



CITY OF TOLEDO

Public Engagement for Toledo's Boards & Commissions



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Executive Summary

The Center for Regional Development (CRD) at Bowling Green State University partnered with the City of Toledo to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the City's community engagement efforts, and on the structure, operation, and effectiveness of its boards and commissions. These bodies serve as critical mechanisms for resident participation, policy guidance, and community voice, yet their impact depends on strong organizational systems, clear communication, and meaningful public involvement. This project was designed to assess current practices, understand both internal and external stakeholder experiences, and identify opportunities to strengthen the City's approaches to civic engagement.

The primary goals of the study were twofold:

- 1. To review existing community engagement strategies and practices**, with a focus on how the City informs, includes, and partners with residents.
- 2. To analyze the structure, roles, and functions of City boards and commissions**, including their capacity, consistency, accessibility, and alignment with best practices.

To achieve these goals, CRD implemented a multi-step, mixed-method evaluation process that engaged City staff, commission chairs, and the broader Toledo community. The results of these efforts are laid out in the pages of this report along with recommendations for improvement to align with best practices.

The project began with **interviews of City employees who serve as liaisons to individual boards and commissions**. These discussions provided foundational insight into operational processes, expectations for members, administrative challenges, resource needs, and variations in practice across the City's boards and commissions. Liaisons offered valuable insight regarding recruitment, onboarding, meeting logistics, communication methods, and the degree to which commissions are fulfilling their intended functions.

Building on these internal perspectives, CRD then conducted **interviews with chairs of the commissions**. These chairs—most of whom are Toledo residents serving in volunteer leadership roles—shed light on their experiences within the commission framework, leading meetings, facilitating member participation, and interacting with City staff. Their insights helped identify strengths such as commitment to service and civic pride, as well as challenges such as unclear expectations, inconsistent training, and limited public visibility.

To capture community-wide perceptions, CRD developed and distributed a **public survey to Toledo residents**. This survey instrument assessed awareness of City commissions, understanding of their purpose, perceived accessibility, and potential barriers to participation. The survey also sought input on how residents prefer to receive information so that future engagement efforts can be built around these preferences. The responses provided a broad perspective on public knowledge gaps, trust in city processes, and opportunities for expanding access to civic roles.

In parallel, CRD administered a **standardized survey to commission liaisons**. This allowed for an apples-to-apples comparison across commissions regarding structure, membership, meeting frequency, policy influence, and administrative capacity. Combining interviews with community engagement allowed us to methodically document both operational conditions and residents' lived experiences. Taken collectively, these activities created a detailed portrait of the current state of community engagement and board and commission operations in Toledo. The insights gained from City staff, commission leadership, and residents form the basis for the recommendations contained in this report.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOARDS & COMMISSIONS

According to the City of Toledo Law Department, the City currently has 26 active commissions, with the Charter Commission currently paused. Many others are inactive (see further down in this report for a list). At the City's direction, we examined the specific boards and commissions listed below, analyzing their required composition for voting, conducting business, and seating members.

We have attempted to identify the purpose and make-up directly from the ordinance whenever possible, but some have been summarized for clarity or brevity.

The ordinances generally state that members of boards and commissions are appointed by the Mayor and the appointments must be approved by the whole of Toledo City Council.

ARTS COMMISSION

The Arts Commission is a non-profit 501(c)3 that manages the City of Toledo's One Percent for Art program. They work to strengthen the region's cultural landscape by expanding opportunities for residents to experience and participate in the arts. It fosters, coordinates, and supports cultural projects, promotes public interest and pride in the area's cultural heritage, and helps address long-term cultural needs by encouraging collaboration among local arts and cultural organizations.

The Commission consists of 18 members who serve three-year terms. It prescribes its own rules of procedure and keeps a record of transactions and reports annually to the Mayor and Council. It shall not meet less than once each month.

BLOCK WATCH

The Block Watch Commission is dedicated to reducing neighborhood crime and improving public safety. It strengthens communication between residents and local government, encourages neighborhood-based problem solving, and supports community participation in crime prevention efforts.

The Board includes 8 members representing Toledo's 8 sectors. Additional appointments include one member designated by the Chief of Police, two appointed by the Mayor, and two appointed by City Council. Members serve two-year terms.

CITY HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

The City Historic District Commission identifies, preserves, and protects Toledo's historic and cultural resources. Its responsibilities include designating landmark properties, reviewing and approving Certificates of Appropriateness, conducting surveys of cultural resources, advising City leadership on preservation matters, liaising with preservation organizations, reviewing National Register nominations, and notifying neighborhood organizations of demolition-related hearings.

Consists of 11 members. A majority constitutes a quorum, and official action requires the approval of the majority of the quorum present.

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

The Civil Service Commission adopts, amends, and enforces rules governing all positions within the classified service. These rules ensure that appointments and employment decisions are based on merit, efficiency, character, and industry, thereby supporting a fair and professional workforce.

The Commission consists of 3 electors appointed by the Mayor with Council approval. Two members constitute a quorum. Members serve six-year terms.

DOWNTOWN PARKING LOT REVIEW & IMPROVEMENT ADVISORY BOARD (DPLRIAC)

The DPLRIAC reviews all surface parking lot design plans and variance requests within the Downtown Overlay District. It ensures compliance with standards related to fencing, brick columns, spacing, and design quality to enhance the appearance and functionality of downtown parking facilities.

The Committee consists of 7 members. A quorum requires 5 members, including the Chair. Four affirmative votes are required for all official actions.

CITY PLAN COMMISSION

The Toledo-Lucas County Plan Commission works to create a community with a high quality of life and equitable access to economic opportunity. It reviews planning and zoning proposals, including land use changes, development plans, and long-term community planning strategies.

The Commission is composed of 5 members. A majority constitutes a quorum, and official action requires the approval of the majority of the quorum present.

CIVILIAN POLICE REVIEW BOARD

The Civilian Police Review Board provides an impartial, community-centered appeal process for individuals who file complaints of police misconduct or are dissatisfied with findings from internal investigations. It enhances transparency, accountability, and public confidence in law enforcement oversight.

The Board is composed of 13 volunteer members. District appointees serve one-year terms (renewable for up to three consecutive terms). All other members serve two-year terms with a maximum of two consecutive terms. No quorum is referenced.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION & CLIMATE RESILIENCE COMMISSION

This Commission advises the Mayor and City Council on environmental protection, climate resilience, and sustainability initiatives. It supports the development and implementation of policies and projects aimed at safeguarding natural resources and improving environmental quality. It also oversees the process for allocating the City's 1% for the Environment Fund.

The Commission has 10 members, appointed by the Mayor, serving two-year terms.

GENDER EQUITY COMMISSION – CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

The Commission addresses discrimination affecting women, girls, and minoritized genders by examining barriers in employment, economic development, political representation, gender-based violence, education, and healthcare. It promotes gender equity and recommends supportive policies and programs.

The Commission consists of 14 members. No quorum requirements are defined in the ordinance.

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

The Human Relations Commission supports a safe, energetic, equitable, and livable city. It works to help residents overcome prejudice, build mutual respect, and strengthen social cohesion. The Commission focuses on community relations, civil rights, and inclusive engagement across Toledo.

The Commission includes 14 members. One Council member serves as a non-voting representative. The remaining 13 members are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by Council. Members serve three-year terms. No quorum requirements are defined in the ordinance.

LATINO AFFAIRS COMMISSION

The Latino Affairs Commission advises the Mayor and City Council on issues impacting Toledo's Hispanic community, including employment, education, and economic development. It compiles and disseminates relevant demographic and socioeconomic data, supports City departments, promotes programs benefiting Hispanic residents, and serves as a liaison and advocate for the community.

The Commission consists of 7 members. No quorum requirements are defined in the ordinance.

MUNICIPAL GOLF PRESERVATION AND ENGAGEMENT COMMISSION

The Golf Commission advises the Mayor, City Council, and Parks leadership on the operation, stewardship, and long-term preservation of Toledo's municipal golf courses. It conducts course assessments, reviews operator contracts, provides input on marketing and youth engagement, and supports historical initiatives such as the Ottawa Park history project and the Toledo Municipal Golf Hall of Fame.

The Commission consists of between 5 and 15 members, appointed by the Mayor, who serve without compensation. The ordinance allows the Commission to establish its own internal rules and procedures.

OLD WEST END HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

The Commission develops and applies standards and guidelines that reflect the Old West End's architectural and historic significance. Its goal is to promote appropriate redevelopment of historic structures and ensure that new development is compatible with the district's character.

The Commission includes 9 Mayor-appointed members. A majority constitutes a quorum, and a majority vote of the quorum is required for official actions.

PARKS AND RECREATION LOCAL PARKS BOARDS

Local Parks Boards support effective management of Toledo's greenspaces and promote recreational opportunities, facilities, and programming that improve residents' quality of life. They ensure neighborhood-level input and encourage community engagement in park development and stewardship.

Each board has at least 5 members, appointed by the Mayor, serving four-year terms. Many community parks maintain their own boards to foster localized participation. A majority of the members shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

TOLEDO SISTER CITIES

Toledo Sister Cities International (TSCI) serves as the collaborative organization representing all of Toledo's sister cities. It strengthens international relationships, supports cultural and educational exchanges, and promotes global peace and understanding by empowering residents to act as "citizen diplomats."

As a nonprofit partner to the City, TSCI works closely with municipal government but is not structured as a City-appointed commission.

TOLEDO URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

The Toledo Urban Forestry Commission advises the City's Forestry Operation and advocates for a healthy, sustainable urban forest. It promotes tree preservation, planting, and planning, and encourages public awareness of the ecological, economic, and social benefits of urban trees.

The Commission includes 15 to 21 members. Commission which shall consist of not less than fifteen and not more than twenty-one members and the term is three years. No quorum requirements are defined in the ordinance.

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

The Youth Advisory Board elevates youth voices in city decision-making by working with Parks and Recreation staff, promoting youth concerns, designing community projects, and encouraging youth engagement in the park system. Members independently plan and facilitate their own meetings and create action plans to address youth needs.

The Board consists of 12-18 students, ages 14-18, who serve two-year terms. Because of the nature of this group being comprised of youth, they do not take action votes or even attendance for the purposes of a quorum.

INACTIVE BOARDS

The City has a lengthy list of boards and commissions that are currently inactive. CRD did not engage with anyone involved with these boards, either past or present. It is important to note these given the focus of this evaluation and because the list is so lengthy. Inactive boards are addressed in the recommendations section.



Inactive commissions, committees, and boards

Advisory Audit Committee

Advisory Board on Consumer Affairs

Bowman Park Advisory Board

Capital Improvements Program

Citizens' Fire Division Advisory Commission

Discrimination on the Basis of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) or Conditions Related to AIDS

Greenwood Park Advisory Board

Health Commission

Investment Advisory Board

Joe E. Brown Park Advisory Board

Labor-Management-Citizens Committee

Mayor's Environmental Advisory Board (replaced by Environmental Protection and Climate Resilience Commission)

Municipal Cemetery Commission (City contracts with Woodlawn)

Neighborhood Block Watch Board

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Commission (replaced by Board of Honor)

Pollution Control Appeals Board

Rev. H.V. Savage Park Advisory Board

School Safety Coordinating Committee

Sinking Fund Commission

Sleepy Hollow Park Advisory Board

Toledo Blight Authority

Toledo Botanical Garden Board (now part of the Metropark system)

Toledo Civic Leader Committee (replaced by Board of Honor)

Toledo/Lucas County Civic Center Mall Oversight Commission

Union Memorial Park Advisory Board

Westwood Park Advisory Board

William A. Smith Jr. Park Advisory Board

Wilson Park Advisory Board

Winterfield Park Advisory Board

Interviews

As noted above, the first step the evaluation process was conducting interviews with City employees who serve as liaisons to the different identified commissions. Interviews were completed with all of the following individuals. Most of these are City employees, with the exception of Mike Miller.

Board/Commission	Liaison	Title
Arts Commission	Ikempesi Ogundare	Office Manager, Arts Commission
Block Watch Board	George Kral	Safety Director
Civil Service Commission	Mike Niedzielski	Director of Human Resources
Civilian Police Review Board	George Kral	Safety Director
DPLRIAC	Mike Miller	Kwik Park
Environmental Protection & Climate Resilience Commission	Dana Reising	Sustainability Manager
Gender Equity Commission	Tiffany Whitman	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director
Golf Commission	McKenzie Kujawa	Legislative Aide
Human Relations Commission	Caryn Maloney	Commissioner, HRC
Latino Affairs Commission	Tiffany Whitman	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director
OWE Historic District	Lisa Corttrell / Bill Harbert	Interim Director, Plan Commission
Park Board	Karen Ranney Wolkins	Parks Commissioner
Plan Commission	Lisa Corttrell / Bill Harbert	Interim Director, Plan Commission
Toledo City Historic Commission	Lisa Corttrell / Bill Harbert	Interim Director, Plan Commission
Toledo Parks and Recreation Advisory Board	Karen Ranney Wolkins	Parks Commissioner
Toledo Sister Cities	Jim Hartung / Austin Mack	President
Urban Forestry	Sarah Stacy	Commissioner of Urban Beautification
Youth Advisory Board	Daveion Beach	Youth Program Coordinator

In addition to the liaisons mentioned above, CRD spoke with Karlene Henderson of the Law Department to clarify issues around meetings, board and commission make-up, and general questions about how the City works within Sunshine Laws.

CRD designed a structured interview protocol consisting of core questions posed to all interviewees and supplemental questions tailored to individual boards and commissions. The areas of focus included:

Recruitment & onboarding

Information flow & communication

Vetting & appointment process

Relevance to City goals & current issues

Interaction with board/commission members

INTERVIEW THEMES

Recruitment

Members reported that recruitment occurs primarily through informal word-of-mouth and invitations from current board members. This practice creates insular groups that are difficult for outsiders to join. Interviewees attributed this pattern to inadequate City engagement and outreach, noting that it also limits diversity and prevents participation by individuals with relevant lived experience.

Onboarding

Boards and commissions employ inconsistent approaches to new member orientation. While a minority reported conducting introductory meetings with incoming members, the majority indicated that orientation consists solely of introductions during the new member's initial meeting. Several participants identified the absence of formal City onboarding as a gap, suggesting that comprehensive training on municipal operations and the governance role of boards and commissions would better prepare members for service.

Leadership & engagement

Outdated practices and poor leadership hinder effectiveness. Several interviewees cited support from the City as a barrier. Changing roles often meant that there was someone new serving as liaison and having to learn the boards' and commissions' processes.

Communication gaps

Groups report inconsistent information flow and lack of transparency that is driven by siloed systems. This is true for all ways that information flows: within the committee, back to the City, and outwardly to the community.

Silos

Interview findings indicate that there is little communication across boards and commissions. This lack of coordination was evident when two City liaisons, interviewed consecutively; each described organizing neighborhood clean-ups without awareness of the parallel effort.

Modernization needs

Interview data suggests that boards and commissions would benefit from increased reliance on technology and social media. While the Ohio Revised Code constrains certain commission activities—permitting virtual meetings but requiring in-person votes on agenda items—electronic formats remain effective for information dissemination and internal coordination.

INTERVIEWS WITH CHAIRS

Building upon interviews with City liaisons and best practices research, CRD engaged board and commission chairs within the project parameters. These positions are held primarily by community volunteers committed to addressing specific municipal issues through civic service. While scheduling constraints prevented universal participation, CRD conducted interviews with the following individuals:

Irma Acuna | Latino Affairs Commission

Ben Pushka | Environmental Protection and Resilience
Commission

Dan Hernandez | Arts Commission

Dave Kosmyna | OWE Historic District

Erin Baker | Human Relations Commission

Jim Mettler | Toledo City Historic Commission

Mark Sobczak | Golf Commission

Marty Coombs | Park Board

Wendy Pestrue | Gender Equity Commission

Recurring themes

Mission clarity & relevance: Participants consistently cited concerns regarding mission definition and scope. Many boards lack explicit alignment with City Strategic Priorities, while others have experienced mission drift from their founding mandates.

Resource & administrative constraints: Common issues include lack of funding, elimination, or changing of support positions at the City level (liaisons), and inadequate administrative assistance. Delays in scheduling, lack of shared systems, and insufficient staff support hinder progress.

Recruitment & engagement: Some boards and commissions reported difficulty attracting diverse and committed members; there is a heavy reliance on word-of-mouth.

