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Comparative Analysis of Resident and Visitor Community Image: Gardiner, Montana

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Residents and nonresident visitors
have significantly different image
perceptions of Gardiner, Montana.

**Comparative Analysis of
Resident and Visitor
Community Image:
Gardiner, Montana**

Norma Nickerson & Meredith Berry



Comparative Analysis of Resident and Visitor Community Image: Gardiner, Montana

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Introduction

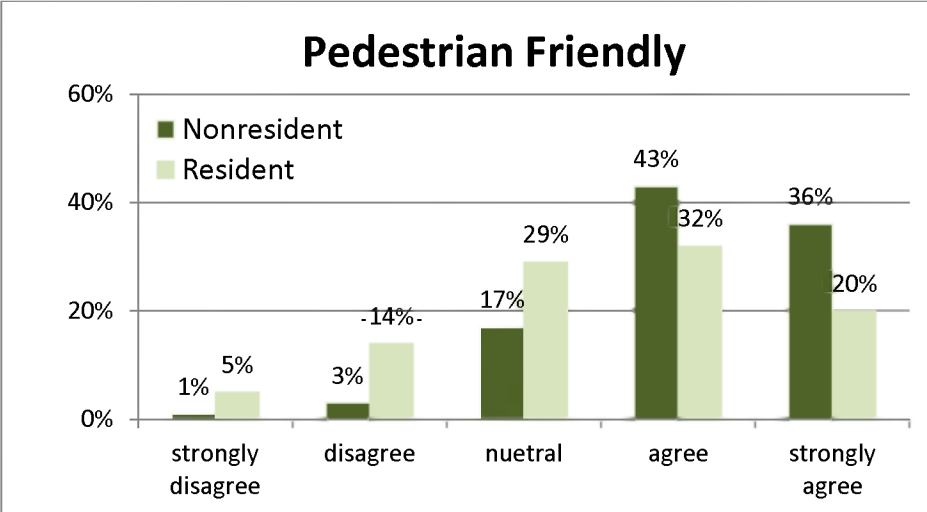
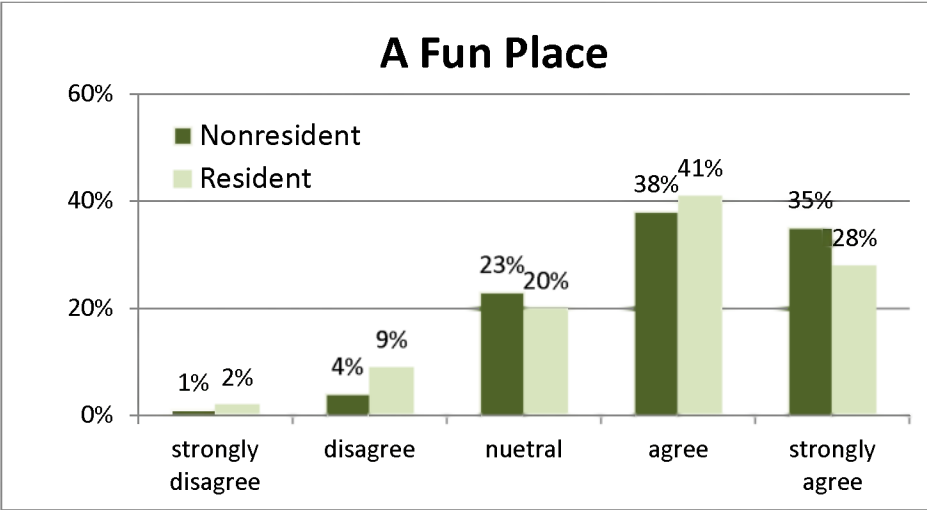
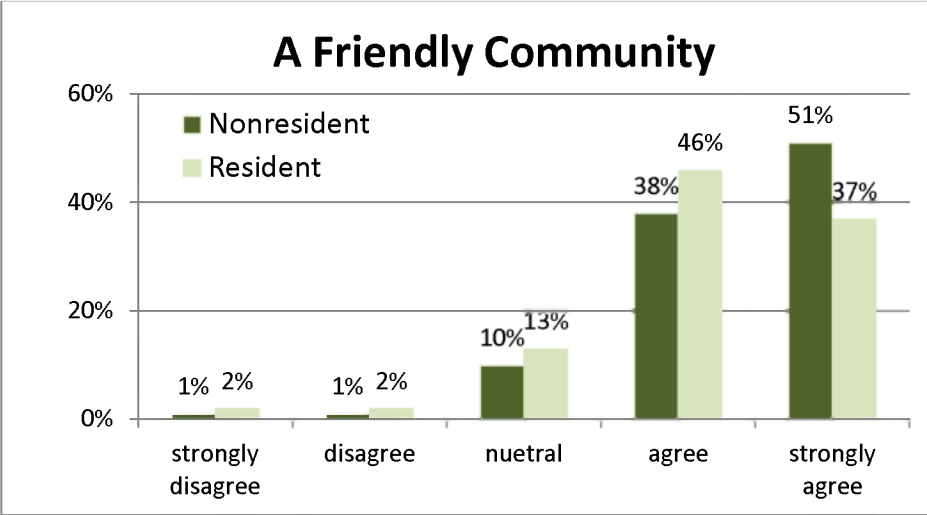
The Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research conducted two separate studies related to the perception and image of Gardiner during 2013: Resident image and nonresident image. The resident study focused on image and quality of life as perceived by those currently living in Gardiner. That study found areas of improvements as well as what they like about their community. For the full report see: <http://www.itrr.umt.edu/Research2013/GardinerMTCSResPerceptions.pdf>. The nonresident study found that visitors were mostly positive about the image Gardiner portrays to the visitor and shows the amount of dollars spent in Gardiner. For the full nonresident study see: http://itrr.umt.edu/Research2013/GardinerMT_VisitorPerceptionsImageSpendingRR2014-2.pdf

