

# SMALL TOWN FEEL



The notion of a “small town feel” as many people call it is referenced very often in our surveys by respondents. At the end of each survey we ask Utahns what they value and we see this theme repeatedly across all cities and towns and in every year’s survey. Due to the clear importance, we chose to look further into this idea and what it may mean from the perspective of the 2022–2023 survey. This page is devoted to some of those findings and associated suggestions for cities and towns in Utah, based on the feedback of respondents and study of relevant literature.

## How are people talking about small town feel?

In response to the questions, “What do you value about living in your city or town?” and “Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about wellbeing in your city or town?”



of respondents answered one or both of these questions.



of those who commented, referenced a small town feel or small town.

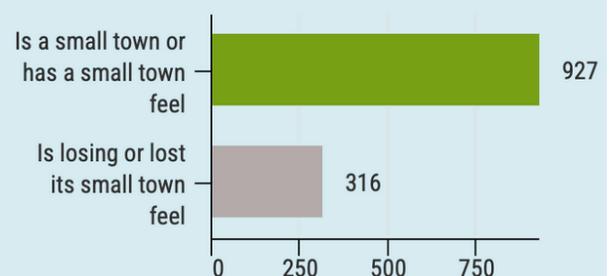


and 35% of that 16% used the term "small town feel" verbatim.

We also found that those mentioning a small town feel mostly framed it as something they currently experience. This has much to do with the phrasing of the first question of being something they value, but is interesting to note. Three quarters of respondents made no mention of the small town feel going away or lost.

The additional items of value that respondents mention include: social connections, nature, open space and agriculture, safety, peace and quiet, and being family oriented.

### The way respondents talk about small town feel within their city or town





It was clear upon reading through the surveys that people care about knowing people around town. Additionally, many value having both deeper social connections and brief interactions while out and about. People also like opportunities to celebrate and recreate with others in their town.

“it’s still a great community to live and raise a family. People care for one another and take care of each other.”  
 “I value the small town, know all your neighbors feel”

Nature and open space are also highly valued. Respondents mention their love of fields and farms and how those differ from a city park or trail in how they make them feel. They love the peace and calm that type of atmosphere brings.

“This is a small community of people who show concern for each other and for the town, located in an area of outstanding scenic beauty.”

“keep the rural feel of Nibley ...Can't we be the one city that still embraces farmland, open space, parks and nature?”

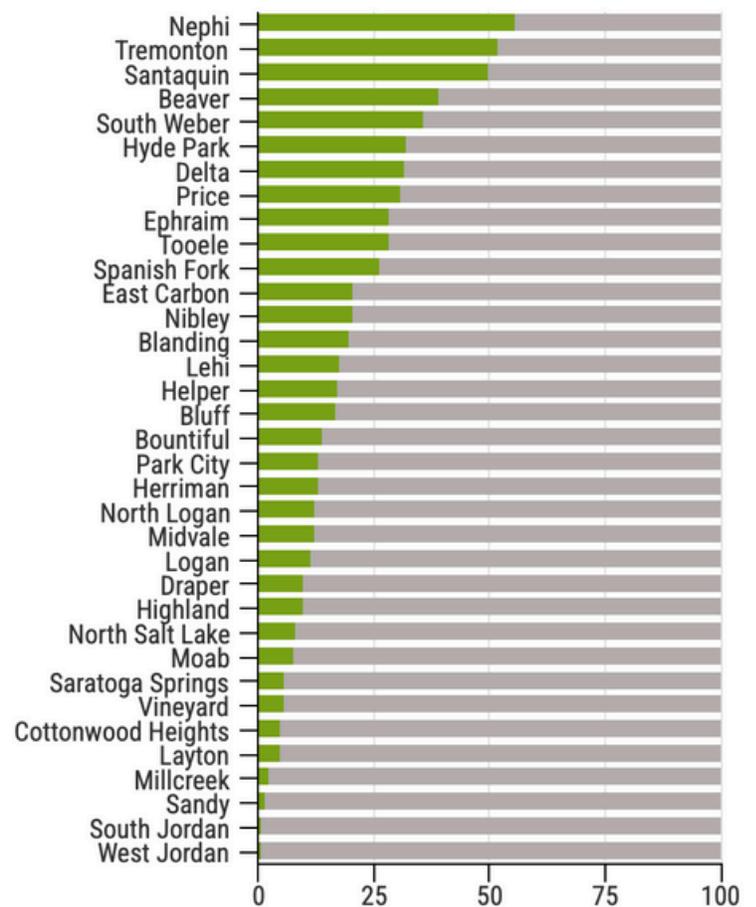
“The cow pastures create a calm and peace and small town feel that a city park will never create.”

