



Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
Community Conservation Across the Commonwealth



Green Burial Massachusetts & Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
results of an online survey conducted throughout the fall of 2014
~ Thank you for taking our Survey ~

Online survey conducted using SurveyGizmo (www.surveygizmo.com). Results summarized and presented by Candace Currie of GBMA, January 2015





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...”a green cemetery sets aside open space for natural habitat and encourages the public to visit a beautiful destination for generations to come. Combining natural burials with land conservation demonstrates another way that protected land can benefit people”.

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Introduction to this Report

1. Review the purpose of the online survey
2. Review the results of each question with a **SUMMARY** and a **WHAT THIS MEANS TO US** section
3. Summarize interest, requirements of a parcel and next steps

The survey results have indicated that the time is ripe for Green Burial in Massachusetts. Interest is evident by the response to this survey. Requirements for location and beauty of parcels will be informed by these results. Activism and education must continue as we move into the next phase of development and design.

The intended audience for this report are the survey takers and those interested in seeing green burial in Massachusetts become a reality.



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Background

Green Burial Massachusetts (GBMA) was formerly known as the Green Burial Committee – a subcommittee of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts. Today, both the Western and Eastern Massachusetts chapters of the Funeral Consumers Alliance support GBMA. GBMA has been educating residents about green burial through community fairs, newsletters, meetings, and recently through film screenings of [A Will for the Woods](#).

In the spring of 2014, **Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust (Mount Grace)** partnered with GBMA with the goal of establishing Massachusetts' first green cemetery open to all.



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Introduction to the Survey Research

GBMA and Mount Grace recently conducted an online survey to gauge peoples' understanding of, interest in, and desire for a green burial ground. Additionally, the survey asked people about known parcels of land that could be reviewed to determine the feasibility of becoming future sites for green burial cemeteries.



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Research Objectives

In addition to determining the desire and urgency for a green burial ground, GBMA and Mount Grace were interested in learning about the desired locale, the type of landscape people wanted to be buried in, the type of monumentation people wanted, and what might be the fundraising challenges for establishing a green burial cemetery.



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Data Collection Process

Almost 400 email survey requests were delivered and 139 people responded. In the world of online surveys, this response rate of 35% is fantastic. Most of the respondents live in the Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire counties. Additionally, Worcester County where many of towns under the purview of Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust is located was also well represented. To a lesser degree, Middlesex County and lastly, the Cape and the Berkshires were represented with fewer responses.



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The Findings

If you like pie charts, the next several slides will excite you.

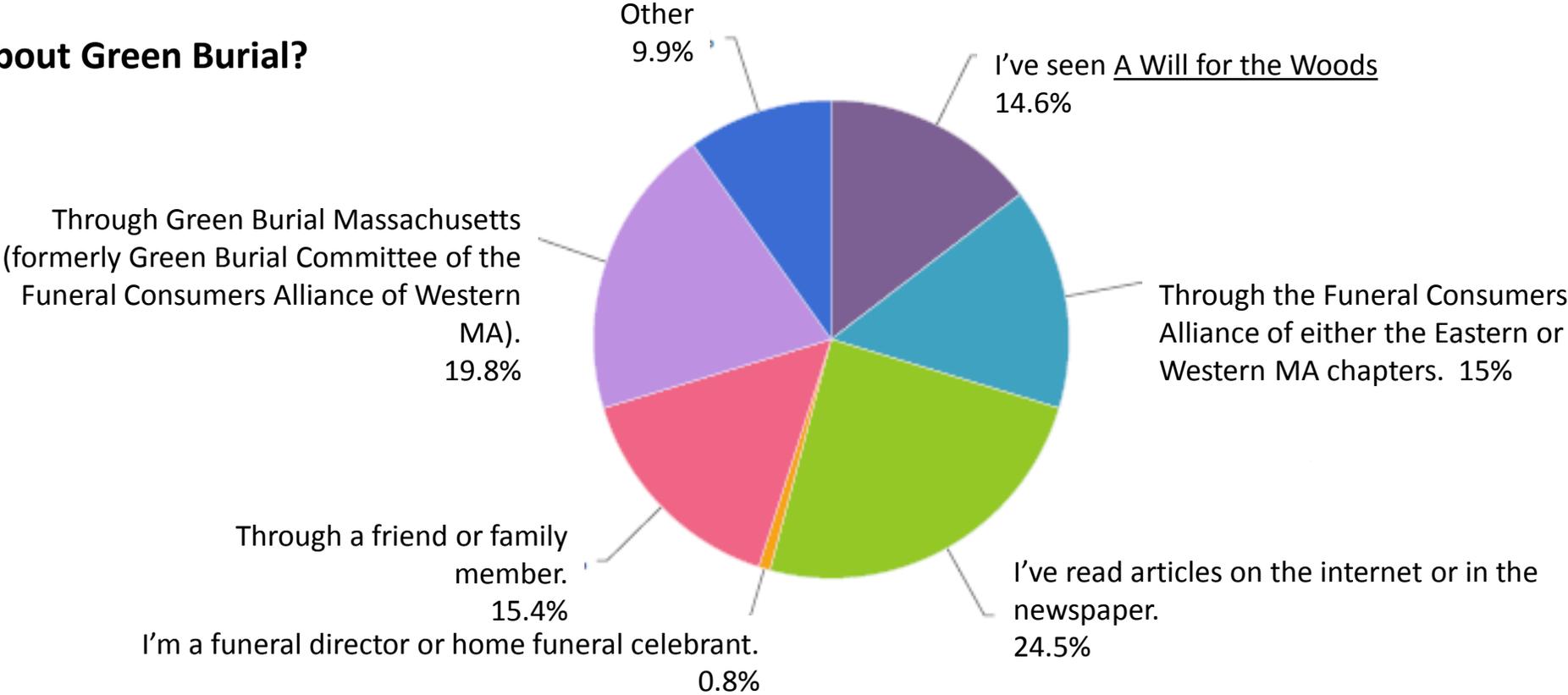
For those of you who don't like to read pie charts, at the bottom of each slide you'll see a **SUMMARY** and a **WHAT THIS MEANS TO US**.



