



CITY OF ST. JOHN'S
**STRATEGIC
PLAN** 2019
2029

What We Heard About Young Adult Engagement (18-30)

April 2026

Our City. Our Future.

ST. JOHN'S

Disclaimer

- This document provides a summary of what was heard from participants during this engagement process. It is not meant to reflect the specific details of each submission word-for-word, although attempts have been made to do so when possible.
- This document does not include recommendations or analysis of what was heard.
- The City produces a What we Heard document for every city-led public engagement project. This collected commentary is shared with the community to ensure we heard you correctly.
- The City protects the privacy of those who provide feedback as per Access to Information and Privacy Legislation.
- The full scope of commentary is used by city staff and Council to help inform recommendations and decisions.

Context

- The current [Youth Engagement Strategy](#) was approved by Council in October 2020. The strategy was based on information gathered prior to and in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic and is currently in its sixth year.
- The Youth Engagement Working Group and lead staff advised that a new strategy is required to adapt to the current needs and expectations of young adults.
- Staff will need to determine whether the new strategy will focus on the same demographic or be modified and whether the context will remain focused on civic engagement or be broader.

Background

- A number of initiatives from the previous strategy were completed:
 - Online Youth Panel – [City Influencers](#)- 28 surveys
 - Youth led pop up events annually
 - [Youth Forum](#) (2022-23)
 - [Business focused event](#) (2024)
 - [Sustainability focused event](#) (2025)
 - Civic engagement added to Pathways Program for high school students
 - Other events and activities in partnership with city staff and linked to MUN/College Orientation.
 - Creation of the [Youth Engagement Working Group](#)

Public Engagement Plan

Purpose

- Gather feedback from 18- to 30-year-olds to determine how to engage with young adults, what they are interested in and barriers to participation.
- Allow 17-year-olds to complete the online survey.
- Better understand the needs of this demographic as it relates to the City.

Approach

- Pop Up events- Mews Centre and Paul Reynolds
- Online Survey
- Targeted Focus Groups
 - Choices for Youth
 - Association for New Canadians
- General Focus Group
- Internal Focus Group

Engagement and Communications

- News Release issued on November 26, 2025
- Project page on EngageStJohns.ca
- 3 newsletters to registered users and followers of EngageStJohns.ca(4500+) including City Influencers (275+) and text messages to City Influencers (130+)
- Posts to regular City communications channels including social media, listservs, website;
Through socials: 77,235 impressions, 24,620 unique reach.
- Information shared with Youth Engagement Working Group and other youth focused organizations.



What We Heard Highlights

- Opportunities to provide feedback are important to young people; they want to have a say in things that impact their lives. It must be meaningful and connected to outcomes.
- Most young people describe themselves as being somewhat engaged in the City.
- Perceptions of City engagement efforts are mixed. Some feel things have improved.
- Barriers to participation in City lead public engagement include lack of awareness, time and competing priorities, event timing and scheduling, transportation and location, language, sensory or cognitive challenges.
- Awareness of engagement tools such as EngageStJohns.ca and City Influencers is low.
- City communications efforts must focus on where youth are and where they interact.
- Youth are not one group: teens, 18-14, 25-30, newcomers, students, etc.

What We Heard Highlights

- Topics of interest to youth are varied and include parks, trails, open spaces, public transit, affordable housing, traffic, roads and parking, arts and culture.
- Preference is for informal engagement opportunities, drop-in, pop up, short form surveys, online (but not the only method).
- Email, social media and text are preferred notification methods.
- Factors that influence perceptions of the City include employment and education, cost of living and housing, safety and public spaces, community, belonging and social connection.
- Civic and institutional spaces can feel adult-centric, formal and intimidating, not inclusive and welcoming.

What We Heard Details – Pop Up Events

- Majority of youth who attended were under the age of 18; and most were junior high/high school students attending recreation drop-in sessions and unwilling to engage in discussion.
- Preference was for communication from the city via email
- Drop-in activities were of interest
- There was limited knowledge of engagement opportunities and other city activities.

N=30

What We Heard Details – Focus Group

(Association for New Canadians)

N=11

- Most participants felt “youth” should begin between ages 14-16 and be capped around 28-30. Participants emphasized life stage over age.
- Participants consistently described youth engagement as active participation that leads to real influence and visible outcomes. Engagement should benefit the collective, not just individuals.
- Most participants rated their connection to the city at around 3 out of 5 but said the city’s vision statement reflected a sense of hope, support and genuine progress.
- Newcomers face additional challenges, especially limited awareness of programs and services, difficulty accessing community spaces, activities often scheduled during work or school hours.
- The City is not seen as a primary point of initial connection for young newcomers.
- Participants noted uneven geographic distribution of community centres and limited culturally relevant and multilingual programming.
- Participants identified overlapping barriers that limit participation including physical, logistical such as distance, transportation, facility access; language and information; unclear where to find information; fees and events held during work/school hours; online systems can be a barrier for some; social gaps especially for people in their mid-20s who have finished school and are job-seeking.

What We Heard Details – Focus Group (Choices for Youth)

- Belonging and safety matter more than formal engagement
 - People must feel welcome, events must be peer-friendly and safe.
- Cost, transportation and time are the biggest barriers to participation
 - Limited bus routes, safety concerns, parking costs, and eligibility barriers for Metro/GoBus
- Many City Spaces signal “not for youth”
 - Basic, uninviting or not designed with youth in mind, too child focused or too formal
- Accessibility is important and goes beyond physical
 - Emotional, sensory, cognitive
- Youth want flexible, low-commitment social programming
 - Drop-in, informal
 - Ideas included bingo, movie nights, speed friending, queer-friendly socials, coffee shop style environments and offering small incentives like food/prizes

What We Heard Details – Focus Group (Choices for Youth)

- Youth are not a homogenous group
 - Needs differ significantly between teens, young adults and older youth
 - People feel increasing isolation as friendships change with age and circumstance
- Language, branding and navigation shape engagement
 - How programs are named, framed and communicated influence participation
 - City materials often feel “research-y”, adult focused and youth do not see themselves in them.

