Williamsburg Regional Library Building Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 8/6-22/2018, the Williamsburg Regional Library (WRL) surveyed the community as part of an information gathering process to inform library building projects. Three thousand one hundred and thirty respondents shared their thoughts with the library, including nearly 7,500 comments. Overall, satisfaction with library services and locations was high among survey respondents. Respondents raised two clear areas of concern: 1) The difficulty of parking at the Williamsburg Library (see details in section 4 below); 2) Concern about moving the Williamsburg Library building. These concerns are addressed in detail below.

It is clear from the survey comments that users value the Williamsburg location and that the library plays an important role in the economic life of downtown Williamsburg. For 65% of all respondents, the Williamsburg Library is the preferred facility; this includes 56% of the James City County residents who responded to the survey and 75% of the York County respondents. Responses to questions about activity prior to and after visiting the Williamsburg Library elicited a range of activities from shopping and dining to use of the Post Office and other municipal facilities (see details in section 3 below). In response to an open-ended question asking respondents to share additional thoughts on WRL, we received over 1,300 comments. About a third of these comments were in reference to some aspect of library collections, programs, or services that the user either liked or found fault with. In particular, there were a significant number of comments on the library theatre with about 58% of the comments supporting the library having a theater and 43% suggesting other use for that space. The other two thirds of the comments were tagged as relating to library facilities, and are discussed in depth below (section 6).

While there is a high level of satisfaction with library service from WRL, there are clearly concerns from some users about the Williamsburg Library moving from its current downtown location. However, there are also clear indications that users are interested in the possibilities that a new or significantly renovated space might offer. Balancing these tensions as WRL moves forward with the City of Williamsburg and James City County will be a key to success for any new or renovated library facilities.
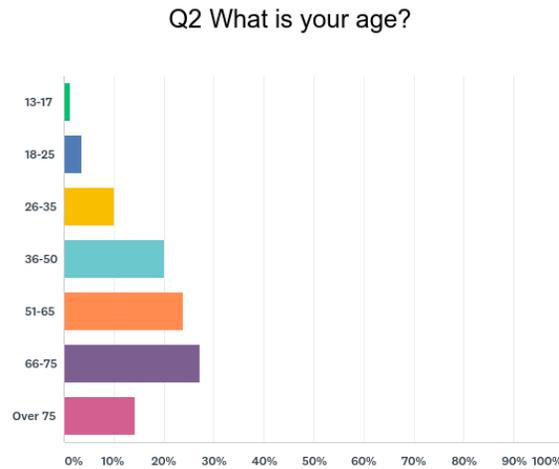
SURVEY RESULTS

## General Information

1. Respondent Demographics

The WRL Building Survey had 3130 respondents. In terms of gender, 69% of the respondents identified as female, and 29% as male. Survey respondents tended to be older, with 66% being 51 years of age or older (figure 1).
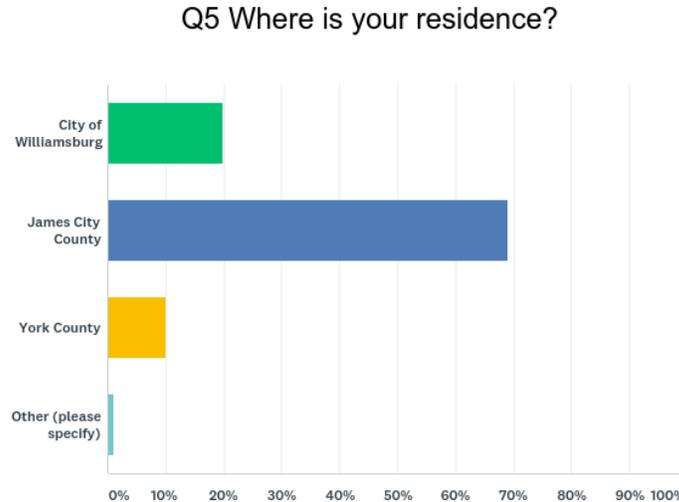
Q2 What is your age?

There was a relatively even spread of responses to how long respondents had lived in the area, though 33% had resided here for more than 20 years (figure 2).