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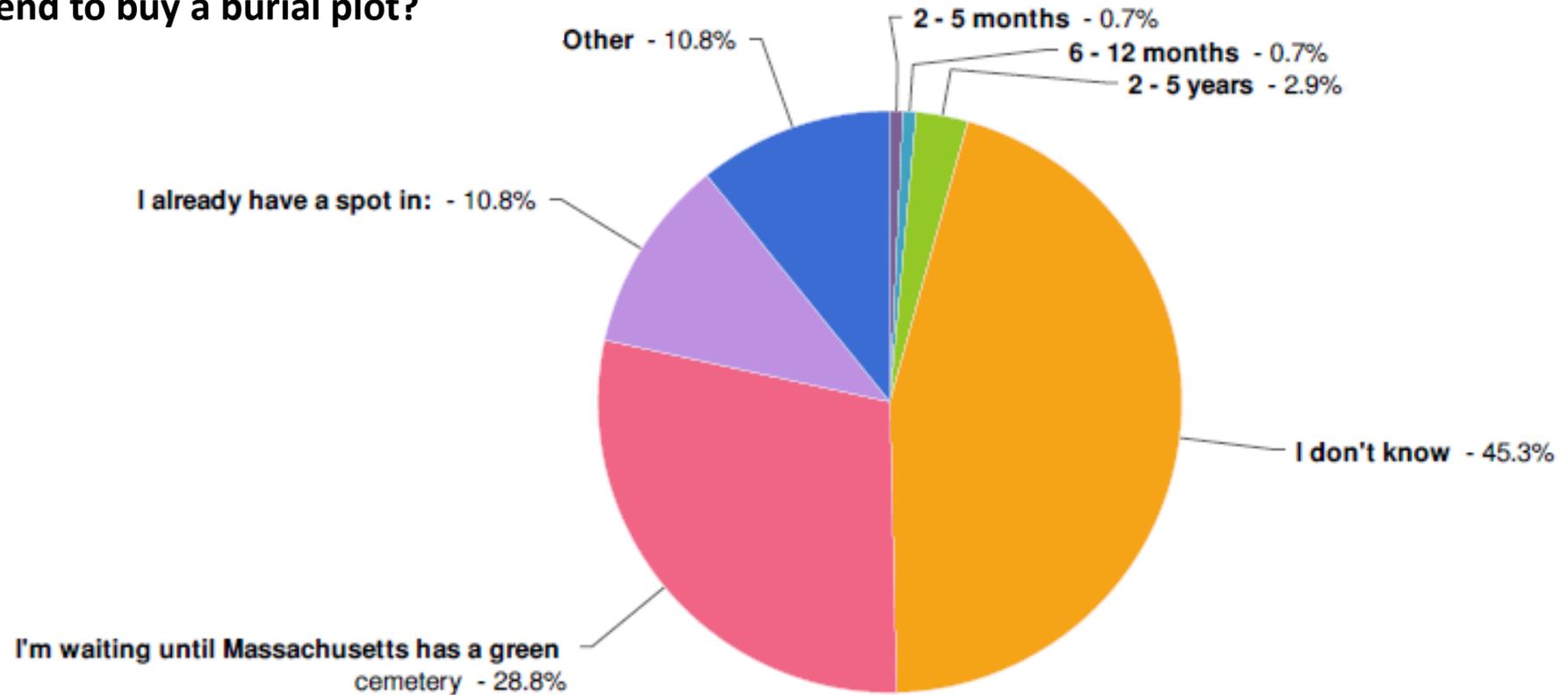
A. How did you learn about Green Burial?