Quorum: Quorum difficulties emerged as a recurring concern. Multiple boards have experienced prolonged inactivity because unfilled appointments leave them below required membership levels, making them unable to achieve quorum when any member is absent.

Communication gaps: Communication deficiencies span several areas, including insufficient coordination with municipal leadership, undefined reporting hierarchies, and limited public visibility of board operations and recruitment efforts.

City-Wide Survey

Boards and commissions ultimately serve Toledo residents. To assess public perception and awareness, CRD launched a citywide survey focusing on specific areas of board and commission operations, including:

1. Awareness & familiarity
2. Communication & transparency
3. Participation & barriers to engagement
4. Perceived usefulness, impact, & effectiveness
5. Improvement & priorities
6. Experience with commissions (whether respondents have served on or attended meetings and what that experience was like)

CRD developed a survey for Toledo residents using research best practices. Based on the city's population of 265,638, we calculated that 384 responses were needed to achieve a 95% confidence interval and ensure a representative sample. We used Qualtrics, a professional online survey platform, to conduct the survey.

The survey included a Spanish language toggle, though all responses were completed in English. We also created QR code flyers in Spanish to engage Spanish-speaking residents. Working with the City project team, we developed a comprehensive community engagement plan to maximize participation, which included:

- Placing a link to the survey on the City website
- A news release to the media
- A link in the Mayor's weekly newsletter
- Inclusion in neighborhood-specific sites such as Facebook and assistance from council members
- Placement on the City's social media outlets
- Art Loop at the Main Branch Library with the Arts Commission
- A presentation at the Zablocki Center
- Pumpkin Palooza at Ottawa Park
- A landlord/tenant event
- Placement at City locations within the Toledo Lucas County Public Library system
- Reaching out to the Sofia Quintero Art & Cultural Center
- A brief presentation for the District One townhall meeting

Our efforts were successful, yielding over 400 complete responses—exceeding our target sample size. We are confident this data represents resident opinions on boards and commissions and the City's engagement on this topic.

The following section includes survey analysis, charts, and data visualizations.

Survey Findings

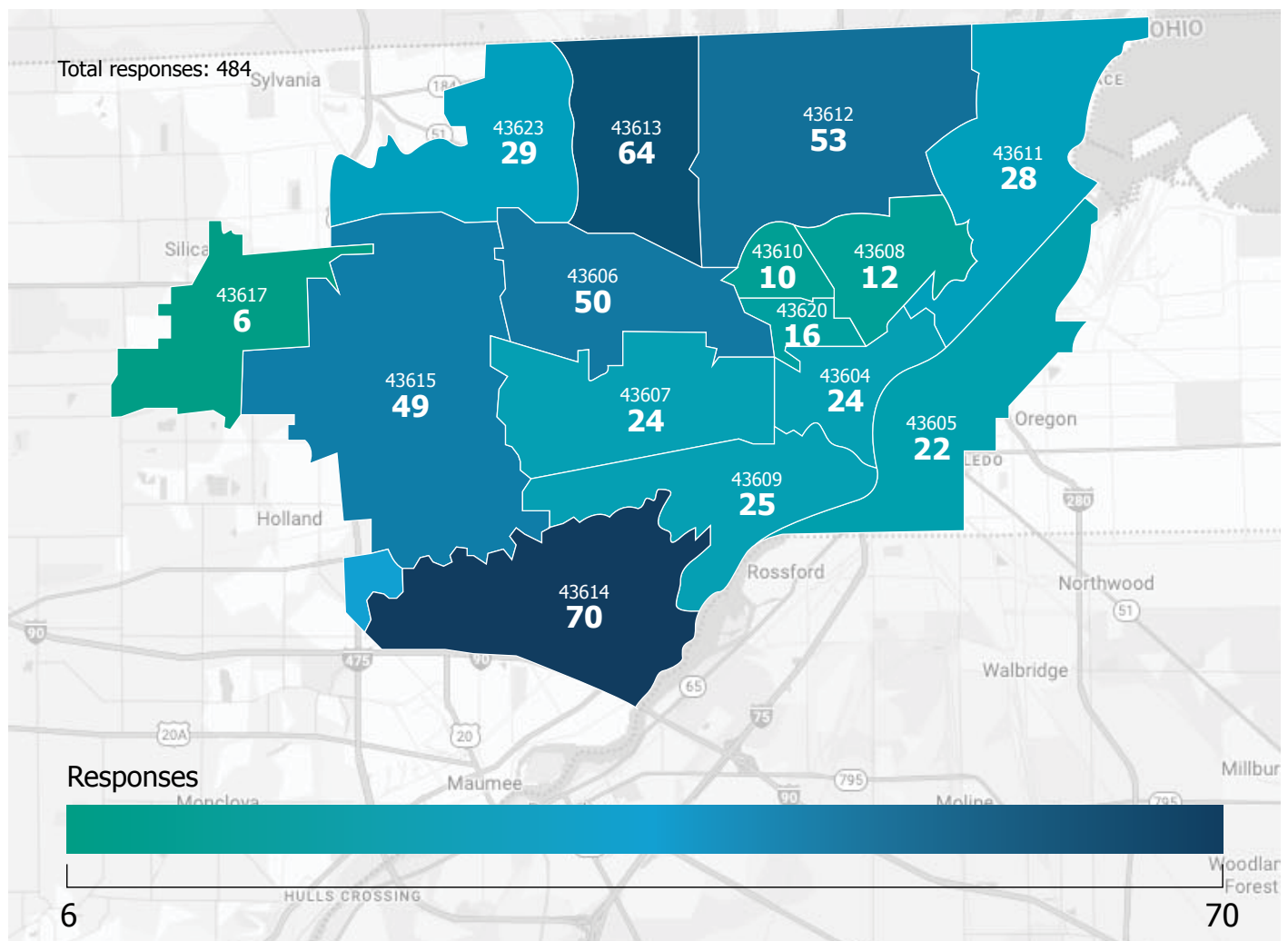
The survey reveals significant gaps in public awareness and engagement with Toledo's boards and commissions. Only 12.8% of respondents expressed any satisfaction with the visibility of board activities, with just 2.4% strongly approving. Over half selected "neutral," indicating widespread uncertainty and low awareness.

However, these results highlight a significant opportunity: residents want to be involved. The responses demonstrate strong interest in civic engagement and partnership with the City, suggesting promising potential for future participation.

Geographic distribution

To ensure broad representation, we collected responses from residents across Toledo. The following map shows respondent locations by neighborhood.

What is the zipcode you call home (not where you might have a PO Box)?

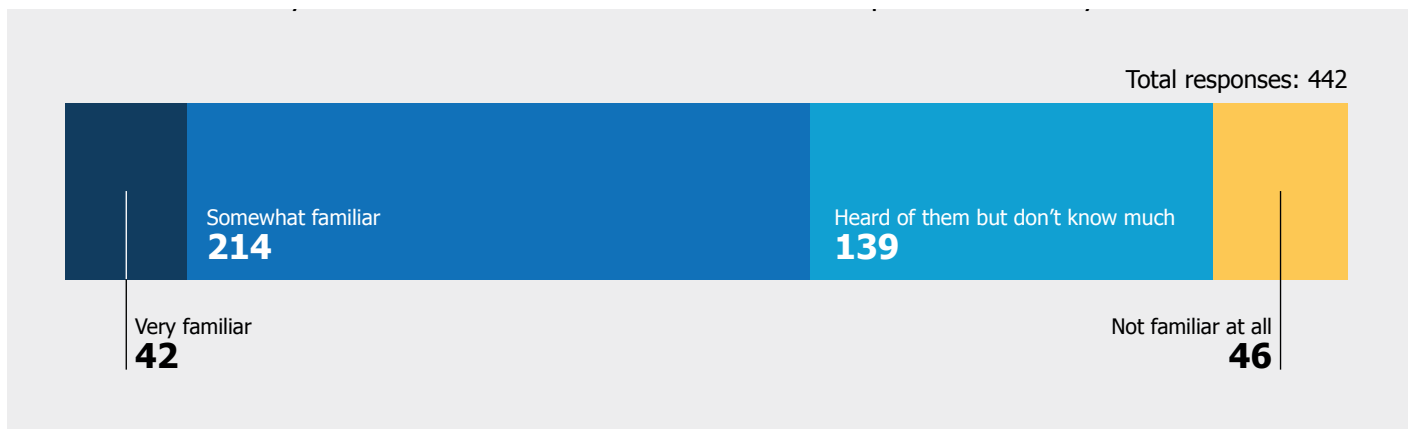


Familiarity with the boards and commissions

Nearly 35% of respondents indicated that they are either “very dissatisfied” or “dissatisfied” with the visibility of the board and commission activities. Only 13% expressed some level of positive satisfaction. The data indicates a significant visibility challenge for the City’s boards and commissions.

- **A majority** of respondents (222 individuals, or **52.6%**) selected “**neutral**”, suggesting widespread uncertainty or lack of strong opinions—likely reflecting low awareness of board and commission activities.
- **Dissatisfaction outweighs satisfaction:** Combined dissatisfaction (106 dissatisfied + 40 very dissatisfied) accounts for **34.6%** of responses, compared to only **12.8%** expressing satisfaction (44 satisfied + 10 very satisfied). This imbalance signals a clear perception gap.
- **Minimal strong approval:** Only 10 respondents (**2.4%**) reported being **very satisfied**, underscoring that few residents feel boards and commissions are highly visible or accessible.

How familiar are you with the boards and commissions that operate in the City of Toledo?



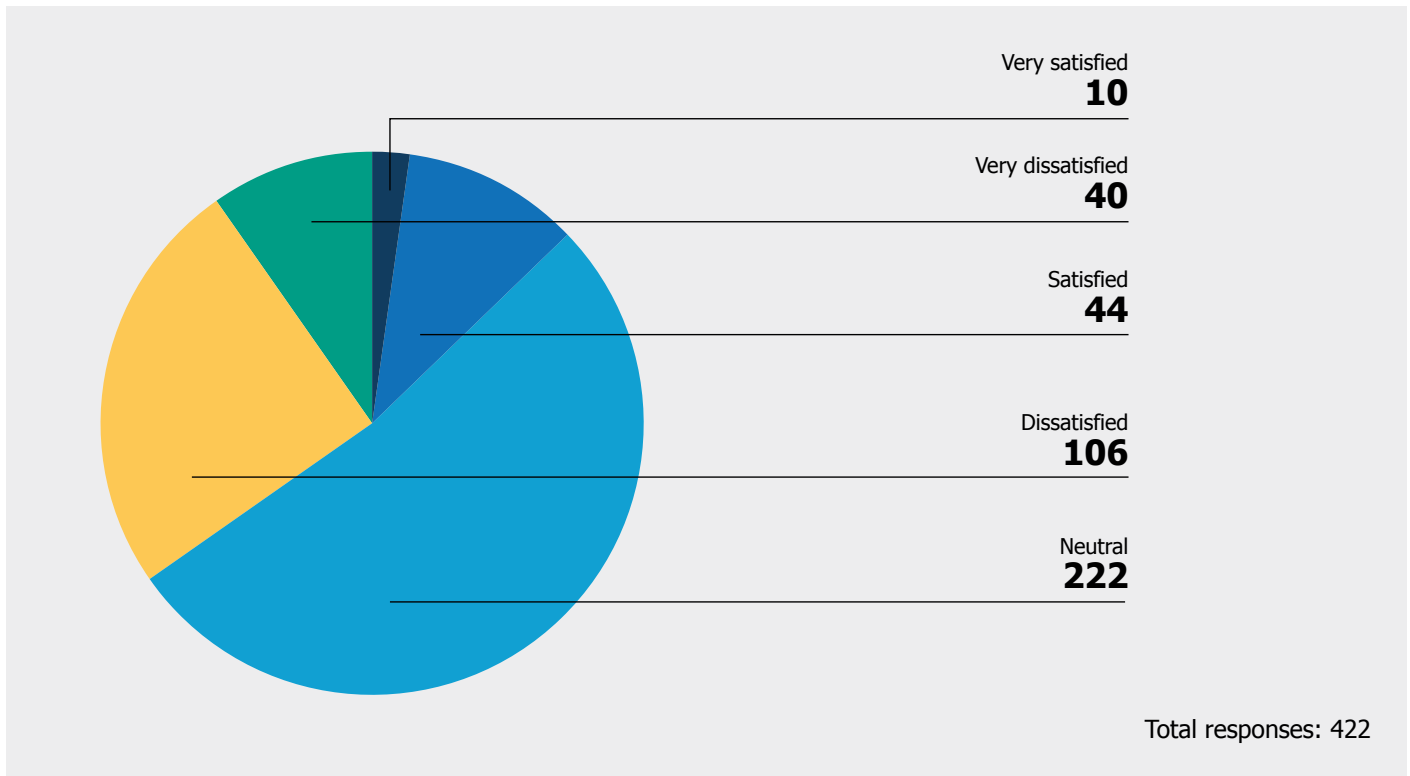
Satisfaction with visibility

Based on 422 total responses, the data reveals a significant visibility and awareness challenge for the City’s boards and commissions.

- **Neutral dominates:** Over half of respondents (222 individuals, or **52.6%**) selected “**neutral**”, indicating widespread uncertainty or lack of strong opinions. This suggests that many residents may not have enough information about board and commission activities to form a judgment.
- **Dissatisfaction outweighs satisfaction:** A combined **34.6%** of respondents expressed dissatisfaction (106 dissatisfied + 40 very dissatisfied), compared to only **12.8%** expressing satisfaction (44 satisfied + 10 very satisfied). This imbalance signals a clear perception gap and a need for improved outreach.
- **Minimal strong approval:** Only 10 respondents (**2.4%**) reported being **very satisfied**, underscoring that few residents feel commissions are highly visible or accessible.

Residents lack awareness of commission activities and perceive communication as inadequate. This highlights the need for proactive outreach, transparent communication, and public-facing engagement initiatives to build trust and awareness.

How satisfied are you with the visibility of commission activities in Toledo?



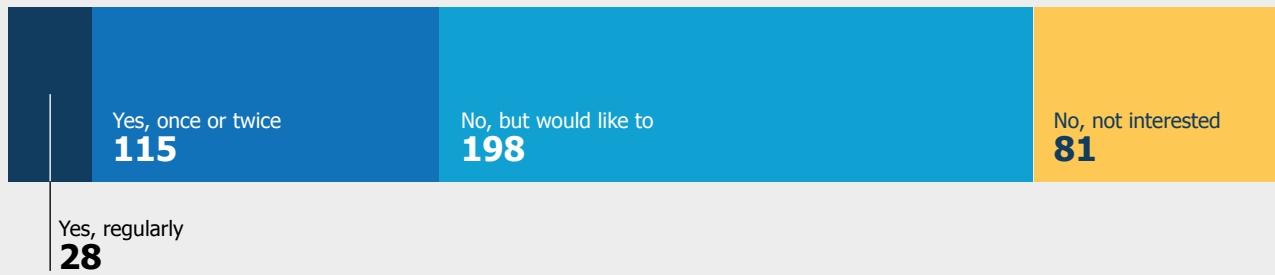
Previous participation

The data reveals several key insights about engagement patterns:

- 1. Low regular participation:** Only **28 respondents (6.6%)** reported participating regularly in board and commission meetings or events. This indicates that sustained engagement is rare among residents.
- 2. Occasional participation:** **115 respondents (27.3%)** have attended a meeting or event once or twice. While this suggests some level of exposure, it does not translate into ongoing involvement.
- 3. High interest among non-participants:** The largest group—**198 respondents (46.9%)**—have never participated but expressed interest in doing so. This is a critical finding; nearly half of respondents are open to engagement if barriers are addressed, signaling a strong opportunity for outreach and recruitment.
- 4. Disinterest segment:** **81 respondents (19.2%)** indicated no interest in participating. While this group is less likely to engage, their proportion is smaller compared to those who are interested but inactive.

How satisfied are you with the visibility of commission activities in Toledo?

Total responses: 422



Awareness of the boards and commissions

Awareness of boards and commissions varies widely among respondents.

- **The Arts Commission** is by far the most recognized, with 81.9% of respondents indicating awareness.