### Q4 How long have you lived in the area?
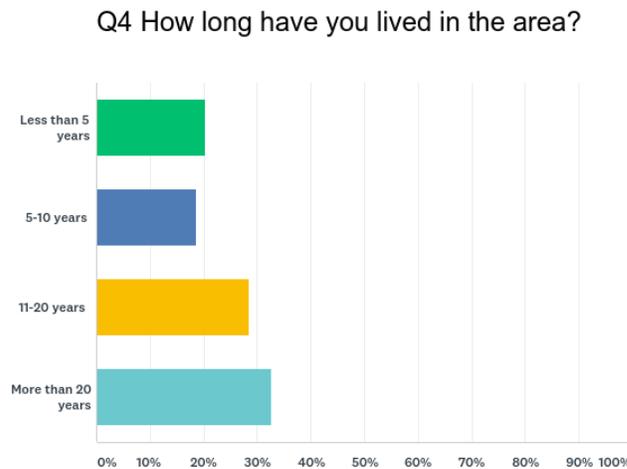
The majority of respondents were residents of James City County (69%), followed by the City of Williamsburg, and then York County (figure 3).

Figure 3, Jurisdiction

Over 97% of the respondents had a WRL library card. When asked what facility they preferred to use, 65% indicated the Williamsburg Library, 15% the James City County Library, and 20% indicated that they use both facilities (figure 4).

Figure 4, Preferred Library Location
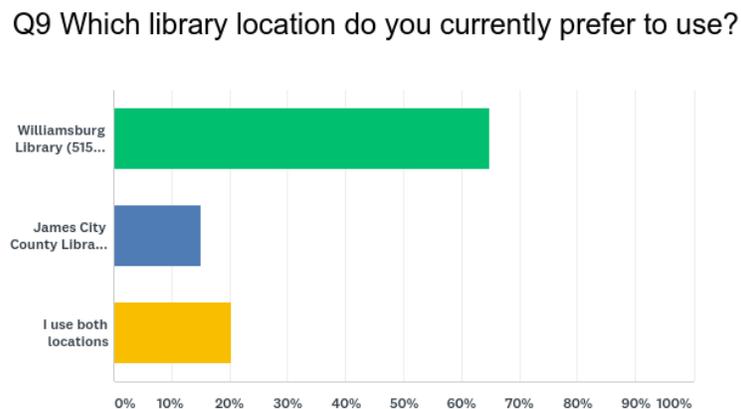
We asked survey users to indicate, if they chose, the neighborhood in which they lived, and nearly 3,000 respondents shared that information. With this data, we were able to look at the locations of James City County residents who preferred to use the Williamsburg Library building. Working with GIS mapping staff from James City County, we then mapped these county neighborhoods in relation to the Williamsburg Library location (image 1). As the map indicates, the majority of the JCC residents who prefer the Williamsburg Library live south of

Lightfoot and west of Williamsburg. This gives some indication of potential future library locations.