What We Heard Details – Focus Group (General)

- Youth generally defined as 15 to 29-30 years old (some suggested 18+)
- Connection to the City levels ranged from low to moderately high (2/5 to 4/5)
- Main points of connection: arts, culture, events, and email communications (though emails are often seen as too long and information-heavy)
- Awareness of City social media: mainly Facebook, with some Instagram. Desired improvements include interactive social media (Instagram polls/stories, TikTok). More opportunities that bring people together. Content that is concise and easy to understand.
- Barriers to engagement included: time constraints, location and accessibility of events, lack of awareness, language and complexity of information (too legalistic or complicated), minor concerns about transportation
- The City's vision statement evokes pride and positivity. Seen as progressive and grounded in history and place. Participants want clearer evidence of how the City ensures belonging and reflects diverse communities in practice.
- Would like to see more central youth hubs, more youth focused events, emphasis on arts and culture



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Public Survey

Overview of key results

Our City. Our Future.

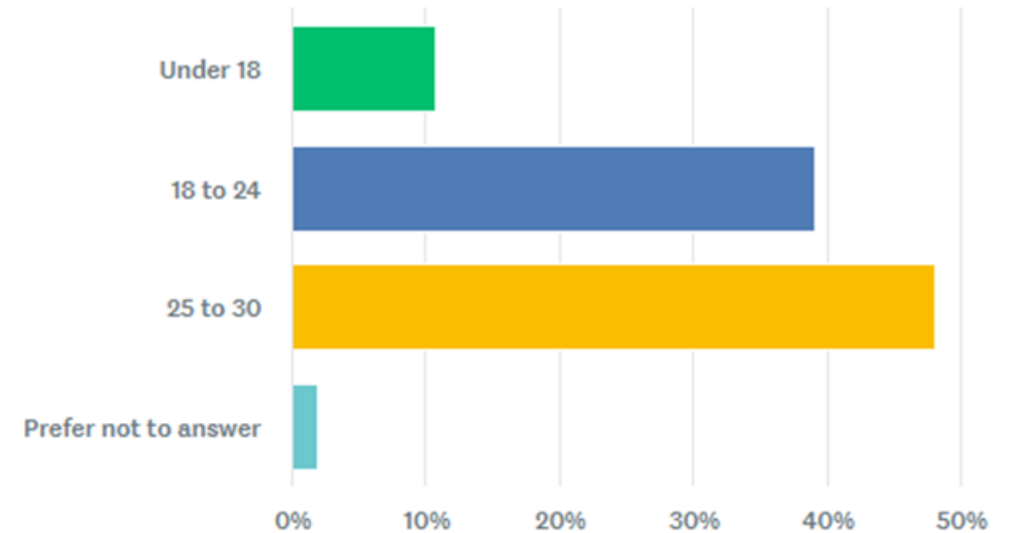
ST. JOHN'S

Demographics

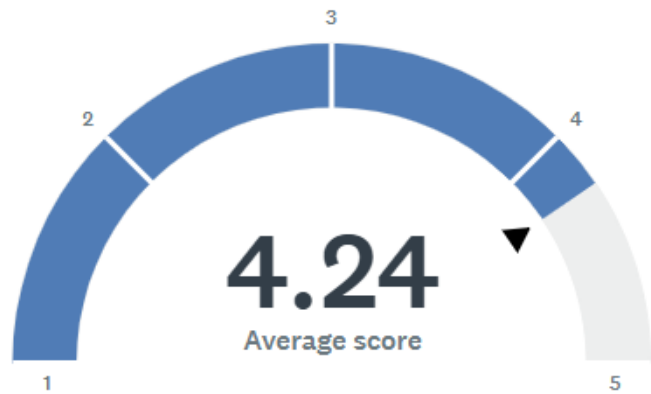
- 492 responses – 461 were in the 18-30 age range, 49 were under 18.
- Good cross section of the demographic
- 41% were full-time students; 18% part-time students
- 39% worked full-time; 32% worked part time
- 38% male; 54% female; 5% non-binary; 2% preferred not to answer

Demographics

- 31% lived in St. John's their whole lives
- 27% lived in St. John's between 0-3 years
- 24% lived in St. John's more than 3 but less than 10 years
- Of those not from St. John's, 24% were from somewhere else in the metro region; 32% were from somewhere else in NL; 17% were from somewhere else in Canada; 27% were from outside Canada.
- 26% were members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community
- 12% identify as being Indigenous
- 23% identify as having a disability
- 17% identify as visible minority