Other highly recognized commissions include:

- **Plan Commission:** 63.5%
- **Toledo Parks and Recreation Advisory Board:** 60.5%

Mid-level awareness is seen for:

- **Toledo Sister Cities:** 50.3%
- **Park Board (any):** 45.6%
- **Youth Advisory Commission:** 45.6%
- **Block Watch Board:** 44.2%

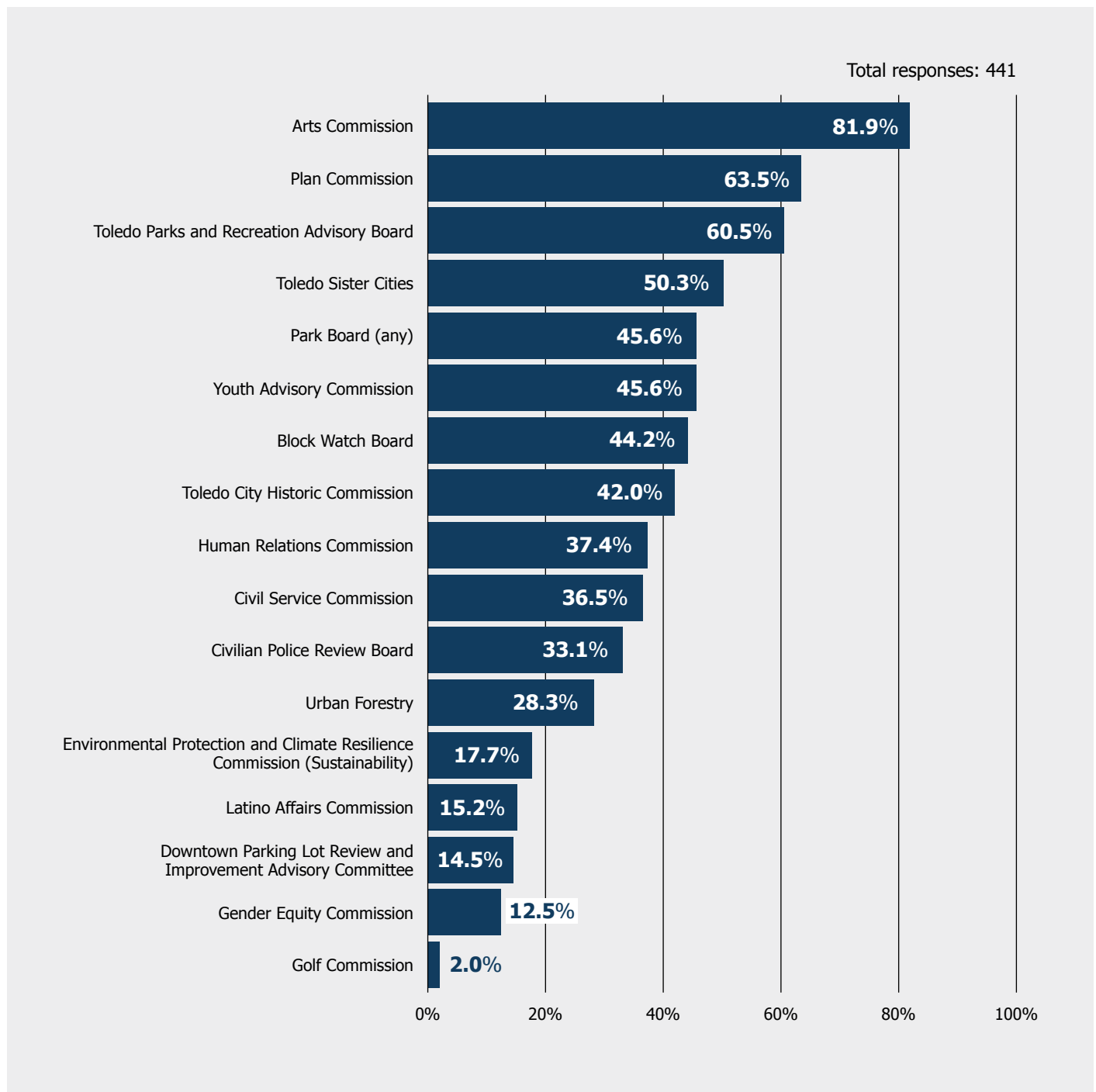
Lower awareness is evident for commissions such as:

- **Human Relations Commission:** 37.4%
- **Civil Service Commission:** 36.5%
- **Civilian Police Review Board:** 33.1%
- **Urban Forestry:** 28.3%

The least recognized commissions include:

- **Environmental Protection and Climate Resilience Commission:** 17.7%
- **Latino Affairs Commission:** 15.2%
- **Downtown Parking Lot Review and Improvement Advisory Committee:** 14.5%
- **Gender Equity Commission:** 12.5%
- **Golf Commission:** only 2.0%

Which of the following commissions have you heard of (select all that apply)?

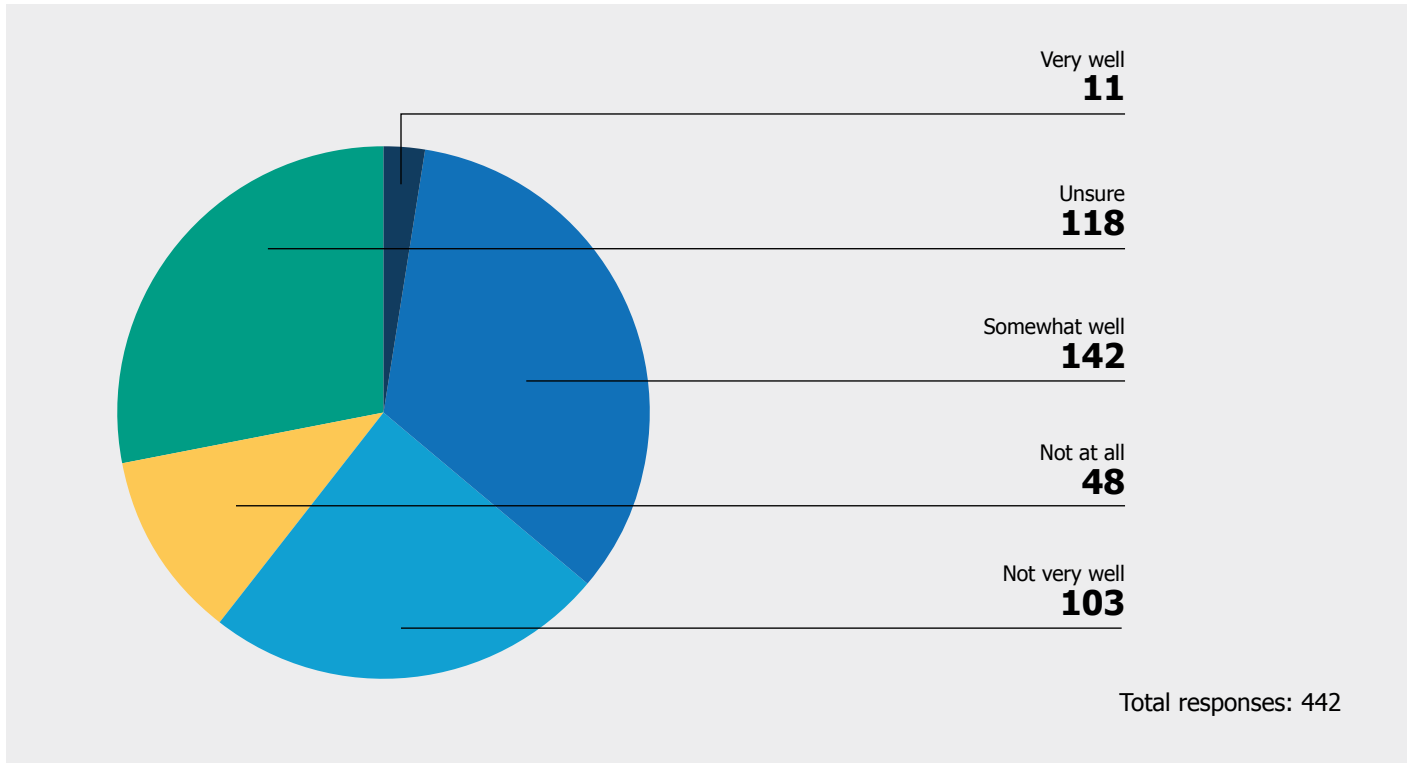


Addressing community need

- **“Somewhat well” (142 responses):** While boards and commissions are perceived as addressing community needs to some extent, the responses suggest there is room for improvement.
- **“Unsure” (118 responses):** A significant portion of respondents are uncertain, which may point to a lack of visibility or communication about boards and commission activities.
- **“Not very well” (103 responses):** Nearly one-quarter of respondents feel boards and commissions are falling short, signaling potential dissatisfaction or unmet expectations.

- **“Not at all” (48 responses):** A smaller, but notable, segment believes boards and commissions do not address community needs at all, highlighting a critical gap.
- **“Very well” (11 responses):** Very few respondents feel boards and commissions are fully meeting community needs, underscoring the need for stronger engagement and effectiveness.

To what extent do you feel commissions address the most important needs of the Toledo community?

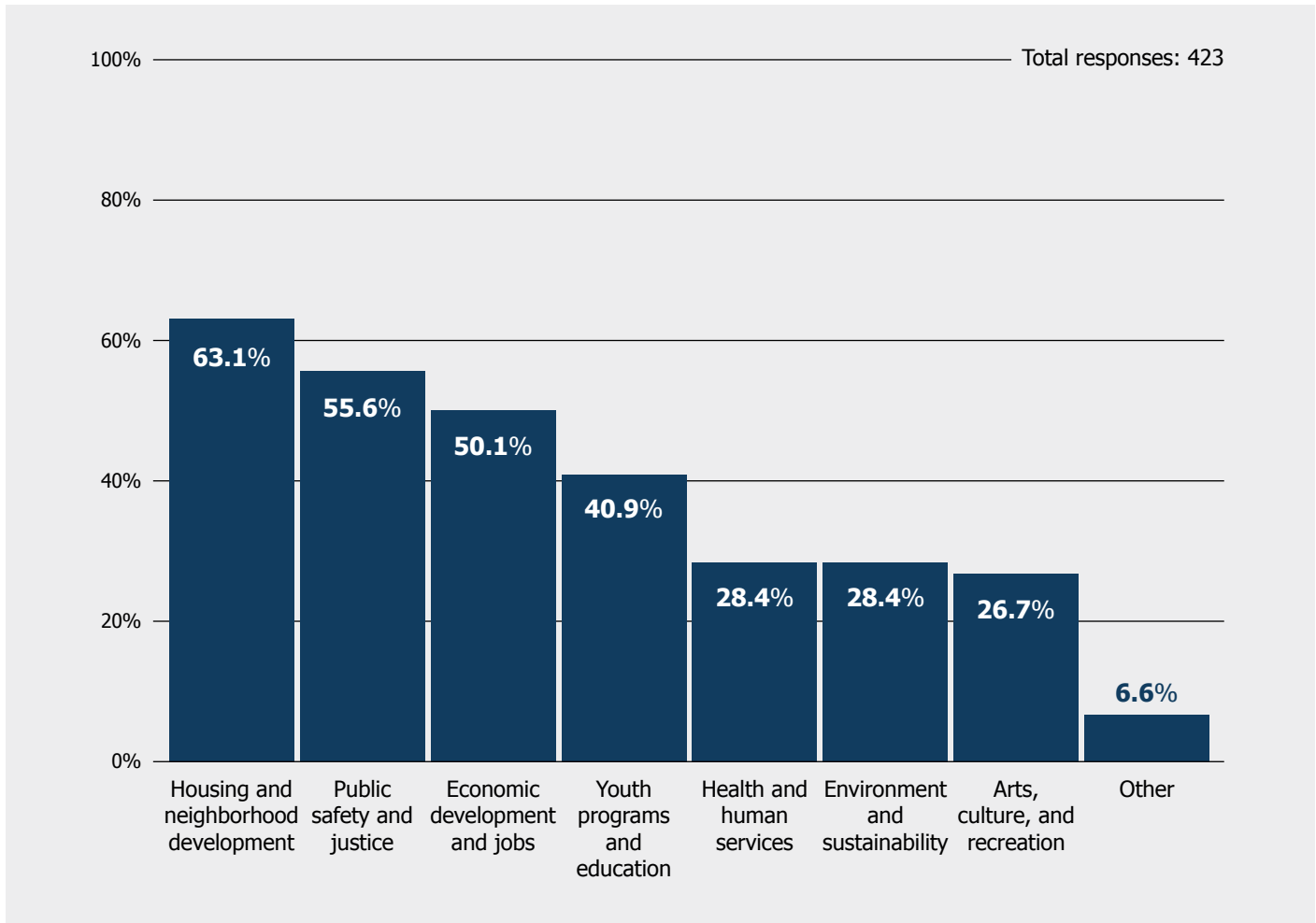


Areas of focus that residents want to see

- **Housing and neighborhood development emerged as the top priority**, with 63.1% of respondents identifying it as the most critical area. This indicates strong community concern about housing stability and neighborhood revitalization.
- **Public safety and justice ranked second at 55.6%**, reflecting significant interest in improving safety and fairness within the community.
- **Economic development and jobs followed closely at 50.1%**, showing that employment opportunities and economic growth remain key expectations for commissions.
- **Youth programs and education were selected by 40.9% of respondents**, highlighting the importance of investing in young people and educational initiatives.
- **Health and human services and environment and sustainability each received 28.4%**, suggesting moderate but notable interest in these areas, particularly in supporting well-being and environmental stewardship.
- **Arts, culture, and recreation accounted for 26.7%**, indicating that while valued, these areas are seen as less urgent compared to housing and safety.
- **Other priorities were minimal at 6.6%**, showing limited emphasis on areas outside the listed categories.

These responses can serve as a guide for the strategic planning process and goal setting as the City moves forward with situating these to better engage with the public and attempt to involve them in membership and the decision-making process.

Which areas do you think commissions should focus on most?

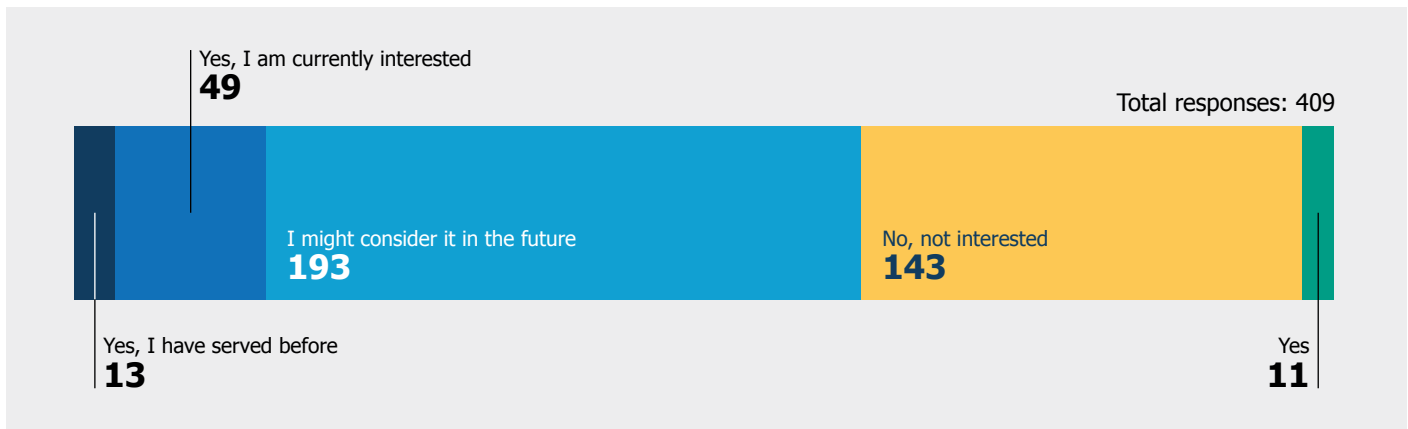


Future service

Based on 409 total responses, the data highlights both current interest and potential future civic engagement:

- 1. Strong future interest:** The largest segment—**193 respondents (47.2%)**—indicated they might consider serving in the future. This suggests a substantial pool of potential volunteers who could be engaged through targeted outreach and education about board and commission roles.
- 2. Current interest:** **49 respondents (12%)** reported that they are currently interested in serving. This group represents an immediate opportunity for recruitment and onboarding.
- 3. Past experience:** A smaller group—**13 respondents (3.2%)**—have served before, and **11 respondents (2.7%)** are currently serving. These individuals could be leveraged as ambassadors or mentors to encourage new participation.
- 4. Disinterest segment:** **143 respondents (35%)** stated they are not interested in serving. While this is a significant portion, it is notably smaller than the combined group expressing current or potential interest (62%).