SUMMARY: Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents learned about Green Burial through the FCA, Green Burial Massachusetts or through A Will for the Woods. About 15% learned about Green Burial through a friend or family member. That's fabulous; we need to continue to encourage talking about green burial. Ten percent (10%), the **Other** category, noted authors Bernd Heinrich, Mark Harris, and Caitlyn Doughty, as well as GBMA's own Carol Coan through her class *Funeral Planning for the Living* offered through Greenfield Community College.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO US: In addition to the great outreach FCA, GBMA and Mount Grace are doing, expanding our outreach with additional materials and media would be advantageous. We could extend our reach with written articles (both web and hardcopy), and do more radio interviews as Leigh Youngblood and Carol Coan have done recently on WHMP. Is anyone interested in writing articles or being interviewed on behalf of green burial in MA? Those of you who are willing to donate your land, why is a green cemetery important to you? What is so compelling about this idea that you are willing to use your land for this purpose?

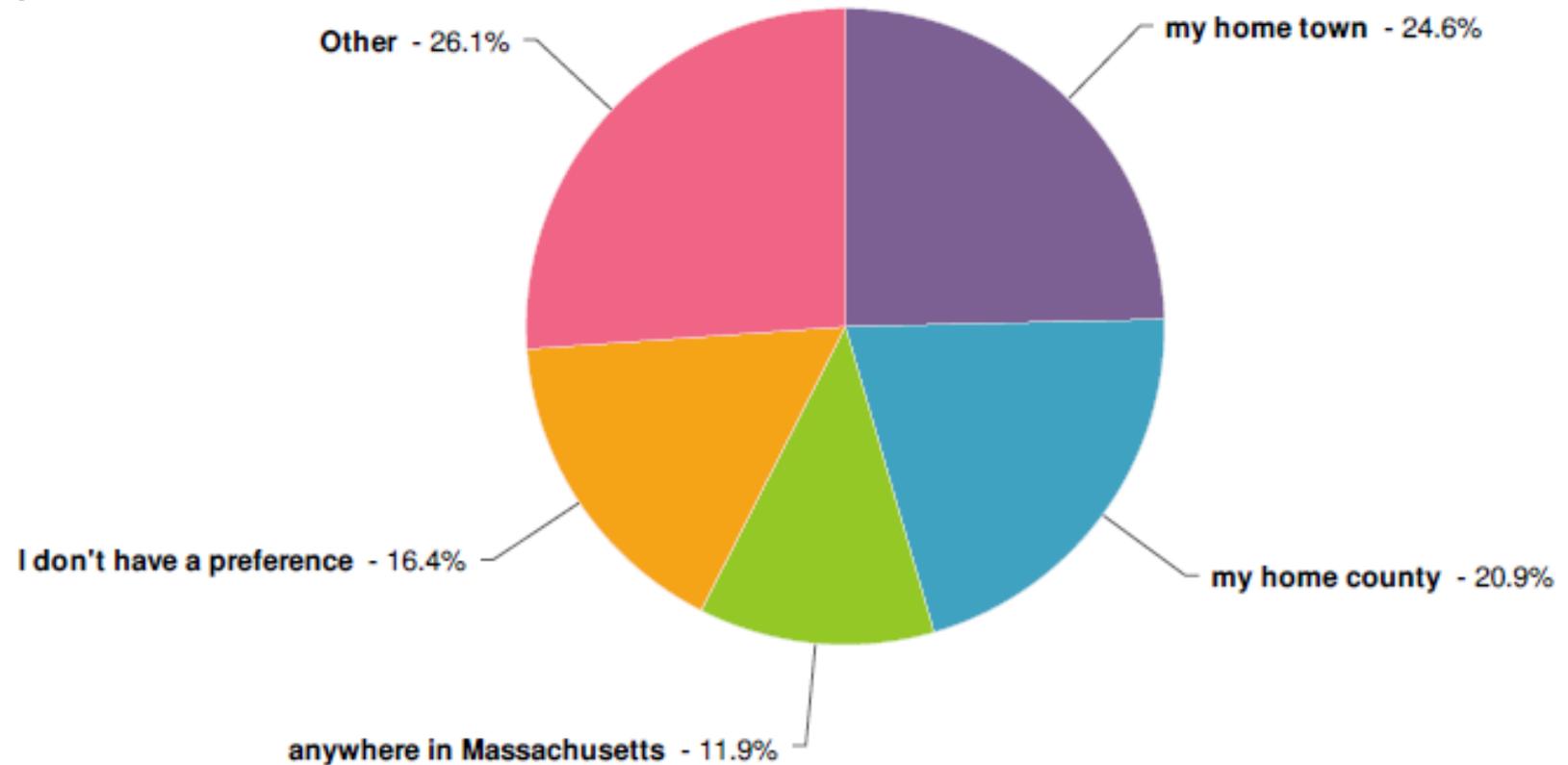
B. How soon do you intend to buy a burial plot?