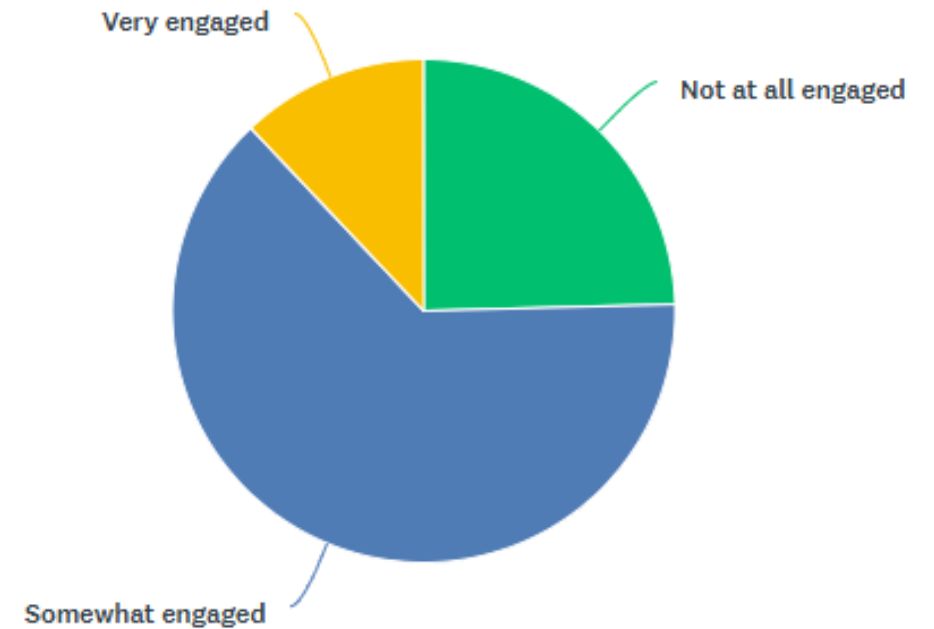


Highlights of results



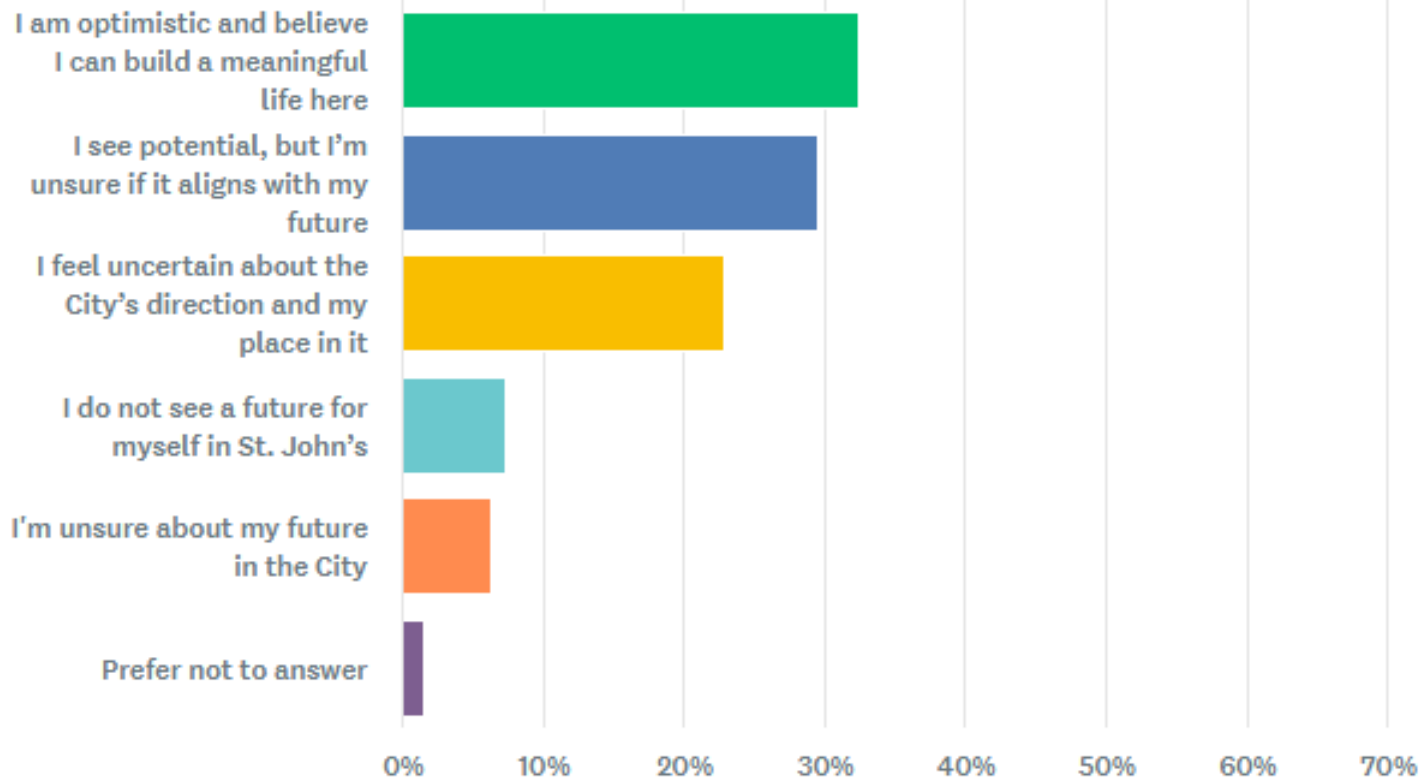
How important is it to you that the City offer opportunities to provide feedback on City programs and services?

Level of engagement with the City



N=426

Which of the following best describes your perspective on your future in the City of St. John's?



