



To: Mr. James Titcomb, Town Manager, Town of Loxahatchee Groves
Ms. Francine Ramaglia, Assistant Town Manager, Town of Loxahatchee Groves

From: Kevin Knutson, Knutson Consulting

Date: April 1, 2020

Subject: **Commercial Development Discussion and Survey Results**

Over the past few months, the Town of Loxahatchee Groves has conducted extensive outreach to Town residents with the goal of identifying long-range priorities. As part of those efforts, several surveys have been conducted to gather input into various topics, including types of commercial development that would be appropriate for the Town.

This memo summarizes the following surveys and feedback opportunities related to commercial development:

- » Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) survey September 2019
- » Visioning workshop of September 28, 2019
- » Visioning session of February 29, 2020
- » Commercial development counter survey March 2020
- » Commercial development online survey March 2020
- » Planned visioning session of March 21, 2020

Each opportunity gathered information that, in aggregate, will provide the Council with a broad representation of resident and property-owner preferences.

What follows is an overview of progress to date on the visioning process and a summary of the outcomes of the resident engagement around commercial development, with additional appendices summarizing the results of each activity.

Progress to Date

The visioning process initiated by the Town Council began with the workshop held on September 28, 2019 with approximately 200 Town residents or property owners in attendance. At the end of the workshop, the Council met to discuss priorities for the next couple of years. After discussing what they had heard in the workshop, learned through the SWOT survey, and had gathered from their time serving on the Council, three key issues kept rising to the top—infrastructure, communications, and development codes.

After further discussion, the Council gained consensus around the priorities and key strategies to implement them:

1. Roads, Canals, & Drainage
 - a. Create a grid to define priority roads
 - b. Establish a long-range financial forecast to determine available funding
 - c. Develop and deploy a maintenance program based on funding
2. Communications & Branding
 - a. Develop key messages that support the Town brand
 - b. Create and execute a strategic communications plan
 - c. Provide official communications vehicles for resident use
3. Relevant Commercial Development
 - a. Update and modernize Town land development regulations
 - b. Create a long-range plan for economic development
 - c. Develop a plan for annexations

After the workshop, staff began working on these three areas and have made progress on both the Roads, Canals & Drainage priority and Communications & Branding.

For Roads, Canals, & Drainage, the following steps have been accomplished:

- » A road grid has been developed by the Roadways, Equestrian, Trails & Greenway Advisory Committee has been adopted and priority roads identified.
- » Financial forecasting and funding alternatives are in development.
- » Maintenance program is in development.

For Communications & Branding, several other actions are underway:

- » Information Technology investments and website upgrades have been started.
- » Working with a local government communications firm to develop communications plan.

In order to make progress in the third area, the Town applied for and received a Community Planning Technical Assistance grant from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity to update and improve the Town's code and inform the development of the Comprehensive Plan. The key deliverables are:

1. A report identifying inconsistent land uses and proposed Zoning Map amendments or other corrective actions.
2. Two public sessions to gather additional input around uses on Okeechobee and Southern Boulevards.
3. A report on the outcomes of the sessions, a summary of past land use decisions, and proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments.
4. Future Land Use Maps and Zoning Maps.

The outcome of the grant-funded process will set the stage for updates to the Town's Comprehensive Plan, amendments to land development codes, and reconciliation of inconsistent approvals.

Overview of Responses

The public outreach portions of the grant activities included two public input sessions, a counter survey, and an online survey. For the surveys and first public session, commercial development ideas generated in the Visioning Workshop were categorized into six subtypes, with examples listed for each. In the session and surveys, residents and property owners were either asked to share how much they supported each use.

The subtypes were:

- » Category 1 – Food Service
- » Category 2 – Personal/Business Services
- » Category 3 – Cultural/Town Center
- » Category 4 – Specialty Commercial
- » Category 5 – Agriculture Related
- » Category 6 – Accommodations

Because these uses were generated by participants in the Visioning Workshop, some existing uses or other potential uses are not included.

Both in the Public Session 1 survey and online surveys, respondents were generally less supportive of commercial uses on Okeechobee Boulevard than similar uses on Southern Boulevard, with a few exceptions. Table 1 lists the percent of positive responses by category for the online surveys.

Category	Southern	Okeechobee
1 – Food Service	84%	62%
2 – Personal/Business Services	66%	36%
3 – Cultural/Town Center	69%	47%
4 – Specialty Commercial	62%	34%
5 – Agriculture Related	75%	63%
6 – Accommodations	54%	31%

Table 1. Summary of positive responses by category from the online surveys.

For this survey, respondents were requested to rank the relative appropriateness of the uses on a five-point scale. The top two responses are considered positive.

Only two categories received majority support on Okeechobee Boulevard—food service and agriculture related services. In food service, 65% supported the idea of a farm-to-table restaurant, while another 63% thought that a coffee shop or breakfast and lunch restaurant would be a good use on Okeechobee. Another high point was 65% support for a park or public event space, in category 3. The highest rating was for a farmer’s market (75%) on Okeechobee Boulevard.

On Southern Boulevard, most uses seemed like a good fit to respondents, although category 6 was a slim majority. Highlights include top scores for sit-down restaurants (91%); farmer’s market (86%); specialty foods (82%); farm-to-table restaurants (80%), parks and public events (78%); movies, concerts and art shows (75%); saddle shop, bootery or leather works (73%); car wash (73%); botanical gardens (71%); veterinarians or pet grooming (71%); Agri and eco-tourism (70%); and a multi-purpose arena (70%). The lowest scores were for an RV park (48%) and a go-kart track or arcade (52%).

These results are similar to the pattern in the public session survey, although the choices of “yes” or “no” in the in-person may have impacted the number of positive responses. In addition, there is the possibility that people motivated enough to attend a public session have stronger opinions. So, while the pattern of support for individual uses is the same, the overall responses were generally lower.

In category 1, for example, no use received majority support along Okeechobee (the average was 44% “yes”), but on Southern the average was 94%, significantly higher than the online survey.

Other notable points in the session survey was strong support for categories 2, 3 and 6 on Southern Boulevard, with near-unanimous support for sit-down restaurants (100%); office space (100%); specialty foods (94%); and 88% support for farm-to-table restaurant, fitness center, veterinarian, recreation center, car wash, and saddle shop/bootery/leather works. The lowest scores were 0% for a YMCA or YWCA, and 17% for car wash or truck wash on Okeechobee Boulevard.