The purpose of this report was to compare the 18 image variables asked in both the resident and nonresident studies to understand similarities and differences in image of Gardiner by residents and nonresidents. Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale. Five of the variables asked the residents, "Gardiner is..." while the nonresidents were asked, "In my opinion Gardiner is..." The sentence was then completed with the same five image variables: 1) a friendly community, 2) a fun place, 3) pedestrian friendly, 4) bicycle friendly, and 5) well maintained.

With the remaining 13 variables, residents responded to the prompt, "Gardiner has..." while nonresidents responded to, "In my opinion, Gardiner has..." These 13 variables included: 1) a range of retail shopping opportunities, 2) unique and rich heritage, 3) exciting nightlife, 4) opportunities to experience local cuisine, 5) good signage, 6) places to purchase local arts/crafts, 7) new and different activities to do in town, 8) nice community/county parks, 9) acceptable traffic flow in the summer, 10) well maintained roads, 11) well maintained business and store fronts, 12) ample parking, and 13) ample sidewalks.

A t-test was conducted on each variable using the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances to determine if significant differences existed in the image of Gardiner between residents and nonresident visitors. Interestingly, all 18 image variables were significantly different. In all but one case nonresidents were more positive in terms of the image of Gardiner than the residents. Residents only had a higher level of image on the variable "Gardiner has unique and rich heritage."

The following pages display graphs for each image variable showing the percent of respondents on each level of agreement or disagreement to the statement. The mean response for residents and nonresidents is shown to the right of each graph. The final two graphs bring all the variables into one figure where the means of the resident and nonresident response for each variable are displayed. The data are the same in each of the two graphs, but the first graph is ordered by the highest to lowest *resident* responses while the second graph is order by the highest to lowest *nonresident* responses. The differences in opinion and strength of opinion are quite evident in the final two graphs.

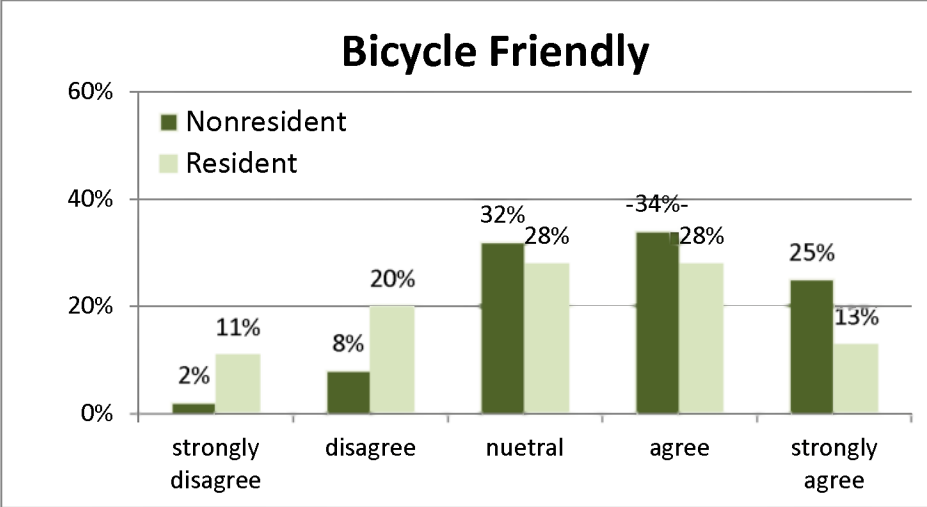


Gardiner is...

A friendly community
 Resident mean: 4.15
 Nonresident mean: 4.37

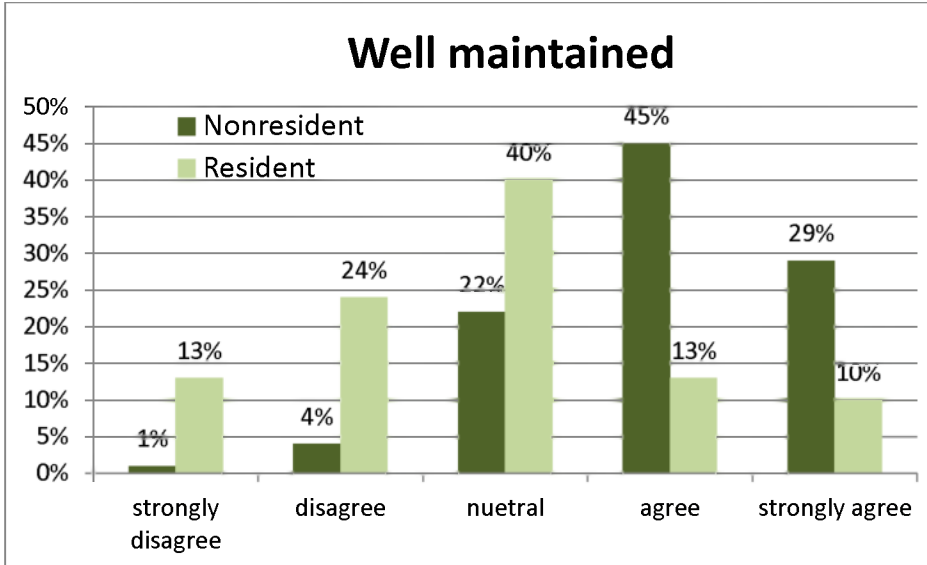
A fun place:
 Resident mean: 3.84
 Nonresident mean: 4.02

