



Connecting With The Morningside Heights Community During Challenging Times

Findings of the September 2020 Survey Conducted by the
Morningside Heights Community Coalition

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Background

- MHCC's June 2020 survey determined that area residents had concerns about the risk of Covid infection at the prospect of college/university students returning in Fall 2020.
- Supported by these survey findings, MHCC actively engaged with local institutes of higher education seeking to ensure that their plans for Fall 2020 would not increase the risk of infection among members of the Morningside Heights community.
- MHCC's efforts had a role in Columbia University reversing its plan to have undergraduates taking in-person classes. Other colleges in the area have followed plans set by Columbia.
- Columbia has allowed for 800+ students with special circumstances* to reside in student housing. These students, as well as faculty and staff, are required to adhere to safety protocols delineated in Columbia's Community Health Compact.
- A reduced student population in the area will impact the customer base for local business, adding to financial pressures already imposed as a result of the pandemic.

*As determined by Columbia

Survey Objective

- While MHCC is not able to hold face-to-face meetings to hear what our neighbors are thinking about, as a follow up to MHCC's June 2020 survey, we created the current survey in order to gain some insights into the views and priorities of Morningside Heights residents at a specific point in time.
- The findings of this survey have helped MHCC shape the topics discussed at the September 21, 2020 Town Hall.

Method

Two different software programs were used for survey collection:

- *SurveyMonkey* – an online tool used for survey design and data collection
- *Mailchimp* – a marketing tool used to send emails to a designated contact list
- An email with an invitation to participate in the survey was mailed to MHCC's contact list on September 3, 2020. A reminder to complete the survey was sent to this same list on September 8 and 14, 2020. Survey collection ended at the close of day September 14, 2020.
- A total of 259 respondents, ages 18 years and older answered the survey.

Note about the survey findings. The findings are limited to a self-select sample (not a random sample) and therefore not statistically projectible to any group or groups outside of this survey.

Key Takeaways

Morningside Heights residents want to **maintain the neighborhood** they know.

Their concerns reflect an interest in having appropriate **housing for residents** and **allowing local businesses to thrive**.

- **Rezoning** which would ensure the **parameters of development in Morningside Heights for residential and commercial** use, is considered **the most important issue**.
- Reflecting that **Morningside Heights is a caring community**, it is also important that **food support** is provided to those who need it.

Matters of **safety** are important to the community – both **preventing the spread of Covid** and **preventing crime** in the neighborhood

- A **majority (91%) agree that Columbia's reversal in plans** was necessary to **prevent the risk of Covid infection** increasing in the community.

Safety/crime prevention and **sanitation/clean streets** lead open-ended comments as **other important issues** for Morningside Heights. The need to address **homelessness** and the **state of neighborhood parks** is also on the mind of our community.

- These issues are not unique to Morningside Heights. They are city-wide issues due to **service cutbacks** resulting from the Covid-related **loss of revenue**.
- **Political leaders**, including those on a local level, are in the position to affect policies. They need to know these are **growing concerns among their constituencies**.