Image 1, JCC Residents Preferring Williamsburg Library
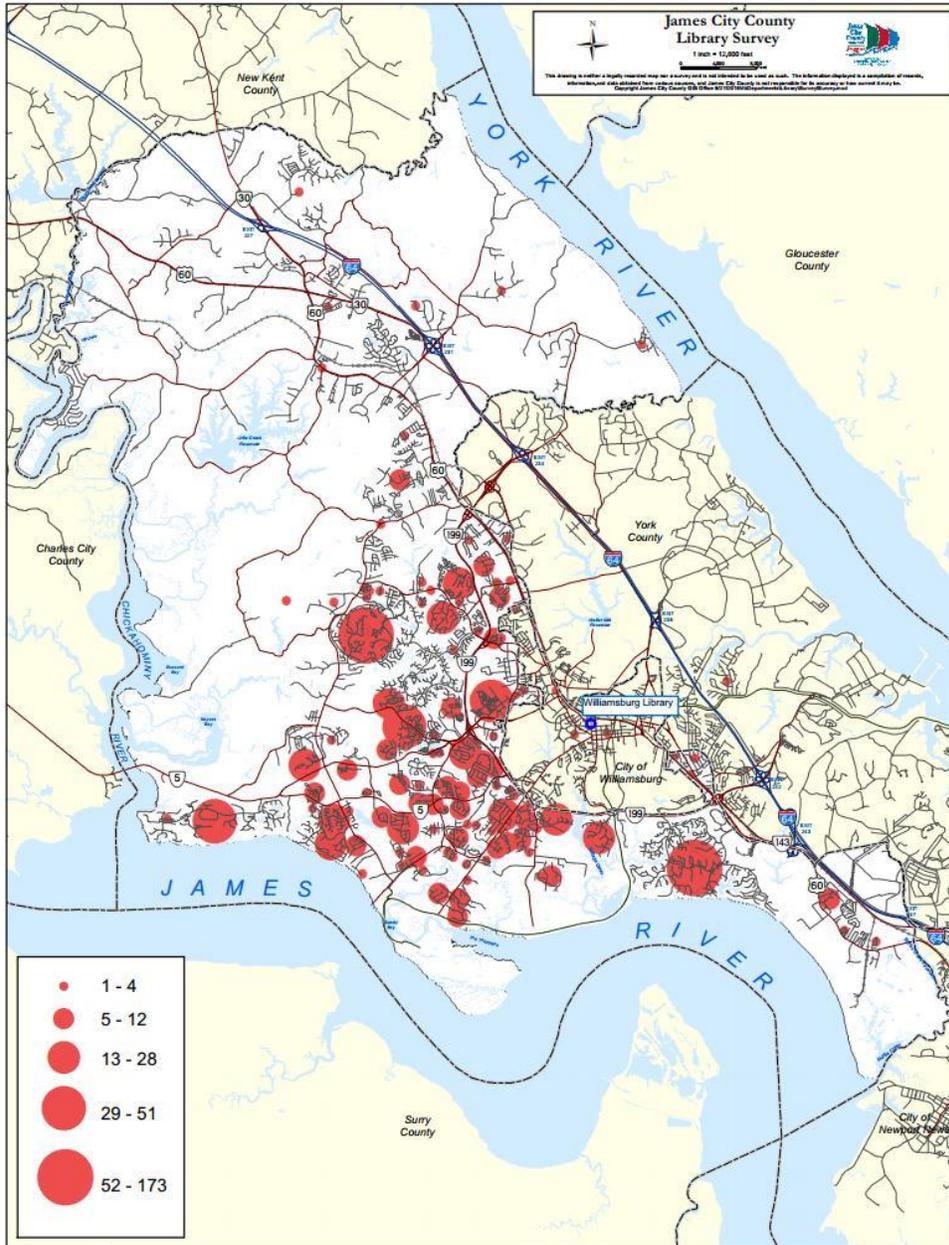
Survey respondents visited the Williamsburg Library building more frequently than the James City County building. (figures 5-6). Additionally, most library visits last from 16 minutes to one hour (figure 7).

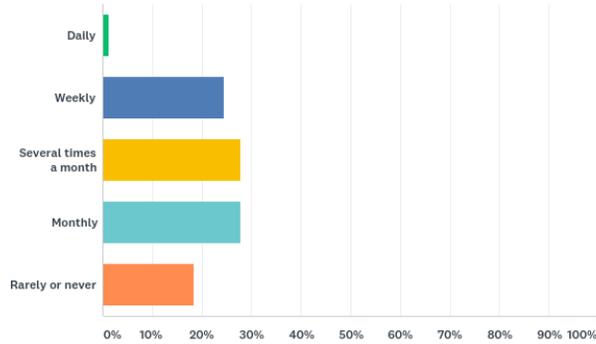Q12 How often do you visit the Williamsburg Library (515 Scotland St.)?

Q13 How often do you visit the James City County Library (7770 Croaker Rd.)?

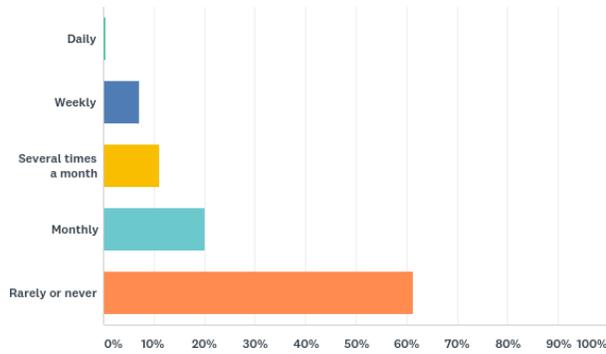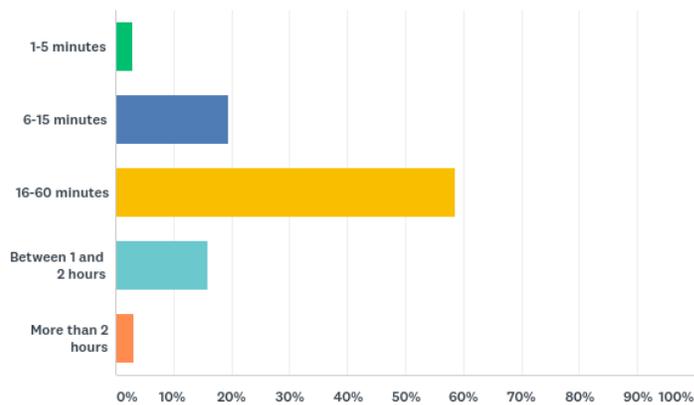Q14 How long are you at the library on a typical visit?