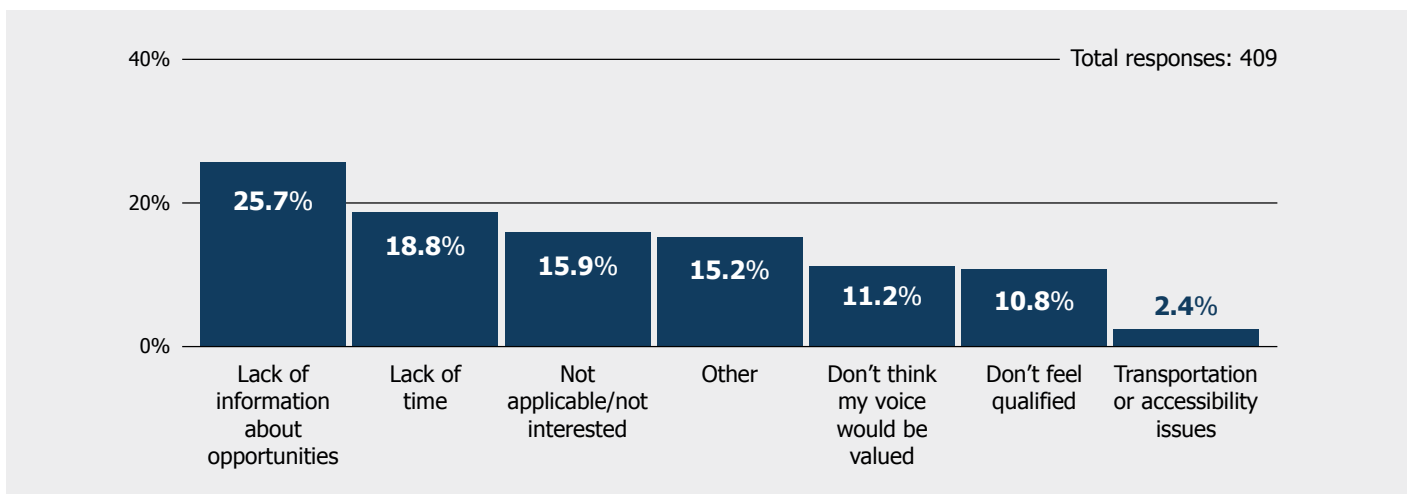
Have you ever considered serving on a City commission?



For those that added optional text entry, the themes of their responses included:

- **Lack of information** about available opportunities and how to get involved. Several asked for more outreach, clear descriptions of roles, or informational meetings.
- **Feeling unqualified or undervalued**, including concerns that their voice would not matter or previous experiences where they felt unheard.
- **Work-related constraints**, such as scheduling conflicts, shift work, or potential conflicts of interest for City of Toledo employees.
- **Age-related barriers**, mentioned by both older respondents and a young respondent who feared being perceived as “too young.”
- **Health issues** or caregiving responsibilities that limit availability.
- **Financial or transportation limitations** for a small number of respondents.
- **Perceptions of political bias or predetermined outcomes**, including feelings that boards and commissions are “too political,” that appointments are already decided, or that certain viewpoints would not be welcomed.
- A few respondents expressed strong distrust in local leadership or political dynamics, describing the process as a “waste of time” or criticizing specific local officials.

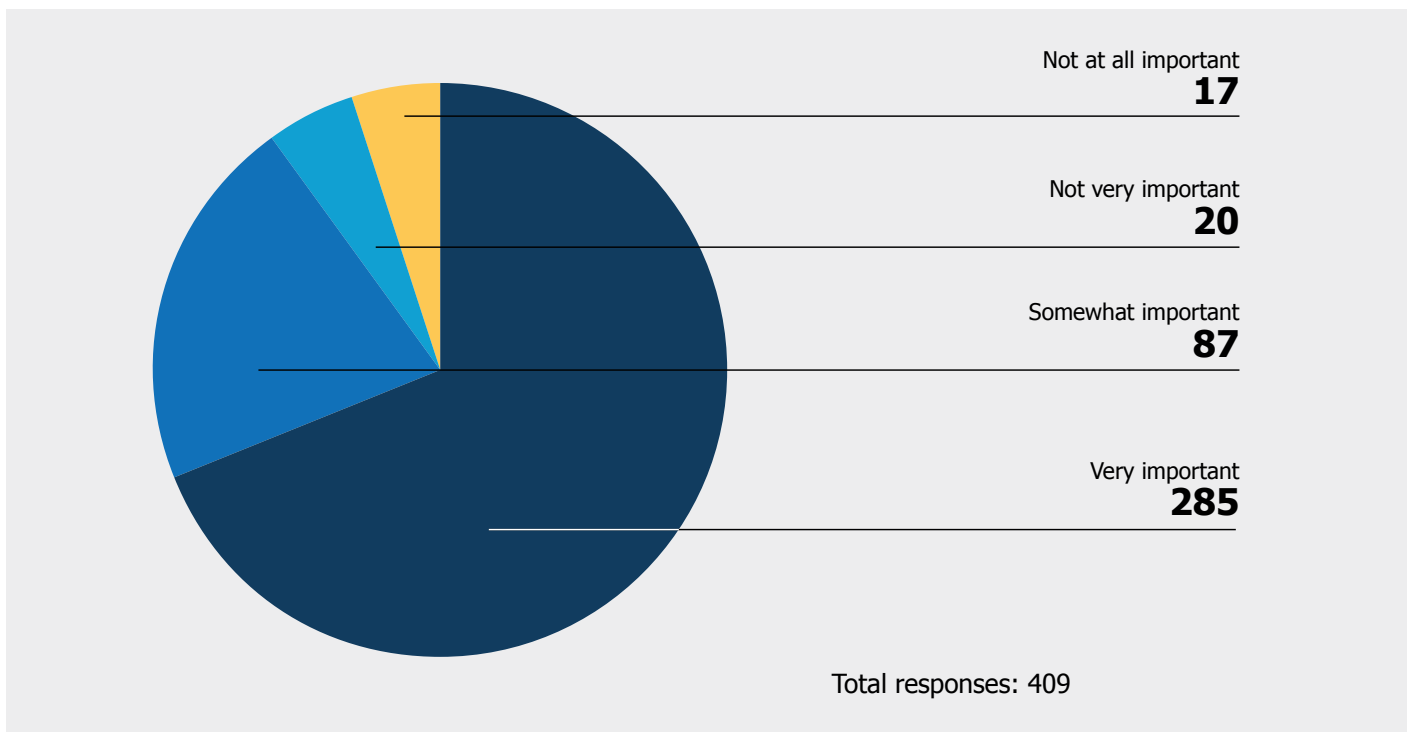
If not interested, what are the main barriers to serving on a commission (select all that apply)?



Importance of representation

- **Overwhelming support for representation based on factors such as age, race/ethnicity, neighborhood, income, background:** A clear majority—**285 respondents (69.7%)**—believe it is **very important** that commissions reflect the diversity of Toledo residents. This demonstrates a strong expectation for inclusive representation in civic leadership.
- **Moderate importance:** **87 respondents (21.3%)** consider representation **somewhat important**, suggesting that while they value representation, it may not be their top priority.
- **Minimal opposition:** Only **20 respondents (4.9%)** said representation is **not very important**, and **17 respondents (4.2%)** indicated it is **not at all important**. This combined minority (9.1%) underscores that opposition is relatively rare.

How important do you think it is that commissions reflect the diversity of Toledo residents (age, race/ethnicity, neighborhood, income, background)?



Does the current make-up reflect Toledo residents?

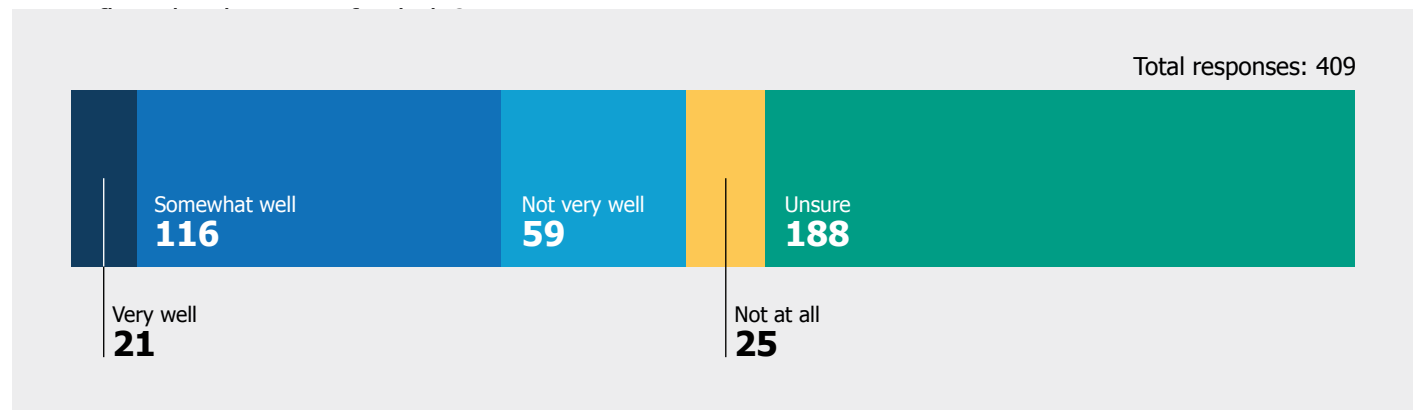
The data reveals mixed perceptions and a significant level of uncertainty:

1. **High uncertainty:** The largest group—**188 respondents (46%)**—selected **"unsure."** This suggests that many residents lack sufficient information about board and commission composition or visibility to form an opinion. This aligns with earlier findings about low awareness and communication gaps.
2. **Moderate positive perception:** **116 respondents (28.4%)** believe boards and commissions reflect diversity **"somewhat well,"** while only **21 respondents (5.1%)** feel they do so **"very well."** Together, these indicate that while some residents perceive progress, strong confidence in diversity representation is limited.

3. Negative perception: 59 respondents (14.4%) said “not very well,” and **25 respondents (6.1%)** said “not at all.” This combined 20.5% signals that a notable portion of residents believe commissions fail to adequately represent Toledo’s diversity.

The “unsure” responses likely reflect other questions that show the residents of Toledo are largely unfamiliar with the boards and commissions, who is on them, and how they operate.

Based on what you know about the commissions, how well do you think current commissions reflect the diversity of Toledo?

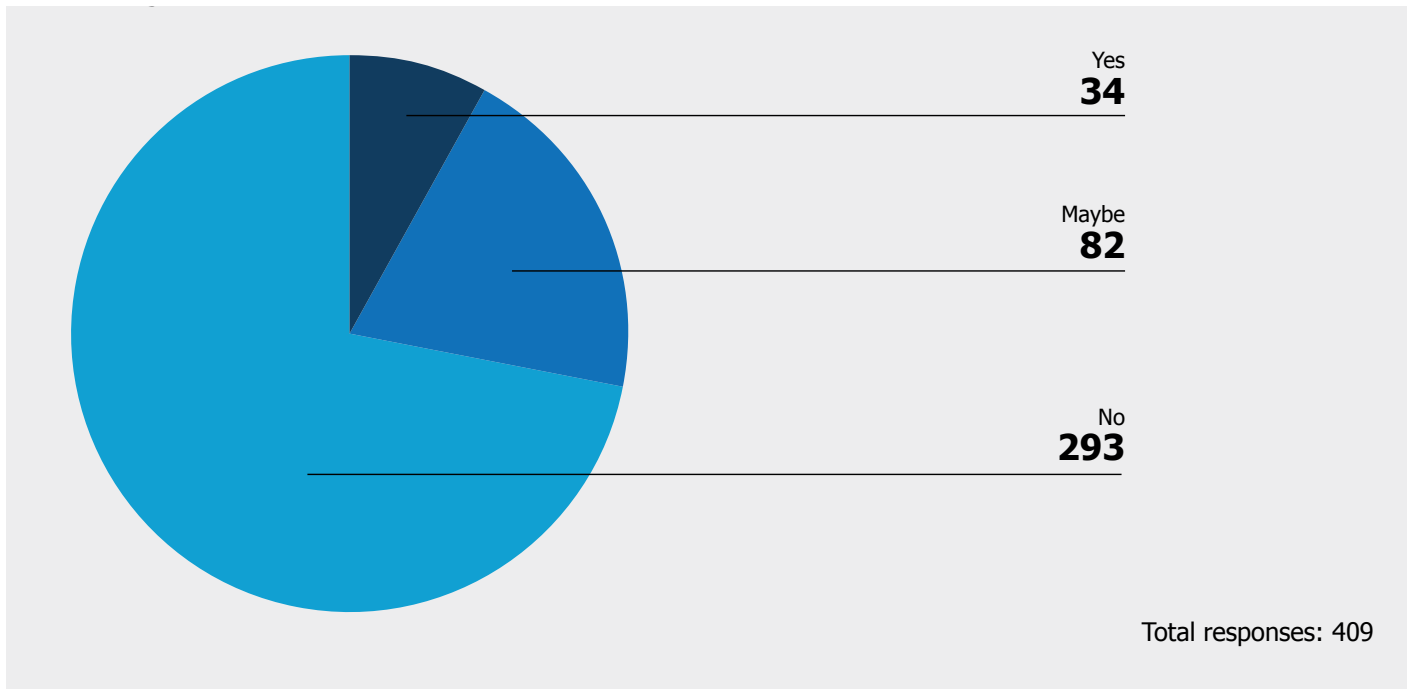


Knowledge of how to serve

- 1. Majority lack awareness:** An overwhelming **293 respondents (71.6%)** answered “no,” indicating they would not know how to pursue membership. This highlights a critical barrier to engagement and underscores the need for clear, accessible information about the application process.
- 2. Uncertainty among respondents:** **82 respondents (20%)** selected “maybe,” suggesting partial awareness or uncertainty about the steps involved. This group could be converted into active participants with targeted outreach and guidance.
- 3. Minimal awareness:** Only **34 respondents (8.3%)** answered “yes,” demonstrating that very few residents have a clear understanding of how to join a board or commission.

This question once again underscores the need for a well-orchestrated outreach plan that can educate people on the process for civic engagement and being of service to their community.

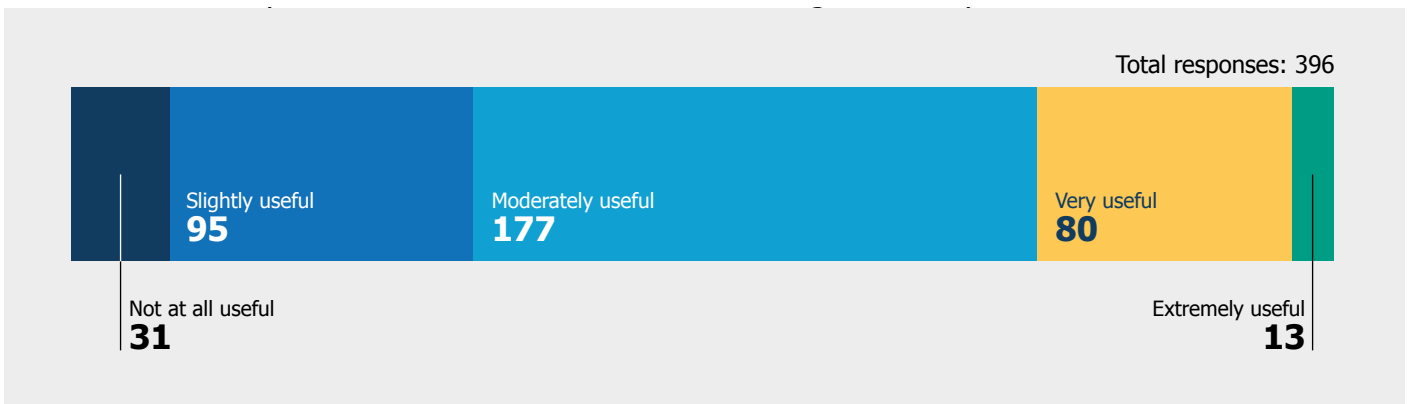
If you had an interest in serving on a commission, would you know how to go about becoming a member?