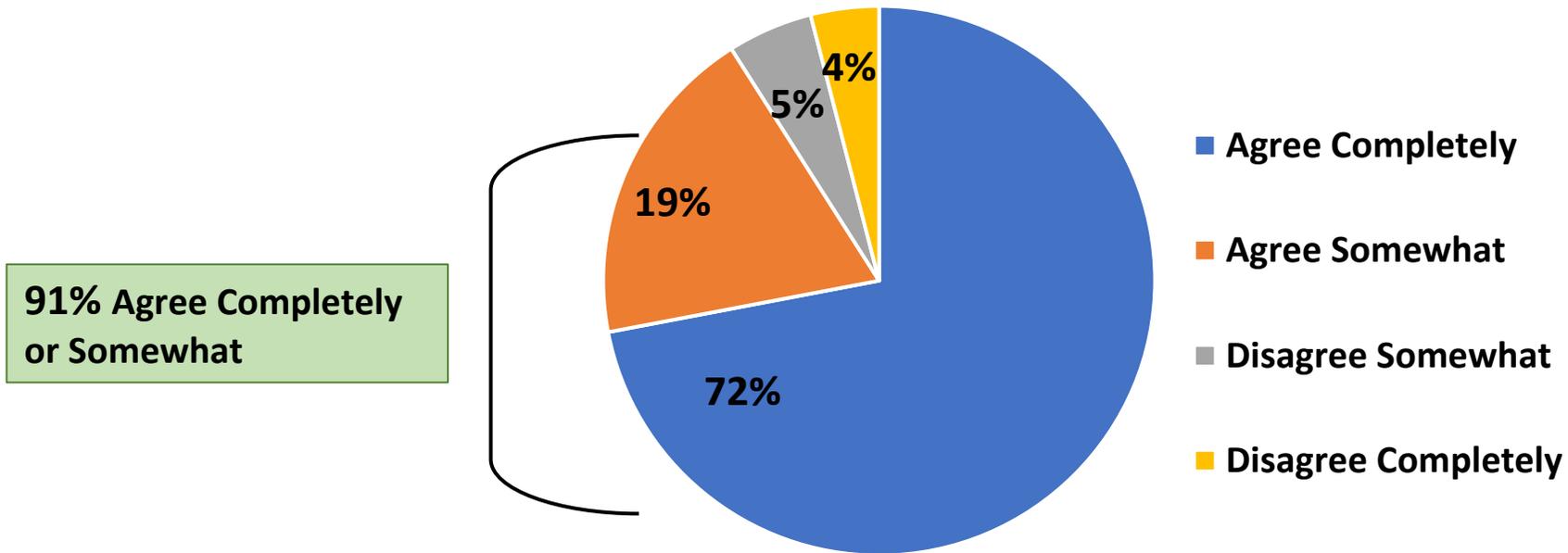
To **support local businesses**, residents are willing to do **more shopping** in the neighborhood, including to replace some current online purchasing.

- There is some interest in establishing a Morningside Heights **business association**. Community members are **less apt** to donate to a **fund to support local businesses**.
- Providing **rent relief** and using **advertising and promotions** are suggested most often for helping local businesses.

Detailed Findings

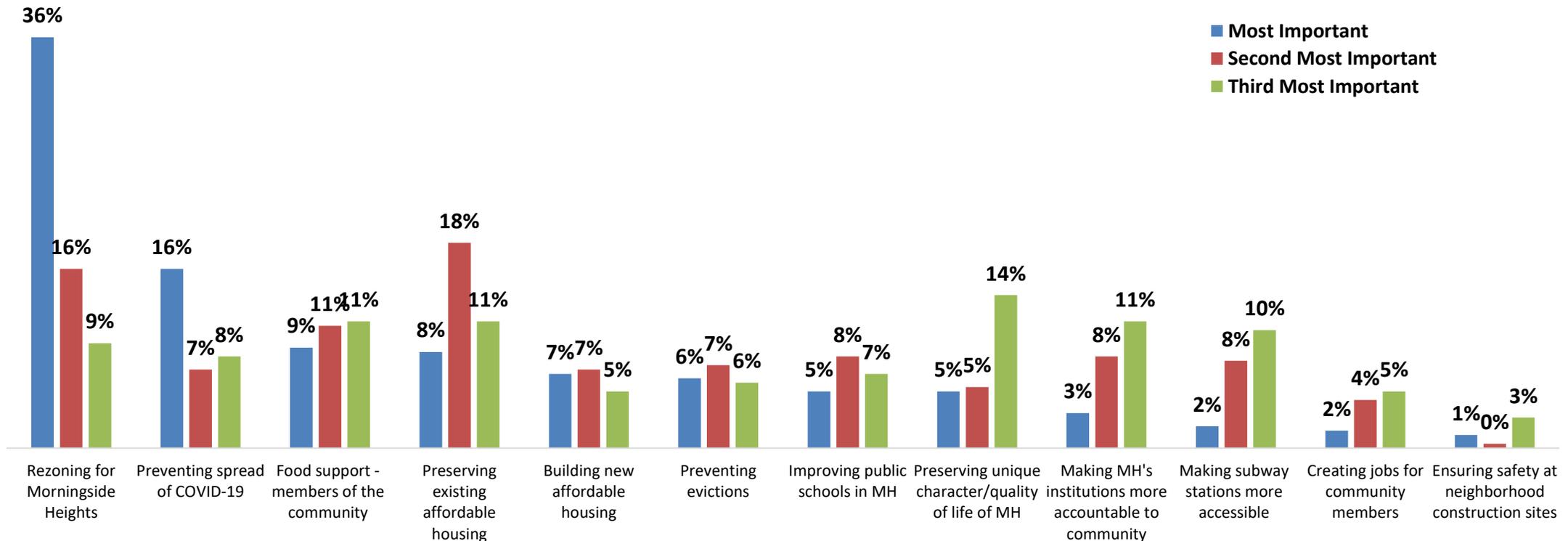
There is close to unanimous agreement that Columbia's reversal of its plan to have in-person undergraduate classes was necessary to prevent the risk of increasing Covid infection in the community.