Pedestrian friendly:
 Resident mean: 3.48
 Nonresident mean: 4.08

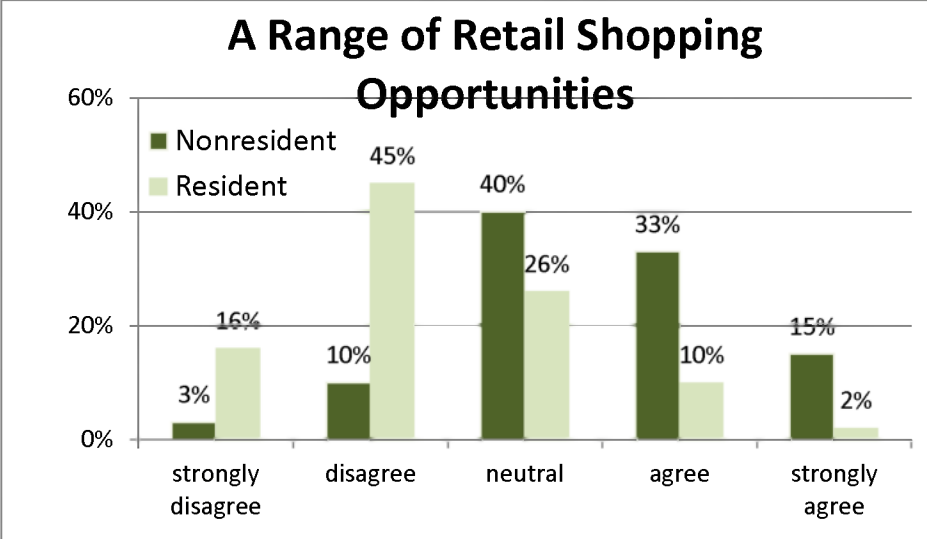


Gardiner is...

