



Strathcona County

OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

What We Heard Report

Phase 1

January 2025



This report was prepared for Strathcona County by O2 Planning & Design.

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Introduction

Strathcona County has a high-quality system of open spaces that contribute to our reputation as a peaceful, safe, and family-friendly community. The County's unique composition of urban and rural communities value ecological integrity and preservation of agricultural heritage. With increasing growth, it is important to ensure these valuable and sensitive lands are protected and enhanced to meet the needs of our evolving community.

In 2024, Strathcona County embarked on a journey to create an Open Space Master Plan (OSMP), which is an important component of Strathcona County's strategic framework to ensure we continue to provide a welcoming place to live and the right mix of open spaces, features, and amenities to support our communities into the future.

The OSMP will help to guide the County's decisions around open space planning, development and operations through identifying actions, key projects and planning initiatives. As a strategic document, the OSMP will build upon existing plans and policies, while ensuring public needs and priorities are included. The Plan will provide direction on how the amenities and functions of open space will be prioritized across the County.

This report summarizes the results of public and interested party engagement that took place throughout summer and fall 2024.

Engagement Timeline

Phase 1a (summer 2024)

In Phase 1a, the project team conducted an inventory assessment of Strathcona County's existing open space assets. Members of the public were engaged through a short online survey to identify community values, interests and needs for County open space.

Phase 1b: Priorities (fall 2024)

Phase 1b gathered detailed feedback which will contribute to the development and refinement of the vision, goals, and objectives for improving County open spaces. Priorities for the future of County open spaces were identified through a series of engagements with the public and interested parties, as well as a detailed online survey.

Phase 2: Implementation (winter 2025)

Phase 2 will be centred around the development of the Open Space Master Plan, as well as an implementation and funding strategy to achieve the vision, goals, objectives and priorities over the next 15 years. Key components of the OSMP will be shared with residents and community groups to ensure we have captured their vision and priorities for County open spaces.

Engagement Approach

How We Engaged

Phase 1a: Vision (summer 2024)

Phase 1a (summer 2024), a short online visioning survey collected residents' input on values, interests and needs for open spaces. The online survey was live from July 2 to August 18, 2024 and was hosted on the County's engagement website at www.countyvoice.strathcona.ca/open-space-master-plan.

Phase 1b: Priorities (fall 2024)

In Phase 1b (fall 2024), residents were invited to share their open space experiences, priorities and preferences through a variety of engagement opportunities:

- Detailed survey (October 15 to November 6)
- Interactive map (October 15 to November 6)
- Interested party workshop (October 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m., virtual on Zoom)
- Community open houses
 - » Tuesday, October 22, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Strathcona County Community Centre
 - » Thursday, October 24, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Ardrossan Recreation Complex

The online public survey and interactive mapping activity were hosted on the County's engagement website at www.countyvoice.strathcona.ca/open-space-master-plan.

Communications and Outreach

In Phase 1 of the project, information about opportunities to participate in engagement was shared widely across Strathcona County through a variety of communications and outreach methods, including:

- Media releases
- Posters in recreation facilities and community centres
- Advertisements on TV screens in community centres and transit centres
- Posters in open spaces across the county
- Road signs across the county
- Social media posts (Facebook, Instagram and X)
- Advertisements in Sherwood Park News

Who We Engaged

Phase 1a

Online Survey

The purpose of the Phase 1a visioning survey was to support the development of a vision, as well as a set of goals and objectives, for the OSMP. Respondents were asked to share their vision for the future of open spaces, as well as to identify any current barriers they experience to accessing or enjoying the open space system.

827 responses (640 complete, 192 partial) to the online survey were received.

Phase 1b

Online Survey

The purpose of the Phase 1b detailed survey was to provide an opportunity for County residents to share their feedback on open space experiences, priorities and preferences. The online survey allowed those who were unable to attend the community open houses an opportunity to share their feedback on their own time and at their own pace.

The survey consisted of four sections:

- **Section 1:** Open Space Experiences
- **Section 2:** Open Space Management Preferences
- **Section 3:** Priorities for Open Space Amenities
- **Section 4:** Open Space Priorities for Growth Areas

725 responses (515 complete, 210 partial) to the online survey were received.

Interactive map

The interactive mapping activity was hosted on Strathcona County's engagement platform, County Voice. The webpage provided information about the project, the County's four open space classifications, and invited participants to place a pin on the map representing a strength, challenge, or opportunity within Strathcona County's open space system.

The interactive mapping activity received a total of 133 pins from 63 unique respondents representing 34 challenges, 41 strengths, 58 opportunities.

Participants were invited to place pins representing the following themes on the map:



Drop this green pin on a location to tell us about a strength within Strathcona County's open space system.



Drop this orange pin on a location where you would like to share a challenge within Strathcona County's open space system.



Drop this blue pin on a location where you see an opportunity within Strathcona County's open space system.

Interested Party Workshop

Throughout Phase 1 of engagement on the Open Space Master Plan, interested parties representing community groups or sports organizations were invited to sign up for an e-newsletter to stay informed about opportunities for their group to share feedback with the Project Team.

An invitation to participate in the Interested Party Workshop was shared with all groups and organizations who were registered for the e-newsletter. The workshop was held virtually to enable participation across the County and shared information about the project and initial directions. Participants were asked to share their experiences, priorities and preferences for open spaces from the perspective of the group or organization they represent.

The workshop was attended by seven participants representing the following five organizations:

- Strathcona County Seniors Advisory Committee
- Strathcona County Pickleball Association
- Strathcona County Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Elk Island Public Schools
- Sherwood Park Minor Baseball

Community Open Houses

Two community open houses were held at different locations in Strathcona County to encourage residents from all areas of the County to attend and share their feedback. During the event, residents were invited to review a series of informational panels, speak to a member of the project team, and share their feedback at various stations.

The community open house held in Sherwood Park was attended by 30 residents and the event held in Ardrossan was attended by 10 residents.

What We Heard

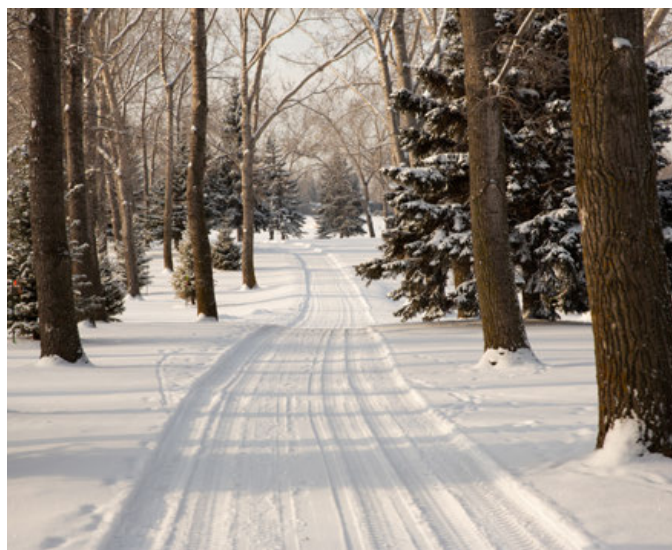
Key Takeaways

Throughout all engagement tactics in Phase 1a and Phase 1b, the following key themes and takeaways emerged.

Enhancing the System: Participants appreciate that the County's open space system is accessible, natural and connected, citing the extensive trail system and access to ecological spaces as a strength. In the future, participants wish to see these elements emphasized and enhanced to continue to build a strong open space system that meets the needs of current and future residents as the County grows.

Navigating Trade-Offs with Growth: Throughout engagement, participants mention the types of amenities and facilities they wish to see included in the open space system in the future. At the same time, participants do not wish to see natural parks and open spaces compromised by the inclusion of recreational amenities or by development as the County grows. Further discussions may be needed to address potential trade-offs between enhancing versus naturalizing the open space system.

All-Season Use: Participants indicated a high frequency of all-season open space visitation, with 65% of respondents saying that they visit open space often during the winter season. While winter open space visitation is already high, participants suggest amenities and operations that could enhance their use and enjoyment of open spaces year-round, including enhanced snow clearing on trails and pathways, fire pits, shelter, lighting, washrooms, skating, skiing, and tobogganing.



Phase 1a: Online Visioning Survey Results

This section details the results of the public visioning survey that took place during Phase 1a in summer 2024.

Vision

Participants were invited to share three words that describe their vision for the future of open spaces in the County. The word cloud below depicts the frequency of words, with large text indicating a more frequently suggested word.

Question #1: Share your vision for open spaces! Which three words would you use to describe your vision for the future of open spaces in the County?



Pickleball

The visioning survey was communicated widely to the community throughout the summer of 2024. It is worth noting that we heard a high level of feedback from pickleball enthusiasts, specifically Strathcona County Pickleball Association (SCPA), in this survey compared to interest in other sports and amenities.

Vision (continued)

Participants' vision for the future of open spaces in Strathcona County centres around accessibility and access to nature, with the words “natural,” “nature,” “trees,” and “green” being somewhat synonymous. Further, participants wish to see open spaces function as welcoming and safe community spaces, with words like “friendly,” “clean,” “safe,” and “inclusive.”

A draft vision statement will be generated using the community input, as well as insights from Strathcona County staff, and shared back to the public for feedback in Phase 2.

Themes

To understand Strathcona County residents' priorities for open spaces, survey respondents were asked, “When thinking about open spaces, which of the following themes is most important to you?”

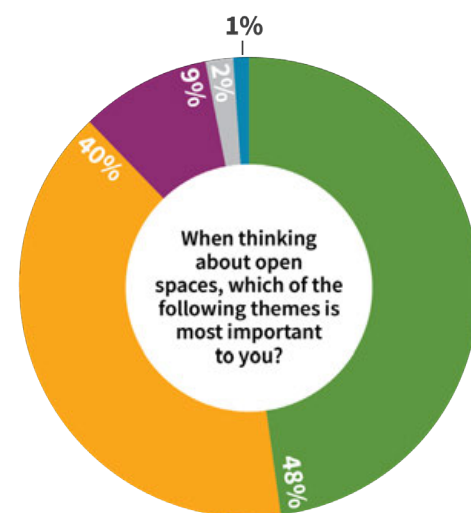
Nature was selected by 48% (310 respondents), followed by leisure and recreation at 40% (259 respondents). Community and heritage were selected by fewer survey respondents, with 8.5% and 1.1% of responses, respectively.

2% (14 respondents) selected “other,” with many open-ended comments including suggestions for specific amenities they wish to see in open spaces, such as dog parks, splashpads, pickleball courts, washrooms, and more. A few comments suggested a theme of open spaces as places for serenity, quiet and reflection.

Most frequent words:

- Accessible (106 responses)
- Natural (80 responses)
- Nature (73 responses)
- Trees (66 responses)
- Pickleball (62 responses)
- Green (57 responses)
- Trails (42 responses)
- Friendly / Clean (37 responses each)
- Safe / Inclusive (34 responses each)

Question#2: When thinking about open spaces, which of the following themes is most important to you?



Percentage of Participants (645 Respondents)



Methodology for Cross Tabulation Insights

Throughout the sections describing the results for Phase 1a and Phase 1b online surveys, cross tabulation insights are shared. Cross tabulation refers to comparing how different demographics answered a question versus total responses. As an example, the share of respondents who consider “nature” to be the most important theme may vary by age, gender, location and other identities. The results of these analyses are listed in green boxes (see example, page 12) to highlight comparisons across demographics.

Analysis was completed for demographic groups with 10 or more complete survey responses (see Survey Participant Demographics section, page 40, for more data). Insights are highlighted for responses where there is a 5% or greater difference from the overall response rate.

Example: 48% of respondents selected “nature” as the theme that is most important to them. When data is separated by age group, 56% of respondents between the age of 20-34 identified nature as their preferred theme (difference of 8%). As a result, people who are 20-34 years old are listed under the “more likely” column on page 12.

**These insights were not tested through statistical analyses (due to data limitations) and cannot be considered statistically valid.*

Themes Across Age, Gender, Identity and Location

Question #2: When thinking about open spaces, which of the following themes is most important to you?

Cross Tabulation Insight

For more information on how these findings were identified, refer to the section *Methodology for Cross Tabulation Insights* on page 11.

Nature

More likely

- 20-64 year olds
- People who are parents
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who were born outside of Canada

Less likely

- > 65 year olds
- Men
- People who live in rural hamlets

Leisure/Recreation

More likely

- > 50 year olds
- Men
- People who live in rural hamlets

Less likely

- 20-49 year olds
- People who are parents
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who live in rural areas

Community

More likely

- People who identified as having a disability

Less likely

- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who live in rural hamlets

Heritage

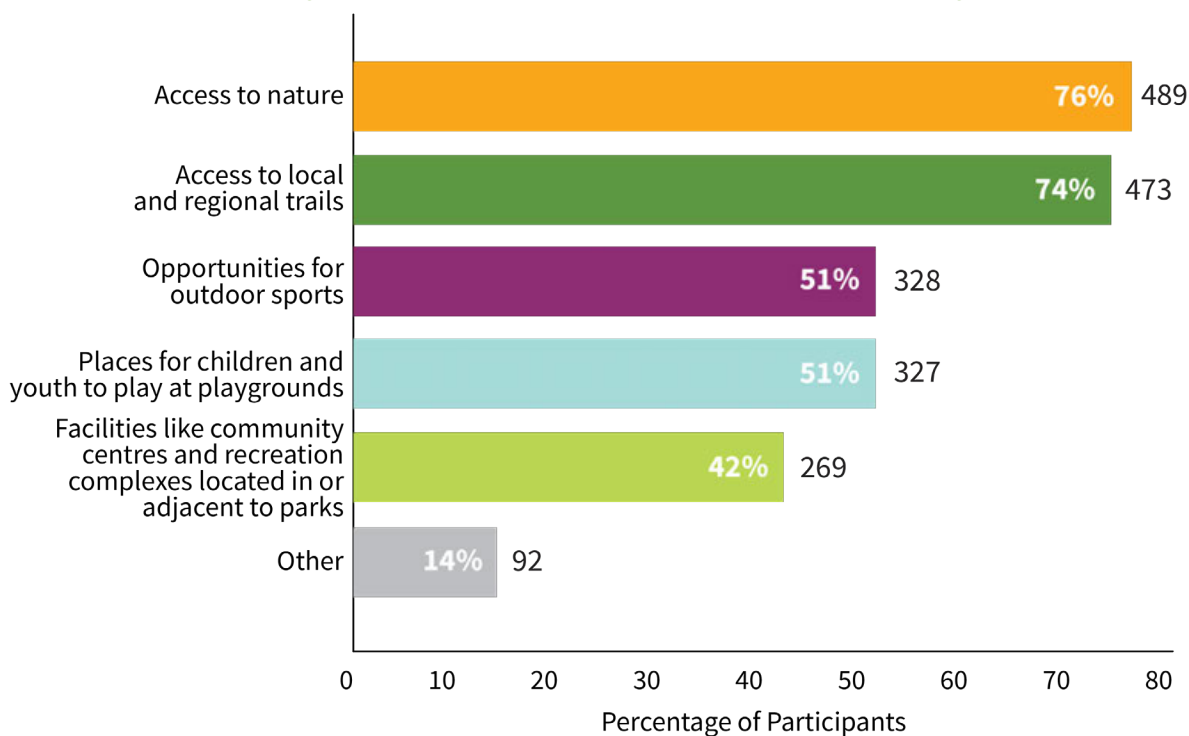
More likely

- People who live in rural areas

Existing Assets

Respondents were asked, “What do you appreciate about open spaces in the County?” This question helps to understand what amenities and facilities contribute to residents’ enjoyment and appreciation of open spaces in Strathcona County.