## Does the conversation differ by city?

The first graph below illustrates which cities mention a small town feel more frequently and the second graph shows which cities the small town feel is more present in and in which cities it is disappearing. These results come from the 2022–2023 surveys.

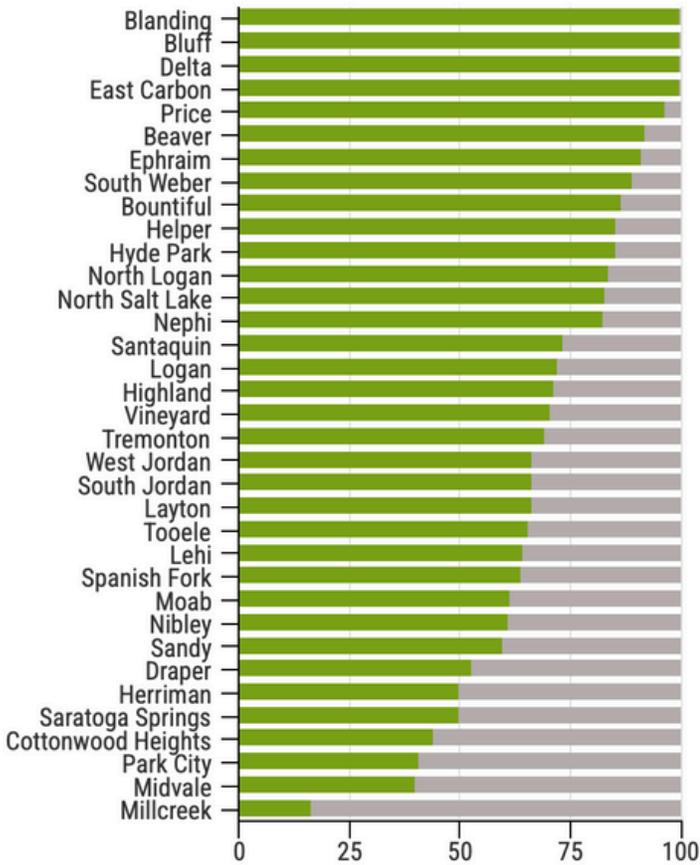
### Percent of respondents that mention a small town feel out of total respondents who make comments

● Mention a small town feel or small town    ● Do not mention



## Out of the comments made on small town feel in each city, the percent of respondents that mention the feel being present

● Small town feel present    ● Small town feel disappearing or lost

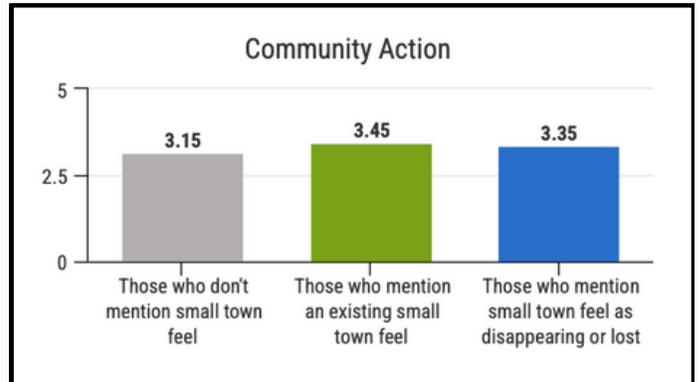


## Should we prioritize preserving this feeling?

Those who mention a small town feel in the survey tend to rate their personal wellbeing slightly higher than those who don't. They also report higher levels of community connection and community action. We can't say one thing causes the other, but between the fact that many people bring it up and these same people

have high wellbeing and community connection it may be worth considering ways to maintain that small town feel so many Utah towns have.