Agreement with Columbia's Reversing Plan for In-Person Undergraduate Classes



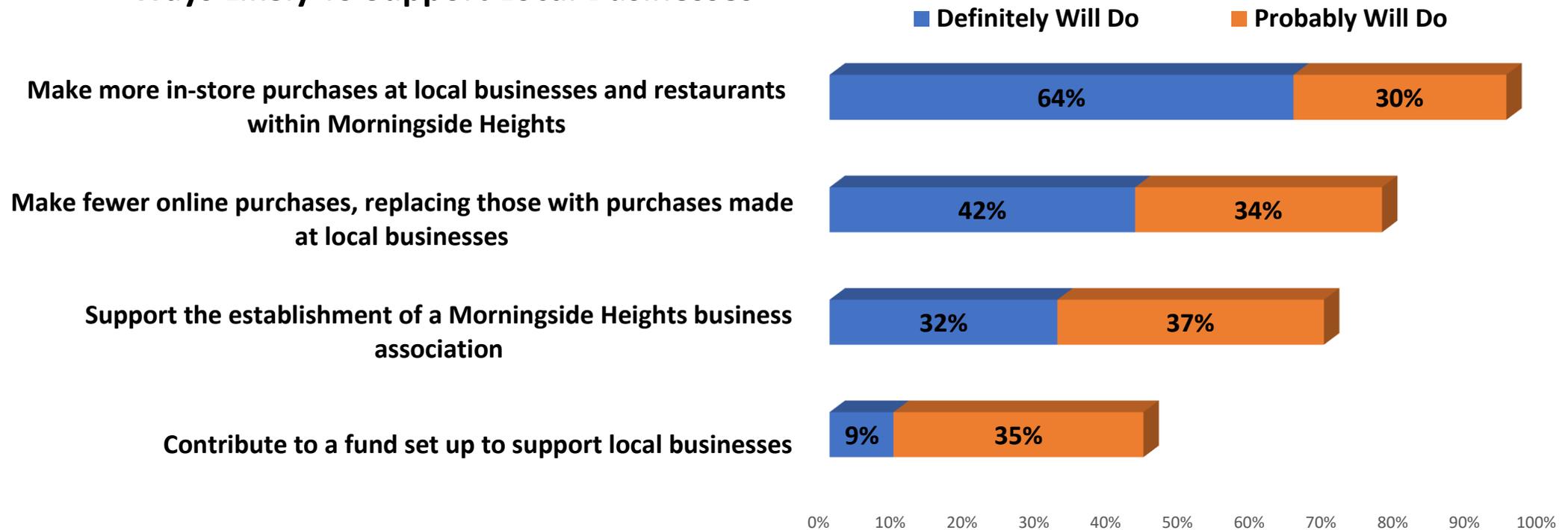
Rezoning, that will determine property use in Morningside Heights, leads other issues as the most important issue. It is followed by preventing the spread of Covid as an important issue. Having affordable housing in Morningside Heights, especially preserving existing affordable housing, is an important issue. Ensuring food security for neighborhood residents also resonates.