In total, there was more support for local services and agriculture related businesses on either road, with a strong preference for commercial development to be located on Southern Boulevard.

Next Steps

Staff has developed specific actions to recommend to the Council to address the priorities above and will share them with the Council. The second session will be rescheduled when social distancing rules have been lifted, and will engage residents in a discussion of the specific actions, to provide further public input to the Council’s deliberations.

Appendix 1 – SWOT Survey

For the purposes of this analysis, I’ve only included questions relevant to commercial development. For a complete summary of the responses, please see the September 16, 2019 memorandum entitled “Results of Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) Survey.”

The survey tool (SurveyMonkey) was set to allow for anonymous responses, so we did not collect any personally identifying information other than the internet protocol (IP) address for each respondent. This information was used to ensure that individuals weren’t “packing” the survey by responding multiple times. No evidence was seen for that kind of influence over the outcomes, as only two IP addresses repeated, and those were for major internet service providers in the region.

The survey went live on August 31, 2019 and was available for input through September 9, 2019.

There was a total of 96 individual responses to the survey. Of that total, 80 respondents identified as residents or landowners, 12 identified as volunteers who sit on boards or committees, two were elected officials, and two were Town staff.

The results showed that development of Okeechobee and Southern Boulevard corridors was the third most important issue to respondents, behind roads and canals (1) and land use and zoning (2). “Smart” or strategic commercial development was considered the top opportunity, as was leveraging agri-tourism (third highest). By the same token, the greatest threat was seen as over-development, with more than half of the respondents citing it.

Appendix 2 – Resident Visioning Workshop

At the September 29, 2019 workshop, participants sat at tables with between four to eight people and engaged in directed conversations around key issues identified in the SWOT survey, including roads and commercial development. Each group discussed three questions and reported out to the entire audience, sharing specific ideas and concerns that each group had identified.

The pertinent exercise was to answer a two-part question: “What kind of commercial development would fit the community?” and “What would not?” The idea was to get more feedback on residents’ opinions around commercial development, which had been prominent in the SWOT survey.

The things that participants thought would fit included a host of agriculture-related services, recreational opportunities, and other concepts in keeping with the theme of a rural community. For a full list, please see the attached results from the workshop. A few key concepts that came up included:

- » Farm-to-table restaurants, shops and markets
- » “Mom & Pop” businesses, such as restaurants, bakeries, gift shops, and services
- » Recreation and entertainment amenities, such as a community center, gun range or movie theater
- » Equestrian-related services and amenities

Things that wouldn’t fit the community included:

- » Big-box stores
- » Strip malls
- » Heavy industry
- » Auto dealers
- » Adult-only entertainment, stores or bars

In addition, we asked participants “What else could we do to foster or protect the Town’s identity, or brand?” Several ideas were offered, mostly centered around a couple of themes:

- » Emphasizing the rural quality of the town
- » Promoting agritourism and farm-to-table services
- » Adding equestrian amenities
- » Strengthening the code

These key themes all support the Council’s desire to take action that will help shape future development in ways that protect the rural quality of the Town.

During the Visioning Workshop in September, the Council set priorities for the near term, including a path forward for addressing issues around commercial development in the Town. Specifically, they added the following as priorities:

- » Relevant Commercial Development
 - Update and modernize Town land development regulations
 - Create a long-range plan for economic development
 - Develop a plan for annexations

Appendix 3 – Resident Visioning Session 1

A visioning session designed to engage residents in a discussion about commercial development was held on February 29, 2020. As part of that session, two surveys were given to the 18 participants that gave them an opportunity to select their preferences from a set of predetermined uses for both Okeechobee and Southern Boulevards.

Because these were administered in person, there is no reason to believe that the results were manipulated. The only bias that should be present is “selection bias,” because respondents had to attend the session to participate. Because of that, the responses to why they attended the session are included below.

The main part of each survey listed potential uses on each corridor and asked respondents to say “Yes,” “No” or “Maybe under the following circumstances” to each use. Table 2 below shows the number of “Yes” responses to each use. (For Okeechobee n=18, for Southern n=17, a “—” denotes the choice was not available on that survey.)

Uses	Southern	Okeechobee
Category 1 – Food Service		
Coffee Shop/Breakfast & Lunch	—	8
Sit-Down Restaurant	17	8
Farm-to-Table Restaurant	15	8
Specialty Foods	16	8
Category 2 – Personal/Business Services		
Fitness Center	15	5
Hair/Nails/Barber	—	8
Vet/Pet Grooming	15	10
Youth/Recreation Center	15	—
Self/RV/Outdoor Storage	12	—
Auto Repair Shop	13	—
Car Wash	15	—
Office Space	17	—
Category 3 – Cultural/Town Center		
Movies/Concerts/Art Shows	12	4
Park/Public Events	14	10
Multi-Purpose Arena	11	8
Youth Recreation Center	14	5
Art Gallery/Town History	—	10
YMCA/YWCA	14	0
Category 4 – Specialty Commercial		
Gun Store/Shooting Range/Driving Range	13	5
Antiques	—	8
Go-Kart Track/Arcade	8	—
Car Wash/Truck Wash	13	3
RV Storage	—	6
Category 5 – Agriculture Related		
Saddle Shop/Bootery/Leather Works	15	11
Botanical Gardens	13	12
Agri-/Eco-Tourism	11	11

Farmer's Market	14	13
Category 6 – Accommodations		
Self-Storage/Outdoor Storage	—	4
Senior Living Facility	10	—
Hotel/Bed & Breakfast	14	5
RV Park/Seasonal	12	4

Table 2. "Yes" Responses on the survey conducted at the February 29, 2020 visioning session.

As can be seen above, there was little appetite for any commercial development on Okeechobee, although certain types appealed to participants more than others, such as agriculture-related uses, as well as parks and arts amenities. On Southern, the majority of respondents approved of most types of commercial development on the list, with the exception of a go-kart track or arcade.