SUMMARY: Less than 5% of the respondents plan to buy a burial plot in the next five years, however there's an eager contingent of Green Burial followers. Optimistically, almost 30% are waiting for a green burial cemetery. Of the 10% in the **Other** category, several indicated they are going for a green cremation, donating their bodies to science, or have space in a church yard or on their own private property.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO US: These results indicate the need for more education on 'is cremation green' and 'what happens to one's body after science is done with it'. Briefly, in Massachusetts, there's only one form of cremation currently allowed that uses natural gas to heat the retorts to incinerate a body. Bodies donated to science are typically embalmed to preserve them for scientific study, and organ donors could have a body burial, but it's important to make that wish known in advance.

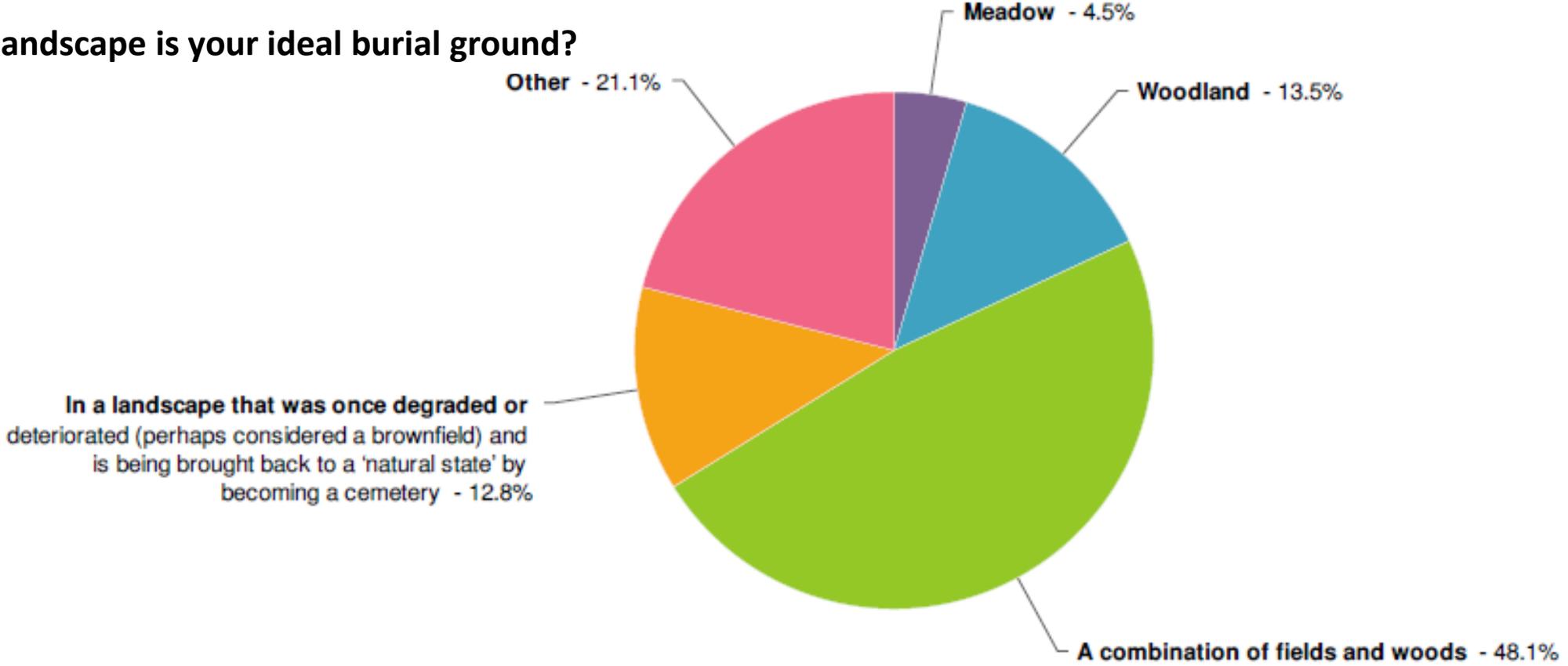
C. In what location would you prefer to be buried?