Question #3: What do you appreciate about open spaces in the County?



Survey respondents indicated that they most appreciate “access to nature” (76% of respondents) and “access to local and regional trails” (74% of respondents). “Opportunities for outdoor sports” and “places for children and youth to play at playgrounds” were both selected by more than half of respondents (51%). While “facilities like community centres and recreation complexes located in or adjacent to parks” was selected the least frequently, this still received a significant number of responses at 42%.

92 (14% of respondents) indicated that there was another element that they appreciate about open spaces in the County. While some comments focused on features and amenities they appreciate about open spaces in the County today, many others used this question as an opportunity to highlight gaps and needs.

Additional elements that survey respondents appreciate about Strathcona County's open spaces:

Community Gathering and Social Connection:

Respondents described their appreciation for spaces that encourage community gathering and social connection, such as community gardens, picnic areas, and spaces designed for programming and events, with adequate seating and shade to enable people to stay.

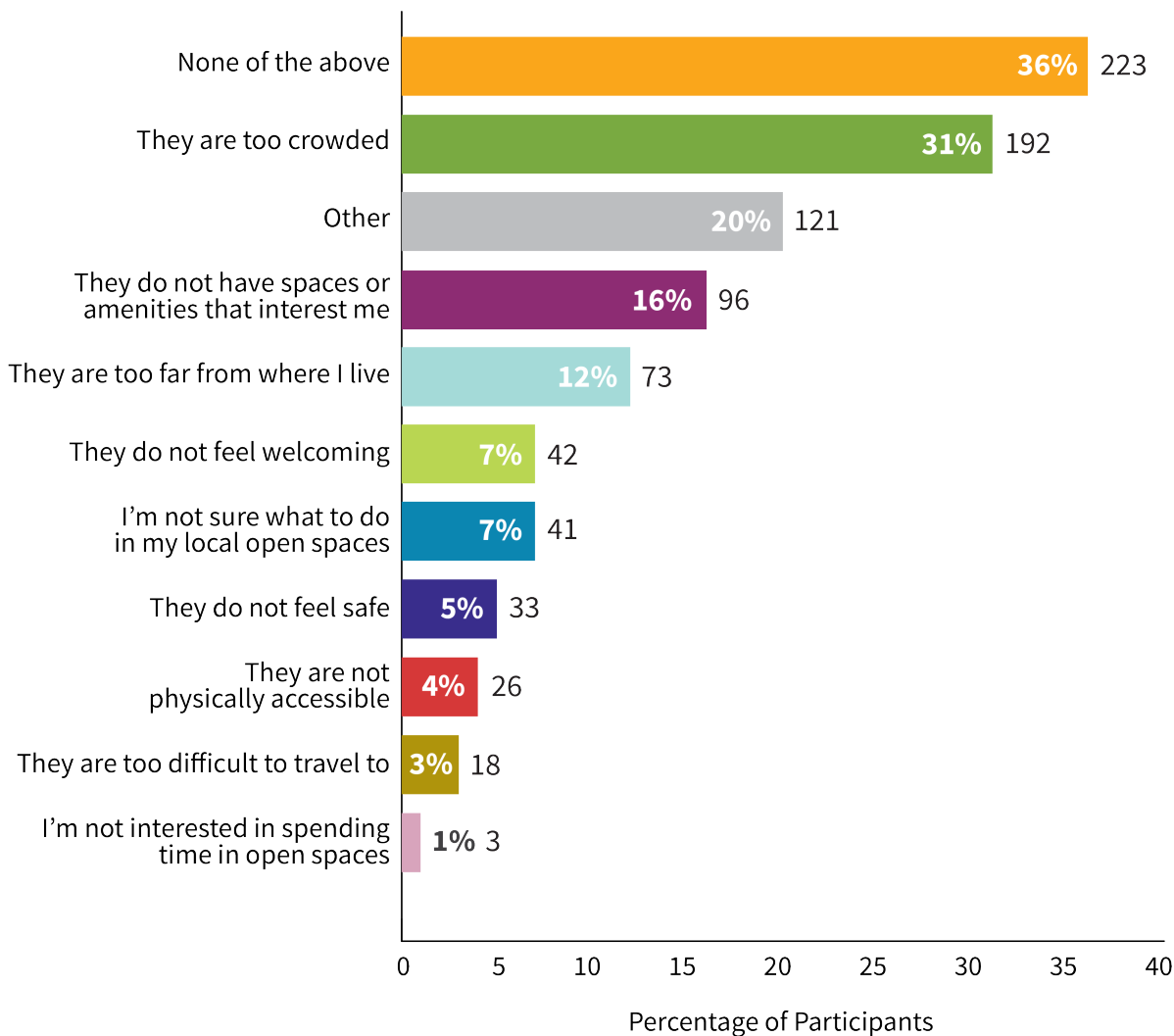
Access and Amenities: Several respondents described their appreciation of having access to open spaces, highlighting features like washrooms, beautiful scenery, trails, parking and parks that are walking distance from home.

Dog Off-Leash Areas: Respondents appreciate that there are dog off-leash areas in the County, and that open spaces are generally considered to be dog-friendly.

Barriers

Respondents were asked to identify barriers they experience when accessing open spaces. This information supports Strathcona County's understanding of how to improve open spaces and meet residents' desire to see them as safe, welcoming, and inclusive.

Question #4: Which of the following barriers do you experience (if any) when accessing open spaces?



Barriers (continued)

The most frequently selected response option was “none of the above,” indicating that 36% (223 respondents) do not feel they experience any barriers to accessing open spaces.

The three most common barriers to accessing open spaces in Strathcona County:

- They are too crowded (31% or 192 respondents)
- They do not have spaces or amenities that interest me (16% or 92 respondents)
- They are too far from where I live (12% or 73 respondents)

The remaining barriers representing issues such as safety, accessibility, travel barriers, and lack of awareness about “what to do” in open spaces were selected by a small number of respondents (7% of respondents or fewer).

The lower response rate for some barriers in this list does not necessarily mean that they are not challenges for respondents. In fact, many respondents leveraged the open-ended text boxes to elaborate on their experiences of barriers, many of which were included in the multiple choice options to this question.

In addition, a follow-up question was asked to those who identified themselves as experiencing a barrier, prompting them to elaborate on their experiences. A total of 433 comments were received between the follow-up question (313 respondents) and in response to the selection of “other” (120 respondents) in the question above. As such, these responses were analyzed in conjunction with each other.

Respondents elaborated on open space barriers by providing additional detail and context:

- **They are too difficult to travel to / They are too far from where I live:** Respondents indicated a desire for open spaces closer to home and highlighted their experience of having to travel long distances to access open spaces in the County. They describe a need for more parking, given that driving to open spaces is often required, as well as improved cycling and trail infrastructure to provide safe access to open spaces and to create a connected network between and within open spaces.
- **They do not feel welcoming:** Respondents shared thoughts of open spaces needing increased maintenance and upkeep, citing issues such as overgrown grass, weeds, and outdated playground equipment, which contribute to feelings that the space is not welcoming.
- **They do not feel safe:** Some respondents described elements of their open space experiences and the behaviours of others (e.g., drug use, unruly behaviour, people experiencing homelessness) that contribute to feelings of unsafety.

- **I'm not sure what to do in my local open spaces:** Respondents spoke about not knowing what open spaces are available or which activities might exist at open space destinations. Several respondents stated that they would like to have access to more or clearer information about the types of open space features and amenities that are available in the County.
- **They do not have spaces or amenities that interest me:** Respondents identified amenities that they wish to have improved access to, with most identifying an interest in additional pickleball facilities, and some requests for other amenities such as outdoor pools or event spaces.
- **They are not physically accessible:** Respondents pointed to the need for paved or compacted trails to accommodate seniors and people with mobility devices such as walkers and wheelchairs. Other respondents expanded on traditional concepts of physical accessibility to describe their frustrations about a lack of benches, picnic tables, shade, washrooms and water fountains as a barrier preventing them from accessing open spaces. The perceived lack of shade was framed as an accessibility issue for older adults, people with mobility challenges, and families with children.

"I'm not sure where they are or how to get there when it comes to some of the bigger ones like deer mound or the wilderness centre."

"It might be helpful to have a webpage that lists the open spaces and what activities you can do there."

"Which spots are great for nature lovers looking to spot birds and native plants? What about families wanting an easy walk with paved paths where they can push a stroller? What are the best areas with large clearings where a small fitness club could do outdoor yoga?"

"My mother has really bad arthritis and needs to take frequent breaks to sit, so she doesn't go to most open spaces because there is nowhere to sit if it is a trail."

"When walking with elderly or children, it helps to have more benches to stop for rests or shade from the heat."

Barriers Across Age, Gender, Identity and Location

Question #4: Which of the following barriers do you experience (if any) when accessing open spaces?

Cross Tabulation Insight

For more information on how these findings were identified, refer to the section *Methodology for Cross Tabulation Insights* on page 11.

They are too far from where I live

More likely

- 20-34 year olds
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who live in rural subdivisions

Less likely

- 50-64 year olds
- People who are dog owners

They are too crowded

More likely

- People who identified as having a disability
- People who live in rural hamlets

Less likely

- 20-34 year olds
- People who are parents
- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who live in rural areas

They don't have spaces or amenities that interest me

More likely

- 20-34 year olds

Less likely

- > 65 year olds
- Men
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who live in rural hamlets

Barriers Across Age, Gender, Identity and Location (continued)

Question #4: Which of the following barriers do you experience (if any) when accessing open spaces?

Cross Tabulation Insight

For more information on how these findings were identified, refer to the section *Methodology for Cross Tabulation Insights* on page 11.

They are too difficult to travel to

More likely

- People who identified as having a disability

They are not physically accessible

More likely

- People who identified as having a disability

Less likely

- People who live in rural subdivisions

They do not feel welcoming

More likely

- 20-34 year olds

Less likely

- People who live in rural subdivisions

They do not feel safe

More likely

- People who identified as having a disability

I'm not sure what to do in my local open spaces

More likely

- 20-34 year olds

Additional Comments

Respondents were asked if there was anything else they would like to share about their use of open spaces in Strathcona County. A total of 329 respondents often reiterated their thoughts expressed in other sections of the survey, including what they appreciate about open spaces and what types of amenities and features they would like to see more of in the County.

Opportunities for Recreation

Respondents emphasized the growing demand for recreational opportunities, highlighting a particular need for additional pickleball courts as the sport gains popularity, as well as features such as improved trail systems.

Ensuring Accessibility and Maintenance

Throughout responses, accessibility emerged as a key concern, with participants emphasizing the need for parks that are easily accessed by all residents, including those with mobility challenges. They also highlighted the importance of maintenance to keep open spaces clean and safe, as well as a need for more washrooms and shade in various open spaces.

Commitment to Nature and Preservation

Respondents stressed the desire to protect and enhance areas that support wildlife, connection to nature, and offer peaceful retreats from day-to-day life. Additionally, there were requests to plant native vegetation and ensure that existing natural spaces are protected from new development.

Wellness and Social Connection

The value of social gathering spaces within open spaces was highlighted, with respondents advocating for more community gardens, gathering spaces, and event spaces. Respondents suggested that features such as community gardens and fitness stations be integrated into parks to encourage social interaction and wellness of community members.

Spaces for Relaxation and Tranquility

Respondents expressed an appreciation for areas that allow for relaxation and emphasized the desire for quiet, natural spaces to enjoy solitude or peaceful reflection.

Phase 1b: Detailed Online Survey

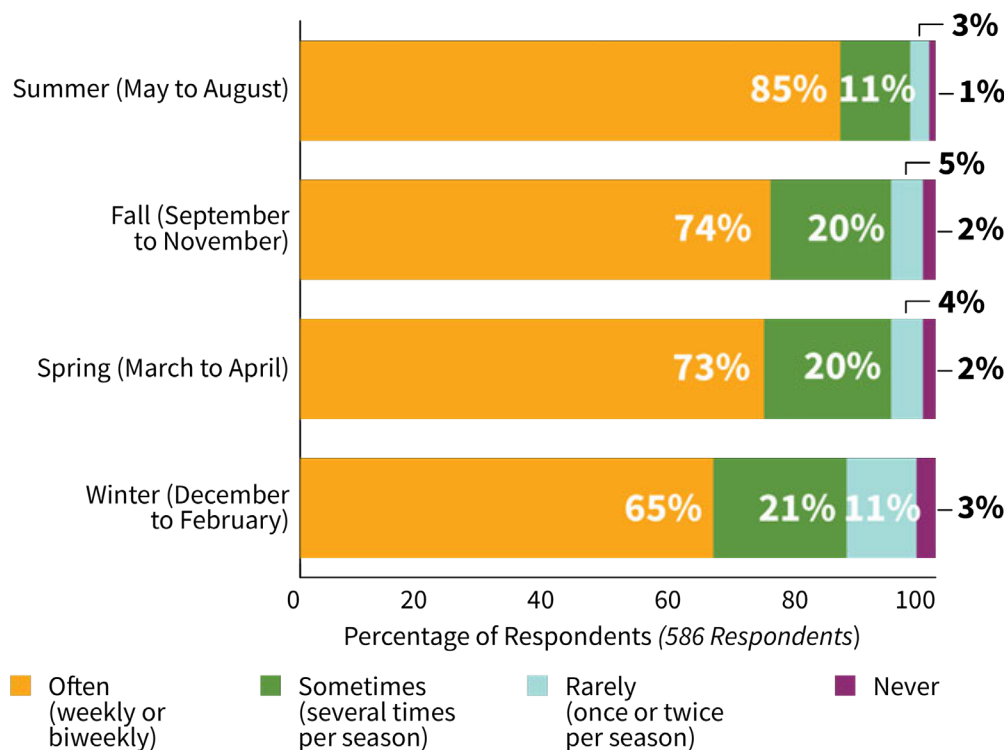
This section details the results of the detailed online survey that took place during Phase 1b in fall 2024.