Bicycle friendly
 Resident mean: 3.11
 Nonresident mean: 3.71

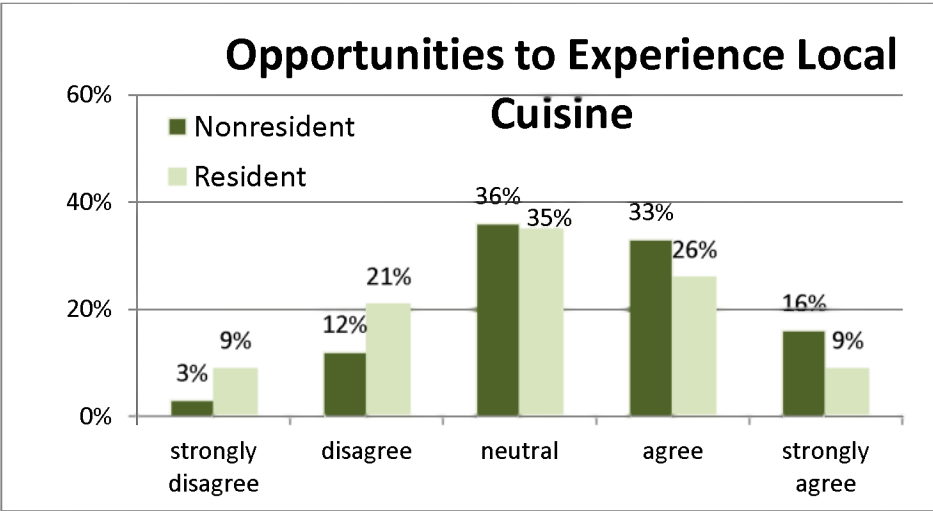
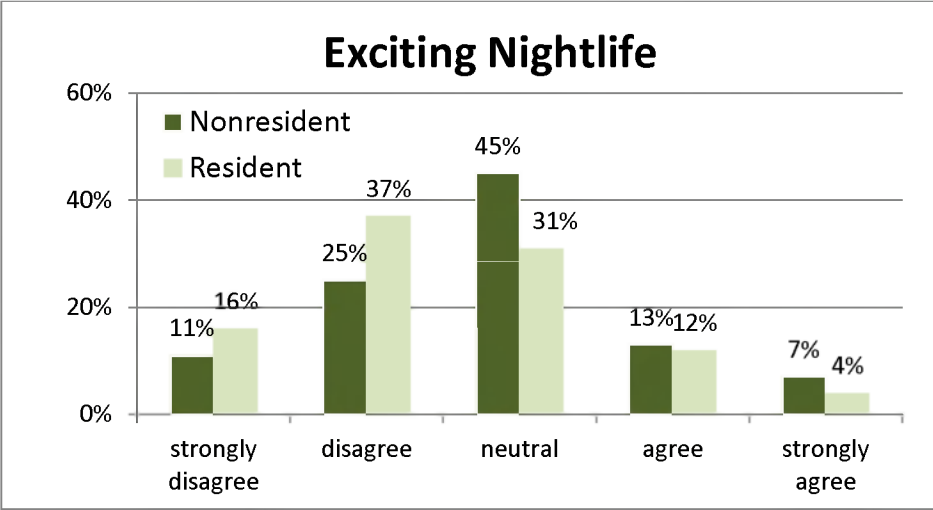
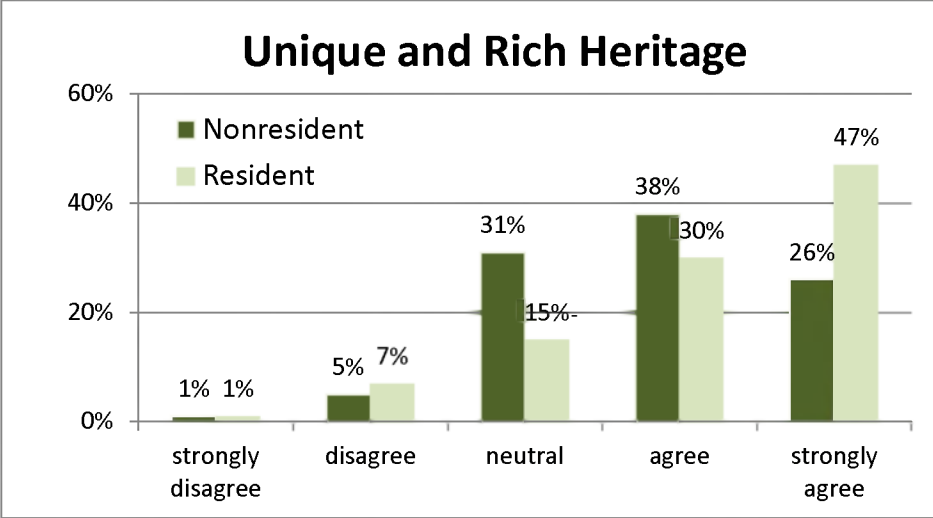


Well maintained
 Resident mean: 2.82
 Nonresident mean: 3.95



Gardiner has...

A range of retail shopping opportunities
 Resident mean: 2.38
 Nonresident mean: 3.48



Gardiner has ...