SUMMARY: Almost 50% of the respondents want to be buried in their home town or county. About a quarter of the **Other** respondents indicated “Western MA”, a rural setting, or places where family and friends can visit. The other quarter don’t have a preference or would like it to be somewhere in MA.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO US: Like in the local church yard or town cemetery, people like to be buried proximate to where they live or in a region that is important to them. This speaks to finding smaller parcels of land connected to existing cemeteries, church yards, or other conserved landscapes rather than a single, state-wide green cemetery.

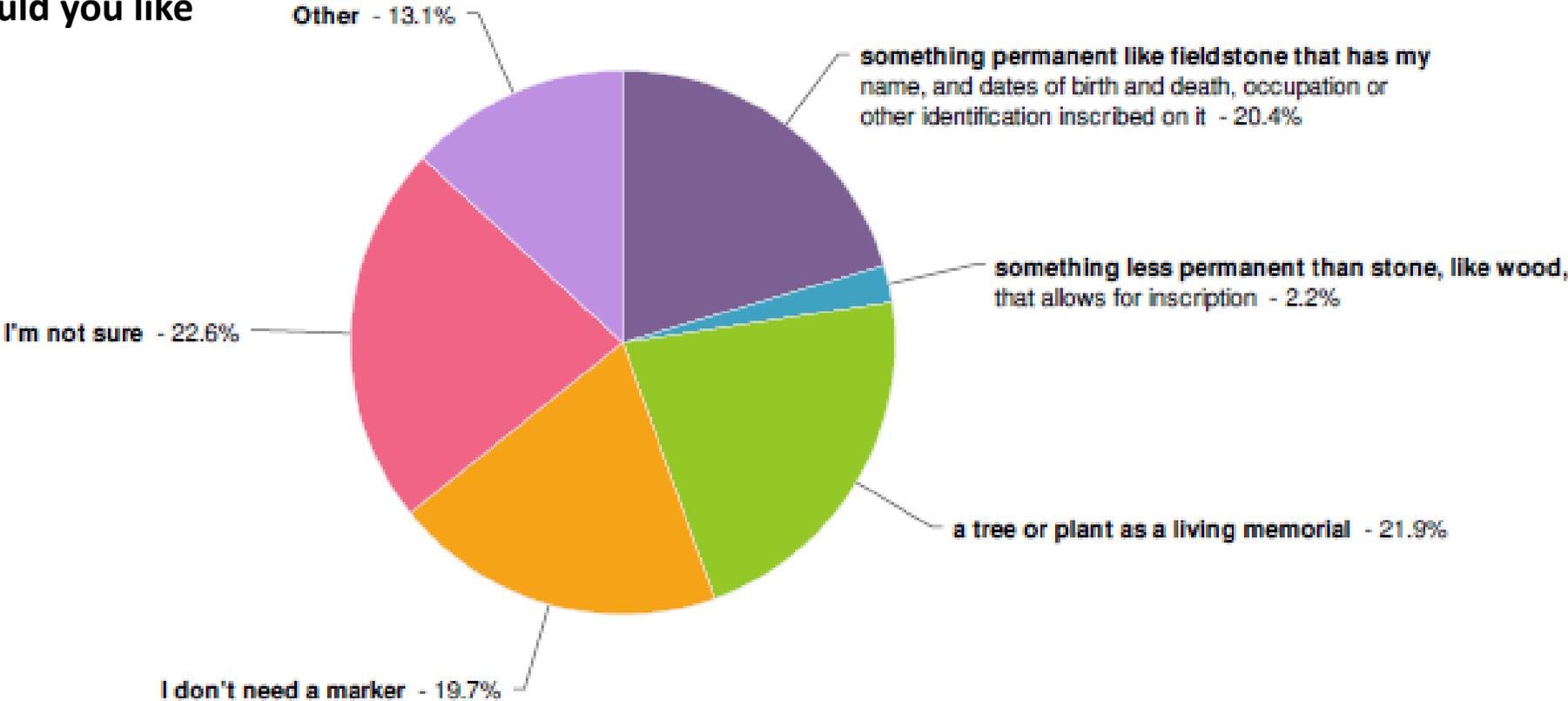
D. What type of landscape is your ideal burial ground?