Most, Second Most, Third Most Important Issues for Morningside Heights



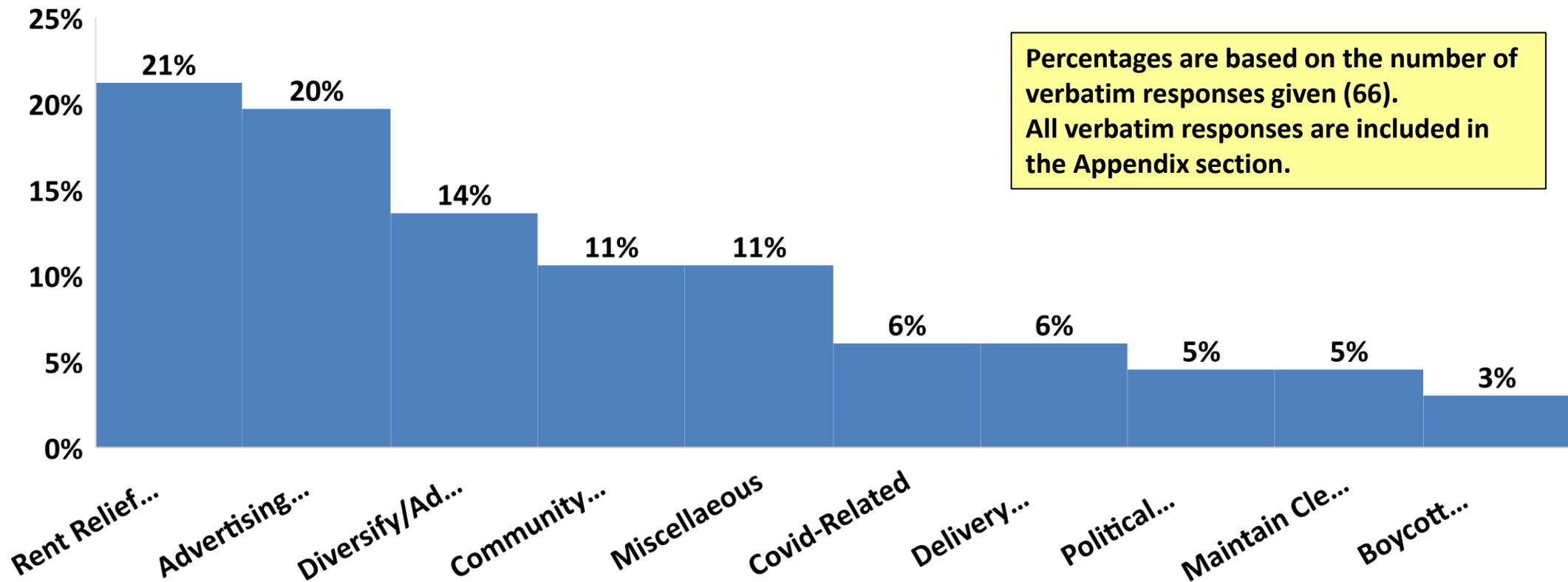
Morningside Heights residents are apt to increase purchases made in the neighborhood and replace some online purchases with spending at local businesses. Establishing a Morningside Heights business association is a more viable notion for supporting local businesses than making donations to a fund specifically set up to support local businesses.

Ways Likely To Support Local Businesses



Offering local businesses rent relief and advertising/marketing by local businesses are cited most often among those offering suggestions. Changes to what is offered by local businesses and community engagement are also mentioned.

Other Ways Suggested for Supporting Local Businesses – Verbatim Responses



Appendix

Other Issues Considered Important for Morningside Heights – Verbatim Responses (page 1 of 8)

Safety/Street Crime

- 1 Addressing the increase in street crime
- 2 crackdown on panhandling
- 3 Crime
- 4 I'm very concerned about the rise in crime, especially gun violence.
- 5 keep up roving safety patrols
- 6 More safe outdoor space for youth recreational programs
- 7 patrolling traffic in the neighborhood with regard to speeding and noise motorcycles
- 8 People driving motorbikes and electric scooters on sidewalks
- 9 Physical safety of residents in the neighborhood
- 10 Safety
- 11 safety
- 12 Safety
- 13 safety
- 14 Safety and Security
- 15 Safety from crime
- 16 Street crime: institute regular foot patrols
- 17 Traffic safety
- 18 Ensure that crime control and prevention have permanent priority
- 19 Public safety regardless of construction sites
- 20 Decreasing crime and improving safety. If it continues to deteriorate, I will be leaving the neighborhood after being a resident for over 10 years
- 21 Maintaining safety in the neighborhood
- 22 Scooters driving illegally