Unique and rich heritage

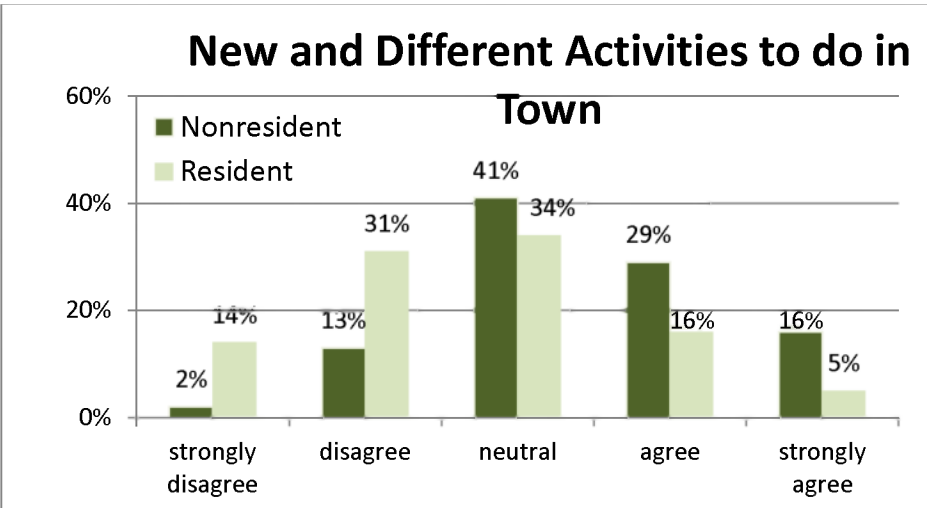
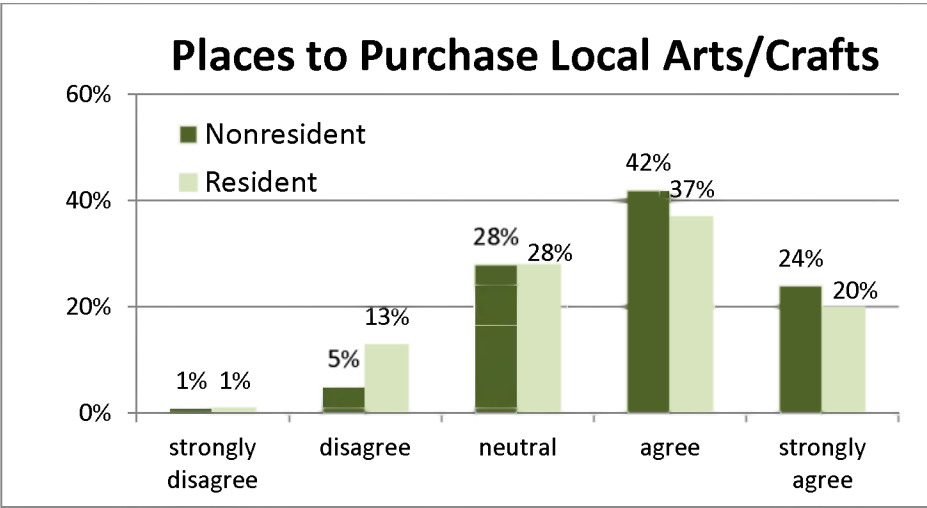
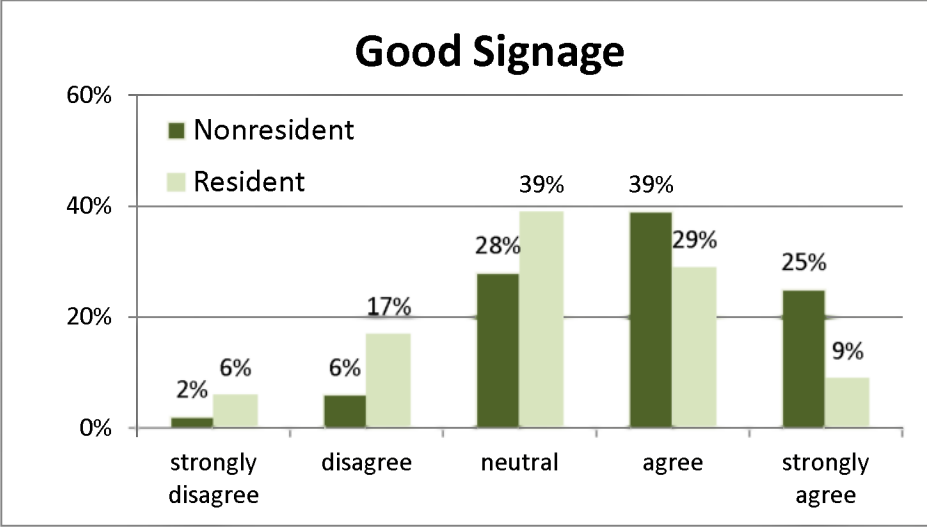
Resident mean: 4.13
Nonresident mean: 3.84

Exciting nightlife

Resident mean: 2.52
Nonresident mean: 2.80

Opportunities to experience local cuisine

Resident mean: 3.05
Nonresident mean: 3.49

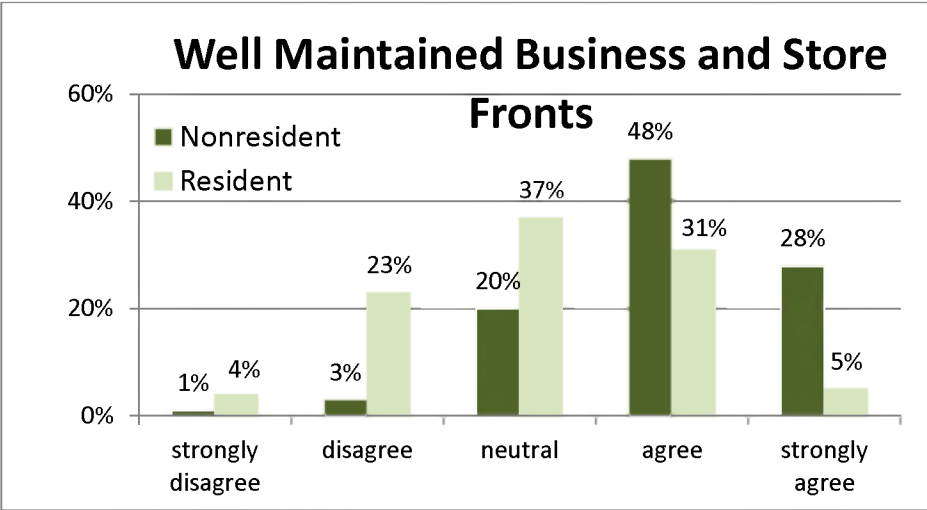
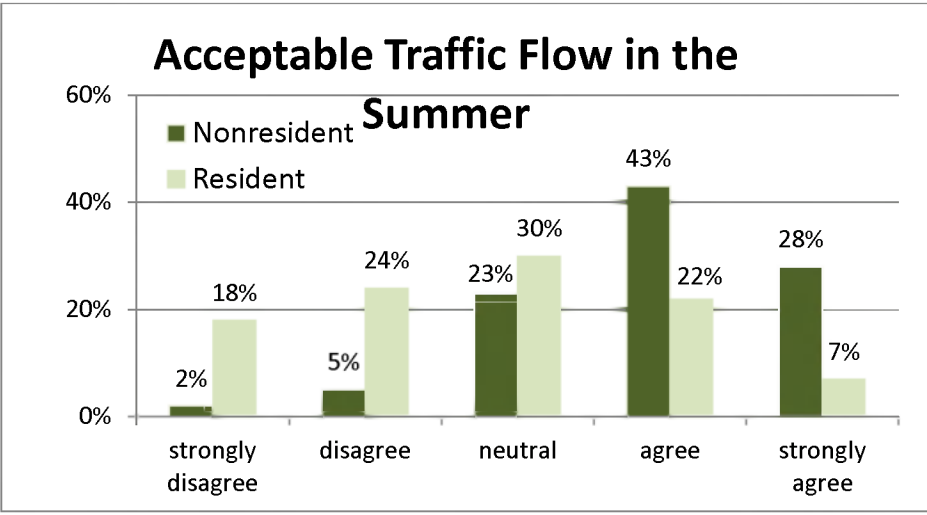
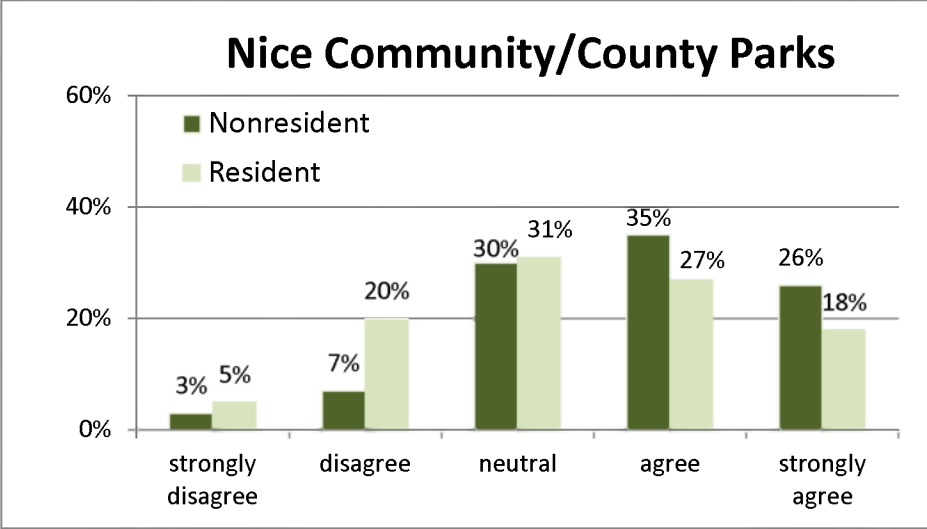