There was additional input solicited at the session, including what participants would like to see along the two corridors that would be "low impact" and what brought them to the session. On the first question, responses are divided between the two corridors:

- » Okeechobee Boulevard "Low Impact"
 - Medical offices, business management, accounting
 - Limited in/out traffic, low noise, Floor Area Ratio (FAR) = .02, good for all ages, landscape and trees
 - This is defined by the town
 - No commercial, community center
 - Medical, storage, office
 - Restaurants, retail
 - Low impact, does not affect daily commuters, no noise or light pollution, businesses/ services for residents
 - Restaurants, RV parks, low commerce
 - Coffee shop, tack store, market for fruit, horse biz, horse arena
 - Low impact as written in neighborhood plan
 - Keep with rural character of title of the town, low impact
 - More trees-plants, keep Okeechobee ag-res, low speed limit, low impact commercial
 - Sports field
 - Community support services (food pantry)
- » Southern Boulevard "Low Impact"
 - Medical offices, business management, accounting (no foot traffic)
 - Low Noise, low light, rural, vista guiding, things that do not draw traffic through the groves, buffers trees
 - This is defined by the town
 - Medical, storage, office
 - Commercial
 - Self storage
 - No nose or light pollution to the north, appeals to traffic on Southern not Town
 - Restaurants, businesses that will last
 - Industrial site not visible from Southern

- Southern can be anything you want, it's commercial already
- Increase Floor Area Ratio (FAR) or allow flexibility in applying FAR if certain desirable criteria are met

We also asked why people attended the session to get an idea of what their overall position is:

- » Want to keep it quiet, nice, low lights, low impact-commercial should be mainly elsewhere
- » To find out why Okeechobee is even being discussed when not in comp plan also to object to survey with built in bias
- » Supporting commercial uses along Okeechobee Blvd
- » Smart Growth
- » What is the plan for Okeechobee Blvd?
- » Loxahatchee Groves should be fair to all. Implement what was suggested at the 1st Visioning
- » Find out what going on and add my opinion making sure to stay on track
- » Keep the ideas as written in the neighborhood plans
- » Concern of the town no protecting and preserving our rural community
- » Concern for Loxahatchee Groves future
- » Interested in preserving the rural character
- » Our future
- » Okeechobee
- » Restoring or preserving and commercial on Okeechobee
- » To sort thru ideas and conflicting laws of commercial development on Okeechobee
- » Desire to see the Groves continue as a rural residential community
- » Seek balance so outer roads are not just depressed business
- » Loxahatchee groves need to stay AG/Res
- » Learn about my neighborhood and expect the best
- » Rural roads with out division of our town

Appendix 4 – Counter Survey

To gather feedback from residents and property owners unable to attend the workshop on February 29, the Town made copies of the survey from the session available at the reception counter at Town Hall (155 F Road).

A total of 28 responses were received, which staff reported were dropped of by one person. Each survey returned had identical answers, and all of them were “No” for every use identified.

Due to the nature of the survey responses, I would advise that we understand that these responses represent a point of view that exists in the community, although the extent to which it is prevalent is impossible to determine. It's worth noting that few similar responses were obtained through the other instruments.

Appendix 5 – Commercial Development Online Survey

To supplement the February session and counter survey, the Town made two additional surveys available to the public—one for Okeechobee Boulevard and the other for Southern Boulevard. The

survey was available between March 5, 2020 and March 18, 2020, with a goal of using the results as a point of discussion at the planned March 21, 2020 session.

While similar in content to the session survey, the online survey asked respondents to use a five-star scale to rate each use. The rubric was:

- » 5 Stars = Yes, this is a great business/use for the corridor
- » 4 Stars = It's a pretty good idea
- » 3 Stars = Maybe, if...
- » 2 Stars = Not great, but I could live with it
- » 1 Star = No, this use/business should not be on the corridor

Each subsection also had the option to fill in an open-ended response to identify other uses or conditions for the score of 3 “Maybe, if...”.

I have reviewed all the Internet Protocol addresses for the respondents and noted no instances of multiple responses from a single location. This survey also asked respondents to identify themselves by name and indicate if they were a resident or not.

Okeechobee Boulevard

A total of 86 people participated in the survey for Okeechobee Boulevard. Forty-seven provided a name and three provided a descriptor, such as “20-year resident.” Seventy-five responded to the “Are you a resident of the Town?” question, with 89% (67) indicating yes, and 11% (8) saying they were not. Another 22% (16) also indicated that they owned a business in town. Lastly, 93% (67) indicated that they owned property, while 6% (5) are likely renters. We collected property addresses on 46 of the respondents. About 13 respondents skipped the demographic questions.

For Category 1 – Food Service, respondents were generally supportive of the ideas presented, as seen in the number giving each idea four or five stars in Figure 1. For all uses, positive scores ranged from 54% to 65%.

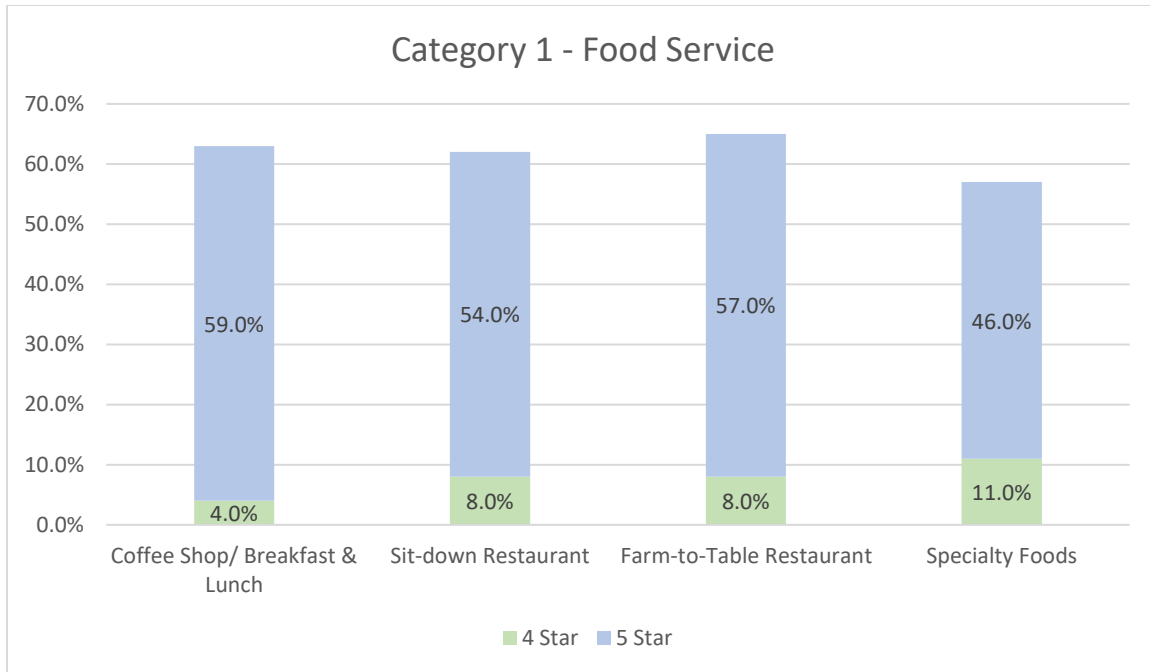


Figure 1. Respondents giving 4 or 5 starts to food service uses on Okeechobee Boulevard.