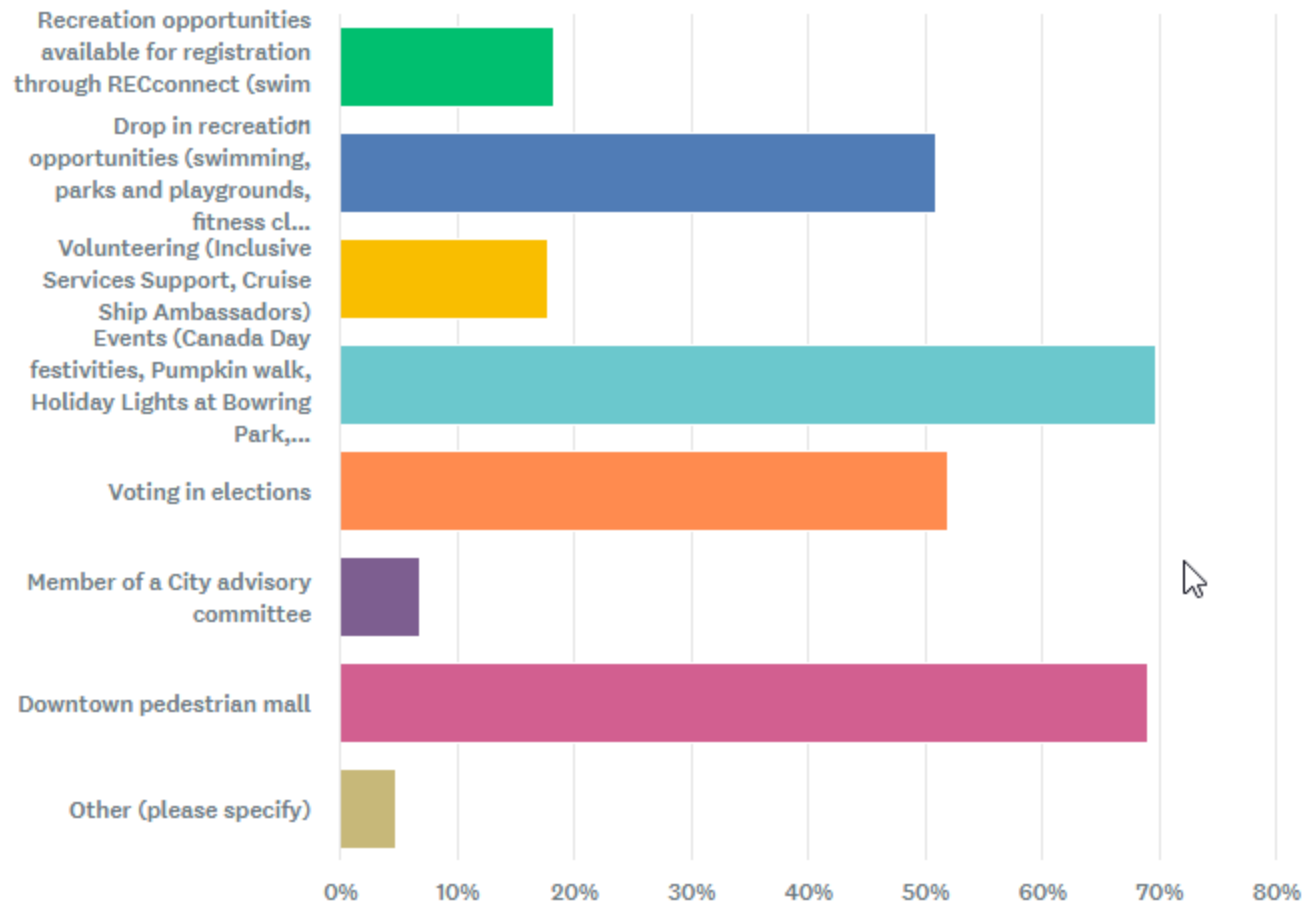
N=375

Factors that shape results:

- Housing
- Crime/Safety
- Amenities including City amenities
- Job opportunities
- Affordability/cost of living
- Public transit
- Homelessness
- Belonging

Those under 18 were a little more optimistic.

Which of the following City programs, services, and activities do you currently participate in or use? (Select all that apply)



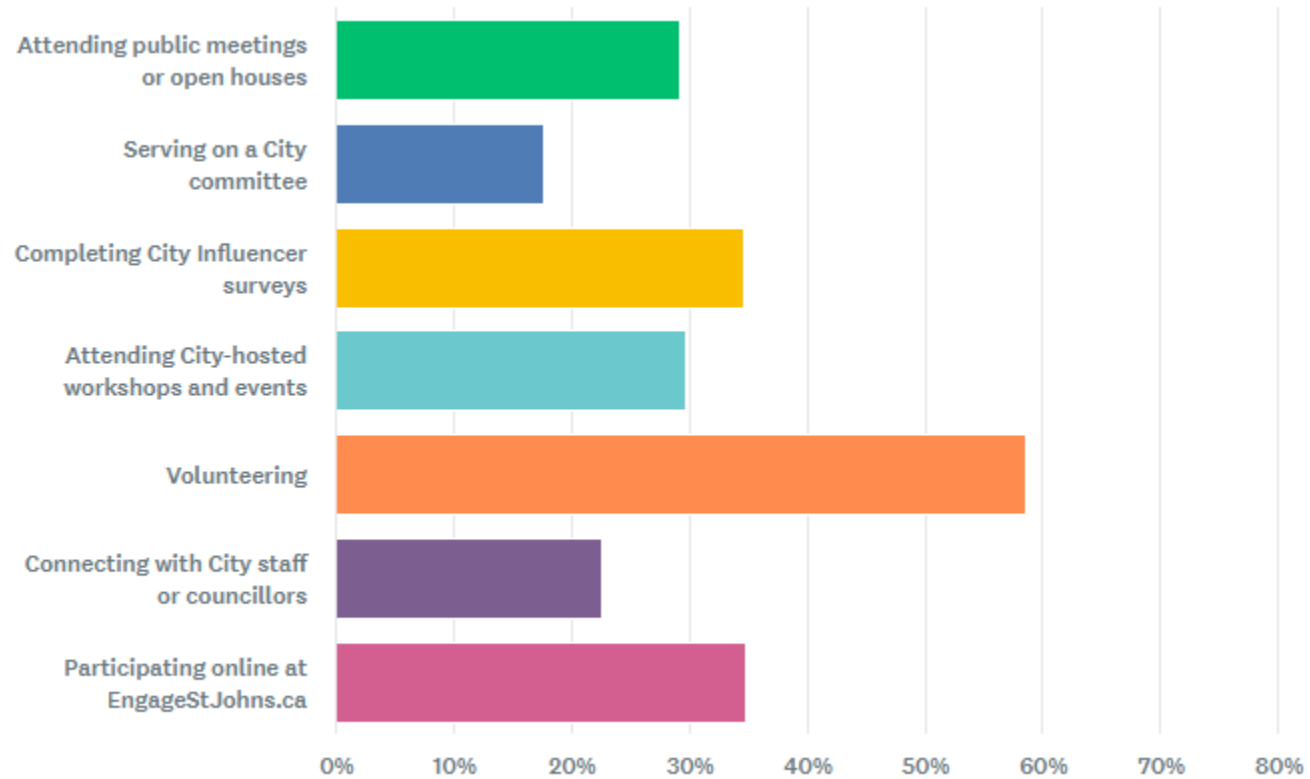
Highlights:

- Under 18 least likely to register for activities
- Drop-ins, events, downtown pedestrian mall most common responses among all age groups. Voting in elections within top three for 18 plus.

N=345

The City of St. John's offers various methods to engage with 18-30-year-olds

Which of the following are you aware of?