Gardiner has...

Good signage
 Resident mean: 3.19
 Nonresident mean: 3.80

Places to purchase local arts & crafts
 Resident mean: 3.61
 Nonresident mean: 3.82

New and different activities to do in town
 Resident mean: 2.66
 Nonresident mean: 3.44



Gardiner has...

Nice community/county parks

Resident mean: 3.34
 Nonresident mean: 3.75

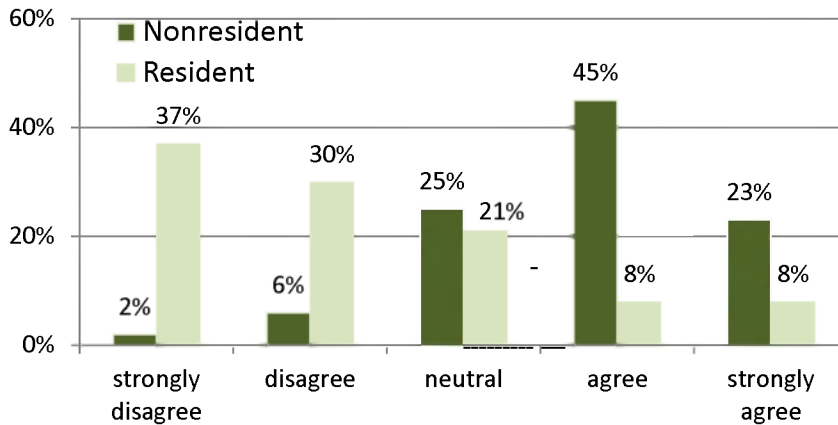
Acceptable traffic flow in the summer

Resident mean: 2.76
 Nonresident mean: 3.90

Well maintained business and store fronts

Resident mean: 3.09
 Nonresident mean: 3.97

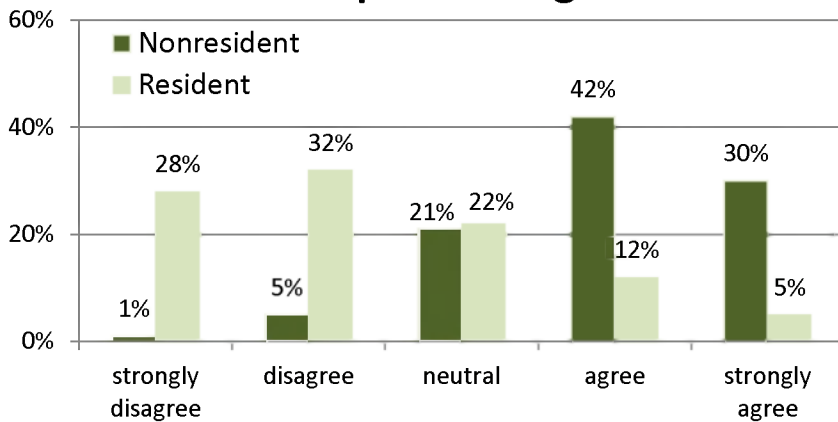
Well Maintained Roads



Gardiner has...