Other Issues Considered Important for Morningside Heights – Verbatim Responses (page 2 of 8)

Retail Spaces/Local Businesses

- 1 Alternatives for empty retail space
- 2 businesses that provide cultural activities which target residents, such as music various genres of music)venues, bars cafes. Would love to have a place to go to listen to music
- 3 Consider measure to limit empty storefronts prohibition on evictions, including businesses, until a new lease is in effect
- 4 keep small businesses afloat
- 5 Preserving small businesses
- 6 small business rent control
- 7 Support local businesses
- 8 Supporting local businesses (particularly small business owners)
- 9 Commercial storefronts returned to "mom and pop" owners. Corporate owned stores have zero investment in the feel, look, upkeep and spirit of the neighborhood
- 10 Supporting local businesses and filling vacant storefronts
- 11 Continuation expansion of outdoor dining areas post COVID
- 12 Support of neighborhood businesses that are not chain stores
- 13 Empty storefronts
- 14 Reducing the empty commercial space. Do landlords get some kind of tax credit for [unrented] empty space?
- 15 Reducing or regulating commercial space. Rental costs
- 16 Supporting local merchants
- 17 Increase the array of quality dining options

Other Issues Considered Important for Morningside Heights – Verbatim Responses (page 3 of 8)

Homeless

- 1 Addressing the increasing number of homeless people on our streets and in our parks
- 2 Are homeless in Morningside Heights hotels How can we better welcome the homeless
- 3 Homeless on the streets
- 4 Homelessness
- 5 Homelessness and getting them off the streets
- 6 Increasing available shelters; more people are sleeping on the street, panhandling, hungry.
- 7 Proper vetting of homeless who are to be offered homes in Morningside Heights
- 8 Providing services, including mental health, for the homeless
- 9 Reduce or eliminate people living on sidewalks and begging.
- 10 Providing shelter for the homeless who live on the streets
- 11 Helping homeless people find a place to live
- 12 Keeping trash from homeless encampments from becoming problematic
- 13 Providing resources for homeless people on the traffic islands along Broadway so they can be properly housed

Other Issues Considered Important for Morningside Heights – Verbatim Responses (page 4 of 8)

Parks

- 1 Continue providing masks in parks
- 2 Maintaining Riverside Park
- 3 Maintaining improving Morningside Park

- 4 Parks - renovating northern end of Riverside Park -- picnic table, outdoor cafe etc... expanded community activities theater, music in both Morningside and Riverside Park
- 5 Parks maintenance, overuse, cleanliness
- 6 The state of Morningside Park
- 7 Amplified music in the park
- 8 Barbecuing and noise in the park is excessive - a mountain of garbage is left behind

- 9 State of Morningside Park - overgrown, abandoned to nature, and the police intervention is haphazard/lazy

Other Issues Considered Important for Morningside Heights – Verbatim Responses ((page 5 of 8))

Neighborhood Diversity

- 1 Diversifying then economic base of the neighborhoods. Too many poor academics and students of poor taste to make for an interesting neighborhood
- 2 Enabling activities that promote mixing of the diverse population (at the library)
- 3 Encouraging mutual support for families and single people in the neighborhood.
- 4 Promote and welcome racial and class diversity
- 5 Retaining the neighborhood diversity
- 6 Stopping gentrification, especially by Columbia

Noise

- 1 Ambulance noise
- 2 Excessive noise, especially at night
- 3 Loud motorcycles at night
- 4 Making Columbia responsive to noise problems from fraternities and sororities
- 5 End noise pollution
- 6 Noise pollution

Other Issues Considered Important for Morningside Heights – Verbatim Responses (page 6 of 8)