SUMMARY: When including the **Other** category, there is almost unanimous response for burial in a meadow, woodland or a place that contains both types of landscape. Almost 13% selected to be buried in a landscape that was once degraded but it was noted that it needs to be a beautiful and peaceful place if a brownfield were developed as a cemetery.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO US: Most of us have an idyllic view of the cemeteries and want to be buried in one. These results speak to the importance of beauty of the land not just the location. It guides GBMA and Mount Grace towards 'idyllic' parcels that include woodlands and meadows.

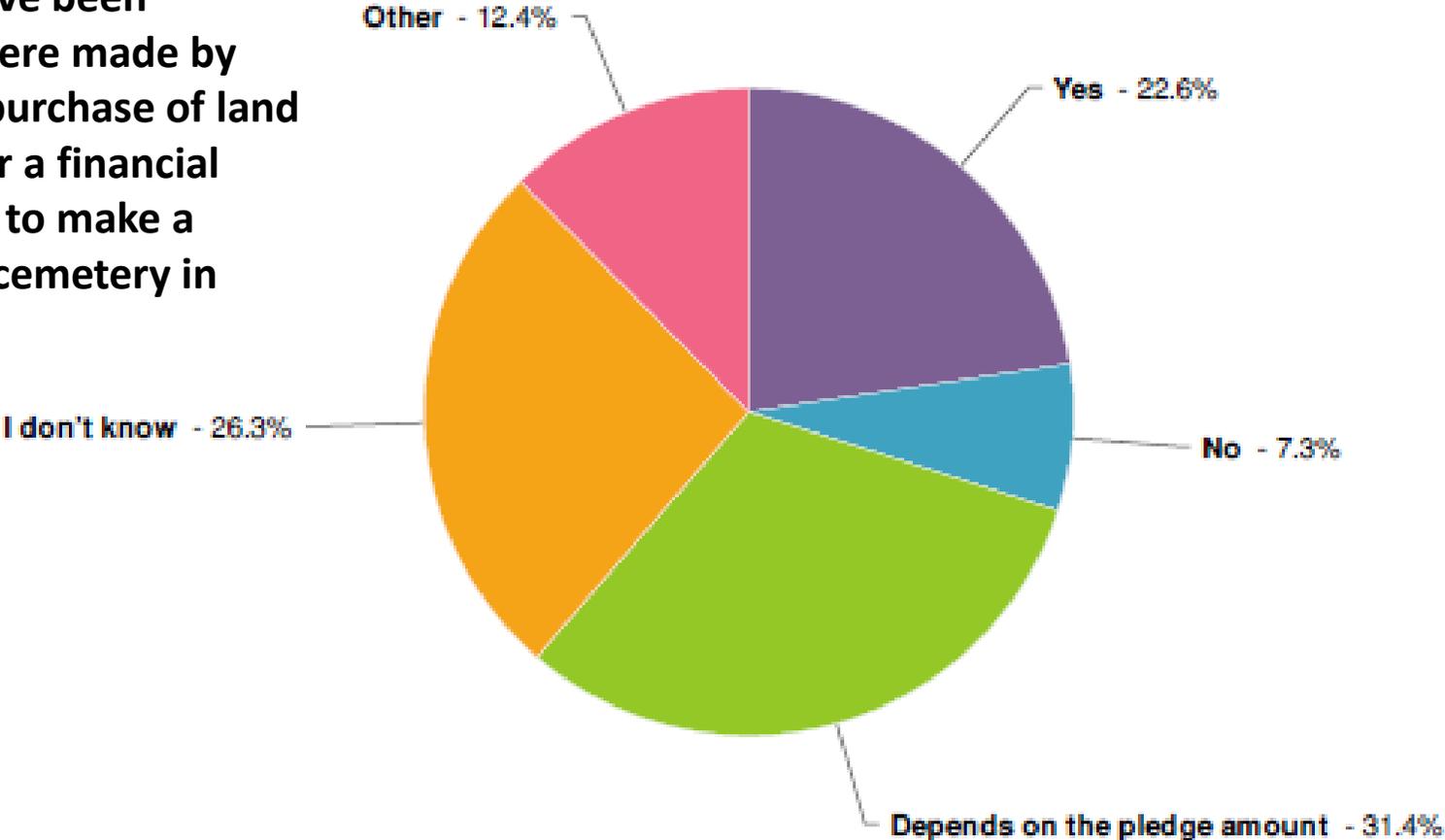
E. What type of marker, if any, would you like on your grave?