Section 1: Open Space Experiences

In the first section of the survey, respondents were invited to respond to a series of questions about their open space use patterns and preferences, as well as to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Strathcona County’s open space system.

Respondents were asked to identify how frequently they visit open spaces during each season. This question provides insights into the types of all season amenities and activities that may be beneficial to provide in Strathcona County.

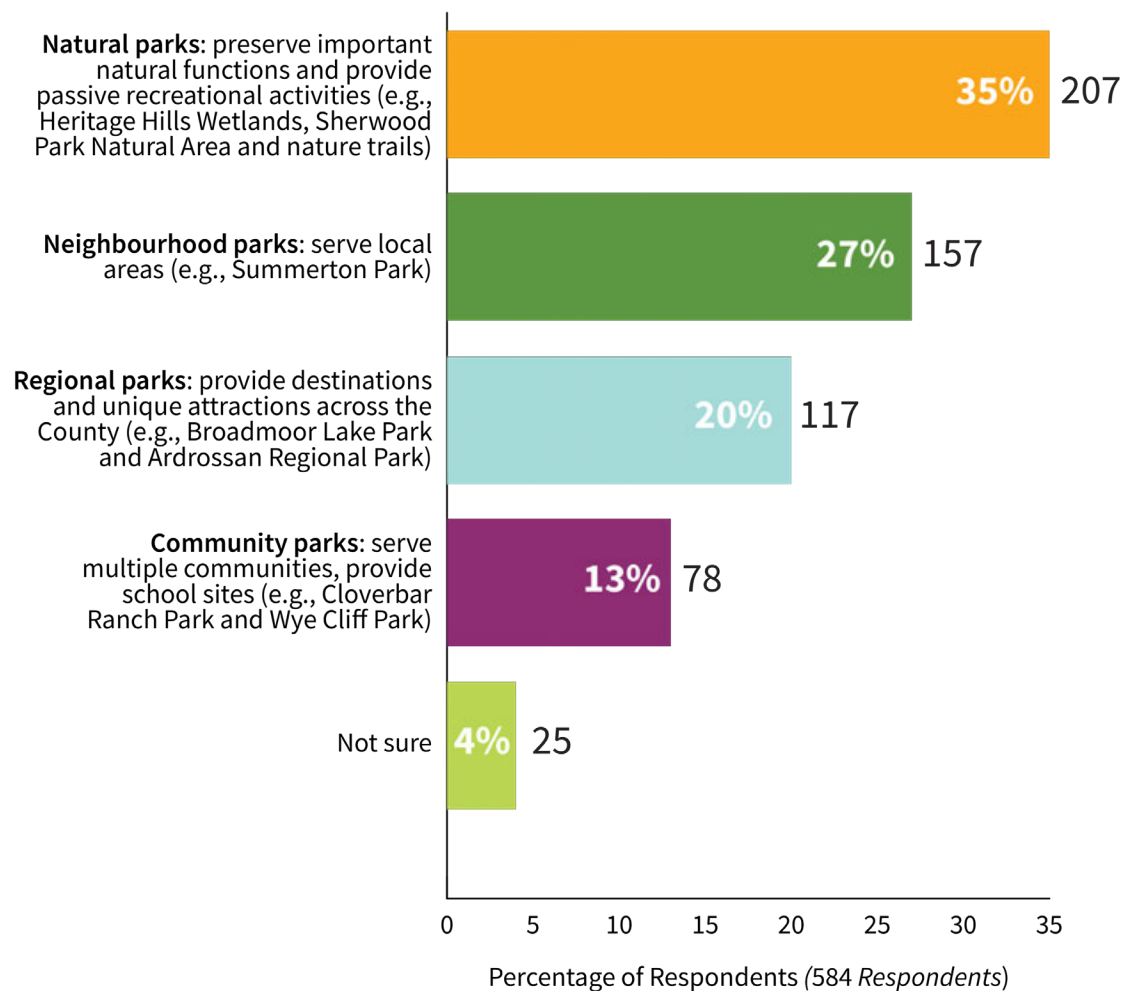
Question #1: On average, how often do you visit open spaces (e.g., parks, playgrounds, trails, etc.) in the County during each season?



65% of respondents indicated they visit open spaces often during the winter, suggesting that Strathcona County open spaces are well-used year-round.

85% of respondents indicated that they visit open spaces often during the summer, and were equally as likely to say they visit open spaces often during the spring and fall seasons (73% and 74%, respectively).

Question #2: The County offers a full range of parks and open spaces, as described below. Which type of open space do you visit most often?



To better understand preferred open space types and associated amenities, respondents were asked which park type they visit most often.

Respondents visit natural parks, such as Heritage Hills Wetlands and Sherwood Park Natural Area, most often (35% of responses). Neighbourhood parks, which are intended to serve local areas, are the second most visited at 27%.

Regional parks (20%) and community parks (13%) are less frequently visited. These park types are intended to serve multiple communities and the County-at large. The results to this question suggest that respondents tend to prefer natural open spaces, as well as park spaces closer to where they live.

Question #3: What are the strengths of the existing open space system? What elements of the system do you enjoy or appreciate?

Respondents (484 responses) described several strengths of the existing open space system, including the following themes and commonalities:

Connected: Respondents appreciate how well-connected the existing trail system is.

Close to home: Respondents enjoy having access to trails and open spaces close to where they live.

Well-maintained: Respondents consider the existing open space system to be maintained well, including reference to plenty of garbage cans, cleanliness and the County's efforts to address issues in a timely manner.

Natural: Respondents appreciate the naturalized spaces within the open space system, including the trails that enable access to natural areas and facilitate residents' connection to nature.

Accessible: Respondents describe how open spaces are easily accessible for all residents, with accessibility features that enable use by seniors and people with mobility challenges.

Question #4: What are the weaknesses of the existing open space system? What improvements could be made?

Respondents (443 responses) described weaknesses of the existing open space system, including the following themes and commonalities:

Comfort: Respondents would like to see additional amenities that enhance comfort and enable residents to stay in open spaces longer, including washrooms, shade structures, lighting and seating.

User conflict: Respondents describe interactions with other open space users that interfere with their enjoyment of the space, including cyclists or e-bikes on pathways, off-leash dogs outside of designated areas, and pet waste left behind on trails or in parks.

Maintenance: While the fact that parks are well-maintained were identified as a strength, some respondents identified elements of the open space system that would benefit from enhanced maintenance and upkeep.

Protection of Nature: Respondents request additional or enhanced protection of natural biodiversity and habitat, and express concern that these open spaces will be lost over time.

Enhanced connectivity and accessibility: Respondents highlighted the strengths of Strathcona County's open space system as generally well-connected and accessible; however, some respondents identified that there is still room to improve these elements.

Note on Accessibility

Throughout Phase 1a and Phase 1b of engagement, participants highlight varied perspectives on accessibility. In Phase 1a, participants were asked to share keywords to describe their vision for the future. The most common keyword shared was “accessible” (106 responses), suggesting their desire to see the County’s open space system become more accessible in the future. In Phase 1b, however, respondents highlight the fact that open spaces are “accessible” as a strength of the system. In several places throughout both surveys, participants describe the accessibility of the system and indicate a desire to see increased accessibility in the future.

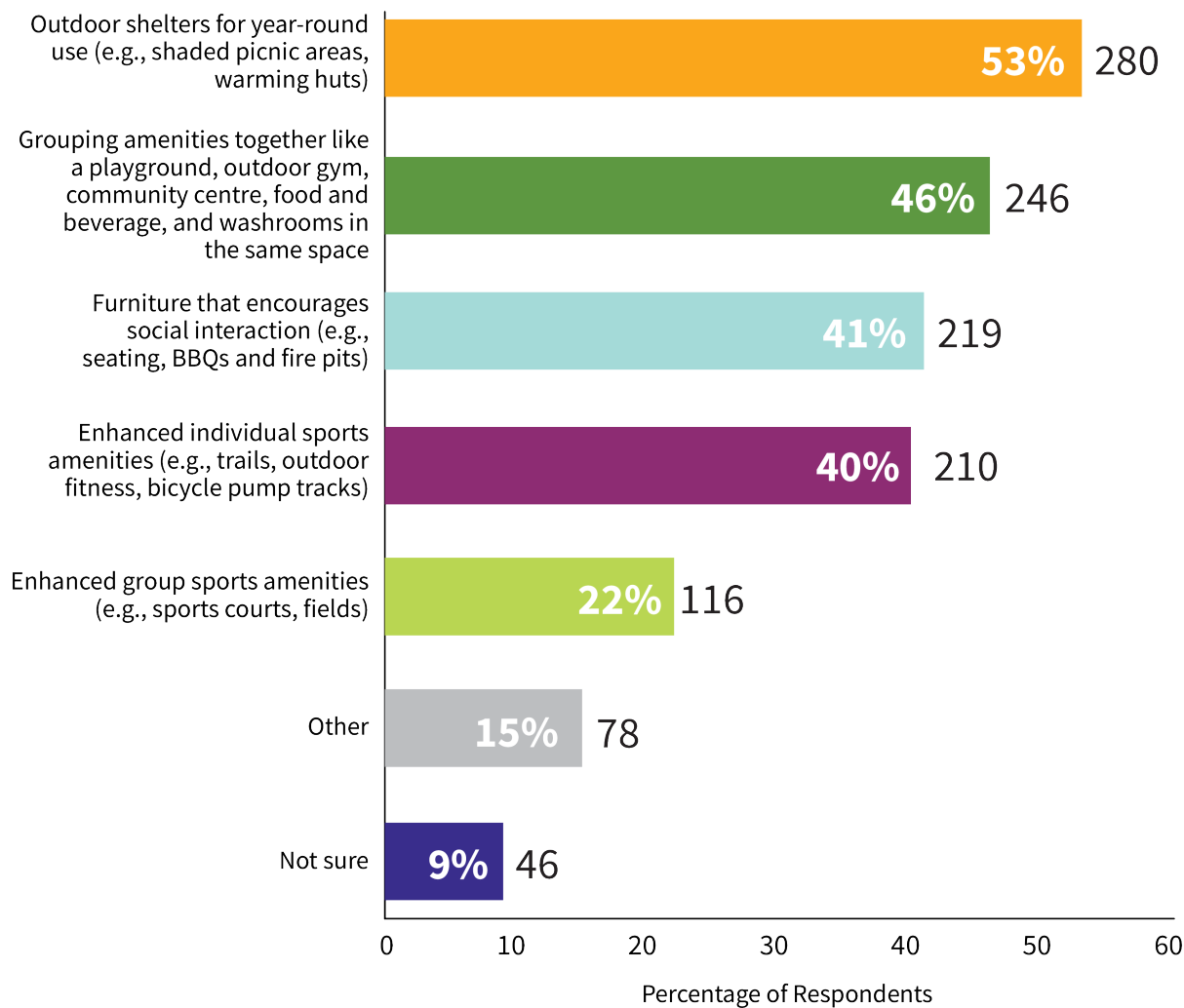
There may be different perspectives being shared, with some respondents referring to *physical accessibility* (e.g., paved trails, seating) and others referring to open spaces that are *easy to access*. Further, some participants who have indicated positive experiences related to open space accessibility may live closer to certain open spaces or have different personal experiences and accessibility requirements.



Section 2: Open Space Management Preferences

In this section of the survey, respondents were provided with a list of open space design, management, operations and partnership considerations, and asked to identify which they would like to see implemented in Strathcona County.

Question #5: Which of the following open space design considerations would you like to see implemented in Strathcona County?



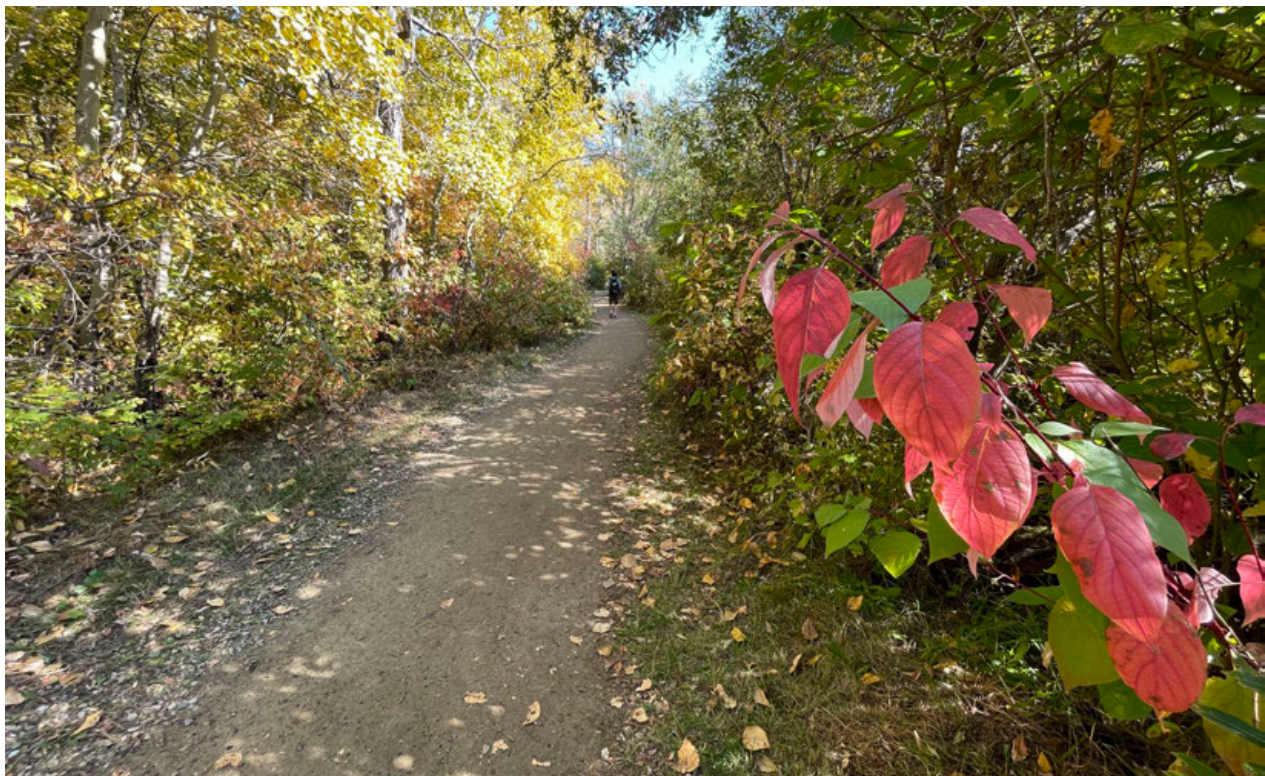
Respondents selected “outdoor shelters for year-round use” most frequently (53%), which includes amenities such as shaded picnic areas and warming huts. The response to this question aligns with the 65% of respondents in Question #1 who identified that they use open spaces often during the winter, and a continued need to provide amenities for all seasons.