Usefulness of the current commissions

- **Moderate usefulness dominates:** The largest group—**177 respondents (44.7%)**—rated boards and commissions as **moderately useful**, suggesting that while residents see value in these bodies, they may not view them as highly impactful.
- **Positive but limited strong approval:** **80 respondents (20.2%)** believe boards and commissions are **very useful**, and only **13 respondents (3.3%)** consider them **extremely useful**. This indicates that strong confidence in boards' and commissions' effectiveness is relatively low.
- **Slight usefulness:** **95 respondents (24%)** rated boards and commissions as **slightly useful**, reflecting a perception that their impact is minimal or inconsistent.
- **Negative perception:** **31 respondents (7.8%)** said boards and commissions are **not at all useful**, signaling skepticism among a small but notable segment of residents.

How useful do you believe commissions are for addressing community issues?

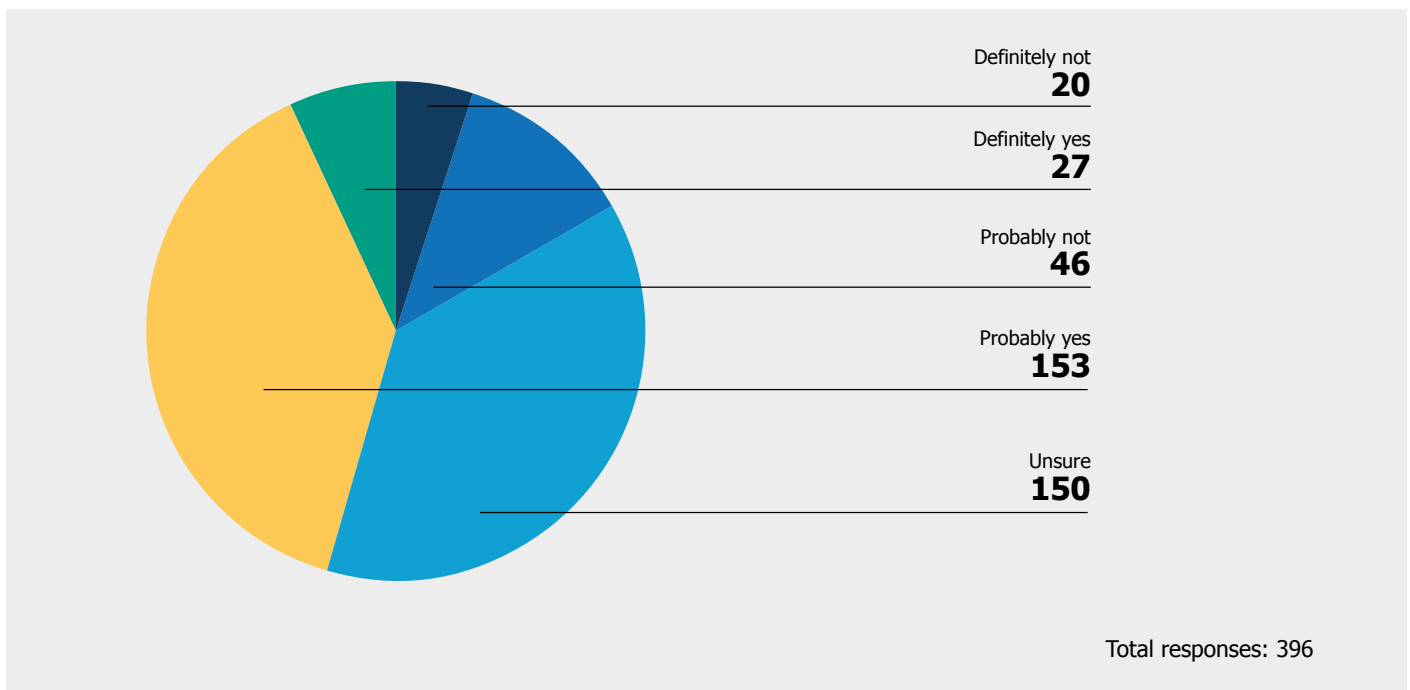


Influence on decision-making

- **39% (153 respondents)** believe commissions **probably** influence city decisions, indicating a moderate level of confidence in their role.
- **38% (150 respondents)** are **unsure**, suggesting a significant lack of clarity or awareness about how boards and commissions impact decision-making.
- **7% (27 respondents)** feel **definitely yes**, showing that strong confidence in boards and commissions' influence is relatively rare.
- **12% (46 respondents)** answered **probably not**, and **5% (20 respondents)** said **definitely not**, reflecting limited skepticism compared to the overall uncertainty.

Regular and transparent communication might alleviate some of the ambiguity that people express regarding how influential these boards and commissions are within the City and the power they have to effect positive change.

Do you feel commissions influence City decisions that affect your community?

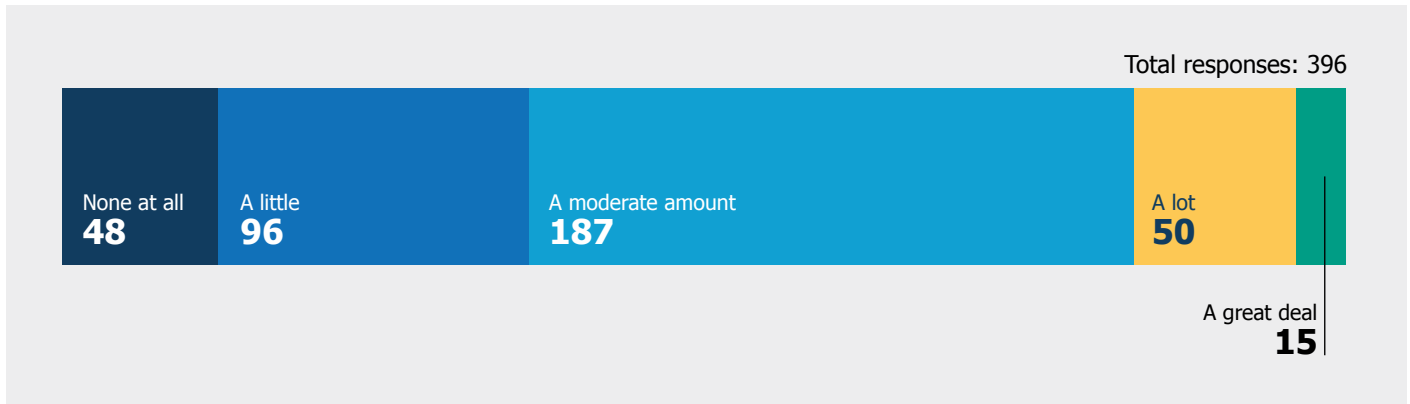


Trust in commissions

- The number one response is **mostly moderate**. Nearly half of respondents—**47.2% (187)**—report a **moderate amount** of trust.
- **High trust** is comparatively limited, with only **16.4% (65)** choosing “a lot” or “a great deal” (12.6% and 3.8%, respectively).
- On the other end, **36.4% (144)** express **low trust** (“none at all” 12.1% and “a little” 24.2%). Taken together, **63.6%** show **at least some trust** (moderate or higher), but **strong trust is rare**, suggesting boards and commissions are seen as **credible but not fully convincing**.

Strengthening transparency, communicating outcomes of goals and objectives more clearly, and increasing opportunities for resident input may help shift respondents from **moderate** toward **high** trust.

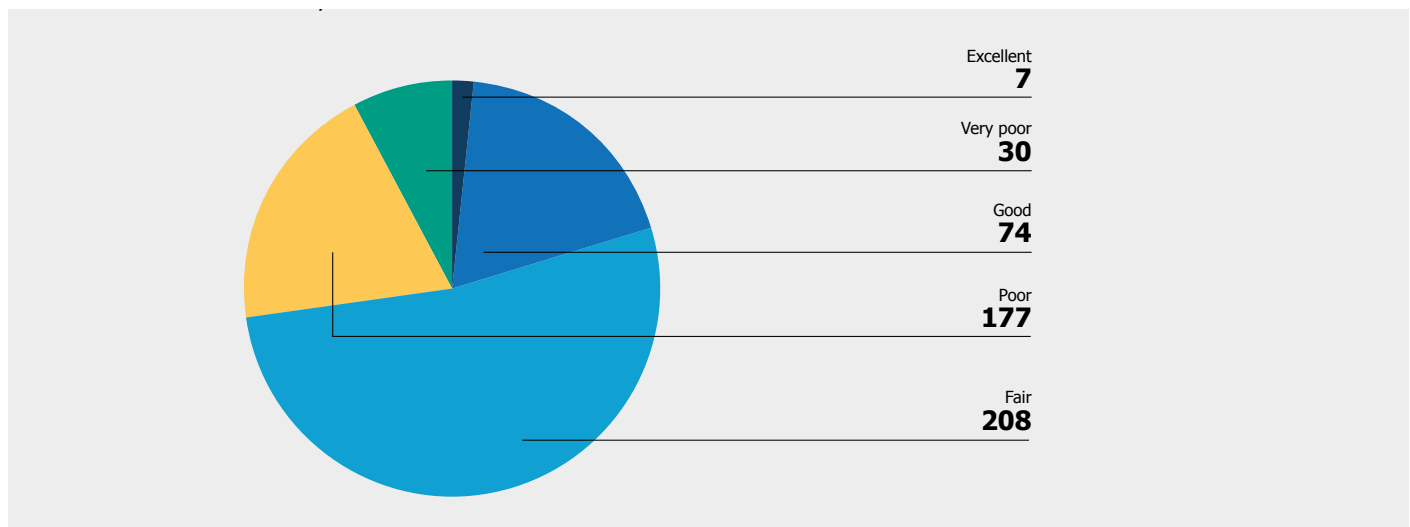
How much do you trust commissions to act in the best interest of Toledo residents?



Overall effectiveness

- The majority of respondents rated the overall effectiveness of Toledo commissions as **low**.
- **Fair** was the most common rating, with **208 responses (52.5%)**, followed by **poor** at **177 responses (44.7%)**.
- **Very poor** accounted for **30 responses (7.6%)**, indicating a small but notable group with strongly negative views.
- Positive ratings were limited:
 - **Good**: 74 responses (**18.7%**)
 - **Excellent**: only 7 responses (**1.8%**)
- Overall, nearly **97% of respondents** rated effectiveness as **fair or worse**, signaling widespread dissatisfaction.
- Only **20.5%** rated board and commissions as **good or excellent**, suggesting very limited confidence in their performance.

How would you rate the overall effectiveness of Toledo commissions?

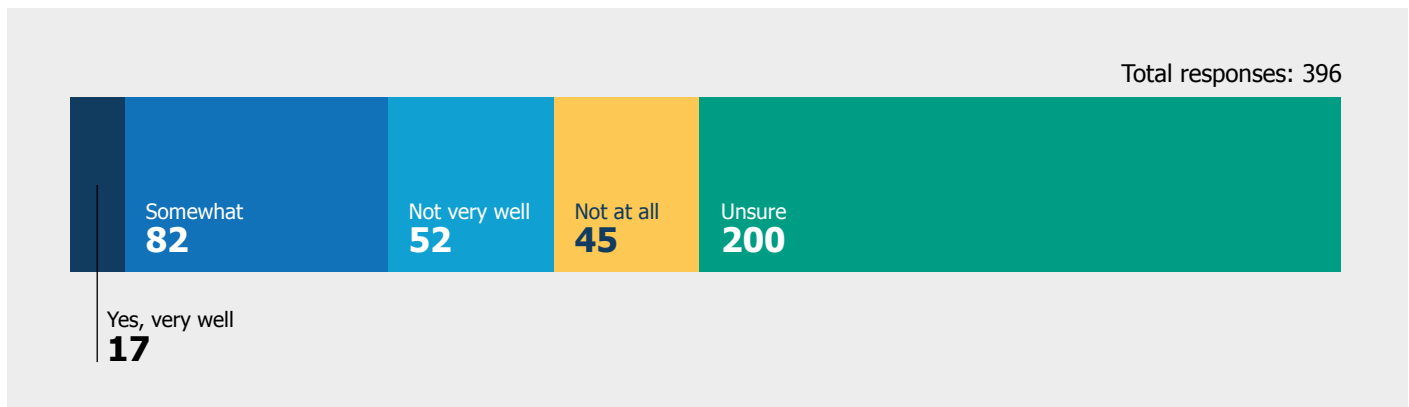


Duplication of efforts

- The largest share of respondents (**200 or 50.5%**) were **unsure** whether boards and commissions avoid duplicating the work of other City departments or organizations.
- **Somewhat**: 82 responses (**20.7%**)
- **Not very well**: 52 responses (**13.1%**)
- **Not at all**: 45 responses (**11.4%**)
- **Yes, very well**: only 17 responses (**4.3%**)

Overall, only **5% of respondents** expressed strong confidence that duplication is avoided, while **24.5%** believe duplication occurs to some degree (**not very well** or **not at all**).

In your opinion, do commissions avoid duplicating the work of other City departments or organizations?



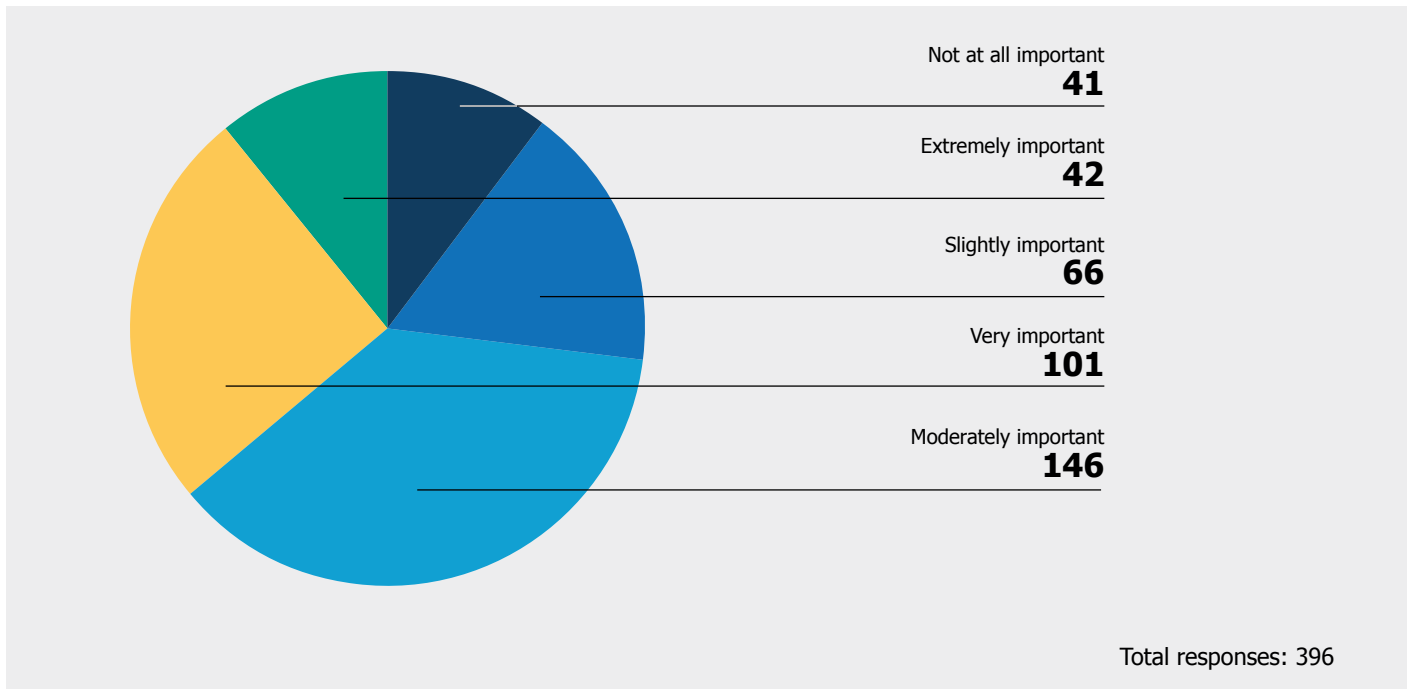
The importance of investment into boards and commissions

The majority of respondents consider continued investment in boards and commissions to be important.

- **“Moderately important”** was the most frequent response, with **146 respondents (36.9%)**, followed by **“very important”** at **101 respondents (25.5%)**.
- **“Slightly important”** accounted for **66 responses (16.7%)**, while **“extremely important”** was selected by **42 respondents (10.6%)**.
- Only **41 respondents (10.4%)** indicated that investment is **not at all important**, showing a small minority opposed to funding commissions.
- Overall, **73% of respondents** rated investment as at least **moderately important**, suggesting strong support for maintaining or increasing resources for boards and commissions.