When asked "In [city], to what degree do people take action together in response to local problems or opportunities?" with 1 being not at all and 5 being a great deal we found:



Maintaining a small town feel does not mean growth needs to cease. As mentioned above a lot of people describe a small town feel in terms of their social connections and their surrounding nature and agriculture. A town can grow and have those things. The more we can understand about what a small town feel is, the easier it is for us to see it as a possible future that works in tandem with other values.

Ultimately what citizens and city leaders both want are towns where people thrive and want to stay and where the charm of the town is preserved.

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## How can prioritizing small town feel be done?

Upon studying the literature extensively as well as the comments of residents there are several points of general consensus.

- Preserving town history
- Identifying and accentuating what makes the town unique
- Planning community and cultural events
- Having public spaces for people to gather and recreate
- Preserving open space
- Revitalizing a main street and making it walkable
- Codes and zoning consistent with the town character

Suggestions of the respondents:

"I like the small-town feel that exists already through community events like Harvest Days, as well as the revitalization of Main Street (that reinforces the small-town feel)" (Midvale)

"I like living in a small town near a big city. Although I understand that's not going happen forever having thoughtful development that incorporates infrastructure, environmental quality, and Parks and Recreation an essential part of that development will help to keep that small town feel" (Tooele)

"I dislike the efforts to turn everything into a formal subdivision with curb, gutter, and sidewalk. I would prefer swales along the roadsides to help retain the rural feel. I'm very concerned that access to the wilderness area east of town be maintained... Commercial development should be done in a way that fosters a city image, not in a copy-cat building code that caters to commercial interests over resident interests." (Hyde Park)

"Work toward building out and defining a true town center, where the community can gather and ground our community." (Nibley)

"The rural, hometown, farmland feel! We need to preserve North Logan's farm heritage. Towns need greens pace and flowing water for wellbeing. Not public parks but FIELDS!" (North Logan)

"Have a city ordinance requiring an Old town look." (Spanish Fork)

"It's very important to keep space and the reason everyone loves Nephi (small town feel) alive and preserved" (Nephi)

The following resources provide direction and examples of how this can be done

[EPA's Smart Growth in Small Towns and Rural Communities Guide](#). recommends planning where development should and should not go, encouraging active transportation, and preserving open space and promoting recreation

[Community Builders post](#). A description of what small town character is and how proper and cohesive design can allow for growth that works in a small town

[Central Florida Development Council post](#). The success and challenges of Lake Alfred, Florida as it tries to keep its small town feel as it grows through facade grants, conservation areas, and city codes

[SW News article](#). How Chaska, Minnesota retains its small town feel through revitalizing their main street, preserving history, holding community events, providing space for people to interact outside their homes, and quality recreation

[IndyStar article](#). Nobelsville, Indiana trying to keep its charm through historic preservation and long term planning, community events, and a facade grant program

[Planetizen post](#). Small town sustainability can be achieved through collaboration, preserving agricultural and natural resources, having public and civic spaces, and planning locally beyond land use

[American Planning Association's Blogpost](#). How revitalizing Main Street and historic preservation help keep Center, Colorado's small town feel

[New Hampshire Municipal Association post](#). Using proper planning and capitalizing on distinctive assets helps small towns thrive

A [neighborhood event toolkit](#) made by Orange County, Florida

[Preservation of Small Town Character in the Town Center of Rutland, Massachusetts](#)  
How Rutland, Massachusetts used historic preservation, zoning changes, and downtown revitalization to preserve small town character

[Utah Business article](#). The role community events play in preserving the small town feel of Santaquin, Utah

Graphs made with Visme