For Category 2 – Personal/Business Services, seven ideas for types of services were included. Positive responses are illustrated in Figure 2, which ranged from 32% to 40%, a minority for each. Significant numbers of respondents didn't think these were good uses at all, with 45% giving one star to fitness centers and personal grooming businesses.

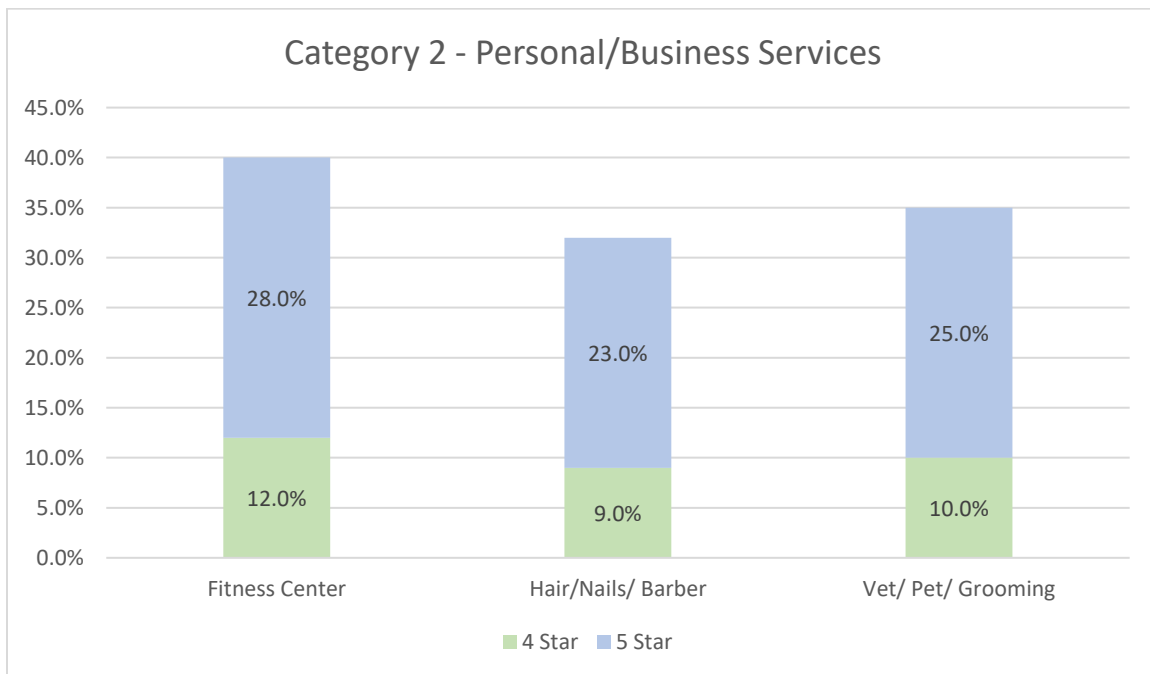


Figure 2. Respondents giving 4 or 5 starts to personal and business service uses on Okeechobee Boulevard.

Category 3 – Cultural/Town Center provided options for public uses, which received mixed responses, as seen in Figure 3. Positive responses ranged from 35% to 65%. Majority positive responses were received only for Parks/Public Events and a multi-purpose arena. A significant amount of one-star ratings were received for a Youth Recreation Center (37%), Art Gallery/Town Center (43%), and YMCA/YWCA (46%).

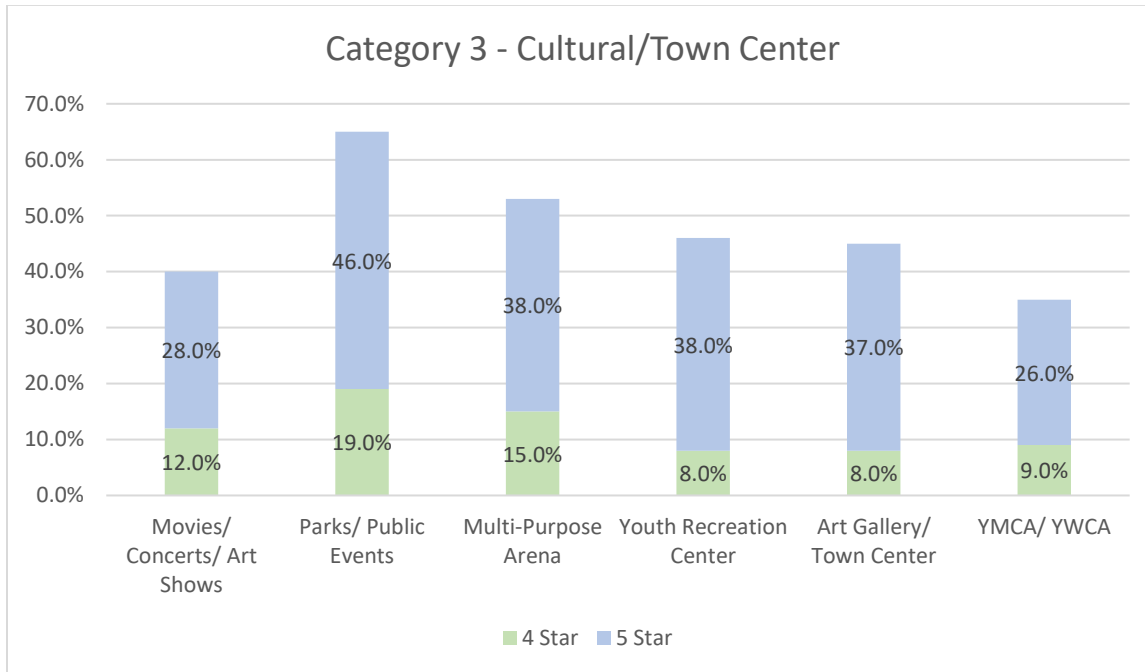


Figure 3. Respondents giving 4 or 5 stars to cultural and Town center uses on Okeechobee Boulevard.