These results highlight a clear expectation and interest among residents for the City to continue prioritizing boards and commissions as part of its governance and community engagement efforts.

How important is it to you that the City continues to invest in commissions?



In addition to the responses on multiple choice questions, we provided a space for residents to express what barriers might exist in serving on a board or commission. These responses can assist the City and recommended director in moving forward with outreach campaigns and engagement. Creating an onboarding process also as recommended will be helpful in addressing concerns.

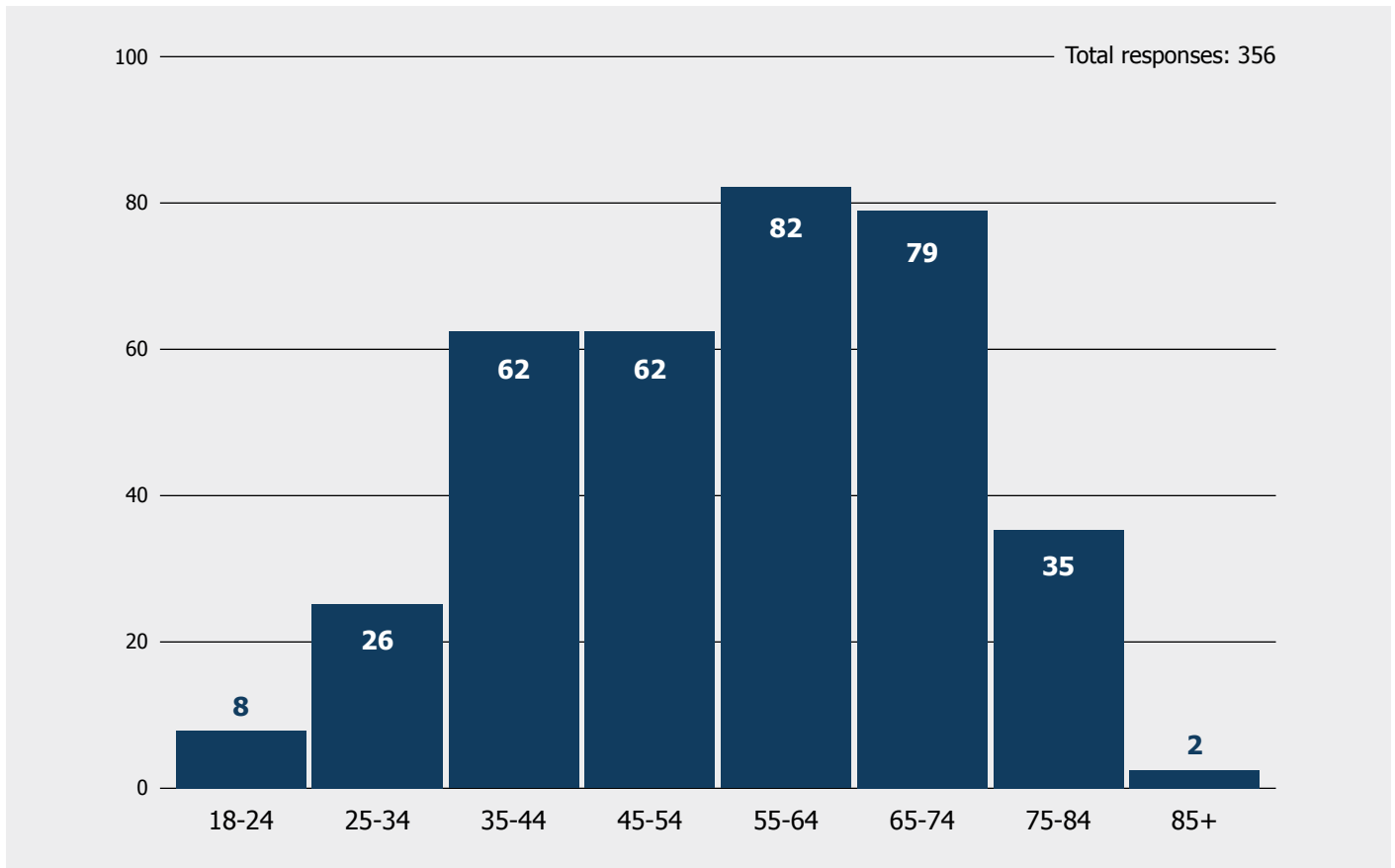
The most common barriers listed were:

- 1. Lack of information about opportunities:** The most frequently cited barrier was a lack of clear information about commission openings, the roles and responsibilities involved, and how to participate.
- 2. Lack of time:** Time constraints were another dominant theme. Respondents noted demanding work schedules, family responsibilities, caregiving duties, and general time limitations as key reasons they could not commit to commission service.
- 3. Feeling unqualified or lacking confidence:** A number of respondents expressed uncertainty about their qualifications or whether they had the expertise needed to contribute meaningfully.
- 4. Concern their voice would not be valued:** A portion of respondents questioned whether their perspectives would be taken seriously if they served.

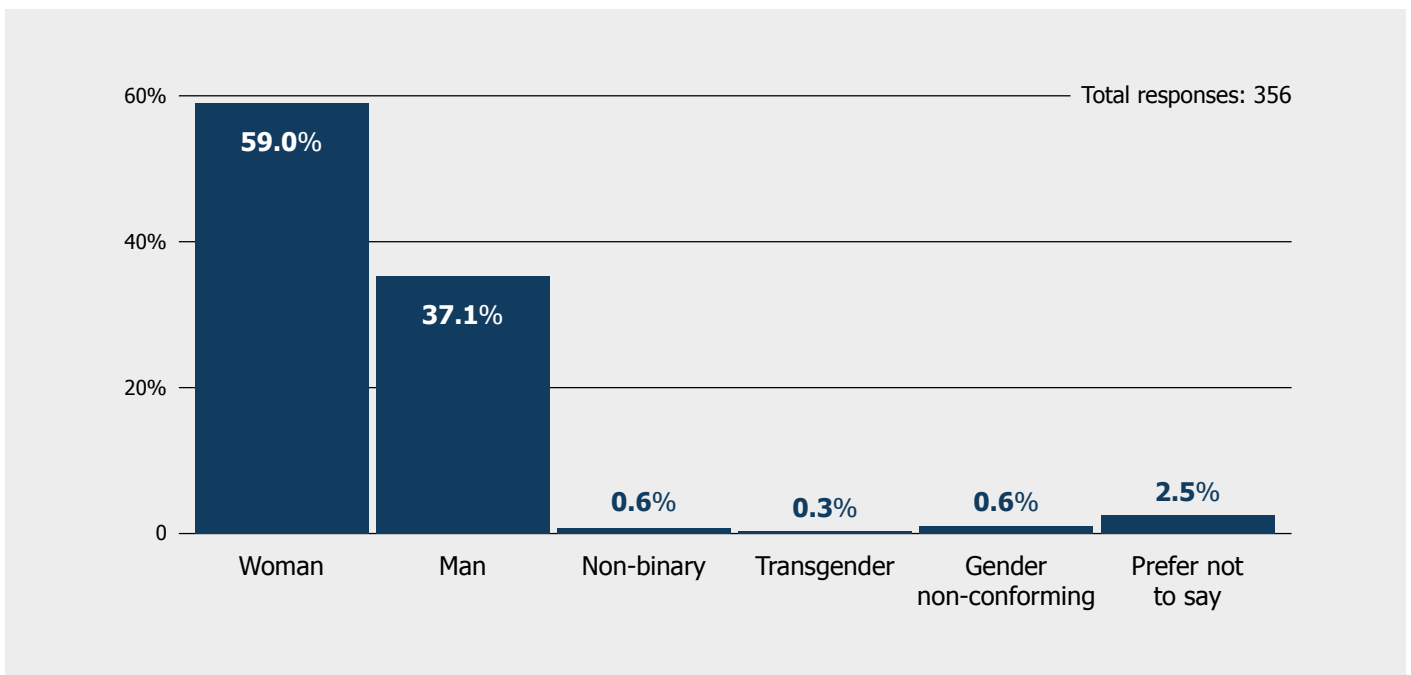
Demographics

These have no analysis and are self-explanatory. Additionally, these questions were optional, so these may differ from the number of responses above.

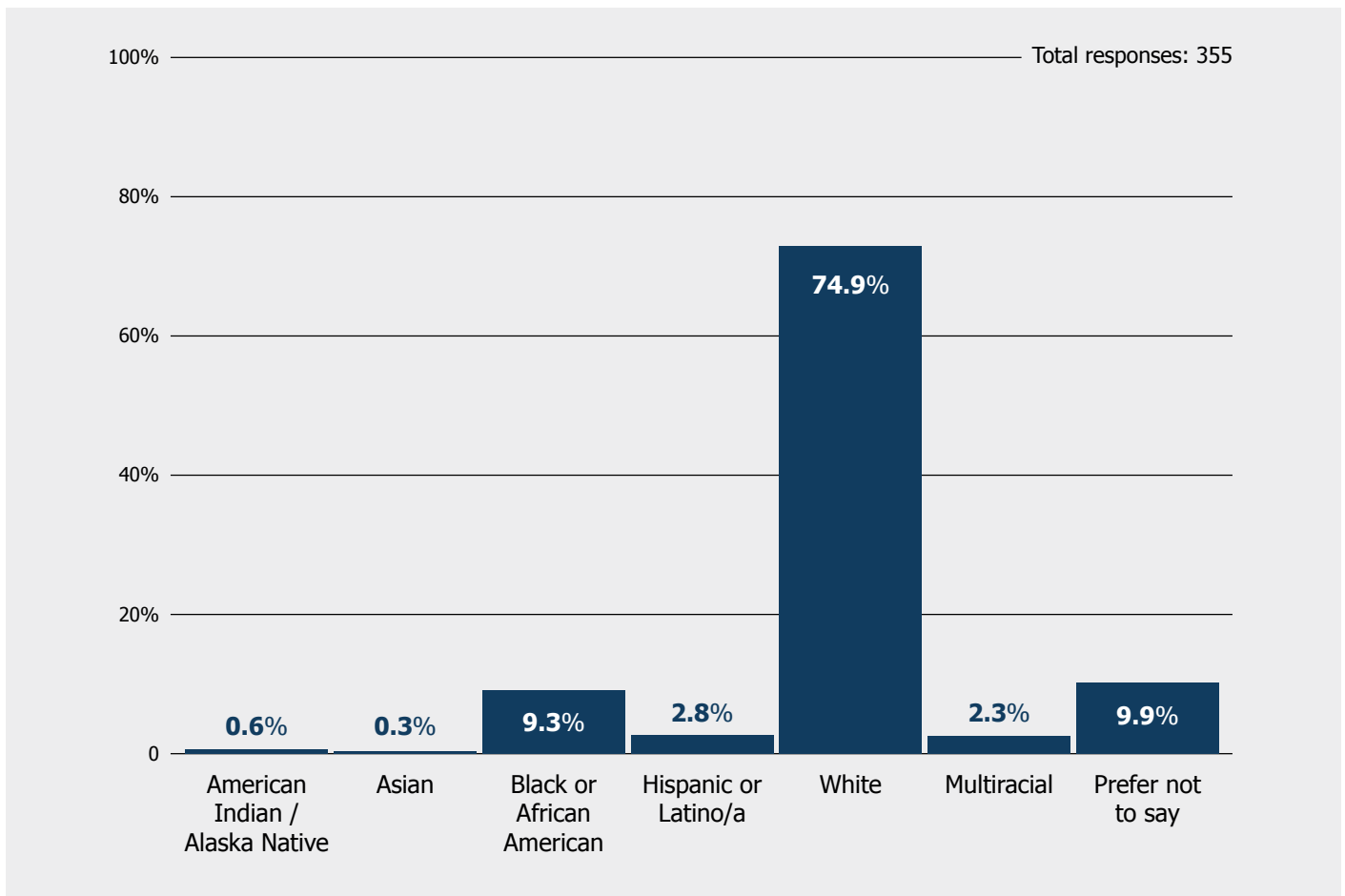
What is your age?



What is your gender?



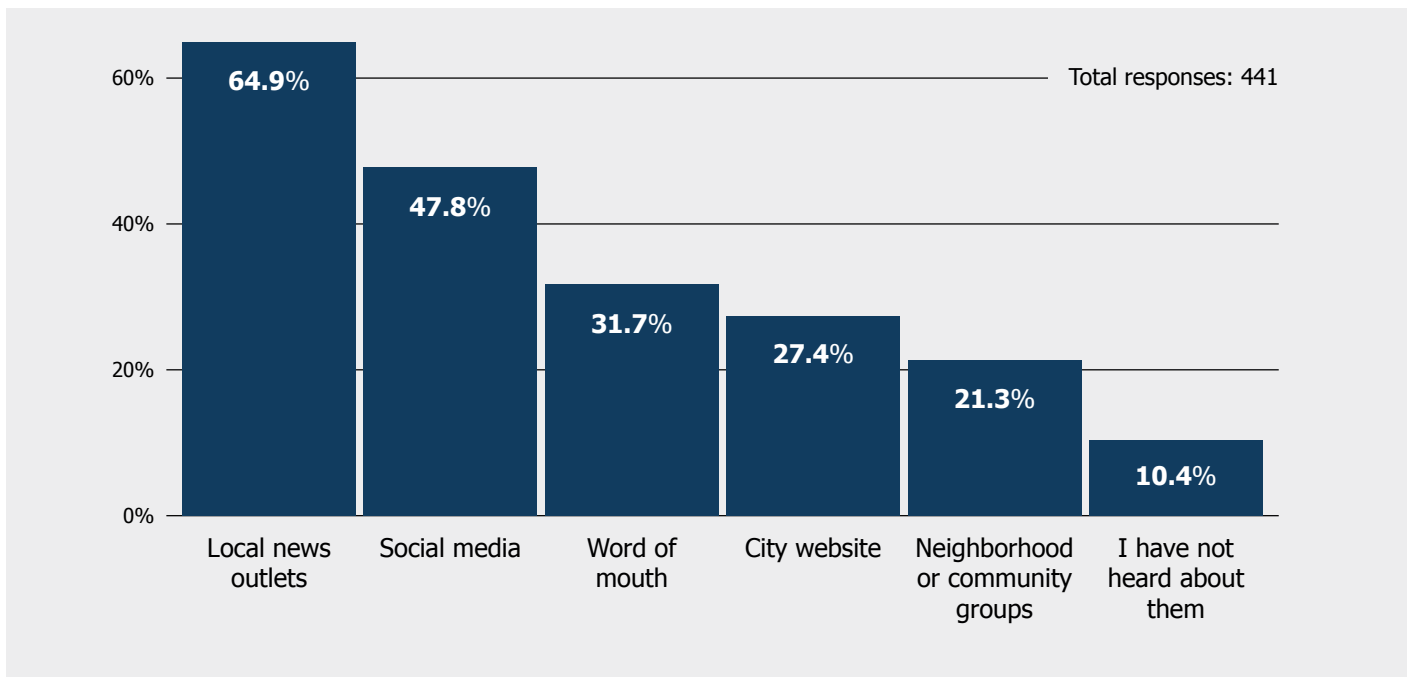
What is your racial/ethnic background?