Design considerations that group multiple amenities in the same open space, furniture that enables social interaction, and enhanced individual sport amenities were selected with similar frequency (46%, 41%, and 40%, respectively).

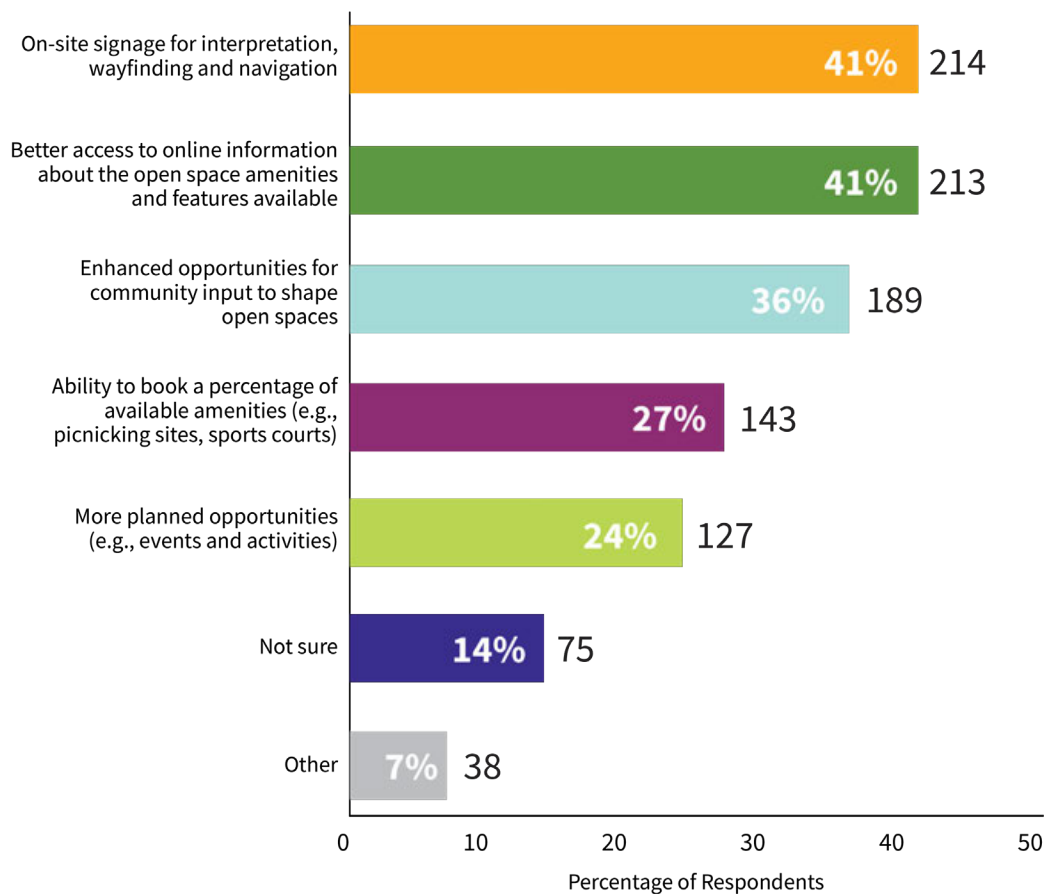
The least frequently selected response option is “enhanced group sport amenities” at 22%.

Respondents who selected “other” (78 respondents, 15% of responses) highlighted the following:

- **Nature:** Open spaces could be designed to include more trails through natural open spaces, and preservation of naturalized areas.
- **Dog off-leash areas:** Respondents describe a need for more dog off-leash areas to be included in the design of open spaces.
- **Comfort:** Respondents wish to see open space design include enhanced elements for user comfort, including washrooms, firepits (warming stations), shade, and seating.
- **Recreation:** There are several requests for additional recreation facilities and amenities, including pickleball, outdoor pools and spray parks, and disc golf.



Question #6: Which of the following open space management considerations would you like to see implemented in Strathcona County?



When asked about the types of open space management considerations they wish to see implemented, respondents identified a desire to have improved access to information about Strathcona County’s open space system, with 41% of respondents selecting “on-site signage” and “better access to online information.”

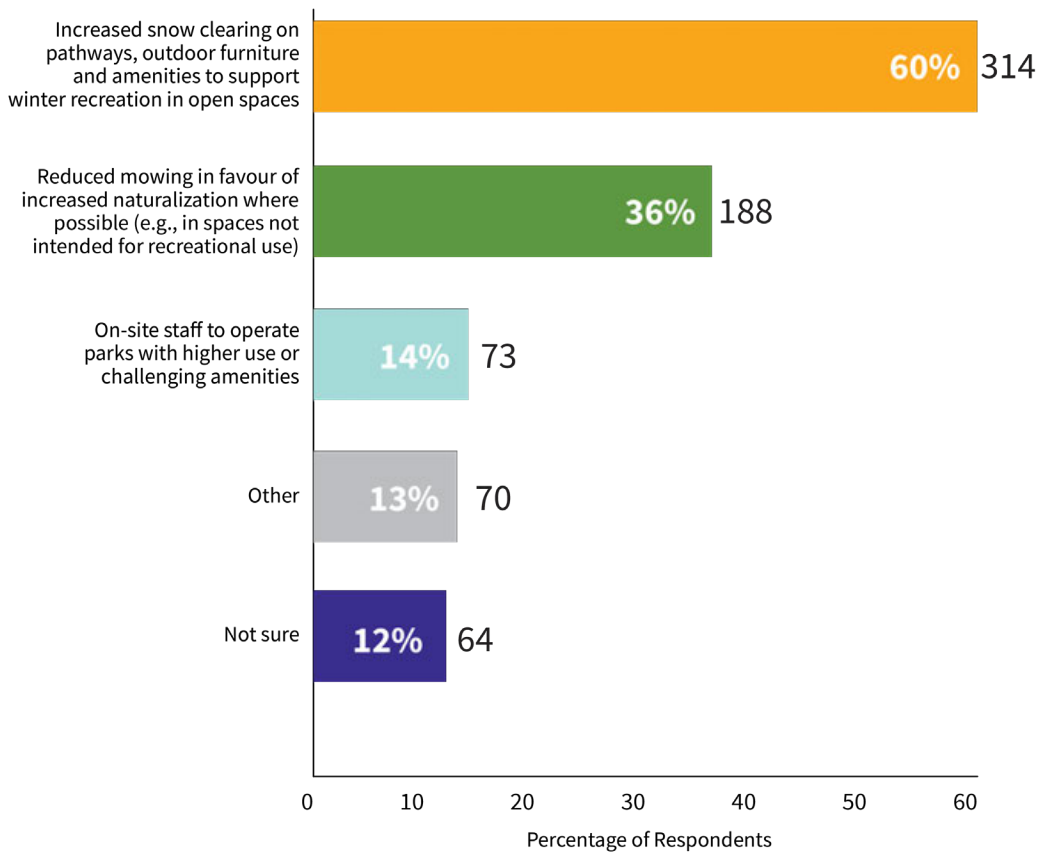
Additionally, 36% of respondents would like to see enhanced opportunities for community input to shape open spaces.

“Would be great to have residents be able to contribute to the strategy implementation of the local parks. Would allow residents to better connect and build community”

Respondents who selected “other” elaborated on many of the response options to add that they would like to see opportunities for collaboration (e.g., community-run events and programming), parameters set around amenity bookings, and enhanced information and signage about the open space system.

“With rebooking please limit number of times groups may book as prime times would be blocked booked and not available to all residents”

Question #7: Which of the following open space operations considerations would you like to see implemented in Strathcona County?



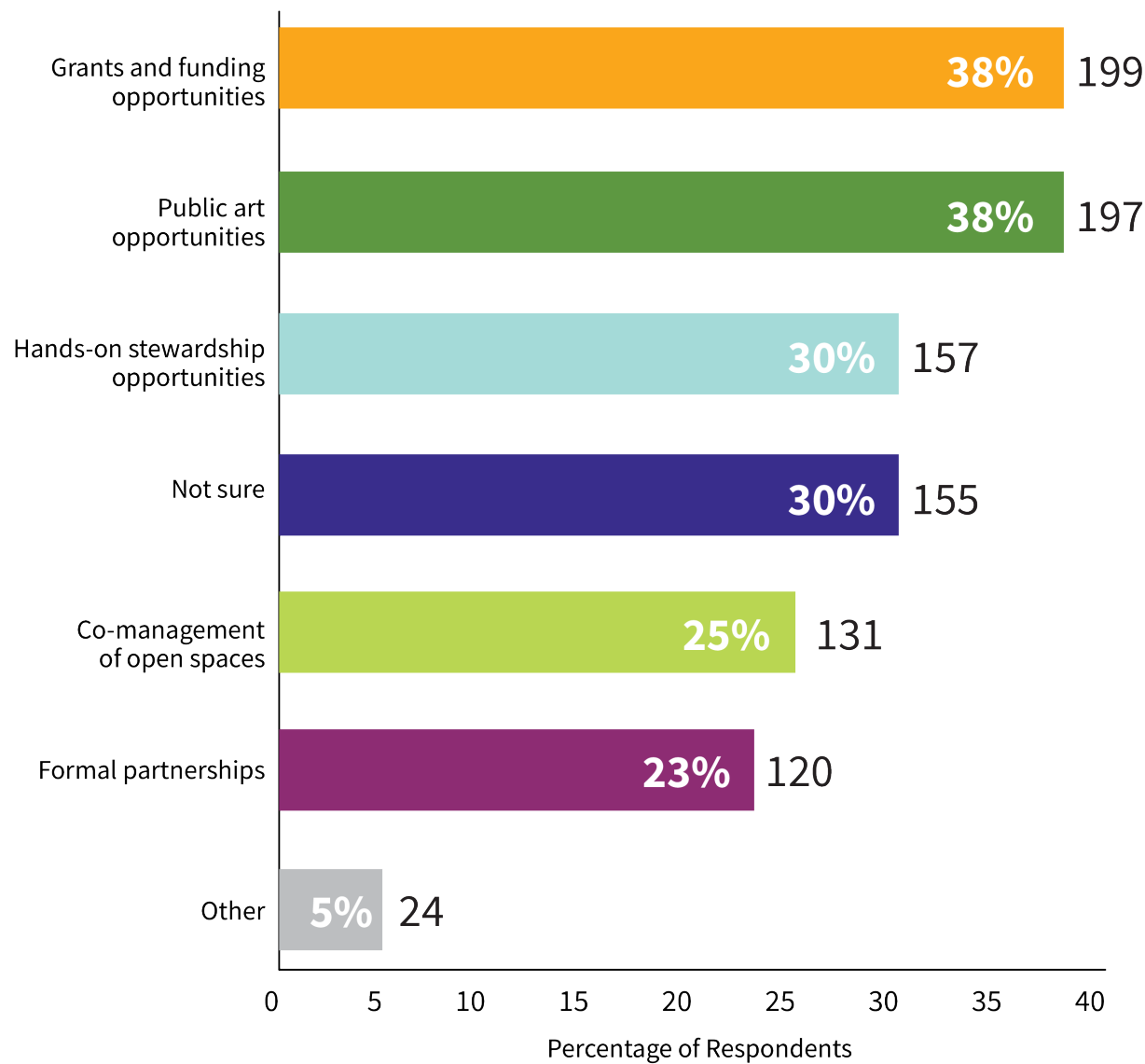
Respondents demonstrated a significant interest in increased snow clearing on pathways, outdoor furniture and amenities to support winter recreation in open spaces. This response was selected by 60% of respondents to this question.

36% of respondents said that they would be interested in seeing reduced mowing in favour of increased naturalization; however, in the open-ended responses to this question, some respondents indicated that they do not wish to see this approach. Respondents mention other nearby cities that have increased naturalization efforts (whether through reduced mowing or intentional plantings), and indicate that they do not feel it is aesthetically pleasing.

Similarly, while some respondents suggest that the County should reduce the amount of spraying of pesticides and insecticides, other respondents wish to see increased spraying of open spaces. There were several comments about the current approach to operations in the County, with respondents applauding the way that open spaces are maintained and indicated that they do not feel any changes are required.

A few respondents suggested ideas for increased staff involvement on-site, including guided tours, nature walks and support with orientation on trails to enhance safety and user experience; however, the response option for on-site staff to operate parks with higher use or challenging amenities was only selected by 14% of respondents (73 respondents).