For Category 4 – Specialty Commercial, respondents were not supportive of the ideas presented, as seen in Figure 4. For all uses, positive scores ranged from 30% to 40%. One-star responses ranged from 44% to 54%.

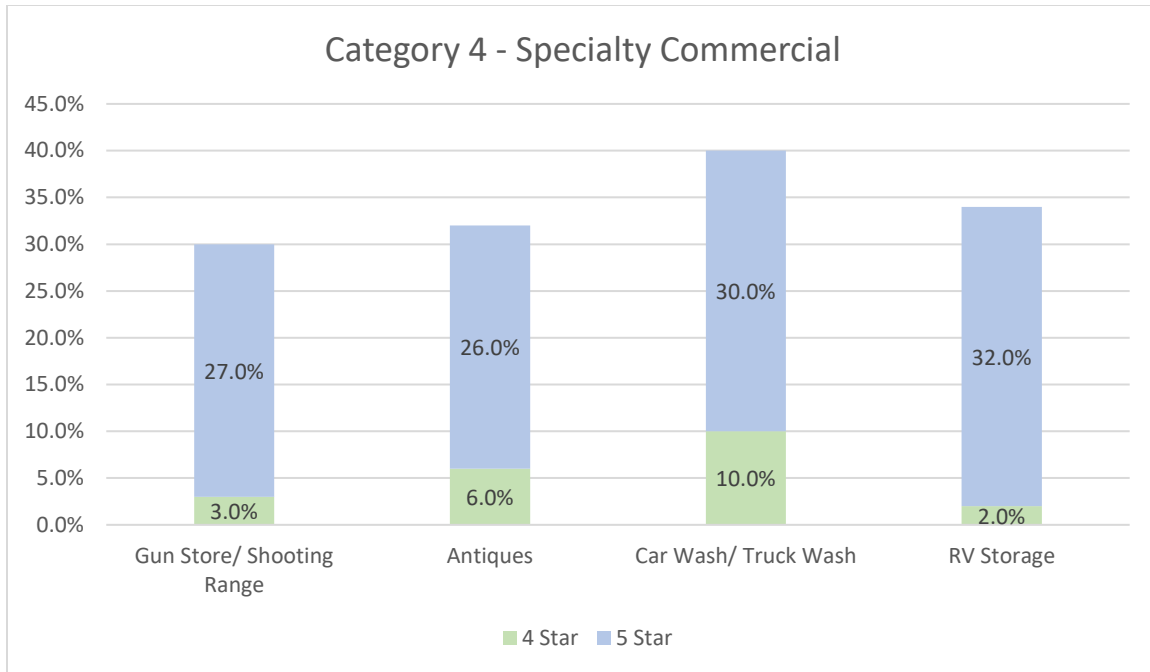


Figure 4. Respondents giving 4 or 5 starts to specialty commercial uses on Okeechobee Boulevard.

Category 5 – Agriculture Related uses provided were generally viewed as positive, as seen in Figure 5. Positive responses ranged from 56% to 75%.

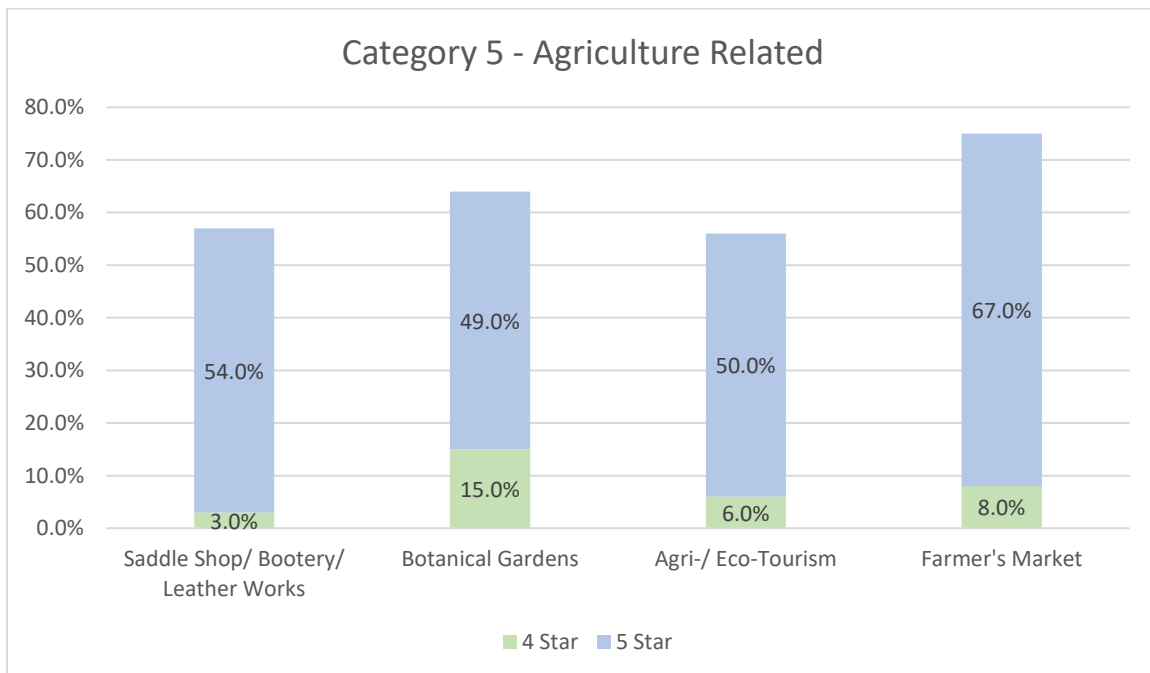


Figure 5. Respondents giving 4 or 5 starts to agriculture related uses on Okeechobee Boulevard.

For Category 6 – Accommodations, respondents were unsupportive of the ideas, as seen in Figure 6. For all uses, positive scores ranged from 29% to 35%, indicated a strong dislike for these uses.

