

# Information Item

Community Development Committee



Meeting date: April 20, 2026

## Topic

Housing Choice Voucher Residential Preferences Study: Survey results

<b>District(s), member(s):</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Policy/legal reference:</b>	N/A
<b>Staff prepared/presented:</b>	Matt Schroeder, Principal Researcher (651-602-1513) Zhu Gong, Researcher (651-602-8437)
<b>Division/department:</b>	Community Development / Research and Metro HRA

## Background

The ***Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Residential Preferences Study*** details experiences and housing preferences of HCV recipients. The HCV program is a federally funded rent assistance program in which eligible households find a unit on the open rental market while renting from a private landlord. Tenants pay 30% of their income towards rent, and housing authorities make up the difference through federal subsidy. This Committee heard an introduction to and background of the study in September 2023 as well as preliminary survey results in May 2025. This information item accompanies the release of the final report.

The report supports consideration of how HCV policies might shift from a “place-centered” to a “people-centered” view when considering how to best serve voucher holders. With the place-centered framework, voucher holders are encouraged, and receive assistance, to move to “high-opportunity” areas to achieve the best long-term outcomes, where “opportunity” is measured on a one-dimensional, low-to-high scale.

The research findings and related conversations with housing authority staff point to a more nuanced, “people-centered” framing, in which opportunity is multidimensional. Different places have different kinds of opportunity, and different voucher holders prioritize different characteristics of neighborhoods as well as homes. This study uses the people-centered view to carefully consider voucher holders’ preferences and experiences, which can help Metro HRA staff and HCV program policies better support voucher holders in attaining the kinds of opportunities they want.

## Survey Methods

The survey recruited participants from Metro HRA and Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (PHA) voucher holders. We contracted with a consultant to assist with survey design and execution, and the consultant de-identified the survey data to maintain respondent confidentiality. Surveys were completed from March – May 2024. A total of 454 respondents completed the survey (a 30% response rate).

The survey included closed-ended and open-ended questions about voucher holders’ preferences, experiences searching for housing, and perceived pros and cons of their housing units and neighborhoods. Researchers worked in parallel to conduct both

quantitative and qualitative analyses of the survey data. Researchers also facilitated focus groups with Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA staff, who provided insights and reflections that helped contextualize survey findings. The full report includes an expanded analysis of open-ended questions to respond to Council Member requests for more qualitative data and direct quotes from voucher holders.

## Survey Results

- Voucher holders have a wide variety of preferences for both neighborhoods and homes. Home characteristics were generally prioritized over neighborhoods, and living in a “high-income area” was generally seen as unimportant. Voucher holders generally prioritized affordable rent, safety from crime, number of bedrooms, and the overall quality and condition of the living space.
- Most voucher holders were able to find at least some of what they were looking for, but 90% of voucher holders reported experiencing at least one difficulty in their most recent housing search. The most frequently reported barriers were finding properties that accept vouchers, and whose rents fall within the limits set by housing authorities, within the HCV program’s 90-day housing search period.
- About two-thirds of voucher holders were happy with their homes and/or neighborhoods. Somali voucher holders were especially satisfied with both their homes and neighborhoods. Neighborhood satisfaction was higher for Metro HRA voucher holders and those with a vehicle.
- Satisfaction was most influenced by the quality and condition of their housing unit, property management practices, and neighborhood safety and amenities.
- Voucher holders’ desire for safety is multifaceted. Safety is not just about crime and violence. They also value “peace and quiet”, the absence of traffic and environmental hazards, good neighbors, and their neighborhood conditions.

## Recommendations

Preferences, priorities, and needs among diverse voucher holders are not one-size-fits-all; a people-centered approach in HCV program administration will best meet voucher holder preferences. Based on the findings, the following resources would help voucher holders:

- More targeted assistance to diverse voucher holders, especially resources for finding properties that accept vouchers and financial help with application fees and deposits
- Information that empowers voucher holders, such as a wider array of characteristics of neighborhoods and homes, in addition to tools describing how much they will pay to rent a given home they are considering
- Programmatic and systemic changes, like efforts to increase the number of landlords and property managers who accept vouchers, and additional funds to increase allowable rents and/or issue more vouchers

## Update on Next Steps

This study had initially envisioned a second, qualitative phase to include focus groups and in-depth interviews with some survey respondents. Shifts in the federal context of the HCV program, however, may limit the Council’s ability to meaningfully respond to additional input from voucher holders. Given this, it did not seem appropriate to ask voucher holders to dedicate substantial time and energy providing input that could not be fully considered, and Metro HRA will continue to engage voucher holders through established, more targeted processes such as the Resident Advisory Board and other programmatic outreach efforts.