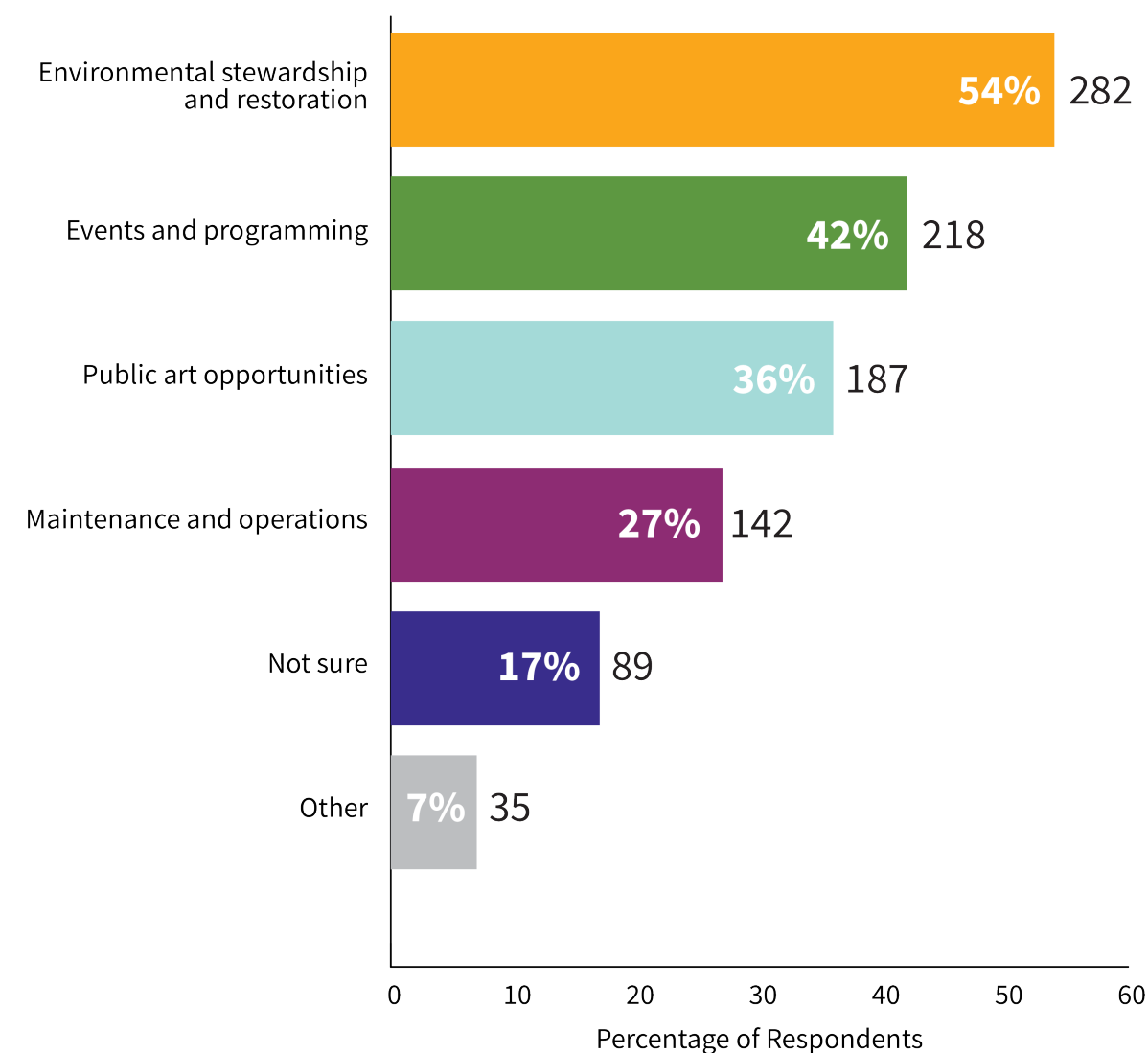
Question #8: Which of the following opportunities related to parks and open spaces do you think should be provided to businesses, community groups and organizations, and local residents?



38% of respondents are interested in grant and funding opportunities, as well as public art opportunities. Hands-on stewardship opportunities was selected by 30% of respondents.

Respondents were less likely to be interested in more official arrangements between the County and businesses, groups and residents, such as co-management of open spaces (25%) and formal partnerships (23%).

Question #9: Which elements of the open space system would you like to see businesses, community groups and organizations, and local residents more involved in?



While only 30% of respondents indicated an interest in hands on stewardship opportunities in Question #8, 54% of respondents would like to see businesses, community groups and organizations, as well as local residents more involved in environmental stewardship and restoration.

Respondents were least likely to be interested in seeing an increased involvement in maintenance and operations (27%).

Opportunities for Involvement Across Age, Gender, Identity and Location

Question #9: Which elements of the open space system would you like to see businesses, community groups and organizations, and local residents more involved in?

Cross Tabulation Insight

For more information on how these findings were identified, refer to the section *Methodology for Cross Tabulation Insights* on page 11.

Maintenance and Operations

More likely

- Men
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who are dog owners
- People who live in Ardrossan

Less likely

- People who are parents

Events and Programming

More likely

- 20-34 year olds
- People who are parents
- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who live in Ardrossan

Less likely

- > 65 year olds
- Men
- People who are dog owners
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who live in rural areas

Environmental Stewardship and Restoration

More likely

- 20-34 year olds
- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who live in Ardrossan

Public Art

More likely

- 20-49 year olds

Less likely

- > 65 year olds
- Men
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who live in Ardrossan or rural areas

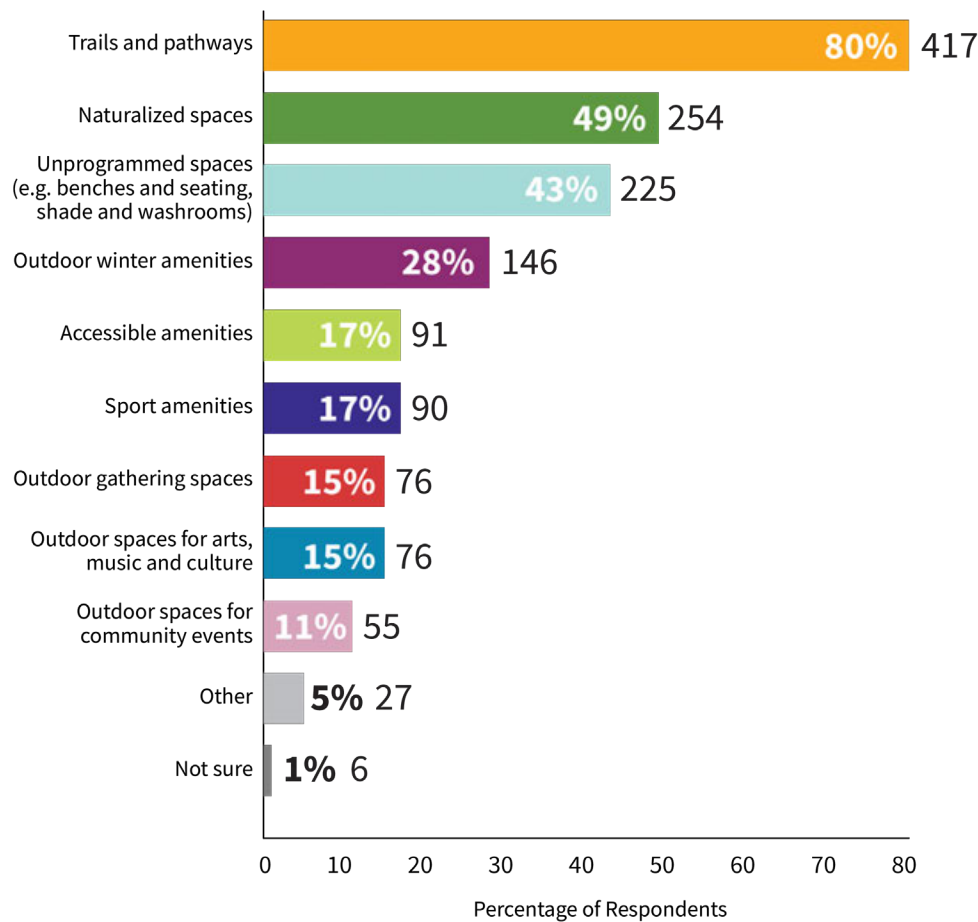
Question #10: Do you have any other comments or ideas for open space management, maintenance, operations and partnerships that you would like to share?

Respondents (191 responses) used this question as an opportunity to highlight specific concerns related to open spaces, such as the cell tower project at Deermound Off-Leash Dog Park and the Boys and Girls Club facility in Brentwood. Additional comments highlight a desire to see more community groups and residents involved in maintenance and programming, rather than businesses, as well as an interest in keeping costs to the County lower to prevent increased taxes.

Section 3: Priorities for Open Space Amenities

This section of the survey asked about respondents’ priorities for open space features and amenities, including alternative uses of roadside boulevards and medians.

Question #11: When thinking about the types of features and amenities located in parks and open spaces, which of the following should the County prioritize?



The top four responses to this question highlight key trends identified throughout this survey, as well as the visioning survey from Phase 1a. Many respondents wish to see trails and pathways prioritized throughout open spaces in the County (80%). Additionally, naturalized spaces (49%),

unprogrammed spaces (43%), and outdoor winter amenities (28%) are features and amenities that respondents would like to see the County prioritize.

Amenity Priorities Across Age, Gender, Identity and Location

Question #11: When thinking about the types of features and amenities located in parks and open spaces, which of the following should the County prioritize?

Cross Tabulation Insight

For more information on how these findings were identified, refer to the section *Methodology for Cross Tabulation Insights* on page 11.

Naturalized Spaces

More likely

- 20-34 year olds
- People who are dog owners
- People who live in rural areas

Less likely

- Men
- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who live in Ardrossan

Trails and Pathways

More likely

- People who are dog owners

Less likely

- Men
- People who are parents
- People who live in Ardrossan

Outdoor Winter Amenities

More likely

- 35-49 year olds
- People who live in Ardrossan

Less likely

- > 65 year olds
- People who are dog owners
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who live in Ardrossan

Outdoor Winter Amenities

More likely

- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who identified as having a disability

Less likely

- Men
- People who are parents

Amenity Priorities Across Age, Gender, Identity and Location (continued)

Question #11: When thinking about the types of features and amenities located in parks and open spaces, which of the following should the County prioritize?

Cross Tabulation Insight

For more information on how these findings were identified, refer to the section *Methodology for Cross Tabulation Insights* on page 11.

Sport Amenities

More likely

- 20-49 year olds
- Men
- People who are parents
- People who were born outside of Canada

Less likely

- 50-64 year olds
- People who are dog owners
- People who identified as having a disability

Outdoor Gathering Spaces

More likely

- People who identified as having a disability

Less likely

- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who live in Ardrossan

Unprogrammed Spaces

More likely

- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who identified as having a disability
- People who live in Ardrossan

Less likely

- 35-49 year olds
- Men

Outdoor Spaces for Community Events

More likely

- People who are parents
- People who were born outside of Canada
- People who live in Ardrossan

Less likely

- People who identified as having a disability
- People who live in rural areas

Outdoor Spaces for Arts, Music and Culture

More likely

- 20-34 year olds

Less likely

- People who identified as having a disability
- People who live in rural areas

Question #12: Strathcona County also has roadside boulevards and medians that contribute to the overall open space system. These spaces total nearly 80 hectares (or 6% of the open space system).

Which of the following uses would you prefer to see in boulevards and medians?

Survey participants were provided with information about roadside boulevards and medians, as these are a component of the open space system that are less frequently known to residents of the County.

When asked which uses they would prefer to see in these spaces, respondents indicated a preference to see naturalization (61%) of these spaces, in addition to a continuation of the existing approach, which usually consists of planting of grass and trees (49%).

Fewer respondents were interested in manicured gardens (26%) and public art (24%) on County roadside boulevards and medians.

Some respondents elaborated on their response to add the following sentiments:

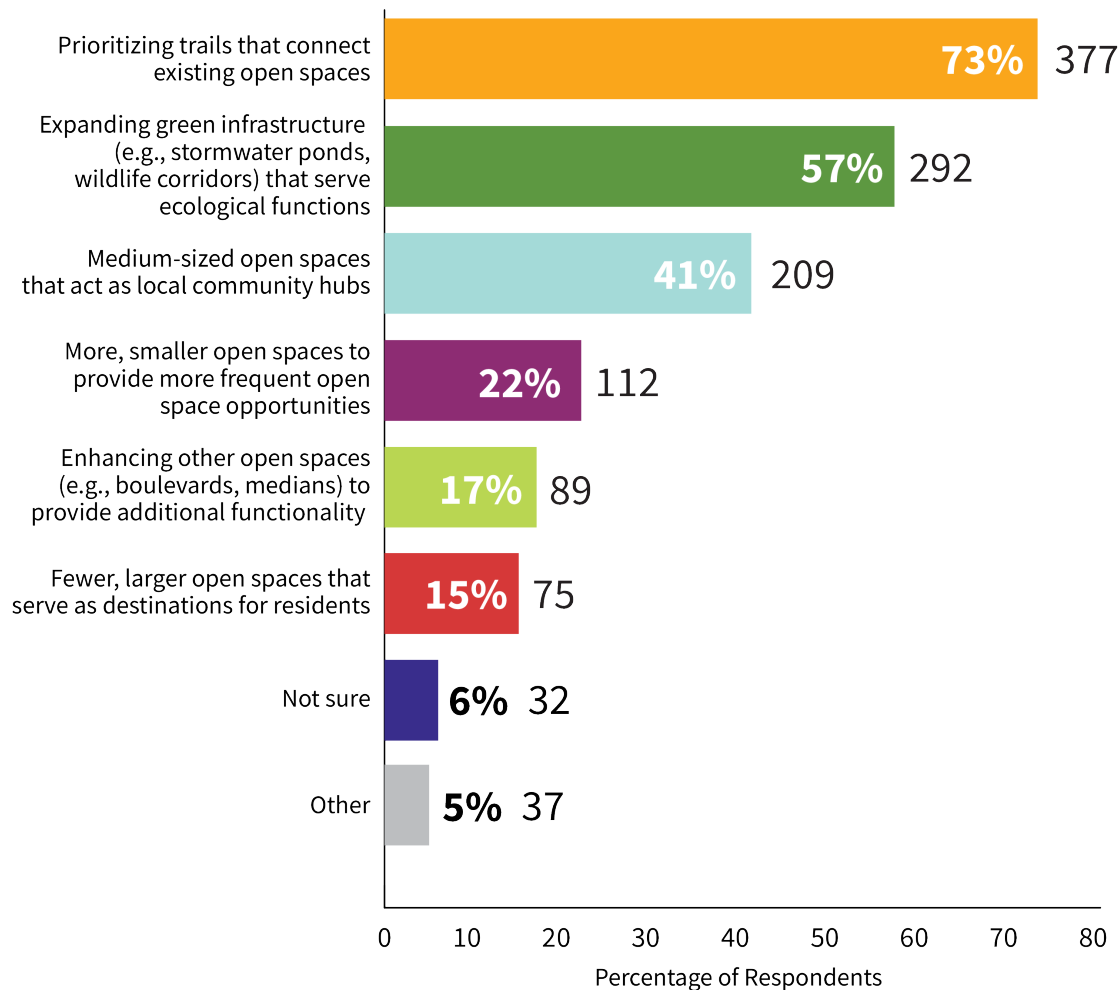
- Ensure that plantings do not interfere with visibility and safety
- Plant more trees within medians
- Consider community gardens and edible plants
- Keep the approach as low maintenance as possible