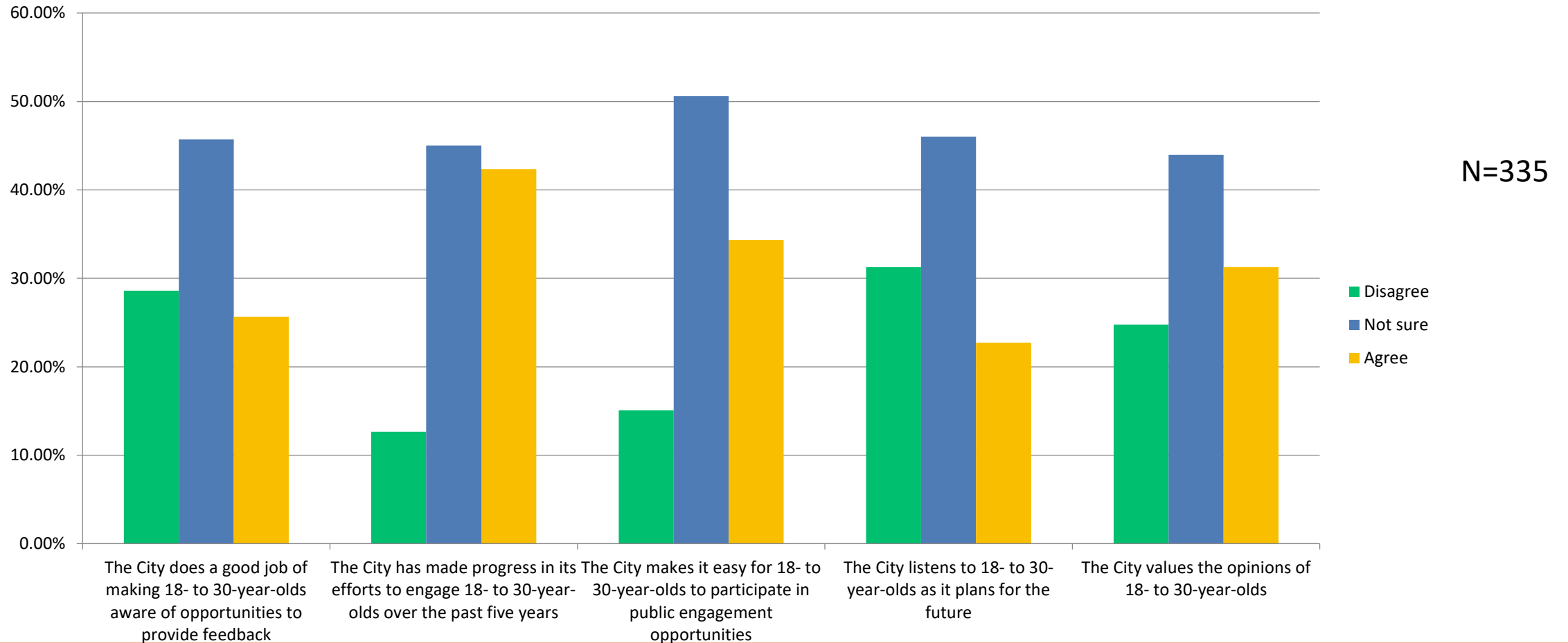
Highlights

- Volunteering highest among those under 18

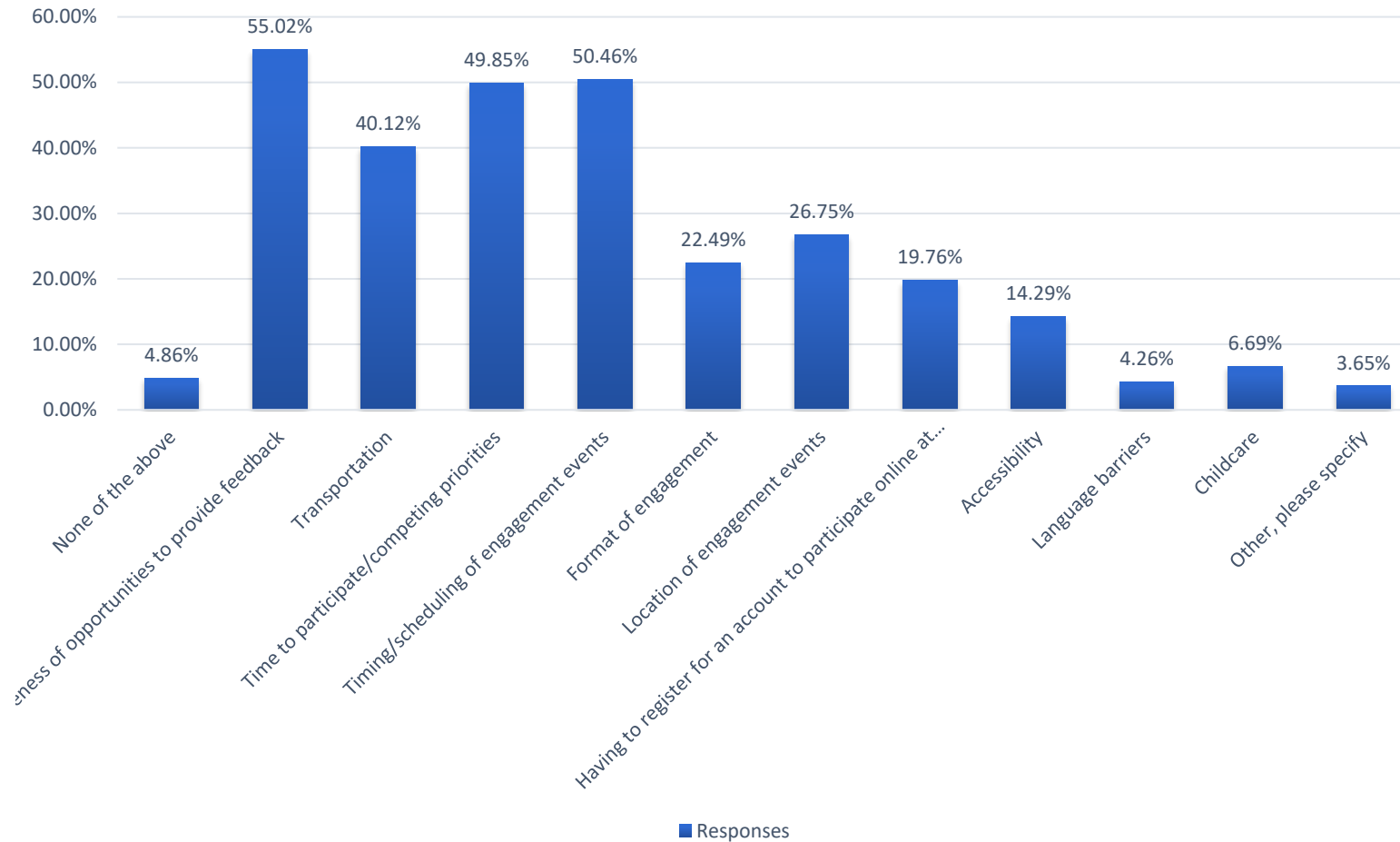
N=345

City Engagement efforts

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Barriers that limit participation in public engagement at the City