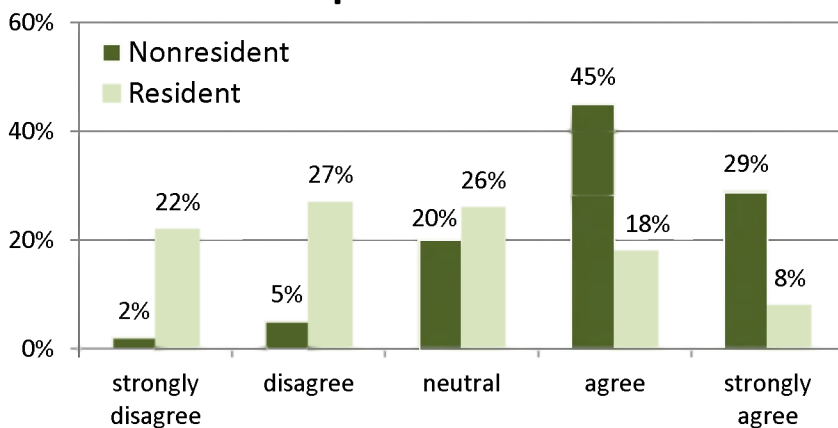
Well maintained roads
 Resident mean: 2.11
 Nonresident mean: 3.81

Ample Parking



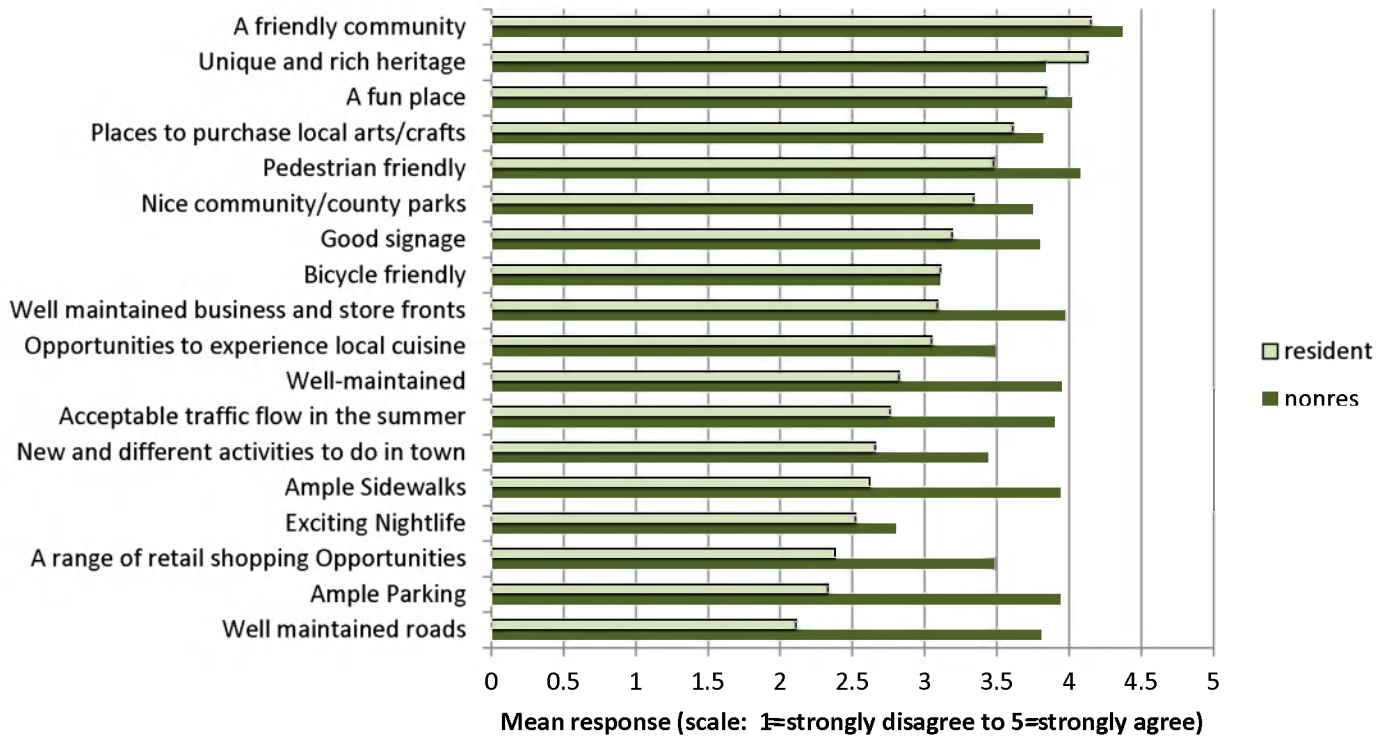
Ample parking
 Resident mean: 2.33
 Nonresident mean: 3.94