SUMMARY: Twenty-three percent (23%) of the respondents want a marker. Another 23% aren't sure what type of marker they want while 20% indicated they don't need a marker at all. The **Other** category also wanted markers in the form of trees, sculpture or fieldstone; several people noted that it was important to indicate to the world that they existed; therefore some type of plaque was important although it doesn't need to be directly over the grave site.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO US: The notion of a tree or a living a memorial is important, but inscribing names, dates of birth and death and even occupation is important as a statement of existence. The type of marker that is allowed could be one of the differentiating characteristics of a cemetery. One green burial ground may allow individual field stone markers on the grave while another conservation burial area may have artistic sculptures upon which names may be displayed or inscribed. Ultimately, if the landscape takes precedence, then the allowed monumentation may be guided by what fits best in the landscape.

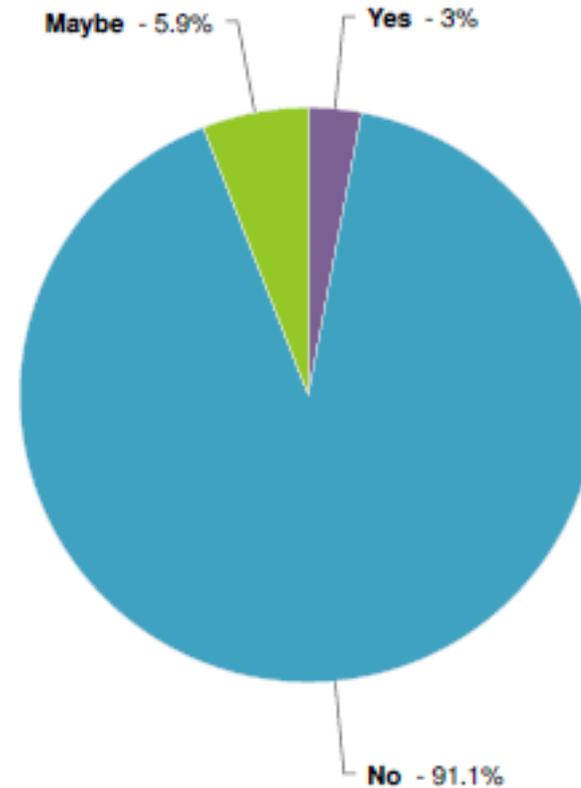
F. For some green cemeteries that have been established in other states, pledges were made by prospective plot buyers towards the purchase of land for cemetery use. We aren't asking for a financial pledge now, but would you be willing to make a pledge in the future towards a green cemetery in Massachusetts?



SUMMARY: Only 7% percent said 'No', over 20% said 'Yes. Around **70%** are willing to have a conversation around making a financial pledge. Even those in the **Other** category are willing to donate if the conditions are right such as it is a sound investment, is similar to perpetual care in a cemetery, or could be a tax-deductible donation.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO US: These 'pledge' results are quite heartening. Thank you.