Section 4: Open Space Priorities for Growth Areas

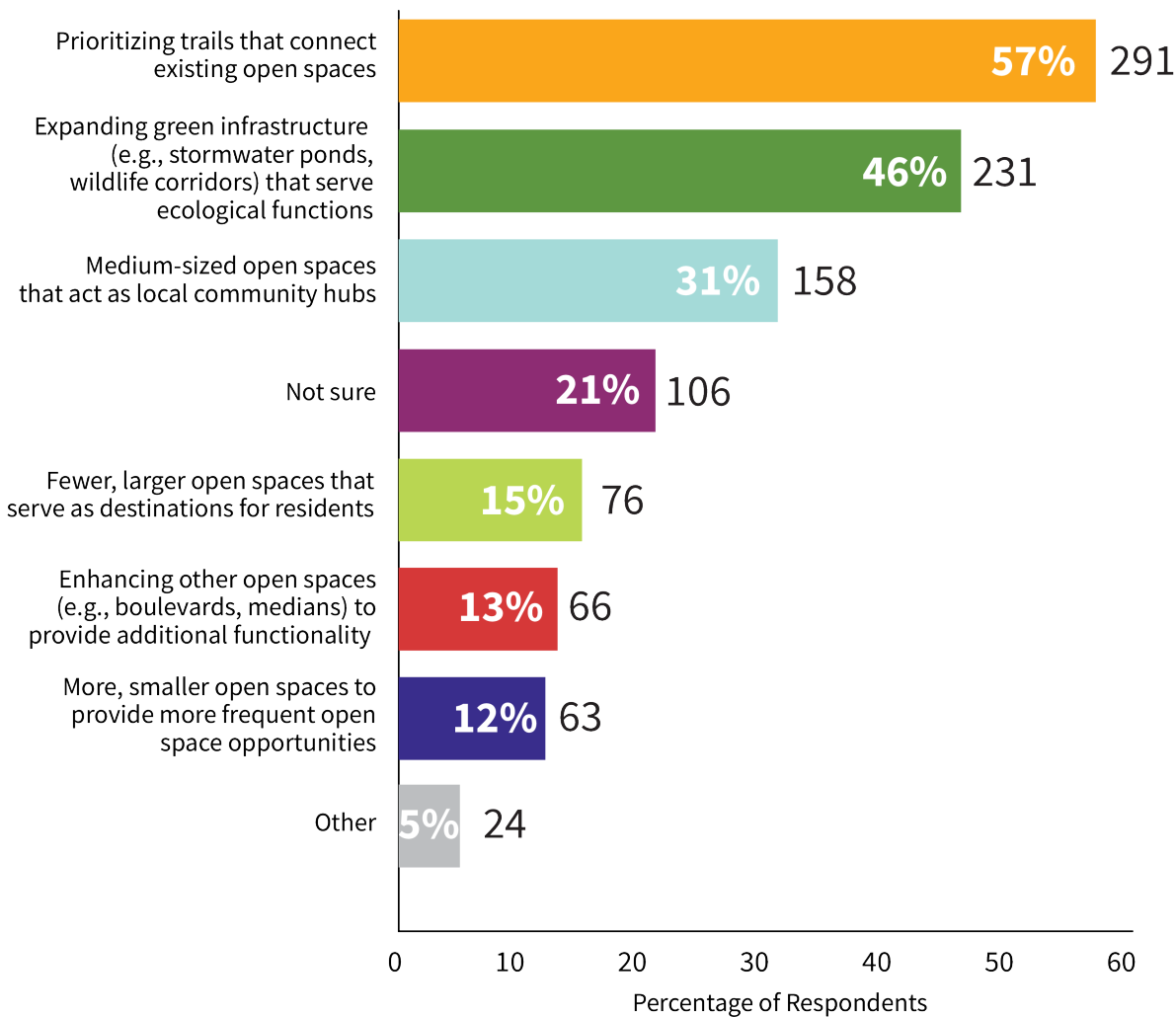
The final section of the survey asked for respondents’ feedback on how the open space system could be expanded or enhanced, particularly when considering new growth areas (e.g., Cambrian, Bremner) and existing hamlets and rural communities (e.g., Ardrossan, South Cooking Lake).

Similar to responses to other survey questions, respondents would like to see enhanced connectivity of existing open spaces through trail systems (73%), as well as expanded green infrastructure that serves ecological functions (57%). When thinking about park size, 41% of respondents said that “medium-sized open spaces that act as local community hubs” should be prioritized for open space development and enhancement in new growth areas.

Question #13: How should Strathcona County prioritize open space development and enhancement in new growth areas (e.g., Cambrian Crossing, Bremner, etc.)?



Question #14: How should Strathcona County prioritize open space development and enhancement in existing hamlets and rural communities (e.g., Ardrossan, South Cooking Lake, etc.)?



When thinking about existing hamlets and rural communities, respondents indicated similar preferences (i.e., prioritizing trails, green infrastructure and medium-sized open spaces); however, selected these options less frequently across the board.

Question #15: Is there anything else you would like us to know about your use of open spaces in the County or priorities for open spaces in growth areas?

Respondents (138 responses) were provided an opportunity to share any additional feedback, priorities or thoughts for the County's open space system in general or particular thoughts on open spaces in growth areas.

In this question, respondents highlight some frustrations they experience with specific open spaces in the County, and a desire to see open spaces protected and enhanced in the future. In particular, a few respondents highlighted the growth that is occurring in Strathcona County and request that natural areas are protected and plenty of open spaces are provided in new growth areas.

Other comments signify the importance of existing assets like the well-connected trail system and specific open space amenities and facilities. Respondents emphasize the importance of not losing these assets, but rather adding to them as the County grows and evolves.

Survey Participant Demographics

Survey participants were invited to answer optional demographic questions, providing information such as their location, age, gender, and other identities. This data was collected anonymously to offer the County valuable insights into the perspectives and priorities of diverse community groups.

The collection of demographic data serves multiple purposes:

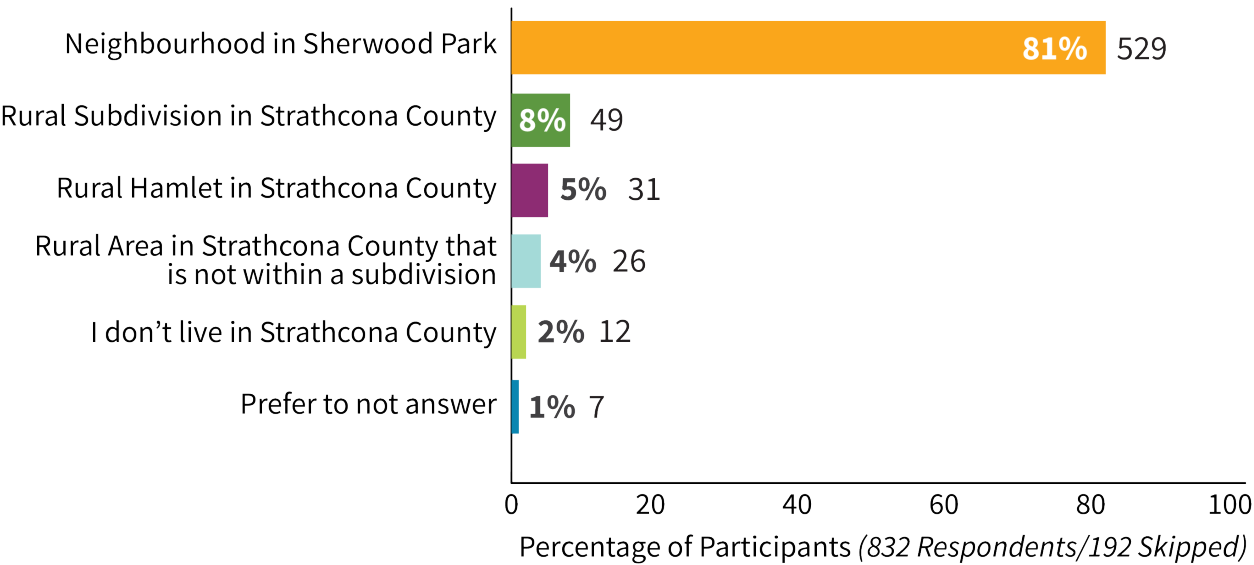
- It helps identify potential gaps in representation among survey respondents.
- It allows for analysis of how different groups within the community may have varying priorities or concerns.
- It supports the County's commitment to equity and inclusion in its planning processes.

By utilizing this anonymized demographic information, the County can ensure that its planning and decision-making processes are more representative and responsive to the diverse needs of all community members.

This data is used throughout the report to highlight where participants' lived experience result in different responses to survey questions.

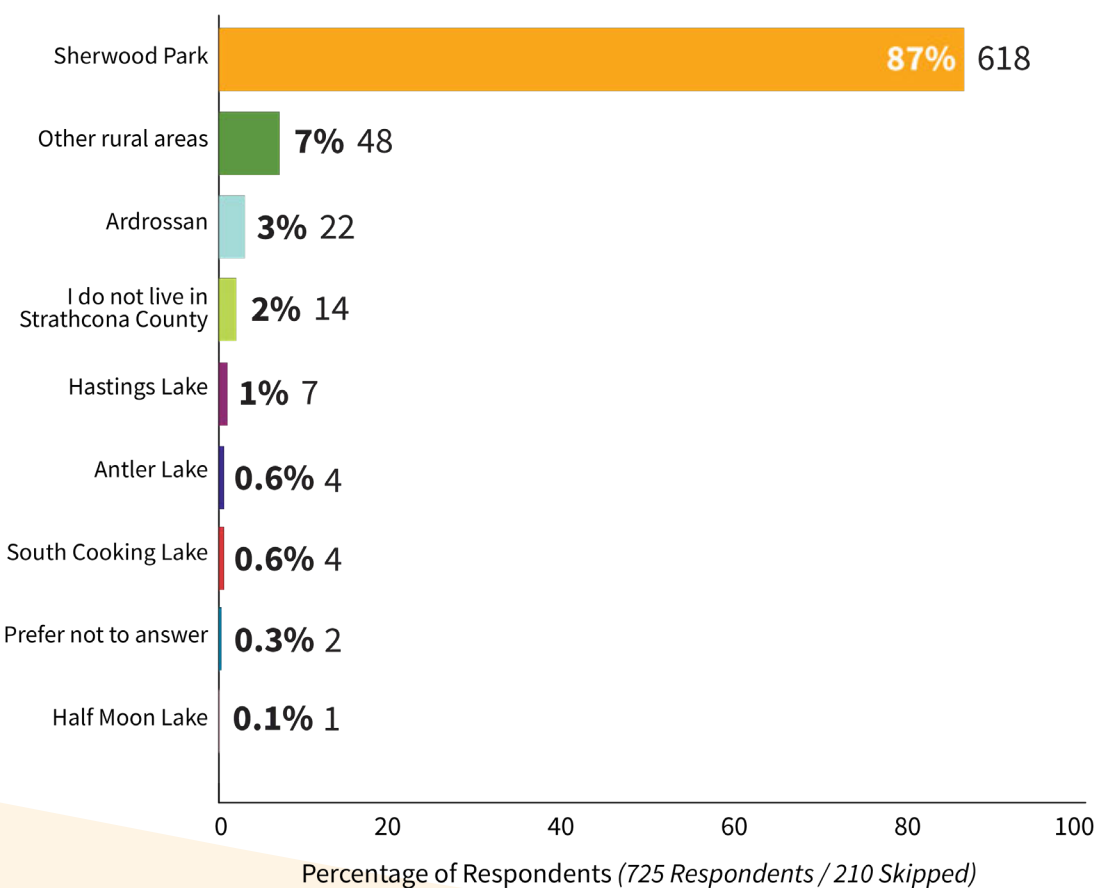
Phase 1a Online Visioning Survey

Where do you live? We ask this question so that we can better understand how different communities within the County experience open spaces.

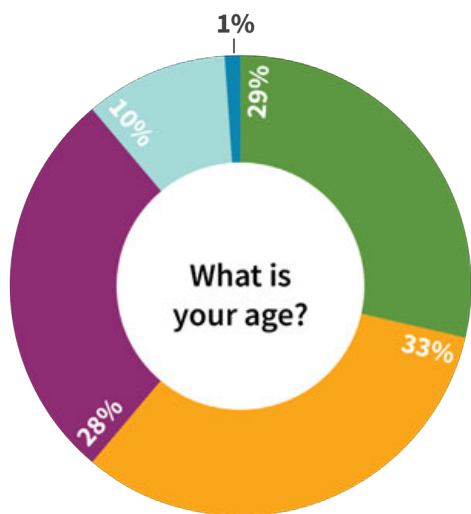


Phase 1b Detailed Online Survey

Where do you live? We ask this question so that we can better understand how different communities within the County experience open spaces.