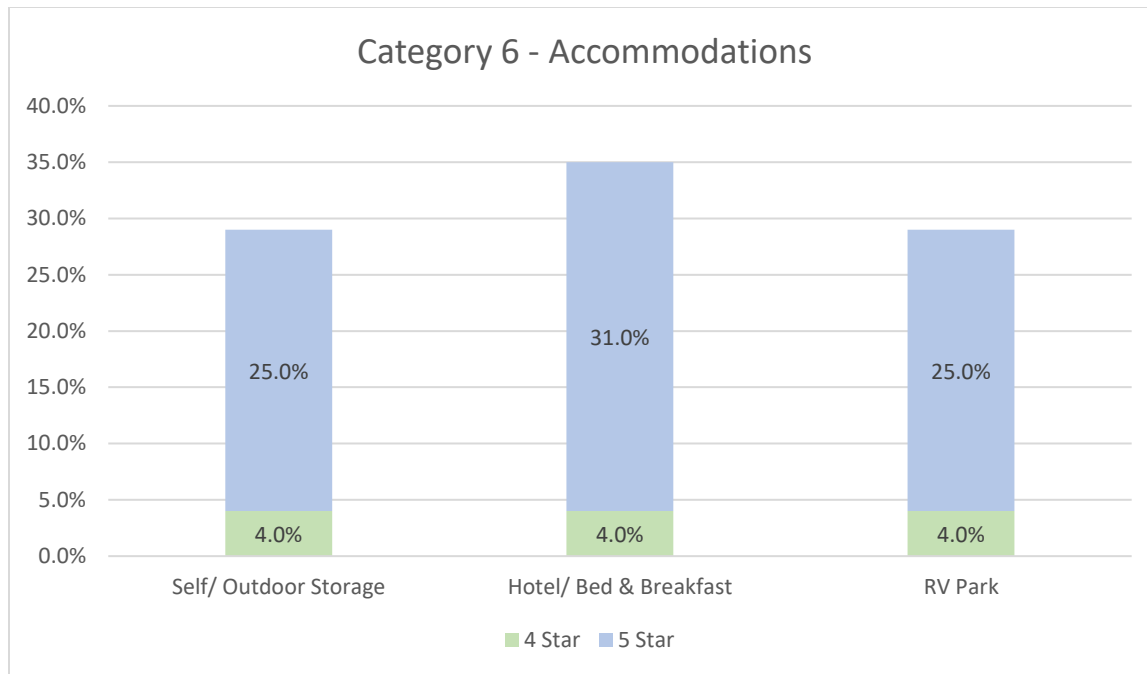


Figure 6. Respondents giving 4 or 5 stars to accommodation uses on Okeechobee Boulevard.

Southern Boulevard

A total of 53 people participated in the survey for Southern Boulevard. Thirty-four provided a name and two provided a descriptor, such as “20-year resident.” All 53 responded to the “Are you a resident of the Town?” question, with 96% (51) indicating yes, and 4% (2) saying they were not. Another 23% (12) also indicated that they owned a business in town. Lastly, 94% (50) indicated that they owned property, while 6% (3) are likely renters. We collected property addresses on 46 of the respondents.

For Category 1 – Food Service, respondents were generally supportive of the ideas presented, as seen in the number giving each idea four or five stars in Figure 7. For all uses, positive scores ranged from 80% to 91%, significantly higher than the same uses on Okeechobee Boulevard and the highest scores for any use in either survey.

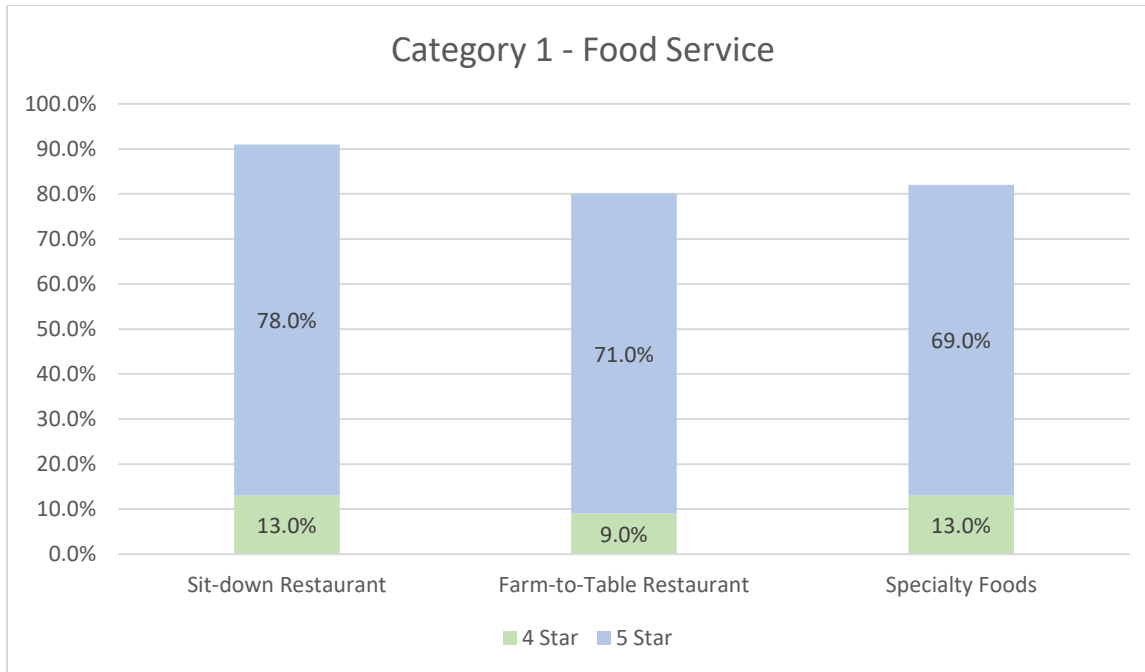


Figure 7. Respondents giving 4 or 5 starts to food service uses on Southern Boulevard.

For Category 2 – Personal/Business Services, seven ideas for types of services were included. Positive responses are illustrated in Figure 8. Positive scores ranged from 60% to 73%, strong, but less positive overall than food services.