Affordable Housing

- 1 Affordable housing
- 2 Building truly affordable housing; the term is a misnomer since rarely do rents have anything to do workers' actual incomes
- 3 Collaborating with non-profit housing developers to be sure we are a voice at the table
- 4 Preserving affordable housing
- 5 Push city and state to tax the wealthy more to support affordable housing
- 6 Upgrading NYCHA housing and grounds

Environmental

- 1 air pollution causes
- 2 Contributing to environmental sustainability in the neighborhood
- 3 Climate change: extreme heat for vulnerable residents and the catastrophic possibility of blackouts of the city's grid during a heat wave
- 4 Health/safety re: air quality (Asthma, Seniors/early childhood)

Other Issues Considered Important for Morningside Heights – Verbatim Responses (page 7 of 8)

Rats

- 1 Rat problem
- 2 Rats over taking Broadway medians and Riverside park

Racial Justice

- 1 Denounce racism practices
- 2 Advocacy for racial justice

Police

- 1 More respect from law enforcement
- 2 Ensuring fair policing and preventing police brutality

Other Issues Considered Important for Morningside Heights – Verbatim Responses (page 8 of 8)

Miscellaneous Comments

- 1 prevention evictions
- 2 Affordable childcare
- 3 building more protected bike lanes
- 4 Columbia affiliation leases
- 5 Support and mentorship for underprivileged youth
- 6 Food for all
- 7 identify homebound seniors at risk
- 8 Introducing vacancy tax in new constructions
- 9 Making subways accessible

- 10 Parking in areas not appropriate
- 11 Health services that are affordable
- 12 Finding a means to limit the height of the building under construction by Union Theological Seminary on Claremont Avenue
- 13 Organizing and mobilizing community members
- 14 Relationships with local institutions greatly inform & affect these items
- 15 End more construction
- 16 Student behavior in buildings where they are renting apartments
- 17 I am offended after the murder that occurred last year
- 18 Healthy food opportunities
- 19 Supporting community members mental health, including drug problems
- 20 Housing developers accountable to the Community re regular check-ins with MHCC
- 21 That this was not prominently listed

- 22 Make sure that everyday protesters along Broadway from 110th-111th Streets adhere to strict social distancing at those intersections and do not create crowded conditions for pedestrians around a busy shopping and dining area between 110th and 113th St.

Other Ways for Supporting Local Businesses - Verbatim Responses (page 1 of 6)

Rent Related/Lower Rent

- 1 rent relief
- 2 Keep rents reasonable.
- 3 Columbia rent support
- 4 It's great that local e-kiosks feature neighborhood business
- 5 Prevent rent increases and turnover
- 6 Urge Columbia to lower commercial rents

- 7 Ask Columbia and other landlords to reduce rent for businesses and allow temporary use of empty storefronts.
- 8 Asking landlords to forgive rent during Covid
- 9 Demand commercial rent control
- 10 Properties that have remained empty should be donated for use--like the movie theatre at Broadway & 99th
Work on attracting "local" businesses--that serve the community or are owned by members of the community vs.
- 11 large chains; work w. condos or condos that control rental
- 12 Give landlords an incentive for renting empty stores
- 13 Rent forgiveness for small businesses
- 14 Lower their rents

Other Ways for Supporting Local Businesses - Verbatim Responses (page 2 of 6)

Advertising/Marketing/Promotions

- 1 Ads in our newspaper
- 2 Have a Celebrate Small Business Day on a Saturday in October, forget the street fair and highlight local shops
Help local businesses with online advertising - if we can't shop in person, how would we know what goods and
- 3 services are locally available?
- 4 Publish or promote an existing on-line directory
- 5 Compiling local business info for new residents
- 6 Directory of online small businesses that don't have a brick and mortar presence
- 7 Highlight a business each week in a newsletter
Perhaps recommend how we might best "boost" their profile? (e.g., Yelp reviews, next-door posts) or a "meet your
- 8 local business owner/neighbor" feature? (perhaps interviews with HS student journalists)
Perhaps some kind of a "point system" that gives you credit a local purchase (e.g., a punch card)—then filled cards
- 9 could go into a pool for a drawing with a nice local prize (dinner & drinks at a local restaurant, e.g.).
- 10 Encourage the purchase of Gift Certificates, or promoting a Go Fund Me campaign for particular stores
- 11 Perhaps providing deals through the MHCC and/or other local blogs
- 12 Promoting to entrepreneurs, limiting chains
- 13 Consulting - making the offer more attractive - preserving the streetscape by planting trees - discouraging vacant
parcels by taxing owners until they are developed - for example Fairways parcel