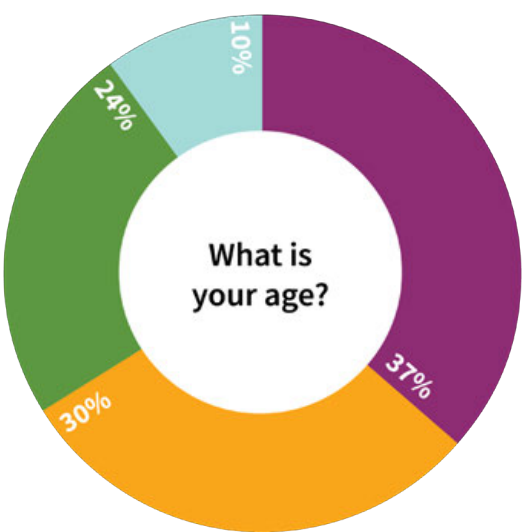
Phase 1a Online Visioning Survey



Percentage of Participants (635 Respondents)

- 19 years or younger
- 20-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-49 years old
- 50-64 years old
- 65+ years old

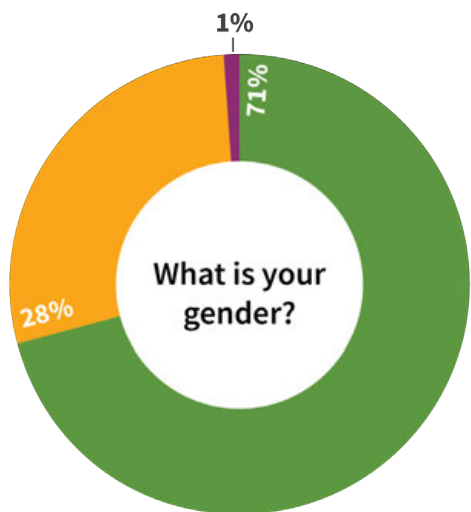
Phase 1b Detailed Online Survey



Percentage of Respondents (514 Respondents)

- 20-34 years old
- 35-49 years old
- 50-64 years old
- 65 years or older

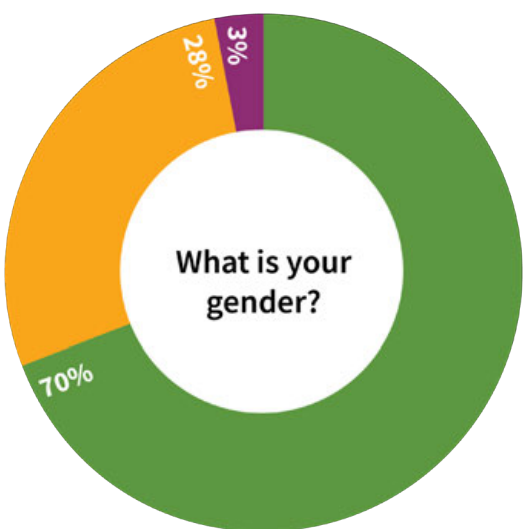
Phase 1a Online Visioning Survey



Percentage of Participants (633 Respondents)

- Female
- Male
- I prefer to self-identify

Phase 1b Detailed Online Survey

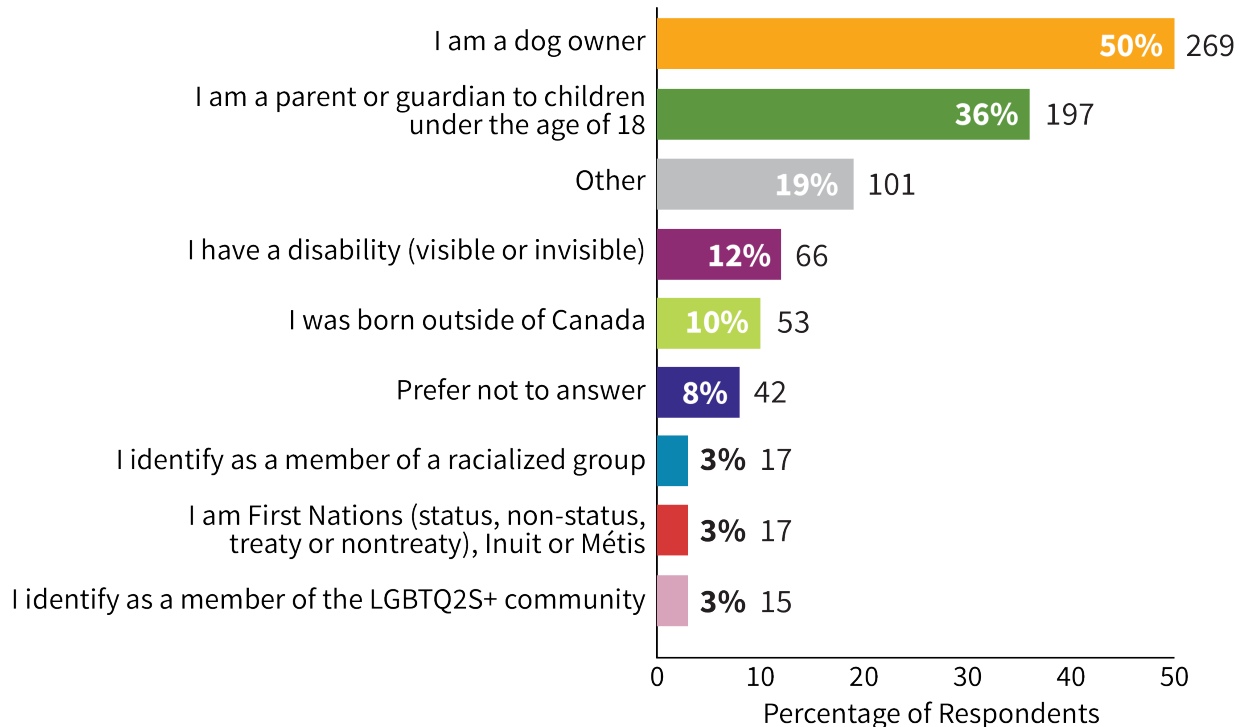


Percentage of Respondents (509 Respondents)

- Female
- Male
- I prefer to self-identify

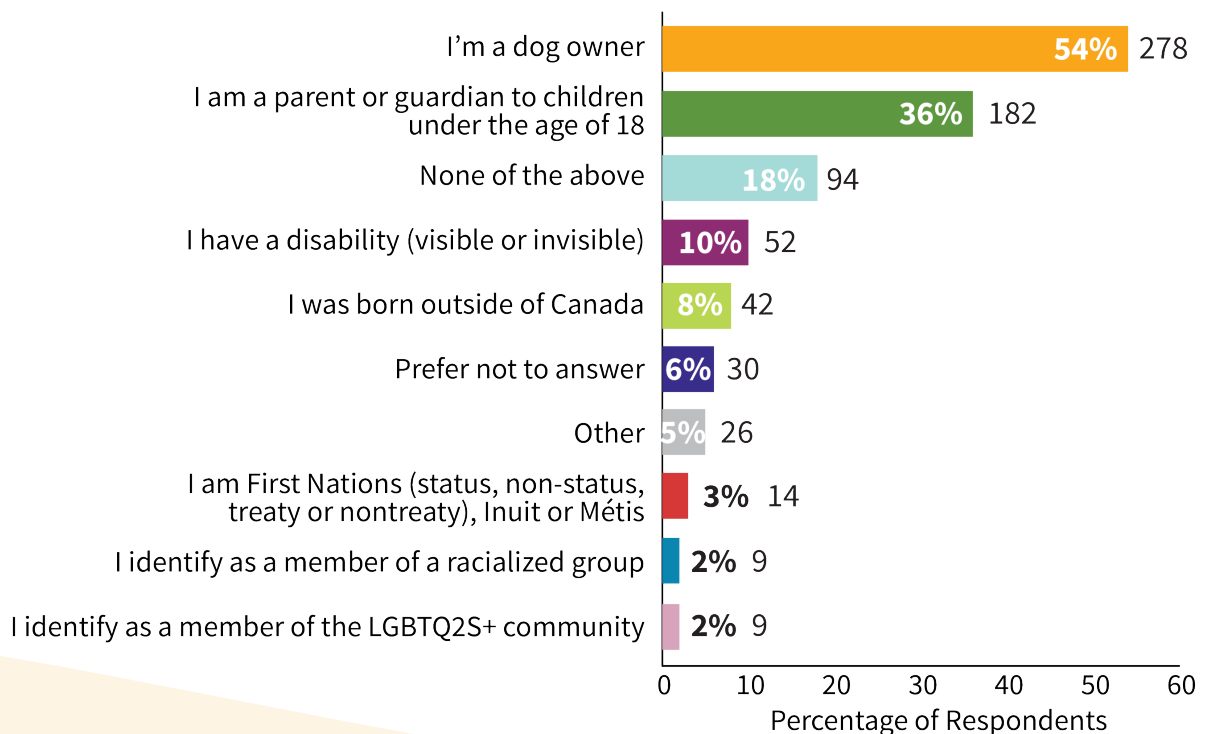
Phase 1a Online Visioning Survey

Which of the following are applicable to you? Please select all that apply.



Phase 1b Detailed Online Survey

Which of the following are applicable to you? Please select all that apply.



Interactive Mapping Activity

The interactive mapping activity, hosted on County Voice, received significant participation (a total of 133 pins, from 63 unique respondents), with respondents sharing their feedback on the strengths, challenges and opportunities for Strathcona County's open space system. **Figure A** shows the location of "pins" on the map across the County as a whole and **Figure B** shows the location of "pins" within Sherwood Park.



Engagement

- Strength
- Opportunity
- Challenge
- Municipal Parks - Other
- Municipal Boundary
- Major Roads
- Streams
- Waterbodies
- Other Jurisdictions Parks and Protected Areas

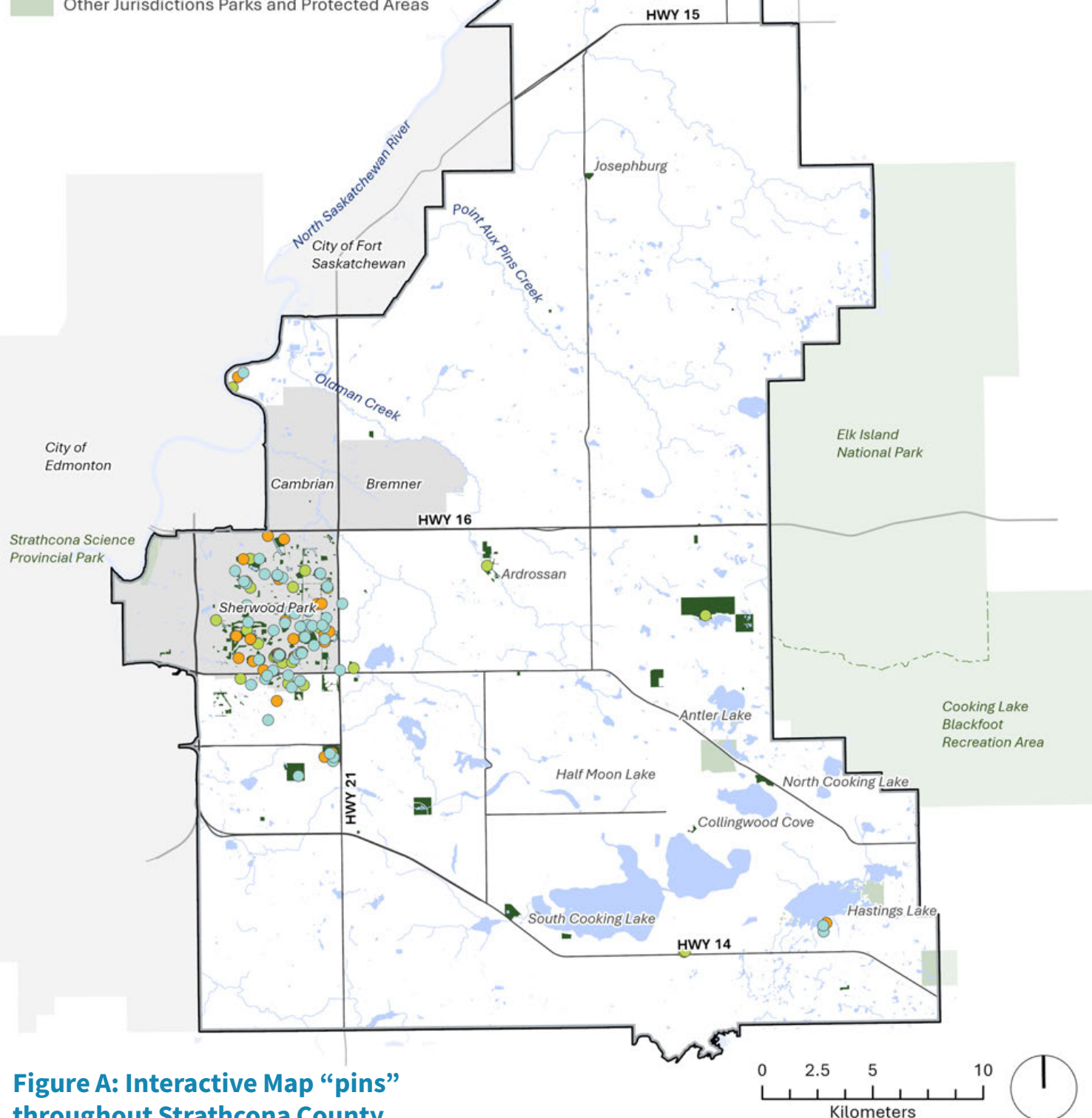


Figure A: Interactive Map “pins” throughout Strathcona County

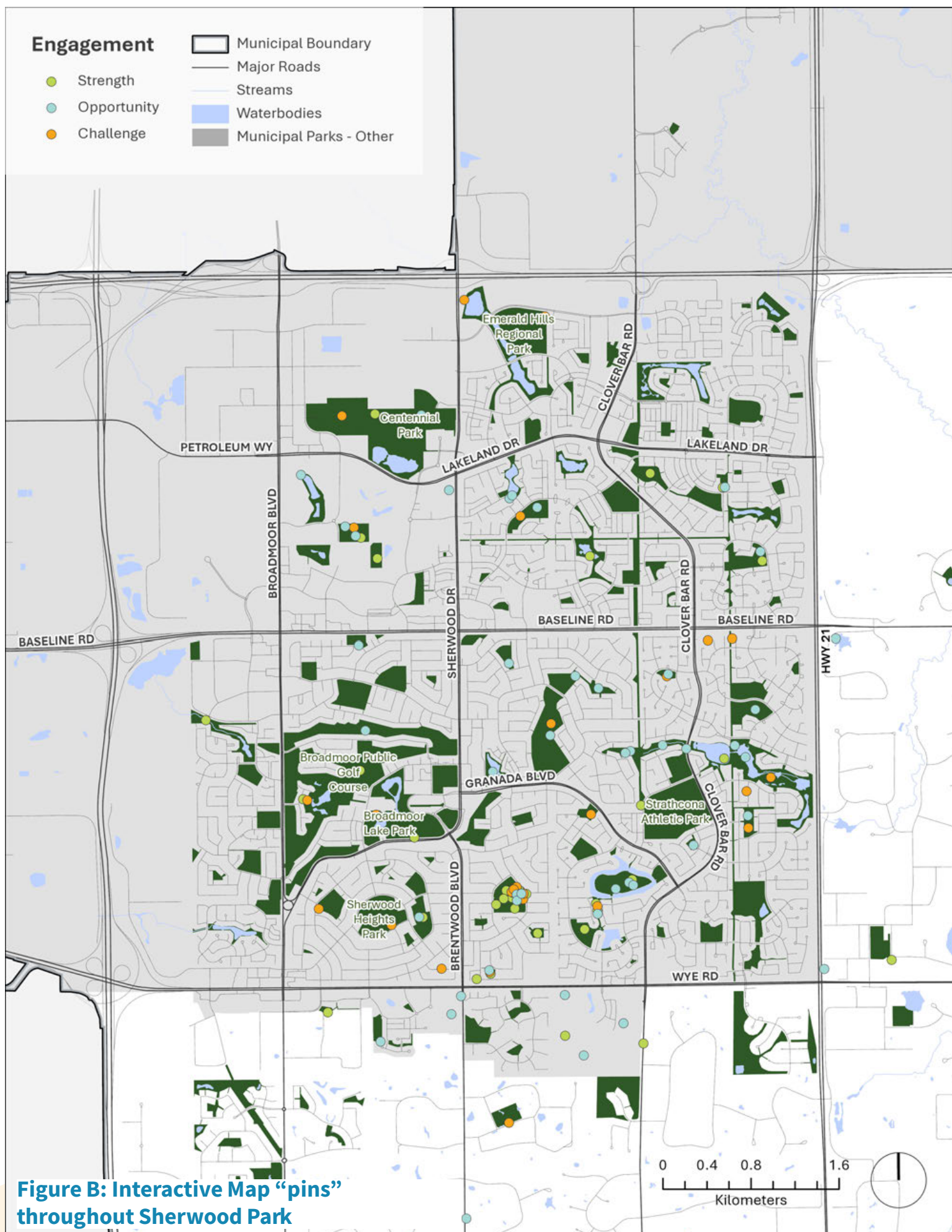


Figure B: Interactive Map “pins” throughout Sherwood Park

The following summarizes the strengths, challenges and opportunities shared by respondents on the interactive mapping activity.