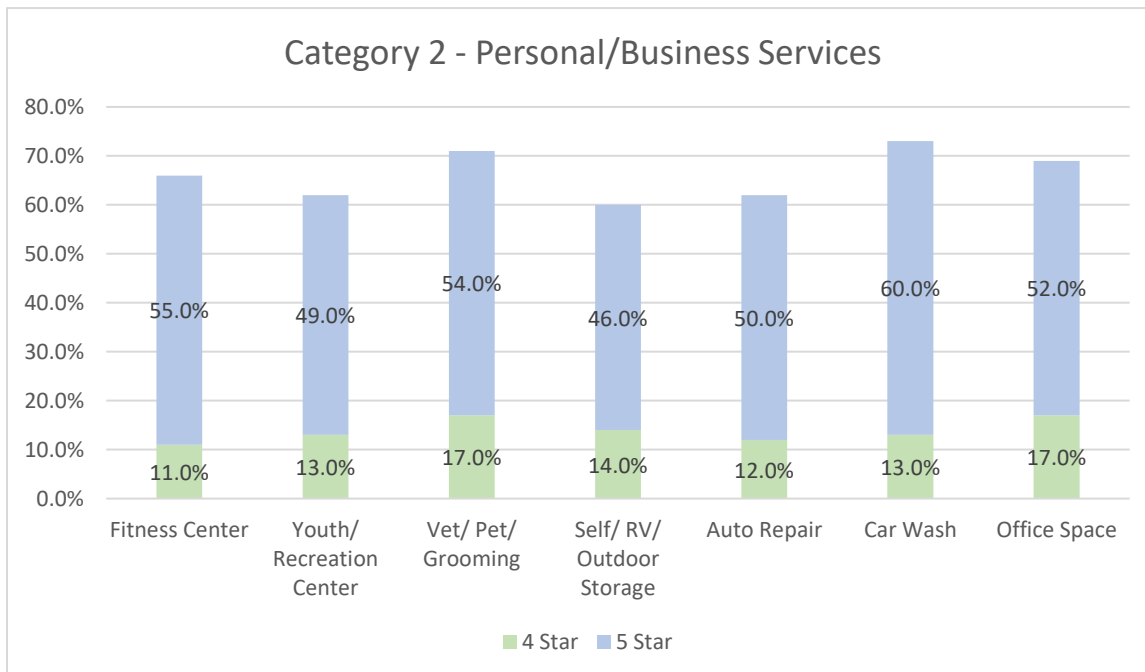


Figure 8. Respondents giving 4 or 5 starts to personal and business service uses on Southern Boulevard.

Category 3 – Cultural/Town Center provided options for public uses, which were generally viewed as positive, as seen in Figure 9. Positive responses ranged from 54% to 78%.

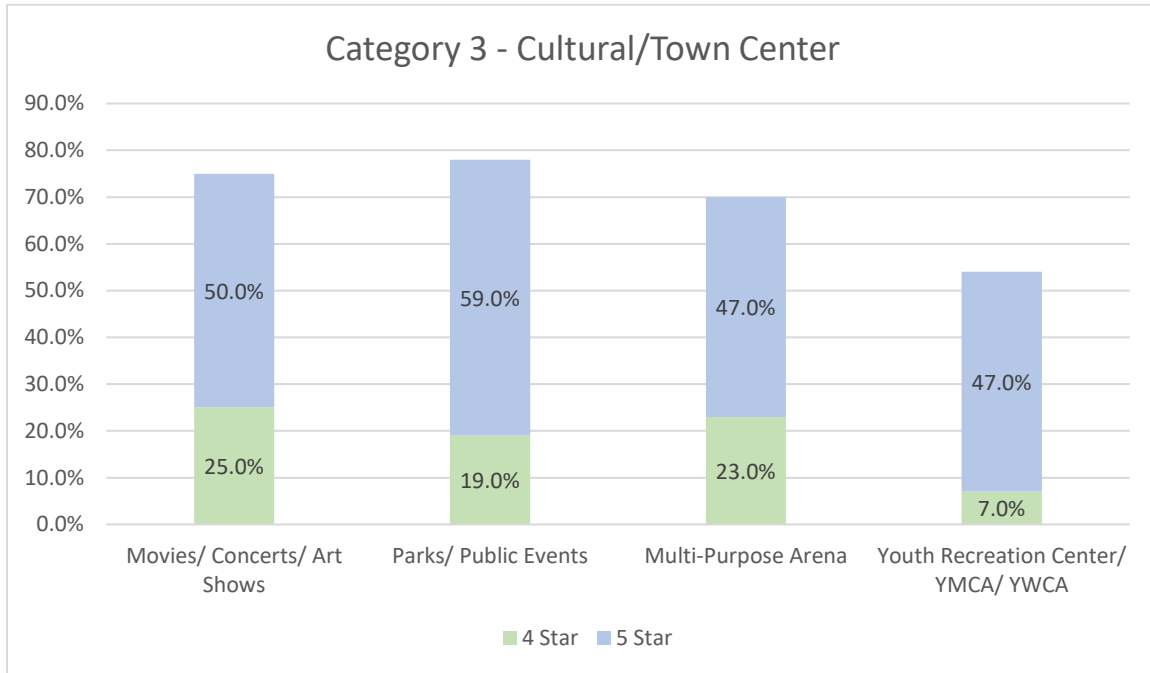


Figure 9. Respondents giving 4 or 5 stars to cultural and Town center uses on Southern Boulevard.

For Category 4 – Specialty Commercial, respondents were also generally supportive of the ideas presented, as seen in Figure 10. For all uses, positive scores ranged from 74% to 52%.

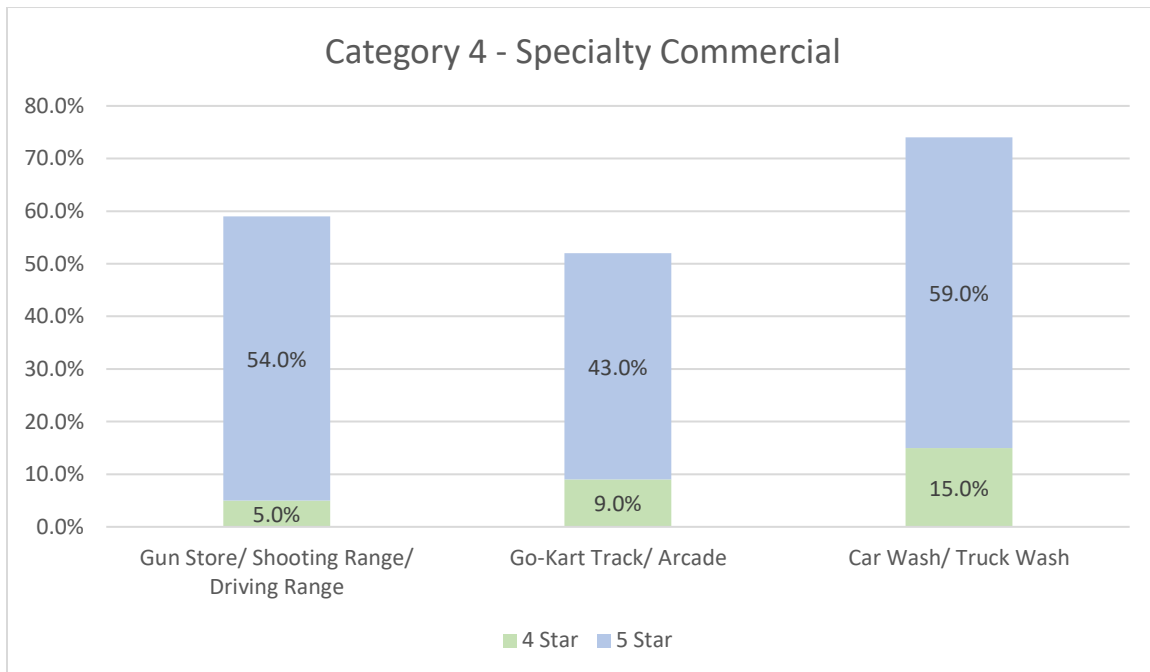


Figure 10. Respondents giving 4 or 5 stars to specialty commercial uses on Southern Boulevard.