2. Library Use and Satisfaction

The survey results reflect a focus on library materials and programs as well as a high degree of satisfaction with WRL services and collections. When asked "What do you do when you visit the library?" 88% of respondents indicated browse for materials to read, view, or listen to. An additional 67% said that they come to the library to pick up items being held for them. In terms of programs, 50% of respondents indicated that they come to the library to attend programs. An additional 45% indicated that they come to attend events in the library theatre. Respondents come to the library to read (30%), view art exhibits (28%), browse the book sale (28%), and consult staff (26%). See table 1 for complete responses.

Table 1, Library Usage

What do you do when you visit the library? Check all that apply.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Browse and checkout books, movies, audiobooks, or music	88.00%	2553
Pickup items on hold	66.36%	1925
Attend events in the library theatre	45.98%	1334
Read	29.89%	867
View art exhibits	28.20%	818
Browse the Friends Book Nook	27.78%	806
Consult staff	26.37%	765
Bring children to visit the library	22.75%	660
Attend adult library programs	22.54%	654
Study or conduct research	19.51%	566
Attend meetings	19.23%	558
Use the wi-fi	16.68%	484
Use a laptop or mobile device in the library	15.93%	462
Use the library as a workspace	13.34%	387
Bring school-age children to library programs	13.20%	383
Bring children age birth to five to library programs	11.03%	320
Use public computers	11.03%	320
Meet with people	10.58%	307
Meet a tutor or student	2.83%	82
Attend teen library programs	2.72%	79

In terms of satisfaction with various aspects of the library facilities, most users are either satisfied or very satisfied with both buildings. The Williamsburg building received high ratings for location (87% either satisfied or very satisfied), accessibility (84%), and comfort (81%). The James City County building was noted for parking (66%), accessibility (64%), comfort (58%), and ease of navigation (56%).

Respondents did note a higher level of dissatisfaction with Williamsburg building in terms of parking availability (29% either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied) and with the availability of lounge seating (12% either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied). At the James City County building 12% of respondents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the convenience of the location. But these were the only instances where the percent of either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied respondents was above 10%.

3. Economic Impact of Williamsburg Library Usage

The survey asked respondents to share if they combine visits to the Williamsburg Library location with other activities. It is clear from the responses that for many users, visiting the Williamsburg Library is part of a pattern of shopping, eating, and doing business in the downtown Williamsburg area (table 2). Although it is difficult to measure the direct economic impact of the library's downtown location, there is little doubt that local shops and restaurants benefit from visits from heavy library use. This is an argument in favor of increasing library parking, as a significant number of survey respondents indicated that if they cannot find easy library parking they go home (see parking discussion in section 4 below)

Table 2, Before Library Visits

When you visit the Williamsburg Library and/or library theatre (515 Scotland St.) do you typically combine this visit with other activities? Please check all that apply.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Shopping or visiting businesses in Merchants Square and Colonial Williamsburg	64.20%	1397
Attending downtown events such as the Farmer's Market, concerts, and festivals	51.79%	1127
Visiting facilities such as the Post Office, Municipal Building, Chamber of Commerce, or Stryker Center	45.59%	992
Shopping or visiting businesses in the City of Williamsburg (for example Richmond Rd. corridor, Midtown, High Street, etc.)	44.49%	968
Eating in a restaurant in or adjacent to the Merchants Square and Colonial Williamsburg	40.40%	879
Visiting or working in Merchants Square or Colonial Williamsburg	35.34%	769
Shopping or visiting businesses in James City County or York County such as the Premium Outlets, New Town, Monticello Marketplace, and Marquis Shopping Center	25.14%	547
Eating in a restaurant in the City of Williamsburg outside the Historic Area	24.72%	538
Visiting, working, or attending classes at the College	17.00%	370
Eating in a restaurant in James City or York County	14.66%	319

The survey then asked participants to share what they did just prior to and just after their most recent visit to the Williamsburg Library. Over 2,100 respondents indicated a wide range of pre- and post-library activities, including visits to shops on Merchant's Square, local restaurants, the Post Office, and many other places. The most popular destinations are indicated below (images 1 and 2). These responses reinforce the concept that the Williamsburg Library plays an important role in the economic life of downtown Williamsburg, and supports the need for a robust, vibrant library facility with ample parking in this area.