Open spaces that received three or more pins (regardless of pin type) include:

Brentwood Park / Brentwood Elementary School (24)

- » Participants admire the natural habitat that exists on this property, and describe experiences spending time and seeing protected species throughout the space.
- » There is concern about the addition of a Boys and Girls Club to this site that would result in the removal of trees and increase in traffic to the area.

Deermound Dog Off Leash Park (7)

- » Park is beloved by many participants, especially the trails
- » Participants wish to see the proposed cell tower relocated to another area of the park
- » There are requests to add a boardwalk or other solution for muddy areas of the park that form after heavy rains

Ball Lake Island Park (4)

- » There are requests for day use amenities such as picnic areas, shade structures, fire pits, BBQ areas, etc.
- » One concern was that the gravel trail is difficult to walk on, so people tend to walk on the grass instead. They request that this section of the trail be paved to support accessibility.

Ball Lake Stream (4)

- » Appreciated by participants for its natural beauty and connection to nature

Concerns were raised about erosion and loss of trees that could be replaced.

Sally Stewart Dog Off Leash Park (4)

- » Participants think the off-leash dog park is great, yet identify a few opportunities for improvement: road connection from Broadview Drive and consideration of alternating access to the space(s) to allow the grass to recover (decreasing muddiness).

Broadmoor Public Golf Course (3)

- » Participants appreciate being able to walk around the course in the off season; however, one participant indicated that there are too many off leash dogs, which is leading to user conflict.

Heritage Hills Wetland (3)

- » Considered to be a “County gem” with access to trails and natural beauty.
- » One concern is raised about the wetlands being constricted by vegetation, which may need some maintenance to prevent further issues.

Centennial Park / Millenium Place Athletic Park (3)

- » There is a request for a washroom facility to support attendance at games and tournaments.
- » Participants identify that there is some damage to natural areas (i.e., erosion from off-trail use) and that mature trees are dying and need to be replanted.

Mcghan Park (3)

- » This park is identified as a well-used community hub that brings people together in all seasons due to the ice rink, basketball court and toboggan hill.
- » Two requests were made for a pickleball court at this location.

While most pins were placed within Sherwood Park, a few pins were placed in areas such as South Cooking Lake, Hastings Lake, and Ardrossan. There is not enough data provided in these areas to understand trends or themes; however, some participants highlight open spaces (and particular features and amenities) that they appreciate and use often as a strength of the system, while others identify some specific challenges or experiences they have had at specific open spaces in Strathcona County.

Interested Parties Workshop

The interested parties workshop provided an opportunity for representatives of community groups and sports organizations to learn more about the Open Space Master Plan (OSMP). The workshop was attended by seven participants representing the following five organizations:

- Strathcona County Seniors Advisory Committee
- Strathcona County Pickleball Association
- Strathcona County Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Elk Island Public Schools
- Sherwood Park Minor Baseball

Following a presentation by the Project Team, participants were provided an opportunity to ask questions about the OSMP and progress to-date.

The Project Team then facilitated a discussion with participants to better understand their experiences and aspirations related to County open space, and how Strathcona County and interested parties can better collaborate in the future. The following summarizes participants' discussion during this portion of the workshop.

Discussion Question #1: How might Strathcona County improve infrastructure within outdoor open spaces to support your organizations' activities? Consider elements like connecting trails to outdoor amenities, improved play surfaces, lighting, spectator shade and seating.

Accessibility:

- » Consider and prioritize accessibility, including design considerations.
- » Design picnic tables and seating areas with accessibility in mind.

Pickleball:

- » Demand for pickleball is growing, including youth participation.
- » There is increasing demand for organized play.
- » Strathcona County Pickleball Association would like to see additional facilities, with a preference for one central location in Sherwood Park. They note that people would be willing to drive to access facilities if located outside of Sherwood Park.
- » Key elements required would be access to parking, spectator seating, and a location that is not in a residential area.

Baseball:

- » Baseball season is becoming longer, which comes with a need for more lighting in the fall.
- » Turf fields would be ideal to play on in the spring due to rain.
- » Emerald Hills diamonds require some shale work.
- » Enhanced amenities would help support sport tourism growth.

Wayfinding:

- » Open spaces would benefit from trail wayfinding and information on components like length and location of seating.

School Sites:

- » Consider safe routes to schools through trail systems.
- » On school sites, ensure there is adequate open space size to accommodate desired uses.

Events and Programming

- » There is a trend towards open air concerts, consider providing amphitheatres to support this use.

Open Space and Park Types

- » Prioritize functional spaces.
- » Uncertainty around whether pocket parks provide quality open space.

Discussion Question #2: How do you envision Strathcona County working with your organization to support utilization of open spaces? Consider opportunities like formal partnerships, grants and promotion.

Strathcona County Pickleball Association:

- » Interested in formal partnerships and the ability to apply for grants in partnership with the County.
- » They envision maintenance of facilities to continue to be completed by the County, but believe there is a potential for a lease agreement for the Association to support minor maintenance.

Accessibility Advisory Committee:

- » Would like to see universal design principles incorporated in County open spaces, including shelters, trails and washrooms.
- » Application of universal design principles could be considered on a case-by-case basis with trails.

School Board:

- » Open to continuing to work with the County as they already do through joint use agreements.
- » Request that the County engages the school board early and often. They are open to more frequent conversations with the planning department and suggest that the County sends information to the school board, and representatives can decide their level of involvement based on relevance and interest.

Discussion Question #3: Could community groups, organizations, and local residents play a larger role in supporting Strathcona County's open spaces? What opportunities do you see?

Maintenance:

- » Residents are likely interested in supporting maintenance (e.g., maintaining shrubbery, gardening, invasive species removal), but would need clear parameters from the County on what's allowed.

Community Open Houses

Community open houses hosted in Phase 1b provided an opportunity for residents to learn more about the OSMP, speak to a member of the Project Team and share their experiences, priorities and preferences related to the open space system. The community open house held in Sherwood Park was attended by 30 residents and the event held in Ardrossan was attended by 10 residents.

Open Space Amenities

Participants were invited to “vote” on which types of open space features and amenities they feel the County should prioritize.

Between the two community open houses, the following responses were received:

- 10 votes – trails and pathways
- 6 votes – unprogrammed spaces (e.g., seating, shade, washrooms)
- 5 votes – outdoor spaces for arts, music and culture
- 5 votes – accessible amenities
- 5 votes – naturalized spaces
- 4 votes – sport amenities
- 4 votes – outdoor winter amenities
- 1 vote – outdoor gathering spaces
- 1 vote – outdoor spaces for community events

The first three stations at the community open houses provided participants with information on open space amenities, as well as design and management considerations, and asked what other amenities or considerations they would like to see the County prioritize or implement.

Open Space Design Considerations

Participants offered the following design considerations that they would like to see implemented in Strathcona County:

- Permanent teepee and sharing circle in a park space
- Ensure all “class A” spaces and fields are accessible
- Provide options for kids parks that are not sandy
- Develop a large pickleball court facility with shade structures, washrooms and online booking
- Balance accessibility considerations (e.g., need concrete paths to enhance accessibility, but recognize that this needs to be balanced with shade and seating opportunities)
- Amphitheatre (two comments)
- Solar lighting on trails
- More seating, firepits, gathering spaces, etc.

Open Space Management Considerations

Participants offered the following management and operations considerations that they would like to see implemented in Strathcona County:

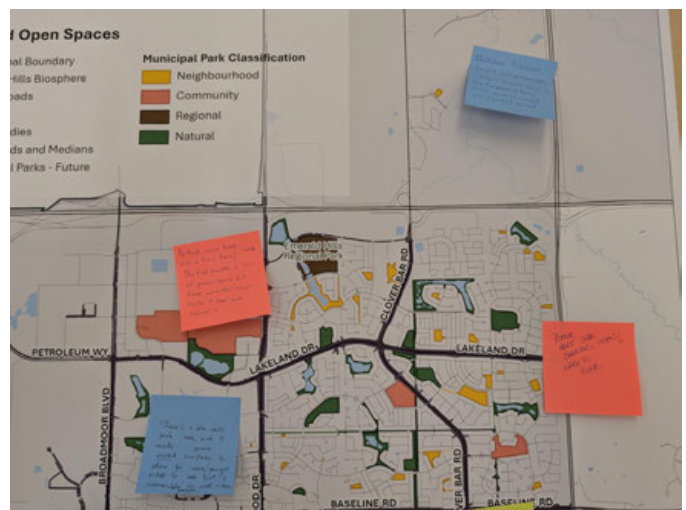
- Option to book outdoor pickleball courts on certain days or times (two comments)
- Solar lighting on paths and garbage cans
- Better online outdoor space availability and booking options
- Wayfinding with extra details (e.g., how far to washrooms, seating, shade)
- Edible trees and plants
- Free music programming
- Summer park “scavenger hunts” to get youth out to parks

Mapping Activity

At the mapping activity station, participants were invited to review two large scale maps displaying Strathcona County’s open space system – one focused on Sherwood Park and the other focused on Ardrossan. Participants were then invited to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities in the open space system and place their feedback on the map using a sticky note.

If participants were interested in sharing feedback on rural hamlets not displayed on the map, tablets were available to support the collection of additional feedback on the online interactive mapping activity.

The sections below detail the strengths, challenges and opportunities shared by residents on the two system maps.



Open Space System Map – Sherwood Park

Strengths

- Broadmoor Lake Park – Great diverse park for all ages.
- Broadmoor Public Golf Course – What a wonderful outdoor destination. Thank you for opening up this space for winter enjoyment as well.
- Clover Bar Road – has a good bike lane on the side of the road, but the way intersections are designed make it unsafe for cyclists because of the median in the middle.
- Heritage Hills – walking paths are so lovely! I love the outlooks into the pond to watch the wildlife.

Challenges

- Conflicts between generations because we don't design amenities for young teens. Need to provide space for teens to be teens.
- All “destination” fields and diamonds should have an accessible path to access for families.
- Strathcona Athletic Park – Baseball diamond 4 – Pop flies happen all the time and exit the field. Have been close calls with people and vehicles almost hit.
- Need better maps and directional signage.
- More walkable opportunities into Edmonton, especially in the southwest park of Sherwood Park
- Near Emerald Hills Regional Park – Perhaps more trees and a trail here? The field provides a lot of green space but trees and a trail would make it feel more natural.

- Better mapping of bike trails, especially in new developments.
- Need less interruption of trails.
- Please keep trail barriers open! Hard to bike.
- Open or remove bollards from trails.
- Need new trails in new areas.

Opportunities

- Ball Lake Island Park – a covered space with fire pits, picnic tables, etc.
- Strathcona Athletic Park – diamond 4 – I would love to see a score clock added to the diamond. This field is used all the time and is a destination for 15+ players.
- Sherwood Park has good bike trails but they could be grouped and marked better to allow for better commuting and access.
- Sherwood Park BMX Park – There's a bike skills park here, but it needs some paved surfaces to allow for more / younger riders to use. Dirt is inaccessible for most riders.
- Sherwood Heights Park – Provide shade at pickleball courts.
- Foxhaven – Soccer posts, natural playground.
- Outdoor pickleball court in Cambrian. There aren't any in the Emerald Hills area so this would be a great asset.
- More promotion / education of bike trails.
- Look for more pathways that can be lit and cleared of snow year round.
- More connection points on trails.

Open Space System Map - Ardrossan

Strengths

- Ardrossan Regional Park – this space has been developed beautifully. I love the splash park and playground with all the picnic tables. I also think having an off leash park so close is brilliant.

Challenges

- Parking is an issue at baseball diamonds, especially the ones for older players. They are parking on a busy road in the ditches because there is no parking. It's a safety concern.
- Lingering smell from snow piles in the winter.
- Loss of agricultural land.

Conclusion and Next Steps

During engagement Phase 1a: Vision and Phase 1b: Priorities, participants eagerly shared their feedback on the current state of Strathcona County's open space system and their aspirations for its future. They emphasized the importance of a natural, connected, and accessible system, expressing a strong desire for these elements to be enhanced. However, opinions varied among residents regarding approaches to open space growth, increased access to features and amenities, and maintenance and operations. To address these differing perspectives, a balanced approach that accommodates a range of open space needs and interests may be necessary as the County continues to grow and evolve. This balance will need to address the changing needs of current residents, as well as the emerging needs of new residential communities in light of ongoing growth.

The next stage of the project will focus on refining the overarching vision and key objectives of the Open Space Master Plan. The focus and structure of the plan document will be refined to reflect feedback gathered throughout engagement in Phase 1a and Phase 1b, and to ensure subsequent efforts are aligned with the overarching planning direction of the County. This work will align with current growth areas and support future Area Structure Plans and municipal open space projects.

In spring 2025, as part of Phase 2 engagement, an opportunity will be provided to review key components of the draft Open Space Master Plan, including the vision and key objectives, along with an Implementation and Funding Strategy. This draft plan will be shaped and refined through ongoing input from the public, interested parties, and County staff, gathered through a series of in-person and online engagement opportunities.