Ample Sidewalks

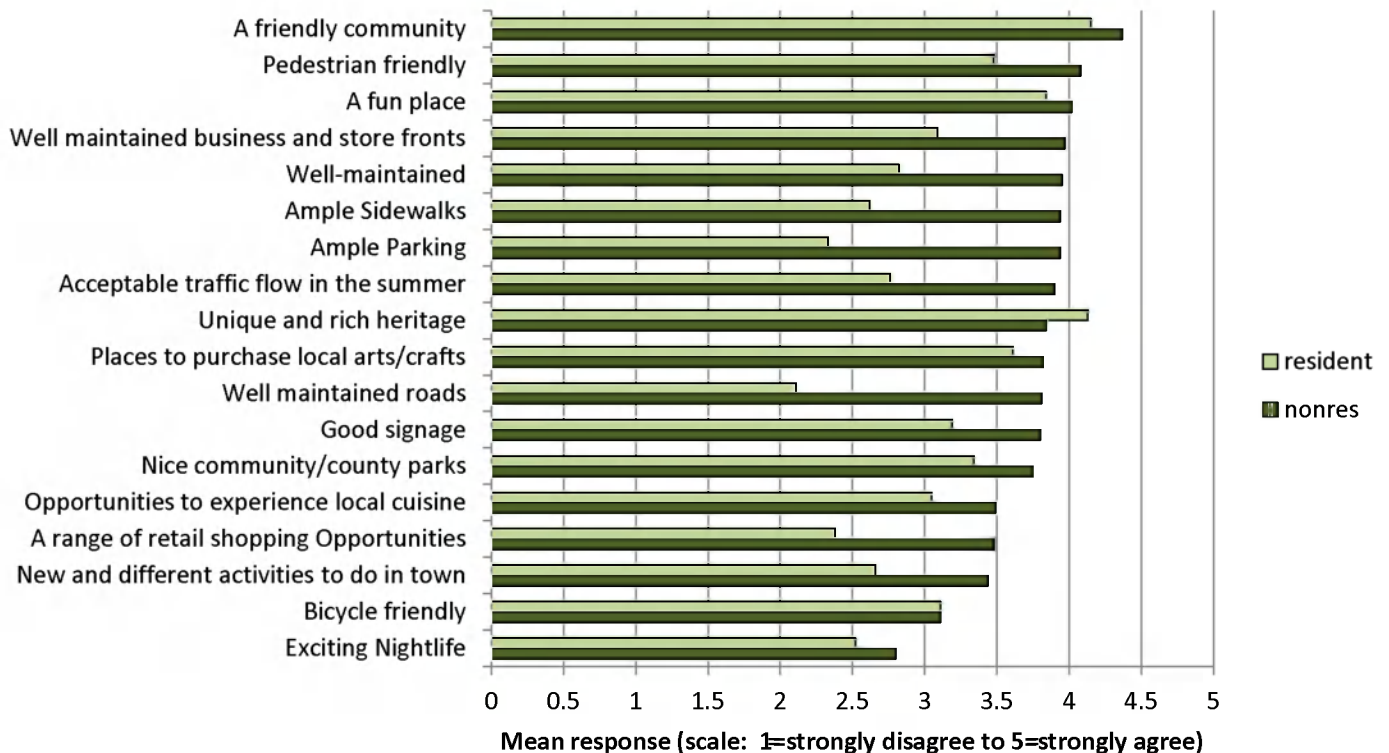


Ample sidewalks
 Resident mean: 2.62
 Nonresident mean: 3.94

Resident image variables from highest to lowest



Nonresident image variables from highest to lowest



Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of this comparison was to visually display each image variable side-by-side (resident and nonresident) so the reader could easily see the differences in perception of Gardiner. It is quite clear that residents are more critical of their community than visitors to the community. Therefore the question is this: Who do you 'improve' a community for – residents or visitors?

Gardiner is a tourism town. It has one economic pillar: tourism. However, tourists are in town for a short period of time while residents are there 365 days a year (minus their own vacation time). In the minds of the researchers, the answer is clear. If residents of a town like where they live, visitors will like it as well. The analogy: As a parent, when your children are happy, you are happy.

How should the citizens of Gardiner use the data provided in the three reports? First of all, look at the resident responses with means that fall under the level of 3. This is where the majority of residents indicate dissatisfaction with their community. It may not be possible to address all these issues immediately, but it provides a template of where to start.

Residents want, but feel Gardiner is lacking in:

1. Well maintained roads
2. Ample Parking
3. A range of retail shopping Opportunities
4. Exciting Nightlife
5. Ample Sidewalks
6. New and different activities to do in town
7. Acceptable traffic flow in the summer
8. Well-maintained (overall)

The only image variable that was higher in the minds of residents compared to nonresidents was the perception that Gardiner has a unique and rich heritage. The message here is that nonresidents don't see that heritage theme as clearly as residents see it. If this is important to the community, it would be necessary to improve the message related to Gardiner's heritage. This could be a museum, historical markers along the sidewalks, evening theatrical performances depicting historical events, or any volume of history related opportunities.

In conclusion, when comparing the images of the community held by residents to that of visitors, it became apparent that the visitor is less attached and therefore less willing or able to be critical of Gardiner. It is recommended that the citizens of Gardiner listen to themselves and improve the town based on their own needs. Visitors will still come and perhaps they may even spend more time once improvements have been made to Gardiner.