Image 2, Pre-library Visits

Image 3, Post-library Visits

4. Parking at the Williamsburg Library

Over 97% of survey respondents indicated that they drive to the library with over 90% of users coming from 20 minutes or less away. With that in mind, it is evident that ample access to

parking is essential for library success. This is particularly the case for seniors, users with limited mobility, and families with small children. In response to a survey question about the impact of parking on their use of the Williamsburg Library, 53% of respondents indicated that parking did not impact their library use and 47% indicated that parking had an impact on their library use. The 47% who indicated that parking had an impact on their library use shared that impact in over 1,200 comments. Over 76% of the comments reflected directly on the parking situation at the Williamsburg Library. Of these comments, 37% of respondents indicated that they have not visited the library, left because of lack of parking, or decreased their library use due to the parking situation. An additional 15% say that they have had to adjust the times of their visits due to lack of parking. Additionally, over 26% of respondents feel that the parking situation is either bad or at least occasionally bad. Only 9% of respondents here indicated that parking was not an issue for them, but even this group often acknowledged that parking might be an issue for other users. Some sample comments on parking at the Williamsburg Library include:

- "The dread of dealing with the parking lot has kept me from obtaining a library card or even contemplating it."
- If there is no parking in" lot or nearby, I probably won't go to the library."
- "The lack of parking has caused us to not stop at Scotland Street as I have 3 kids and didn't feel comfortable parking down the street then trying to walk to library through busy streets."
- "At times it is difficult to secure a parking space due to an event on site or in immediate area. Have had to leave without visiting."
- "Mobility issues make it difficult to walk from behind the community building to the library, as often must be done."

Some other themes that arose in the comments about parking are:

- A need for additional handicapped parking space
- Concern about the 2-hour parking limit in the library lot, the parking deck, and behind the Community Building
- Concern about use of the library lot by non-library users, including tourists, shoppers, W&M students, people attending events in other areas in the City, etc.
- A need for dedicated, untimed library parking
- A lack of comfort with parallel parking

5. What is important in a new or renovated library?

We asked survey respondents to indicate what features of a new library they believed to be most important, ranking the choices from Very Important to Not Important. The top five items selected by respondents were: Onsite parking (94% Very Important or Important), Accessibility (89%), Large windows and natural lighting (82%), Sustainable, energy-efficient design (79%),

and Quiet work areas (77%). The least important features were: Drive-up service window (18% Very Important or Important), Arts and crafts room (31%), Bookstore-style displays (31%), and Café space (32%). See table 3 for full responses.

Table 3, New library features

What is important in a new or renovated library?

	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	No opinion	Total Responses
Onsite parking	71.33%	22.51%	3.54%	1.60%	1.03%	2626
Accessibility	52.99%	36.00%	7.71%	1.35%	1.95%	2672
Large windows and natural lighting	41.44%	40.36%	11.88%	3.36%	2.95%	2676
Sustainable, energy-efficient design	45.41%	33.36%	13.40%	4.22%	3.62%	2680
Quiet work areas	33.95%	42.60%	13.75%	3.41%	6.29%	2669
Theater/performance space	37.43%	33.37%	16.89%	6.10%	6.21%	2688
Large, up-to-date building	30.44%	37.73%	21.07%	8.80%	1.96%	2648
Access to new technology	28.23%	41.40%	20.79%	5.80%	3.78%	2674
Self-service features	27.73%	40.51%	21.61%	6.64%	3.51%	2651
Access to electric outlets	28.85%	37.36%	19.70%	4.86%	9.23%	2655
Lounge seating	21.24%	41.75%	22.60%	6.45%	7.96%	2637
Large children's room	29.95%	28.00%	17.71%	6.82%	17.52%	2654
Space for large book and audiovisual material collections	17.55%	32.75%	30.99%	9.69%	9.02%	2672
Group and individual study rooms	16.96%	35.67%	28.10%	8.07%	11.21%	2641
Multiple meeting rooms	16.09%	37.54%	25.14%	8.29%	12.93%	2653
Teen room	14.58%	30.19%	25.83%	6.93%	22.46%	2640
Digital labs/Maker spaces	12.56%	22.97%	35.31%	14.56%	14.60%	2651
Bookstore-style displays	7.78%	22.85%	39.19%	22.55%	7.63%	2674
Cafe space	9.77%	22.72%	31.55%	25.32%	10.64%	2650
Arts and crafts room	9.62%	21.20%	35.01%	20.94%	13.24%	2651
Drive-up service window	6.99%	11.36%	31.10%	43.70%	6.84%	2675