How news from the City is being accessed

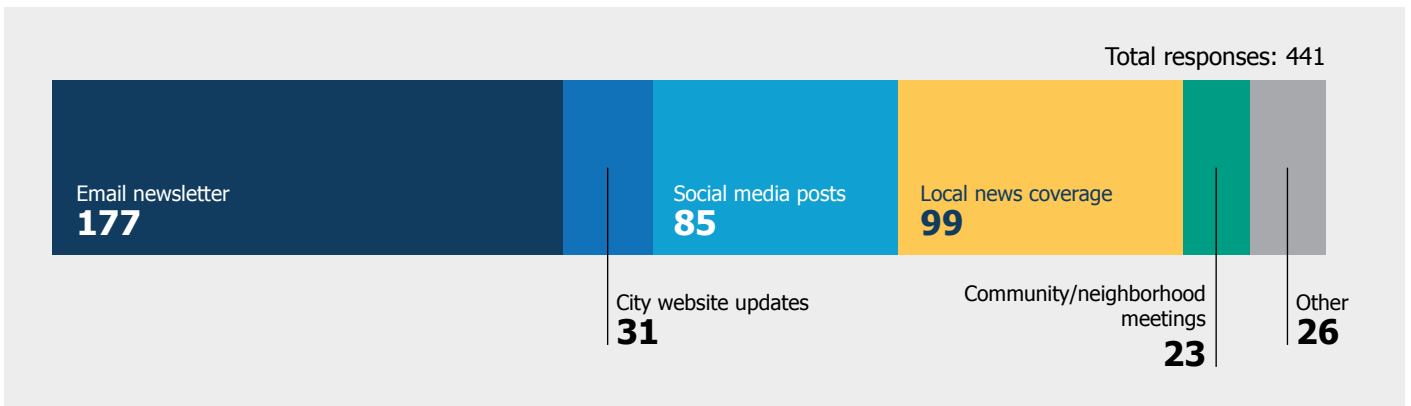
- **Local news outlets** are the primary source of information about City board and commission activities, cited by **64.9%** of respondents.
- **Social media** is the second most common source at **47.8%**, followed by **word of mouth (31.7%)** and the **City website (27.4%)**.
- **Neighborhood or community groups account** for **21.3%**.

How do you typically hear about the activities of the City commissions (select all that apply)?



Preferred avenues of communication

What is your preferred way to receive updates about commissions?



Survey Summary

The survey results reveal a significant disconnect between Toledo residents and the City's boards and commissions, but also demonstrate substantial untapped potential for civic engagement.

Key findings

Awareness and visibility challenges: The data consistently shows low public awareness of board and commission activities. Over half of respondents (52.6%) expressed neutrality regarding visibility, while dissatisfaction (34.6%) far outweighed satisfaction (12.8%). This pattern of uncertainty appears throughout the survey—46% were unsure if commissions reflect community diversity, 50.5% were unsure about duplication of efforts, and 71.6% do not know how to pursue membership.

Strong interest in participation: Despite low awareness, resident interest in civic engagement is robust. Nearly half (47.2%) indicated they might consider serving in the future, and an additional 12% are currently interested. Similarly, 46.9% of respondents have never participated but expressed interest in doing so—a critical finding that signals considerable opportunity for recruitment if barriers are addressed.

Perception and trust issues: While 63.6% of respondents show at least moderate trust in commissions, strong confidence is rare. Most residents (52.5%) rated overall effectiveness as “fair,” with only 20.5% rating it as good or excellent. Additionally, **38% were unsure whether commissions actually influence city decisions**, reflecting ambiguity about their role and impact.

Clear priorities: Residents identified housing and neighborhood development (63.1%), public safety and justice (55.6%), and economic development and jobs (50.1%) as top priorities for commission focus.

Representation matters: An overwhelming 69.7% believe it is very important that commissions reflect Toledo's diversity across age, race, ethnicity, neighborhood, income, and background.

Barriers to participation: The primary obstacles residents identified include lack of information about opportunities, time constraints, concerns about qualifications, and doubts about whether their voices would be valued.

Best Practices

The findings from our interviews and survey reveal consistent themes: unclear mission alignment, communication gaps, recruitment challenges, and limited public awareness all point to the need for standardized practices and stronger organizational infrastructure. To address these challenges, CRD reviewed best practices for municipal boards and commissions as identified by national trade associations, university studies, and municipal audits, prioritizing research from organizations serving communities comparable to Toledo in size and demographics.

Among the most useful frameworks we identified was the University of Illinois Chicago's **Nine Keys to Effective Board**

and Commission¹. These principles, echoed across numerous other sources, directly address the challenges identified in our research and provide a foundation for the recommendations that follow.

1 Clarify purpose, mission, and roles

It is vital that each board or commission within the City of Toledo clearly articulate its purpose, mission, role, and the responsibilities of its members. When roles are ambiguous or overlapping, governance becomes less effective.

- Board members need to understand their role and that of the board or commission more broadly within the structure of the City and how this relates to the current five (proposed) Strategic Priorities of the City. Establishing clear roles and responsibilities will provide this foundation .
- Creating simple job descriptions for each board or commission will ensure that roles are clearly defined.
- Each board or commission’s purpose should directly support the City’s Strategic Priorities and community goals.
- Implementing strategic planning processes for each board or commission will facilitate clear articulation of purpose and development of measurable objectives.

2 Monitor operating costs

Financial oversight is a recognized best practice for municipal boards and commissions.

- While interviews revealed no concerns regarding financial waste or impropriety, prudent stewardship of public funds remains a core governance obligation.

3 Ensure transparent appointment and succession processes

Effective governance demands that boards have timely and transparent recruitment, onboarding, and succession procedures.

- Interviews revealed that, more often than not, getting appointments to boards and commissions was an issue compared to transparency in the process, but insular recruitment practices were named as problematic.

4 Ensure representation

Boards and commissions serve the public interest and should mirror the community they serve.

- Intentional recruitment strategies—encompassing community-based outreach, partnerships with civic and cultural organizations, simplified application procedures, and ongoing engagement with underrepresented populations—would enhance board composition and ensure decision-making benefits from diverse viewpoints.

5 Uphold transparency, accountability, and compliance with “Sunshine” Laws

Because boards and commissions operate in the public sector, they must adhere to open-meeting, public-record, and transparency standards.

¹ Nine Keys to Effective Board and Commission Management | Government Finance Research Center | University of Illinois Chicago. (n.d.). <https://gfrc.uic.edu/keys-to-effective-board-and-commission-management/>

- Ohio Public Records Act (Ohio Revised Code §149.43 and §121.22) requires that Regular reporting on operations, including mission, achievements, and goals, is key in communicating with the general public on the importance of the boards and commissions and the work being done to benefit them.
- These laws ensure that public bodies conduct most of their business and deliberations in public, with some exceptions for specific topics like personnel issues or legal negotiations that can be discussed in “executive sessions.” The laws also grant the public the right to inspect public records, with exceptions.

6

Structure meetings and agendas to prioritize strategic issues

Boards often default to purely operational or routine items, but best practice encourages focusing time on strategic oversight.

- Strategic focus ensures productive use of volunteer time, elevates the perceived value of service, and facilitates member recruitment and retention.
- Meaningful engagement in governance decisions—rather than routine administrative matters—strengthens member commitment and board effectiveness.

7

Maintain robust member onboarding, training, and evaluation

To maximize the value of board service, members should be oriented and supported, and the board’s performance periodically reviewed.

- Most boards lack formal orientation processes. While only one board reported structured onboarding, several interviewees identified this as essential.
- Comprehensive orientation covering City operations, board functions, and strategic priorities would improve member readiness, clarify roles, and strengthen engagement from the outset.

8

Encourage stakeholder engagement and community input

Boards and commissions exist to serve the public interest. Engaging residents, stakeholders, and key partners helps inform decisions and maintains legitimacy.

- Integrating board and commission updates into City Council members’ community and neighborhood meetings would provide regular touchpoints for public engagement, enable two-way communication with residents, and utilize existing civic infrastructure to strengthen awareness and participation in municipal governance.

9

Review sunset and purpose periodically

Occasionally, boards and commissions may outlive their original purpose or become redundant. Periodic review helps ensure each board and commission remains relevant and effective.

- Defined terms for board and commission authorization with mandatory reauthorization requirements institutionalize periodic review of purpose, performance, and continued relevance.
- Formal sunset provisions provide a clear mechanism for decommissioning inactive or obsolete boards and removing them from municipal records.

Recommendations

The preceding analysis draws on three complementary sources: interviews with City liaisons and commission chairs, a citywide resident survey, and a review of national best practices. Together, these reveal consistent patterns—limited public awareness, communication gaps, unclear mission alignment, recruitment challenges, and the need for stronger organizational infrastructure—that inform the recommendations below. Each recommendation links to one or more of the City’s Strategic Priorities and reflects both the operational insights from those closest to the work and the expectations of the residents these bodies serve.

1 Establish a Citywide director-level position for boards & commissions governance

Strategic priorities

Build safe, vibrant, and connected neighborhoods · Promote economic growth and inclusive opportunity · Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure · Cultivate a thriving workforce · Secure Toledo’s financial future

CRD’s findings reveal significant inconsistencies in board and commission operations, communication breakdowns, and inadequate coordination. A director position would centralize oversight of recruitment, onboarding, training, compliance, communication, and reporting, providing operational consistency and unified accountability for volunteer support.

Beyond day-to-day coordination—including meeting schedules, public records compliance, term monitoring, and strategic alignment—the director would directly address concerns raised by participants and residents through:

- » Creating a standard onboarding process for new members of boards and commissions
- » Working with the boards and commissions to establish measurable goals each year
- » Strategic planning with the boards and commissions to ensure alignment with the City of Toledo Strategic Priorities
- » Creating a robust engagement plan to attract residents to the boards and commissions
- » Developing a process to ensure that the lines of communication are clearly defined.
- » Convening regular meetings (monthly or quarterly) of the City liaisons to share information across these groups. This will break down silos and facilitate communication.
- » Coordinating across relevant City departments for activities that have shared goals

2 Increase public engagement through community-embedded opportunities

Strategic priorities

Build safe, vibrant, and connected neighborhoods · Promote economic growth and inclusive opportunity

Public engagement is essential to board and commission effectiveness. A comprehensive strategy should communicate meeting information, clarify each board’s purpose and connection to City Strategic Priorities, and actively recruit diverse participants. Sustained implementation requires dedicated coordination and consistent effort.

Survey findings revealed limited resident awareness of boards and commissions. To expand reach, the City should integrate engagement into existing community touchpoints:

- » Information tables at libraries, community events, and neighborhood meetings
- » Board and commission “open houses”.
- » Regular board and commission updates at district meetings.

3

Create transparent, inclusive, and public-facing recruitment strategy

Strategic priorities

Build safe, vibrant, and connected neighborhoods · Promote economic growth and inclusive opportunity · Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure

Current recruitment relies heavily on word-of-mouth, creating insular networks that exclude residents with lived experience, younger residents, renters, and underrepresented communities. A transparent, City-led recruitment process would build equitable pathways for civic leadership and increase diversity in policy influence. This approach should include:

- » Public listing of openings and eligibility
- » Updated lists of current board and commission members
- » Application portal with clear role descriptions
- » Outreach through libraries, recreation centers, neighborhood meetings, and social media
- » Targeted recruitment in underserved neighborhoods

4

Develop a standardized onboarding and training program

Strategic priorities

Build safe, vibrant, and connected neighborhoods · Promote economic growth and inclusive opportunity · Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure

Interview findings revealed minimal onboarding across most boards and commissions. The Arts Commission's member handbook represents a best practice model that could inform standardized onboarding protocols and guide the development of consistent operational frameworks for all boards and commissions.

New members often enter without clarity on mission, expectations, or the City's vision. A standardized onboarding program should include:

- » Overview of Toledo governance and strategic priorities and how these relate to the boards and commissions
- » Legal requirements (Sunshine Laws, conflicts of interest, etc.)
- » Clear expectations for participation, quorum, attendance, and decision making

5

Implement mission alignment reviews and strategic plans for all commissions

Strategic priorities

Promote economic growth and inclusive opportunity · Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure

Chairs and liaisons frequently reported mission drift and unclear Strategic Priority alignment. Boards should conduct structured mission reviews every 3-5 years on staggered schedules. This ensures boards remain relevant and advance Toledo's civic and economic goals.

- » Confirmation or revision of purpose
- » Creation of a simple strategic plan tied to City priorities
- » Annual goals with measurable outcomes
- » Clear reporting lines and expectations

6 Implement automatic sunset provisions and activity-based review for all boards and commissions-based review for all boards and commissions

Strategic priorities

Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure · Secure Toledo's financial future

To ensure that Toledo's boards and commissions remain active, relevant, and aligned with City priorities, the City should adopt formal sunset requirements for new and existing bodies. Many commissions identified in this report have been inactive for years—sometimes decades—creating confusion for residents, complicating administrative oversight, and obscuring which bodies are currently functioning. A structured, recurring review process will increase transparency, reduce administrative burden, and strengthen public trust.

A comprehensive sunset policy should include:

- » **Activity based sunset requirement:** Any board or commission that has not met, achieved quorum, or otherwise conducted official business in a period of two years should automatically sunset unless explicitly renewed by a vote of City Council. based sunset requirement:
- » **Automatic sunset for newly created boards:** All newly established boards and commissions should include a two or three-year sunset clause, requiring an affirmative vote of Council to renew, revise, or dissolve the body once the period ends. or three year sunset clause
- » **Annual activity certification:** As part of the City's recommended annual reporting process, each board must document meeting dates, membership status, accomplishments, and alignment with City priorities to demonstrate ongoing relevance.
- » **Clear public communication:** Sunset decisions, renewals, and rationale should be publicly documented on the City's boards and commissions portal, so residents know which bodies are active, inactive, or under review.

This reform streamlines the City's civic infrastructure, ensures accountability, and reinforces that commissions exist to meet current community needs—not to persist indefinitely without demonstrated purpose.

7 Standardize communication expectations & public transparency requirements

Strategic priorities

Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure

Transparent communication strengthens public trust, encourages meaningful engagement, and supports legal compliance. Currently, significant communication gaps exist—both internally (from commissions to the City and then to the public) and among the boards and commissions themselves. Closing these gaps will also help ensure full compliance with Sunshine Law requirements.

The City should implement:

- » Standard templates for agendas, minutes, and annual reports
- » A unified online portal with meeting materials, membership rosters, and mission statements
- » Required timely posting of agendas and minutes
- » A communications toolkit to assist volunteer chairs

8

Foster cross-commission collaboration and reduce silos

Strategic priorities

Build safe, vibrant, and connected neighborhoods · Promote economic growth and inclusive opportunity · Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure

Collaborative infrastructure improves service delivery and deepens neighborhood engagement. Interviews revealed that many boards and commissions address overlapping issues but rarely communicate or coordinate their efforts. Establishing quarterly cross-commission meetings or a “Commission Leadership Roundtable” would help to:

- » Reduce duplication
- » Share best practices
- » Coordinate community initiatives
- » Improve City-to-commission communication

9

Modernize information systems & utilize technology to expand access

Strategic priorities

Promote economic growth and inclusive opportunity · Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure

Technology can expand civic access and help members serve more effectively, but modernization must be approached thoughtfully given Toledo’s digital inequities and the residents who lack reliable broadband, devices, or digital literacy. Many boards and commissions currently operate without shared systems or tools; public awareness remains limited; and some groups still rely on outdated communication methods. Recommended modernization strategies include:

- » A central digital hub for all boards and commissions
- » Optional hybrid meeting participation (even if votes must be in-person under ORC)
- » Digital recruitment and application tracking with applicants receiving a confirmation of their application
- » Coordinated City social media features highlighting board and commission work

10

Improve support for liaisons through clear expectations & consistent assignments

Strategic priorities

Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure

Frequent turnover in liaison roles leaves boards and commissions without stable or reliable support. Many chairs reported long delays in receiving assistance and inconsistent interpretations of procedures.

The City should:

- » Define a standard role description for liaisons
- » Assign liaisons for multi-year terms where possible
- » Provide regular training on ethics, recruitment, and administrative tasks

11

Address quorum and membership capacity issues

Strategic priorities

Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure

Regular meetings and the ability to conduct business consistently are essential for boards and commissions to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. However, several boards and commissions struggle to meet these expectations because they cannot reliably achieve quorum—often due to vacancies or inactive members. In some cases, a single member’s absence for vacation or illness can stall the group’s ability to address important business.

The City should:

- » Conduct a full membership audit to identify outdated terms
- » Actively recruit to fill gaps
- » Consider adjusting membership size for boards with chronic quorum issues
- » Implement attendance standards and replacement processes

12

Implement annual reporting for all commissions

Strategic priorities

Build safe, vibrant, and connected neighborhoods · Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure

To strengthen accountability and transparency, each board and commission should submit an annual report. This practice would create a structured feedback loop and enable City leadership to track progress, identify resource needs, and ensure alignment with broader goals. Annual reports should summarize:

- » Membership and attendance
- » Key accomplishments
- » Alignment with Strategic Priorities
- » Recommendations to City leadership

13

Consolidate boards and commissions with overlapping missions to improve coordination and efficiency

Strategic priorities

Deliver exceptional City services and modernize infrastructure · Promote economic growth and inclusive opportunity

The City’s interviews and survey results reveal significant duplication of effort, siloed communication, and overlapping missions among several existing boards and commissions. Consolidating boards with related or redundant functions will improve efficiency, reduce administrative load, strengthen strategic alignment, and create clearer points of engagement for residents.