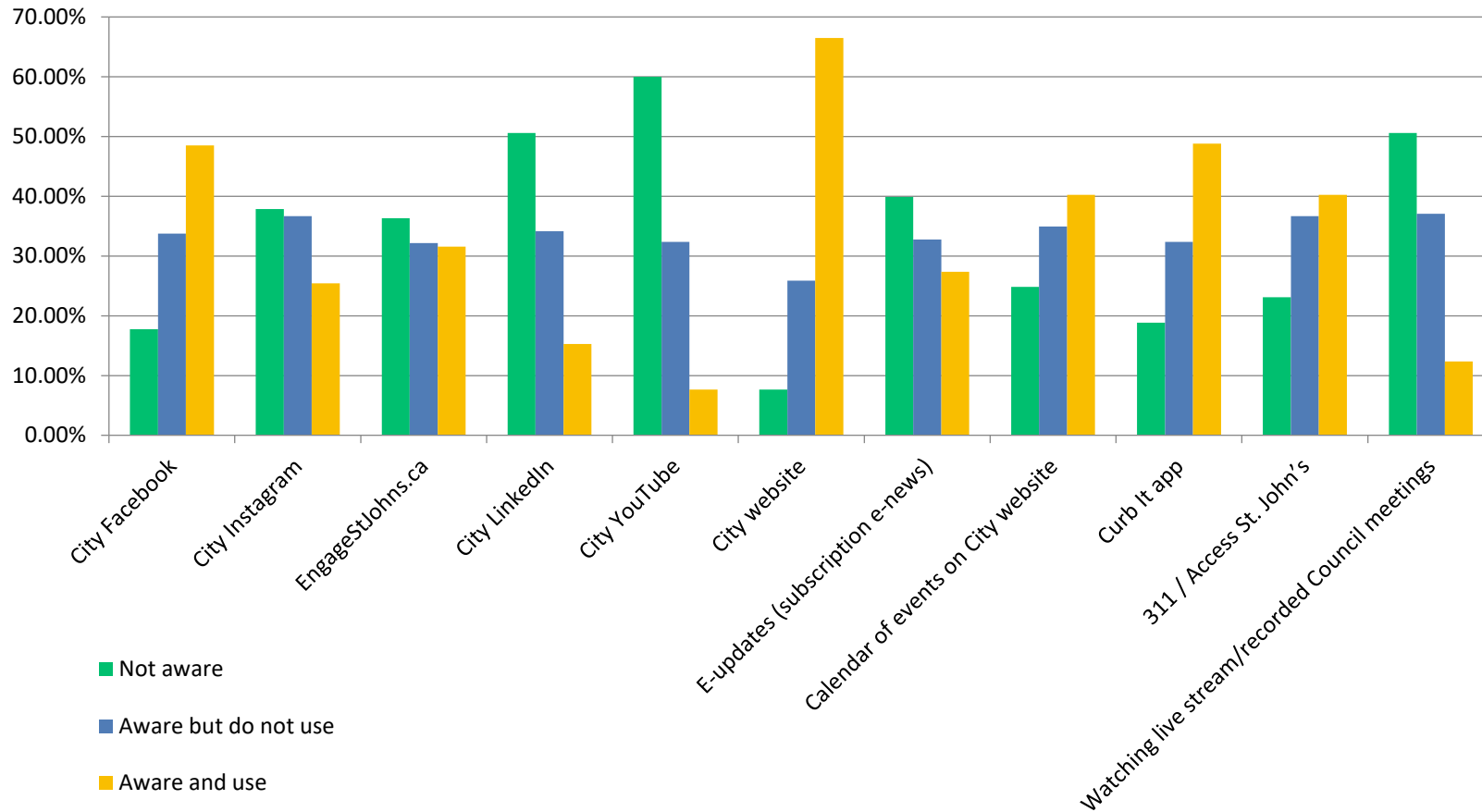


Top 3 barriers:

- Awareness
- Timing/scheduling of engagement
- Time to participate

N=329

Awareness of City Communications tools



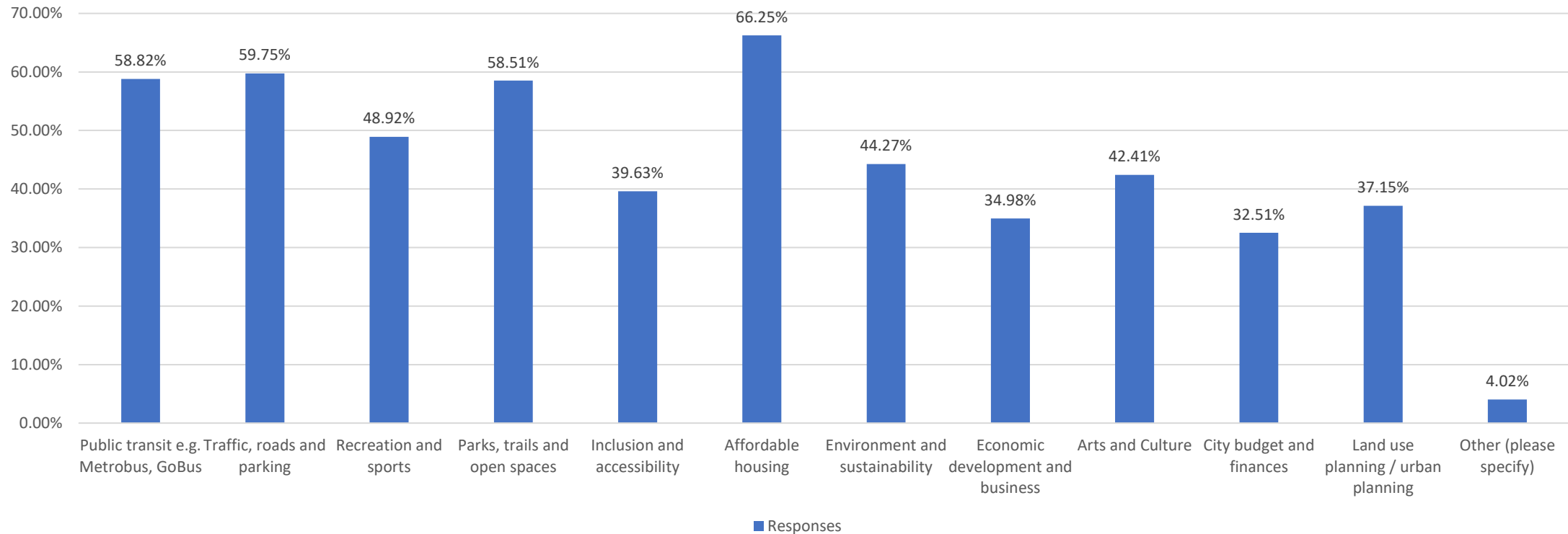
Highlights:

- Awareness and use highest for City Website
- Curb It and City Facebook are also used by nearly half of respondents
- Lowest level of awareness is for City You Tube, City Linked in and streaming/recordings of Council meetings.
- Moderate levels of awareness and usage for Calendar of events (40%) and Access St. John's (40%), EngageStjohns.ca (30%), e-updates (28%), Instagram (25%)

N=323

Interest in City topics

If the City was offering you an opportunity to provide feedback on the topics listed below, which topics would interest you? (Select all that apply)



N=323

City Influencers

- 66% not aware prior to the survey; 15% aware but had not joined; 16% already an Influencer
- Time was the biggest reason cited for why they have not joined. Some people think it's a place; somewhere they have to go.
- For those interested in doing surveys, the main reason they do them is they want to provide feedback, followed by want to influence decision making, and then chance to win gift card. Some people noted they just like doing them.
- Why they don't do them: don't feel feedback influencers decisions, not interested in the topic, forget, don't have time, etc.



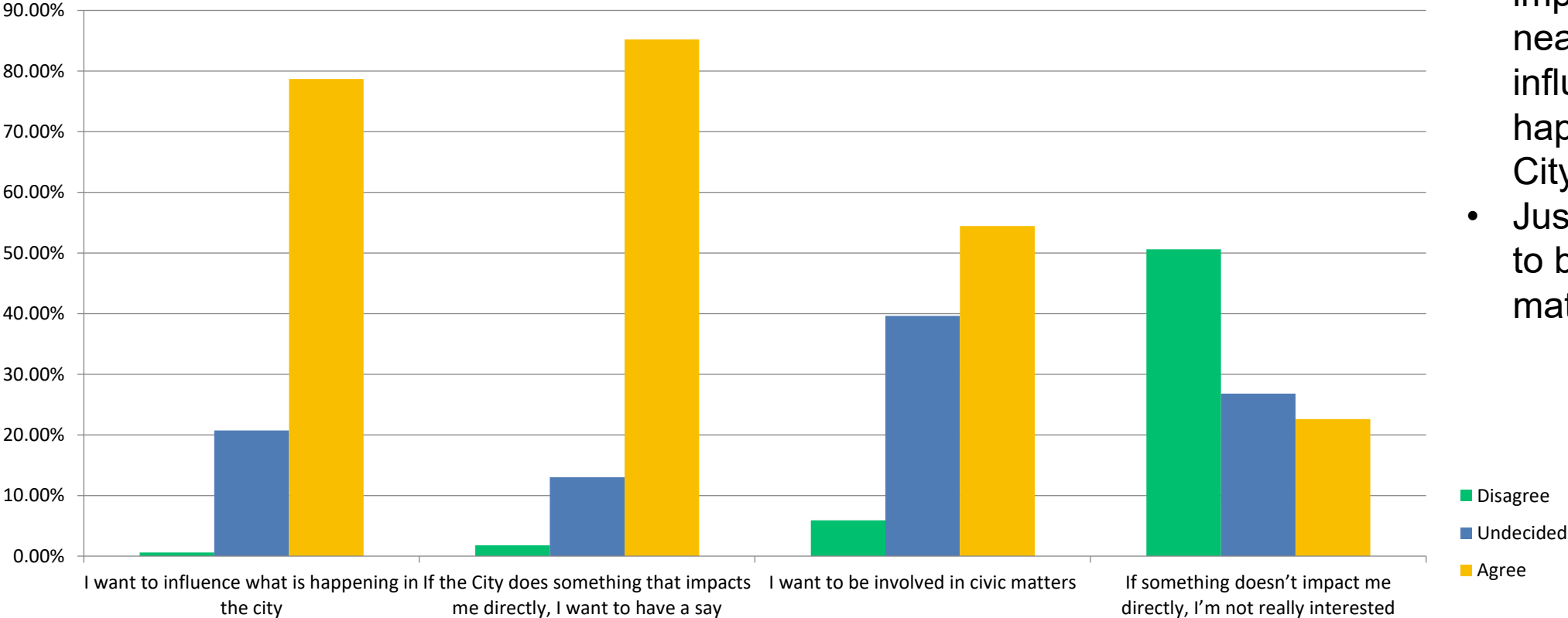
Awareness of past projects involving engagement

- Pedestrian Mall 40%
- Neighbourhood plans 34%
- Building Safer Communities 20%
- Shared Use Paths 18%
- None of the ones listed 35%
- The rest of the listed projects ranged from 10-18% awareness

N=321

General feedback on engagement

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Highlights:

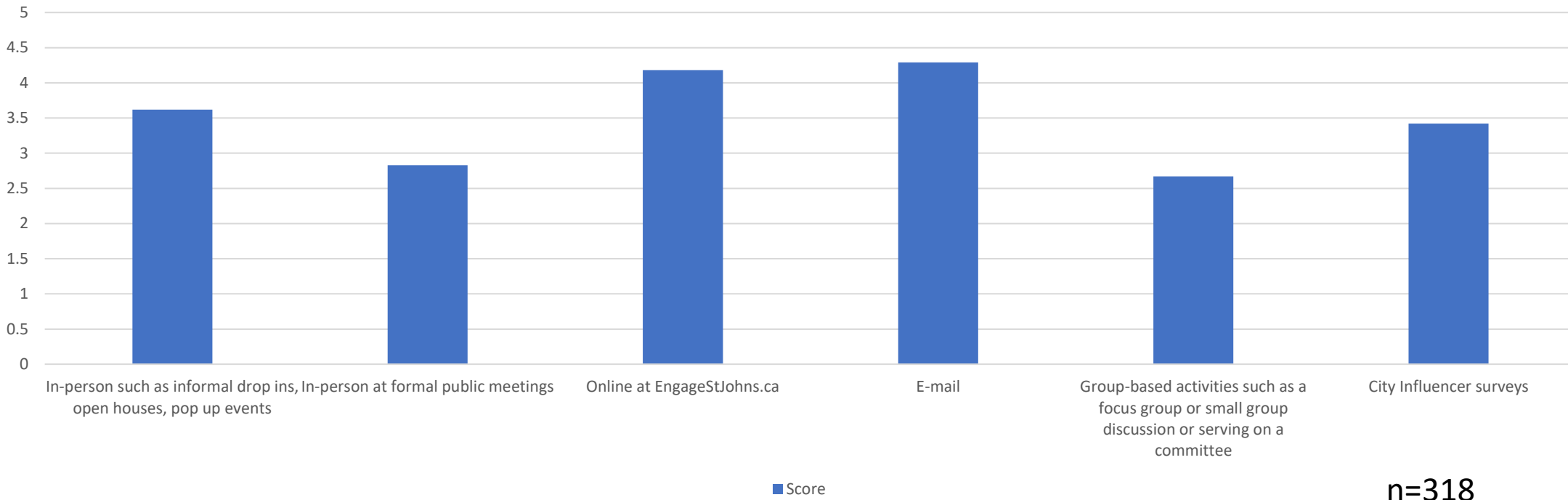
- More than 80% want to have a say in what impacts them and nearly 80% want to influence what is happening in the City.
- Just over 50% want to be involved in civic matters.