Other Ways for Supporting Local Businesses - Verbatim Responses (page 3 of 6)

Diversify/Add Types of Businesses

- 1 Insisting they keep their storefronts clean. Encouraging stores that meet PRACTICAL needs of residents (not another bubble tea shop).
- 2 Affordable food store - I shop a lot at Trader Joes and Whole Foods in the 90s. West Side Market is very expensive as is Morton's. Other ethic food stores (Hispanic). H Mart was a good addition to the neighborhood
- 3 We need more kinds of businesses! If I don't shop locally it is often because what I need is not available here.
- 4 Get more interesting and unique businesses
- 5 If they catered more to non-student needs: bakery, butcher/seafood, stuff that seems to exist in every other neighborhood but has long vanished from MSH
- 6 Fill empty stores with clothing, specialty foods, butcher
- 7 Increasing outdoor seating. Closing streets on weekends
- 8 Find ways to support local biz in developing online sales capacity, websites, etc. seems important in the COVID era where many want to minimize in-person shopping.
- 9 The cost to buy local products cannot be exorbitant given we are suffering economically.

Other Ways for Supporting Local Businesses - Verbatim Responses (page 4 of 6)

Community Engagement

- 1 Hire local residents to work in our community businesses
- 2 Asking local organizations to buy locally as well.
- 3 Local business should be more friendly toward the community also.
- 4 Attend local events - fresh market a night out where local business to events
- 5 Asking local organizations to buy locally as well.
- 6 Columbia University should be contributing more to small business in the community

Covid-Related

- 1 End Covid 19
There needs to be accountability both ways, frequent testing of staff and sanitizing of locations, wearing of masks, prevention against harassment inside and outside of store fronts or on street dining. Greater concern for customer health and well being. assurance of quality products, food and services at reasonable prices
- 2 I don't think anything matters for local businesses except the implementation of a vaccine. It is unfortunate and unfair that many businesses will not survive long enough, but I don't see a way out of this dilemma.
- 3
- 4 The more local businesses that offer online ordering and delivery the better during COVID times

Other Ways for Supporting Local Businesses - Verbatim Responses (page 5 of 6)

Delivery Service Options

- 1 Make it easier to identify delivery services. We are still not going into stores, under any circumstances.
- 2 Better delivery/ordering options
- 3 Build an online portal for shopping local with delivery
- 4 Morningside Heights Delivery Service partnerships....

Political Advocacy

- 1 Lobby for city support
- 2 Political advocacy or coalitions with other businesses
Evaluate the role of current regulations -- are they a burden that prevent new local businesses from starting up? or which zone certain locations in a way that restricts new businesses
- 3

Maintain Clean Streets

- 1 Have neighborhood cleanup volunteers I'm willing
- 2 support Doe Boys or similar projects to keep the sidewalks clean and attractive
There was no answer fit indicating don't shop online and am against it. I have been shopping at local businesses like West Side Market and Foodtown and Duane Reade this whole time. We can make these businesses more attractive to shop at by keeping our streets clean more garbage pails and frequent pickups). I
- 3 feel that insufficient attention is paid to this basic issue.

Boycott Amazon

- 1 Forbid Amazon and the big corporations to set up shop in the neighborhood
- 2 Boycott Amazon and that bum Bezos.

Other Ways for Supporting Local Businesses - Verbatim Responses (page 6 of 6)

Miscellaneous

- 1 Encourage the safe reopening of Columbia University and other neighborhood institutions in order to bring back the students who help our local businesses prosper.
- 2 Just continue to patronize them to the best of our ability.
- 3 Landlords who are good urban citizens in the first place let alone now.
- 4 live music
- 5 more open streets, car free zones, safer streets from traffic increase foot traffic and hence business
- 6 providing better access to capital
- 7 DEFEAT TRUMP