To maximize effectiveness, the City should identify groups with shared or complementary mandates and reorganize them under unified structures with specialized subcommittees as needed. Priority consolidation opportunities include:

- » **Human Relations umbrella model:** The **Gender Equity Commission** and the **Hispanic/Latino Affairs Commission** both address equity, access, and community representation—missions already central to the **Human Relations Commission (HRC)**. Consolidating these bodies as formal HRC subcommittees will reduce duplication, increase collaborative capacity, and expand the Commission’s ability to engage diverse communities while still preserving identity specific expertise. specific expertise.
- » **Historic preservation consolidation:** Toledo currently sustains multiple historic commissions—including the Historic District Commission, the Old West End Historic District Commission, and others—that often operate independently despite addressing similar issues. Consolidating these into **a single Historic Preservation body housed under the Plan Commission** will strengthen consistency in design review, improve compliance with ordinances, reduce quorum challenges, and enhance public understanding of preservation processes.
- » **Clear structure with specialized working groups:** Within each consolidated commission, subcommittees or working groups can focus on specific cultural communities, neighborhoods, or historic districts, allowing targeted expertise to remain intact while benefiting from shared administrative and strategic resources.

This approach supports better coordination, reduces fragmentation, and provides residents with a more navigable, transparent, and effective board and commission system—one aligned with the City’s Strategic Priorities and informed by best practice governance standards. practice governance standards.



Conclusion

Through a mixed-methods evaluation—comprising liaison and chair interviews, a citywide resident survey exceeding 400 responses, and a review of national best practices—this report provides a comprehensive assessment of Toledo’s boards and commissions. These bodies represent a cornerstone of civic engagement, providing residents with a voice in shaping policy, programs, and community priorities. This evaluation reveals both the commitment of volunteer members and City staff alongside systemic challenges—including fragmented communication, inconsistent onboarding, limited recruitment, and unclear alignment with strategic priorities—that have hindered their full potential.

Interviews with City liaisons and commission chairs reinforced these findings, revealing firsthand the operational challenges—including unclear reporting structures, inconsistent administrative support, and difficulties maintaining quorum—that hinder effective governance.

The survey data underscores a critical gap between the City’s intentions and residents’ perceptions. Awareness of boards and commissions is low, trust is moderate, and participation remains limited. However, these findings also present Toledo with a clear mandate and significant opportunity. Residents want to be involved—73% support continued investment in boards and commissions, and nearly half expressed interest in future service. Strong community priorities around housing, public safety, and economic development provide a clear roadmap for revitalizing civic infrastructure.

This willingness to engage, currently stifled by substantial communication and visibility challenges, can be transformed into active participation through intentional reform. Implementing the recommended strategies—establishing a dedicated director-level position, standardizing onboarding and training, creating inclusive recruitment processes, providing clear information about roles and applications, and leveraging technology—will ensure consistency, accountability, and accessibility. These reforms will strengthen governance while fostering representation that reflects Toledo’s diverse neighborhoods. These recommendations align with established best practices for municipal boards and commissions, including the University of Illinois Chicago’s Nine Keys framework, which emphasizes clear purpose and mission,

transparent processes, robust onboarding, and regular performance review.

The path forward requires a shift toward proactive engagement and collaboration. By embedding outreach into community spaces, aligning missions with strategic priorities, demonstrating commitment to diverse representation and resident input, and fostering cross-commission communication, Toledo can transform its boards and commissions into dynamic engines of civic engagement. The foundation for robust civic participation exists—it simply needs to be activated through sustained communication efforts and modernized operations.

Ultimately, these investments will build public trust, amplify resident voices, and position Toledo as a model for inclusive, effective governance. By empowering residents to help shape their community, the City can create vibrant partnerships between local government and the people it serves, ensuring a more equitable and engaged future for Toledo.

Appendix

To support a consistent and comparable assessment of how the City of Toledo’s boards and commissions are administratively supported, the CRD administered a standardized survey to all assigned board and commission liaisons. This “apples-to-apples” approach ensured that each liaison responded to the same core set of questions regarding their roles, responsibilities, level of engagement, and capacity.

The survey confirms that liaisons play a critical role in board operations, serving as the primary link between volunteer members and City administration while supporting meeting logistics, compliance, communication, and institutional continuity. At the same time, results reveal variation in how the liaison role is defined and resourced across departments, highlighting opportunities for greater consistency, training, and centralized coordination moving forward.

We have provided the responses in a consistent format below.

At the time of this report completion, we had not received responses from the following assigned boards and commissions:

- OWE Historic District Commission
- Park Boards (any)
- Toledo City Historic Commission
- Toledo Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
- Toledo Sister Cities
- Urban Forestry Commission
- Youth Advisory Commission

Arts Commission of Greater Toledo

Purpose: To support artists, improve public spaces through art, advocate for arts and culture, and create opportunities for artistic income and community engagement.

Activities:

- Running large public arts events (Momentum Festival, Art Loop, etc.).
- Grantmaking for artists and organizations.
- Youth arts employment programs like YAAW.
- Managing the City's 1% for Art program and public art collection.
- Arts advocacy at local, state, regional, and national levels.

Success:

- Attendance at events
- Dollars paid to artists
- Youth program feedback and demographic measures
- Art conservation, education, acquisition, and community engagement

How often does your board/commission meet?

10 times per year; executive committee meets monthly.

What was the date of your most recent meeting?

November 18, 2025

How many people by City of Toledo ordinance are supposed to make up this board/commission?

15+

How many people are currently serving on the board/commission (as of this survey)?

15+

Has the board/commission engaged in strategic planning in the last 2 years?

YES	NO
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In the last 12 months, have members reviewed purpose of the mission as defined in the city ordinance?

YES	NO	Not yet; plan to restart work in 2026.
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Does your board/commission have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for members?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Is there a current roster of board/commission members with terms and contact information available to the public?

YES	NO
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Are conflicts of interest disclosed and managed appropriately within your board/commission?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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How does your board/commission conduct regular evaluations of its effectiveness or impact?

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program evaluations and community feedback.• Staff and committees conduct annual action planning.• Reports go through executive committee and board.
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Are meetings publicly noticed in accordance with Sunshine Law requirements?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Briefly describe any onboarding/training provided to new members to ensure they understand their role and that of the board/commission.

Formal orientation with leadership; monthly committee reports; opportunities for ongoing learning

How does this board/commission address concerns of Toledo residents and/or fit into the strategic priorities for the City?

Through community feedback, design review boards, and alignment with the Toledo Strategic Plan for Arts & Culture and NRSA priorities.

How are you communicating the work and activities of this board/commission with the residents of Toledo and other stakeholders?

Public meetings, events, community conversations, annual reception, strong social media and web presence, direct mail, and presentations to elected officials.

Toledo CEDAW Gender Equity Commission

Purpose: To address gender-based discrimination and advise the City on policies affecting women, girls, and minoritized genders

Activities: Monthly meetings, community programming, event sponsorship, Gender Equity Summit, Gender Equity Analysis, internal city employee resource group (WAVE).

Success: Completion of the Gender Equity Analysis, regular meetings, and events like the Breaking the Cycle of Violence conference.

How often does your board/commission meet?

Monthly

What was the date of your most recent meeting?

September 25, 2025

How many people by City of Toledo ordinance are supposed to make up this board/commission?

13

How many people are currently serving on the board/commission (as of this survey)?

8

Has the board/commission engaged in strategic planning in the last 2 years?

YES	NO
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In the last 12 months, have members reviewed purpose of the mission as defined in the city ordinance?

YES	NO
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Does your board/commission have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for members?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Is there a current roster of board/commission members with terms and contact information available to the public?

YES	NO
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Are conflicts of interest disclosed and managed appropriately within your board/commission?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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How does your board/commission conduct regular evaluations of its effectiveness or impact?

Does not currently conduct regular evaluations
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Are meetings publicly noticed in accordance with Sunshine Law requirements?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Briefly describe any onboarding/training provided to new members to ensure they understand their role and that of the board/commission.

Not applicable

How does this board/commission address concerns of Toledo residents and/or fit into the strategic priorities for the City?

Works to make Toledo welcoming and safe for all.
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How are you communicating the work and activities of this board/commission with the residents of Toledo and other stakeholders?

Not too well

Parking Lot Review Commission

Purpose:

To review parking lot standards and ensure compliance.

Activities:

Reviewing city code, suggesting changes, and reviewing lot designs.

Success:

No Response

How often does your board/commission meet?

Meets when advised or when a meeting is requested.

What was the date of your most recent meeting?

March 6, 2025

How many people by City of Toledo ordinance are supposed to make up this board/commission?

7

How many people are currently serving on the board/commission (as of this survey)?

7

Has the board/commission engaged in strategic planning in the last 2 years?

YES	NO
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In the last 12 months, have members reviewed purpose of the mission as defined in the city ordinance?

YES	NO
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Does your board/commission have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for members?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Is there a current roster of board/commission members with terms and contact information available to the public?

YES	NO	No response
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Are conflicts of interest disclosed and managed appropriately within your board/commission?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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How does your board/commission conduct regular evaluations of its effectiveness or impact?

Does not currently evaluate.

Are meetings publicly noticed in accordance with Sunshine Law requirements?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Briefly describe any onboarding/training provided to new members to ensure they understand their role and that of the board/commission.

No Response

How does this board/commission address concerns of Toledo residents and/or fit into the strategic priorities for the City?

No Response

How are you communicating the work and activities of this board/commission with the residents of Toledo and other stakeholders?

No response

Environmental Protection and Climate Resilience Commission

Purpose: To develop and implement policies and projects that protect the natural environment.

Activities: N/A

Success: Implemented projects.

How often does your board/commission meet?

Monthly

What was the date of your most recent meeting?

January 10, 2024

How many people by City of Toledo ordinance are supposed to make up this board/commission?

15+

How many people are currently serving on the board/commission (as of this survey)?

2

Has the board/commission engaged in strategic planning in the last 2 years?

YES	NO
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In the last 12 months, have members reviewed purpose of the mission as defined in the city ordinance?

YES	NO
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Does your board/commission have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for members?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Is there a current roster of board/commission members with terms and contact information available to the public?

YES	NO
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Are conflicts of interest disclosed and managed appropriately within your board/commission?

YES	MAYBE	NO	"I don't know"
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How does your board/commission conduct regular evaluations of its effectiveness or impact?

N/A

Are meetings publicly noticed in accordance with Sunshine Law requirements?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Briefly describe any onboarding/training provided to new members to ensure they understand their role and that of the board/commission.

N/A

How does this board/commission address concerns of Toledo residents and/or fit into the strategic priorities for the City?

Work aligns with the City's environmental sustainability strategy.
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How are you communicating the work and activities of this board/commission with the residents of Toledo and other stakeholders?

Through the publication of the Climate Action Plan.

Municipal Golf Preservation Commission

Purpose: To advise the City on municipal golf courses and promote them.

Activities: Creating promotional videos, advertising tournaments, reviewing financials, brainstorming new revenue ideas.

Success: Improving golfer experience and increasing revenue.

How often does your board/commission meet?

Monthly

What was the date of your most recent meeting?

October 27, 2025

How many people by City of Toledo ordinance are supposed to make up this board/commission?

6

How many people are currently serving on the board/commission (as of this survey)?

6

Has the board/commission engaged in strategic planning in the last 2 years?

YES	NO
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In the last 12 months, have members reviewed purpose of the mission as defined in the city ordinance?

YES	NO
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Does your board/commission have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for members?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Is there a current roster of board/commission members with terms and contact information available to the public?

YES	NO
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Are conflicts of interest disclosed and managed appropriately within your board/commission?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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How does your board/commission conduct regular evaluations of its effectiveness or impact?

When they met, this never happened.

Are meetings publicly noticed in accordance with Sunshine Law requirements?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Briefly describe any onboarding/training provided to new members to ensure they understand their role and that of the board/commission.

None

How does this board/commission address concerns of Toledo residents and/or fit into the strategic priorities for the City?

When they actually met, they would let a Community Services Officer, or the Chief of Police know their concerns.
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How are you communicating the work and activities of this board/commission with the residents of Toledo and other stakeholders?

They are not, and when this was active there was minimal to no communications.
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Municipal Golf Preservation and Engagement Commission

Purpose: To advise on the operation and preservation of municipal golf courses and advocate for municipal golf

Activities: Reviewing golf course "business health," discussing improvements, brainstorming engagement strategies, sharing community feedback.

Success: Staff liaison declined to answer.

How often does your board/commission meet?

Monthly

What was the date of your most recent meeting?

October 28, 2025

How many people by City of Toledo ordinance are supposed to make up this board/commission?

10

How many people are currently serving on the board/commission (as of this survey)?

6

Has the board/commission engaged in strategic planning in the last 2 years?

YES	NO
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In the last 12 months, have members reviewed purpose of the mission as defined in the city ordinance?

YES	NO
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Does your board/commission have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for members?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Is there a current roster of board/commission members with terms and contact information available to the public?

YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
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Are conflicts of interest disclosed and managed appropriately within your board/commission?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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How does your board/commission conduct regular evaluations of its effectiveness or impact?

Done informally through ongoing conversation

Are meetings publicly noticed in accordance with Sunshine Law requirements?

YES	MAYBE	NO	NO RESPONSE
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Briefly describe any onboarding/training provided to new members to ensure they understand their role and that of the board/commission.

Currently informal and unstructured

How does this board/commission address concerns of Toledo residents and/or fit into the strategic priorities for the City?

Concerns are brought to meetings and followed up with explanations or solutions.

How are you communicating the work and activities of this board/commission with the residents of Toledo and other stakeholders?

Latino Affairs Commission

Purpose: To advise the Mayor and City Council on issues affecting the Latino community, especially related to employment, education, and economic development

Activities: Advising city departments; compiling research and statistics, organizing programs and community activities, serving as a liaison between the Latino community and city leadership

Success: N/A

How often does your board/commission meet?

Monthly

What was the date of your most recent meeting?

October 25, 2025

How many people by City of Toledo ordinance are supposed to make up this board/commission?

7

How many people are currently serving on the board/commission (as of this survey)?

7

Has the board/commission engaged in strategic planning in the last 2 years?

YES	NO
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In the last 12 months, have members reviewed purpose of the mission as defined in the city ordinance?

YES	NO
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Does your board/commission have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for members?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Is there a current roster of board/commission members with terms and contact information available to the public?

YES	NO
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Are conflicts of interest disclosed and managed appropriately within your board/commission?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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How does your board/commission conduct regular evaluations of its effectiveness or impact?

No

Are meetings publicly noticed in accordance with Sunshine Law requirements?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Briefly describe any onboarding/training provided to new members to ensure they understand their role and that of the board/commission.

Not applicable

How does this board/commission address concerns of Toledo residents and/or fit into the strategic priorities for the City?

Ensures Toledo is welcoming and safe for all.

How are you communicating the work and activities of this board/commission with the residents of Toledo and other stakeholders?

"We are not."

Plan Commission

Purpose: To review zoning plans.

Activities: Intake and review of zoning plans.

Success: Number of successful developments.

How often does your board/commission meet?

Monthly

What was the date of your most recent meeting?

November 6, 2025

How many people by City of Toledo ordinance are supposed to make up this board/commission?

5

How many people are currently serving on the board/commission (as of this survey)?

5

Has the board/commission engaged in strategic planning in the last 2 years?

YES	NO
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In the last 12 months, have members reviewed purpose of the mission as defined in the city ordinance?

YES	NO
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Does your board/commission have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for members?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Is there a current roster of board/commission members with terms and contact information available to the public?

YES	NO	Left blank
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Are conflicts of interest disclosed and managed appropriately within your board/commission?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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How does your board/commission conduct regular evaluations of its effectiveness or impact?

None

Are meetings publicly noticed in accordance with Sunshine Law requirements?

YES	MAYBE	NO
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Briefly describe any onboarding/training provided to new members to ensure they understand their role and that of the board/commission.

Training with the director

How does this board/commission address concerns of Toledo residents and/or fit into the strategic priorities for the City?

All developments are reviewed for strategic-plan compliance.
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How are you communicating the work and activities of this board/commission with the residents of Toledo and other stakeholders?

Through public notices.