G. Do you know of land that might be available for use as a green cemetery?

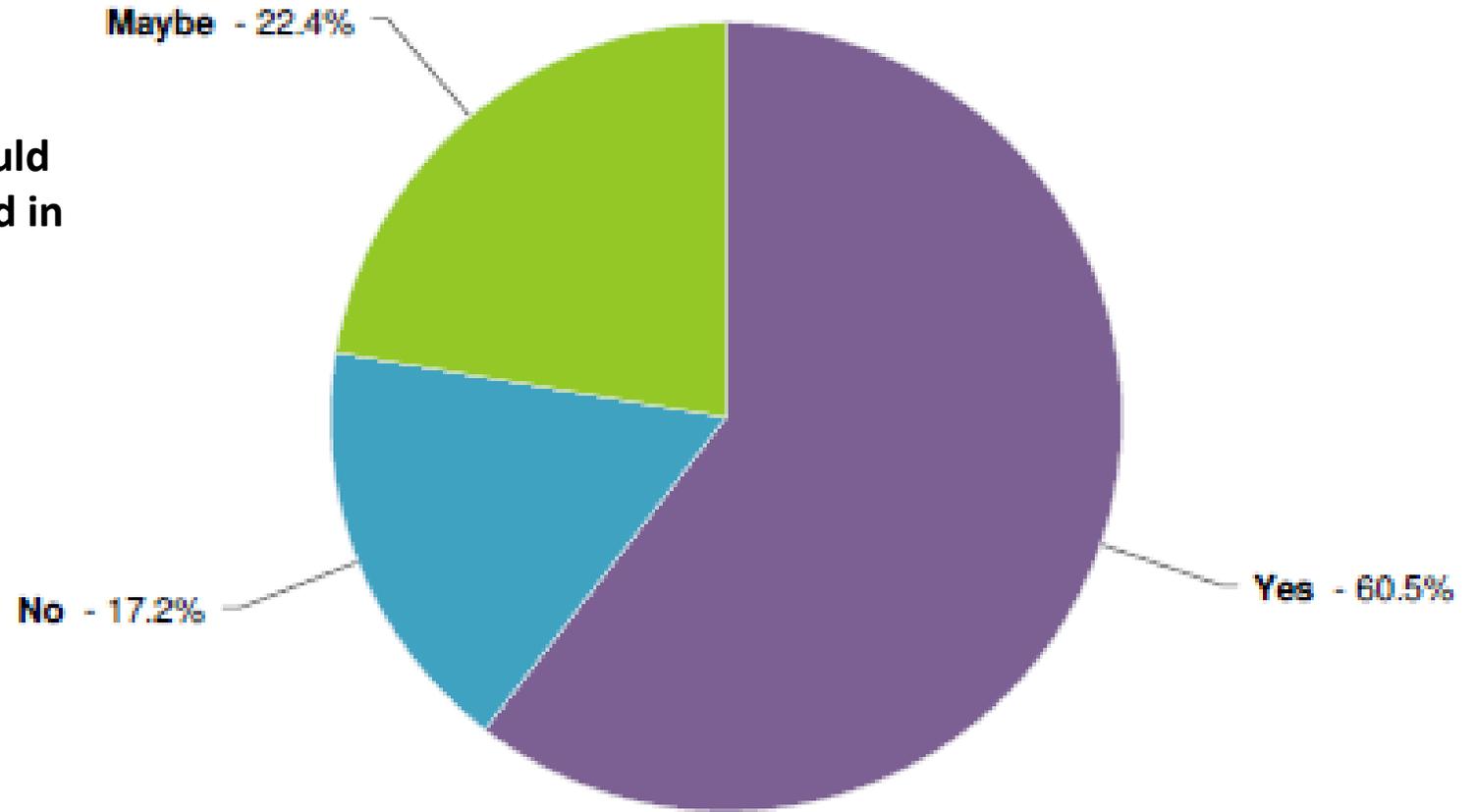


Answer	Location
Maybe	Wayland
Maybe	Rindge NH
Maybe	Leverett MA
Maybe	Deerfield
Maybe	Gill, Ma.
Maybe	Wilbraham, Hampden
Maybe	Straddles Whately/Hatfield
Maybe	
Yes	Rowe, MA
Yes	Chesterfield, Williamsburg
Yes	Orange, MA / Franklin
Yes	Conway, MA

SUMMARY: Twelve parcels were identified as potential sites. Unfortunately, one of those sites is in NH, which makes it unsuitable for a Massachusetts' burial ground.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO US: We have followed-up on most of the properties or an evaluation of the property is in process. The search continues; and clearly there are other areas beyond the Pioneer Valley that need to be investigated.

H. We are planning to show more screenings of a the film A Will for the Woods and want to gauge interest. Would you or someone you know be interested in attending?



SUMMARY: Over 60% want to see A Will for the Woods.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO US: Green Burial Massachusetts and Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust have scheduled several more viewings of A Will for the Woods including in the Berkshires. We know there are other films available about green burial including one with Billy Campbell about establishing Ramsey Creek Preserve in South Carolina. We're considering a 'film festival' about green burial. We'll keep you posted.

Summary

- **Interest:**
 - We know you are interested and based on your responses, we know green burial is in the public realm.
- **Requirements:**
 - Burial grounds local to community are preferred
 - Land must be beautiful
 - Monumentation, of some sort, is preferred
 - Compelling financial invitation is required and worthwhile
- **Next Steps:**
 - Continue activism and education
 - Move into development and design
 - Create non-profit entity to do fundraising



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