These responses indicate a clear interest among those surveyed for features that are not currently part of the Williamsburg Library facility—openness, accessibility, quiet work areas, and ample parking. Additionally, when asked about factors that are most important to a library location, respondents also indicated that ample, on-site parking was the highest priority , with 95% of respondents indicating this was Very Important or Important (see table 4 for full results). This question also garnered nearly 400 comments. The majority of these comments reference keeping the Williamsburg Library in its present location, perhaps with some renovation, but the sentiment clearly goes towards a downtown location for the library. Additional comments note a need for

parking, family or gender-neutral restrooms, and a desire to maintain a "small town" feel to any new or renovated library facility.

Table 4, Library location preferences

Please rank the importance of the following factors to potential library locations.

	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	No opinion	Total
Space for on-site parking	71.32%	23.77%	3.49%	0.89%	0.52%	2692
Located on or near public transportation route	31.81%	32.93%	19.50%	8.61%	7.15%	2672
Prominent, visible location	30.48%	36.42%	22.04%	9.45%	1.61%	2677
Convenient to shopping, businesses, and restaurants	19.26%	34.48%	30.29%	13.65%	2.32%	2674
On or adjacent to major traffic corridors	17.96%	34.71%	30.28%	14.95%	2.10%	2662

6. General Comments

The survey concluded with an opportunity for respondents to share any additional comments with the library on concerns, ideas, etc. Over 1,300 respondents shared comments here. About a third of these comments were in reference to some aspect of library collections, programs, or services that the user either liked or found fault with. We received about 70 comments on the library theatre with about 58% of these comments supporting the library having a theater and 43% indicating they saw no need for a library to have a theater or suggesting the theater be moved to the Kimball space in Merchant's Square.

We tagged the 800+ comments that related to library facilities using the following tags (see table 5 for full results):

- Library collections are of prime importance (B)
- Like the library but it could be better (CBB)
- Love the library and its staff (L)
- We need a new library space (N)
- The Williamsburg Library has parking issues (P)
- Keep the Williamsburg Library where it is but renovate (R)
- Keep Williamsburg Library just as it is and where it is (W)

We then looked at the tagged responses overall and by the respondent's jurisdiction. Of the 825 tagged comments, 39% of the comments indicated a strong preference for keeping the Williamsburg Library in its current location, with an additional 7% indicating that there could be a need for renovation of the space, and a further 7% indicating that while they liked the Williamsburg Library, perhaps the facility could be better. As might be expected, over 60% of

Williamsburg residents commented favorably on the current library location and facility, while the numbers were lower for JCC residents (33%) and York Co. residents (34%). There were a substantial number (29%) of commenters who simply wanted to say how much they love the library. Most of these comments singled out the library staff as being a primary factor in their satisfaction with the Williamsburg Regional Library System.

Table 5, Comment tags

Description	Comments	Percentage
Library collections are of prime importance	65	8%
Like the library but it could be better	56	7%
Love the library and its staff	227	28%
We need a new library space	48	6%
The Williamsburg Library has parking issues	46	6%
Keep the Williamsburg Library where it is but renovate	59	7%
Keep Williamsburg Library just as it is and where it is	324	39%
Total	825	

The survey results indicate a high level of support for the Williamsburg Regional Library System in the community. This support is consistent with findings from past surveys and anecdotal information that we gather. At the same time, there is also a high level of concern about the future of the Williamsburg Library building. Survey respondents clearly value the downtown location, and while a slim majority indicate that they do not have problems parking at the Williamsburg Library, a significant number of users say that lack of adequate parking has reduced their library use. There are also clear indications that users are interested in the possibilities that a new or significantly renovated space might offer. Balancing these tensions as WRL moves forward with the City of Williamsburg and James City County will be a key to success for any new or renovated library facilities.