Category 5 – Agriculture Related uses provided were generally viewed as positive, as seen in Figure 11. Positive responses ranged from 70% to 86%.

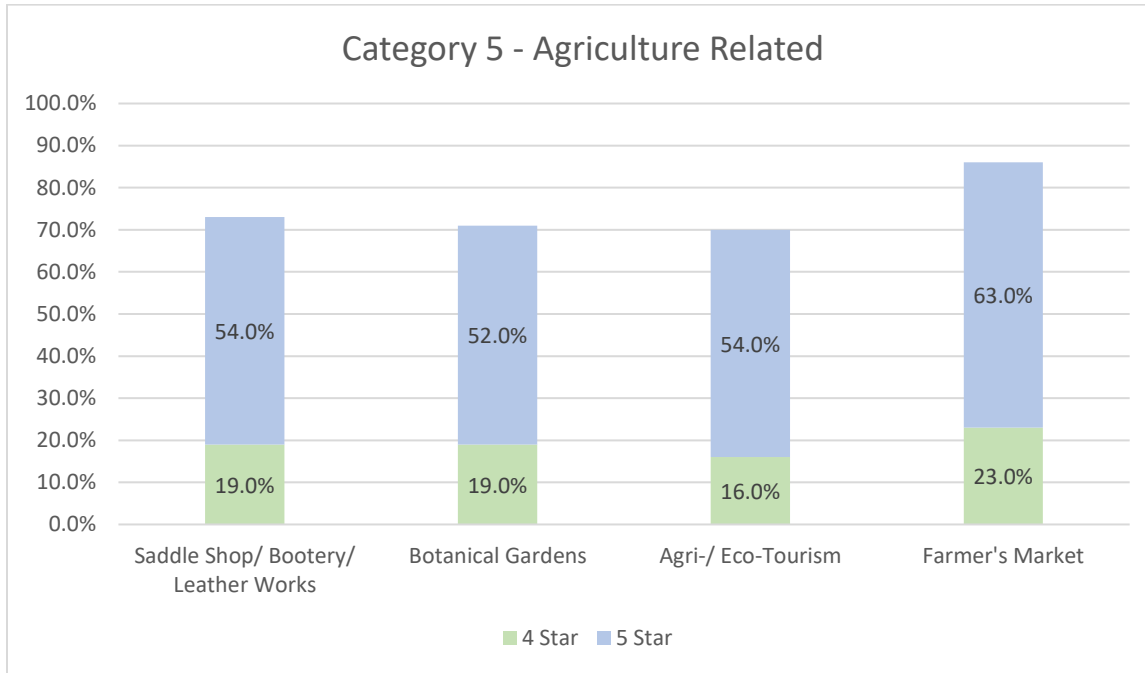


Figure 11. Respondents giving 4 or 5 stars to agriculture related uses on Southern Boulevard.

For Category 6 – Accommodations, respondents were generally less supportive of the ideas presented than in other areas, as seen in Figure 12. For all uses, positive scores ranged from 74% to 52%.

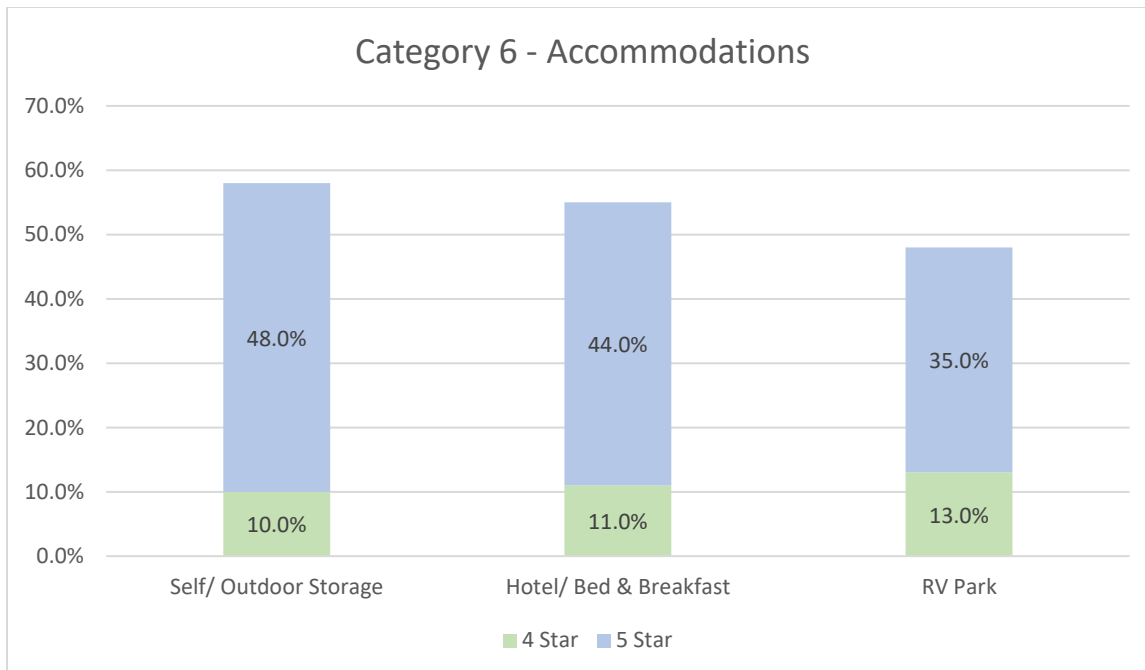


Figure 12. Respondents giving 4 or 5 stars to accommodation uses on Southern Boulevard.