the auto break-ins. This topic does indicate that there may be some perception issues in the community. One respondent mentioned that VHCA spending money on a private security patrol was a waste. However, the security patrol (FBAC) does not receive any funding from VHCA. Also, the consensus seems to be that crime is increasing, while we know from Atlanta Police Department data that this is not the case.

Of the 127 who responded to this question there was some concern expressed over **tear-downs and infill** housing with at least eighteen mentioning these words specifically. There were also a few comments that can be categorized as concern over **gentrification** and the loss of affordable housing.

On the issue of **homeless** people in the neighborhood, two respondents categorically want them gone. One wants to know more about the root cause and one wants to find ways to help. While four people is insufficient to draw any conclusions about the sentiment of the larger community, for those that feel strongly enough to have written in a response, there is no consensus.

There were a few strongly worded comments about the **Todd Memorial issue** – both for and against the lawsuit. There were also a handful of comments about protection through some sort of **historic designation** – again both for and against.

Another small group of responses can be categorized as **quality of life issues** including concern over the frequency of festivals and runs (both in the neighborhood and at Piedmont Park) that close streets and cause other inconvenience. A few would like to see greater investment in protecting trees, improving parks, cleaning up litter in the neighborhood and making residents and landlords maintain properties.

Over twenty-five responses in one way or another addressed **transportation** concerns including the need to control speeding and make the neighborhood safer for pedestrians, and bicyclists. The lack of free parking and increase in traffic are also seen as detrimental to the neighborhood by a few of the respondents.

Finally, with regard to the **VHCA** and the **VHCA board**, as expected, there were strong feelings expressed by a few respondents. With a total of only ten responses, the comments were generally supportive of being open about finances, publishing agendas and minutes, and seeking input through surveys and other means. Some expressed concern about the board pursuing personal agendas. For a few respondents, negative feelings about the recent election were expressed. A few also identified the need to ask the association to vote on major expenditures including grants, and on other important issues.

All responses are available upon request for review by members of the association (all neighborhood residents and businesses are members of VHCA). Please contact kay.stephenson@gmail.com. Since this survey was conducted for and by residents of Virginia-Highland, detailed responses will not be shared with residents or businesses outside of the neighborhood.