

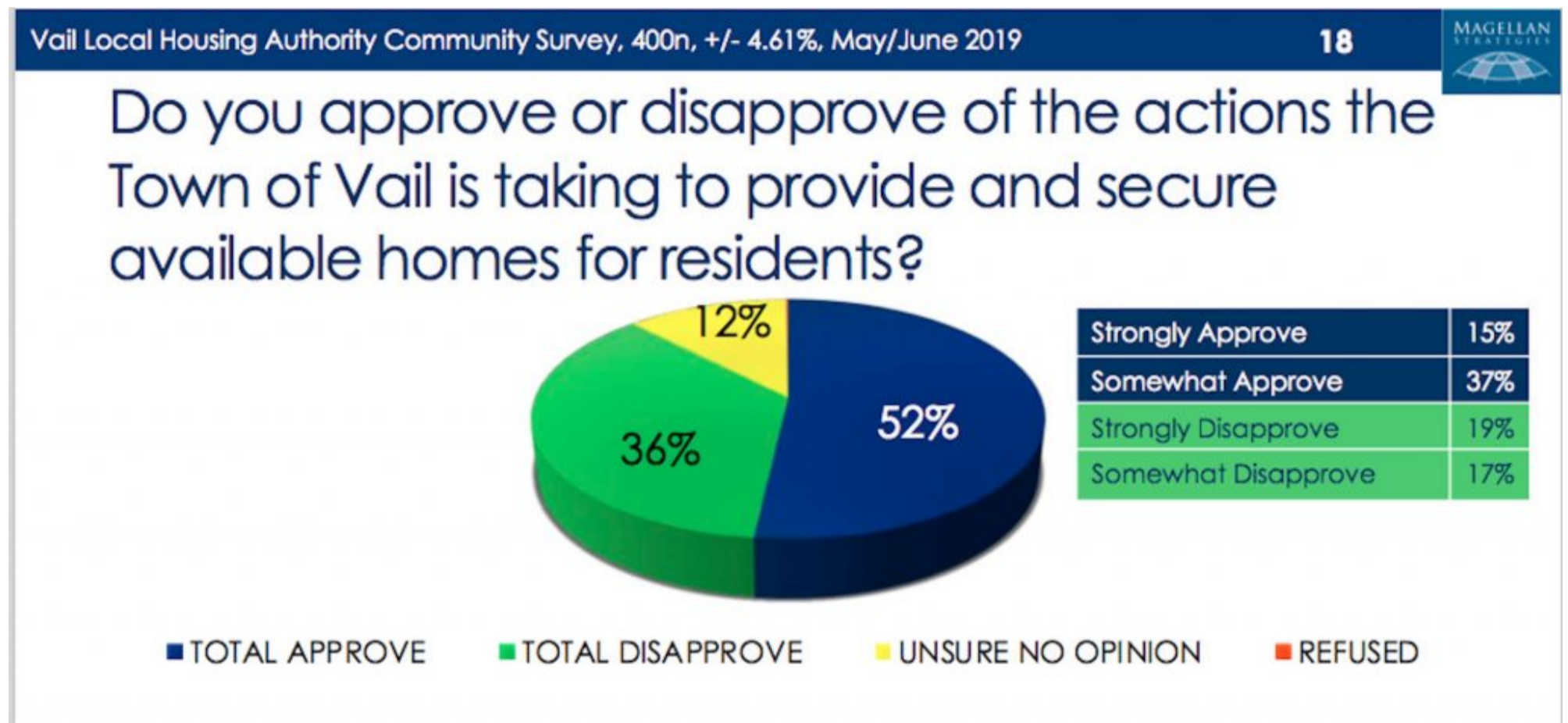
Public says housing a 'big' problem in Vail survey

Survey shows town officials have work to do before asking for a tax to fund the housing program

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A recent housing survey in Vail shows majority support for the town's recent efforts.

Special to the Daily

By the numbers

- 94%: Survey respondents know the town of Vail sponsored and developed the Chamonix townhome project.
- 75%: Agree that local governments in mountain resort towns should "make reasonable efforts" to maintain and increase the housing supply.
- 52%: Survey respondents who approve of the town of Vail's actions.
- 51%: Oppose either a sales or property tax to fund housing efforts.

Source: Magellan Strategies.

VAIL – Town officials won't ask voters for a housing tax this year, but the 2020 election remains an option.

On Tuesday, the Vail Town Council saw the results of a housing survey commissioned by the Vail Local Housing Authority – which advises the council on housing issues. That survey showed a good bit of support for local government action to bolster workforce housing in town. For now though, that support stops at supporting a new tax for funding.

The survey was conducted for the authority by Magellan Strategies. People were surveyed either online or by telephone, and more than 700 people participated – roughly 15% of the town's electorate.

Here's a brief rundown of the results:

- 51% believe the lack of "available and affordable homes" in Vail is a big problem.
- 32% say housing is "somewhat" of a problem.
- 75% of Vail voters agree – with 46% in "strong" agreement – that local governments in mountain resort communities should make "reasonable" efforts to maintain and increase the supply of resident-occupied, deed-restricted homes.

But, there's also this:

- 28% of those surveyed said they would support a sales or property tax increase.

'Funding a program, not a project'

While town officials said there's no time this year to change the numbers for and against a possible proposal, council member Greg Moffet said there's time to prepare a campaign for the 2020 election. Since that's a presidential election year, Moffet said he expects a broader group of voters will participate than in this year's town council voting.

David Flaherty of Magellan Strategies said aiming for a 2020 ballot question would also give town officials time to better define a request and spend more time educating voters on the need for a stable funding source.

Vail Local Housing Authority Board Chairman Steve Lindstrom has long favored a new revenue source for housing. In a Wednesday morning meeting, Lindstrom said one of the complications of asking voters for a steady source of funds is that “we’re funding a program, not a project.” That makes it more difficult to provide specific information to voters.

Lindstrom added that educating people about the housing authority’s job will also be important.

Lindstrom noted that Vail’s housing authority isn’t a stand-alone agency, but an advisory board to the town council.

Changing public perception

Another challenge moving forward is public perceptions of just where the problems lie in Vail’s housing picture.

According to a report prepared by Flaherty, “Many voters blame the growth and adoption of Airbnb and VRBO for the lack of housing for full-time residents. They think the long-term rental market has decreased significantly and short-term rentals have increased due to (second) home owners using these services.”

Those opinions have led to suggestions by some voters that the town needs to limit the number of short-term rentals allowed in town.

Many survey respondents also said that Vail’s employers, big and small, need to pay their employees more. Others said employers need to be more accountable for housing their own people, rather than allowing the town to take the lead.

There may be a debate brewing among council members regarding short-term rental regulations.

Council members Jen Mason and Kim Langmaid both said they favor tighter restrictions on short term rentals.

“We’re in the blame stage,” council member Jenn Bruno said of several survey responses. “We need to educate people that there are solutions.”

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