N=319

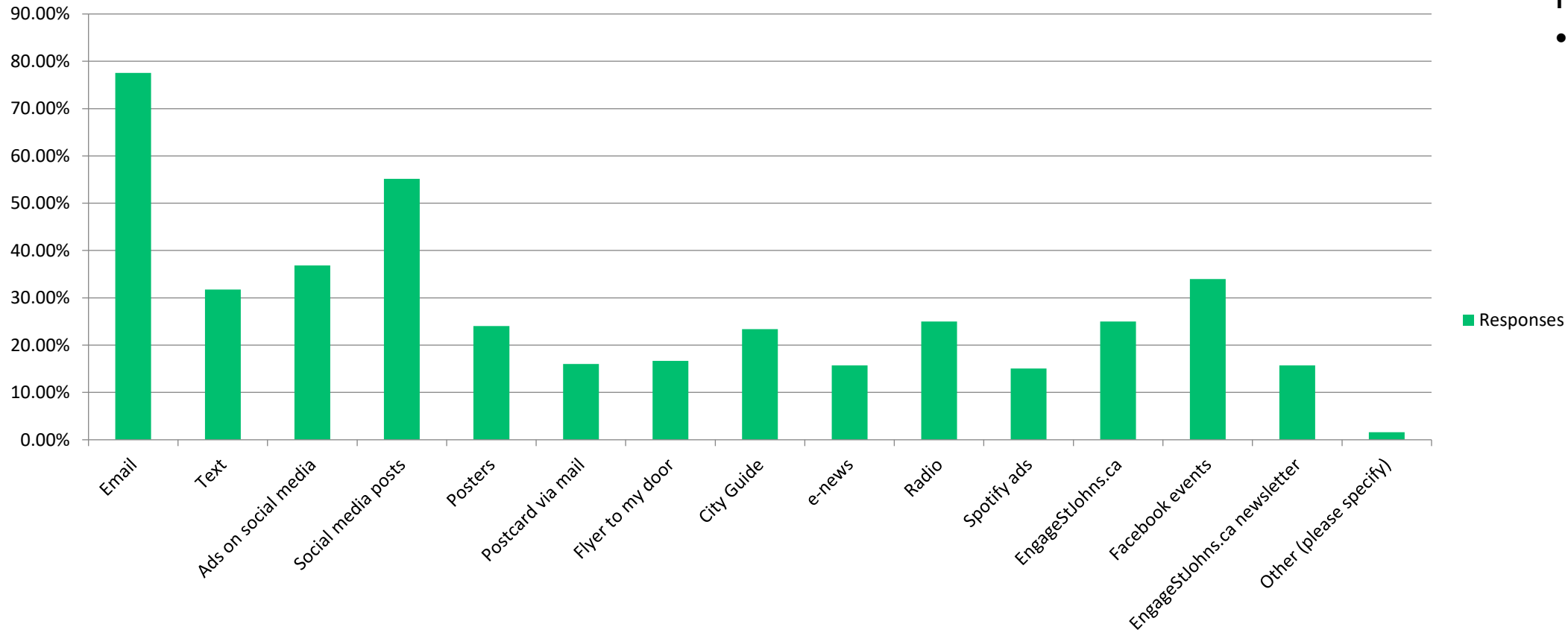
Engagement Preferences

How would you prefer to provide feedback to the City through public engagement?
(Rank the list below by dragging and dropping each option in order of most preferred to least preferred option)

- Highlights:
- Email and online are the highest rated first options for providing feedback.
 - In person through informal events is also a highly rated choice.



Preferences for receiving information



Highlights:

- Email is the highest rated choice for receiving information, followed by social media posts, ads on social media and facebook events.

Other: app similar to Curb It

N=312

Other feedback

- Access to nature, trails and walkability
 - Lack of walking trails especially in Kenmount Terrance
 - Car-dependent design, unsafe roads for walking
 - Development that prioritizes housing density and profit over livability
 - Desire for mandatory pedestrian and nature-oriented spaces
 - Walkability and access to nature are key reasons people choose to stay or leave
- Public Transportation
 - Long wait times, limited routes, poor reliability
 - Issues for suburban access/shift workers
 - Public transit impacts ability to participate in events, employment, childcare
 - Need for bus shelters, extended service hours

N=118

Other feedback

- Housing Affordability and Cost of Living
 - Unaffordable, scarce, or unsafe especially for young adults and students
 - Welcome more medium and high-density housing
 - Concerns about rising rents, competition and homelessness among youth
 - Link to transit, employment and livability
- Youth Voice, Trust & Governance
 - Feedback needs to be acted upon
 - Need formal mechanisms such as youth councils, research roles
 - Transparent feedback loops needed
 - Youth need to be taken seriously
 - Meet youth where they are: neighbourhoods, schools, campuses, online

Other feedback

- Employment, Careers & Economic Opportunity
 - Job opportunities limited
 - Need more pathways for digital economy, marine technology, culture and tourism
 - Need more support for youth entrepreneurship: funding, mentors, incubators and reduced barriers
 - Concern about brain drain and ability to retain skilled young people
- Public Spaces, Recreation and Culture
 - Need more youth-friendly, accessible, flexible spaces
 - More diverse creation options, extended hours
 - Strong support from pedestrian mall, libraries and shared study/work spaces, cultural events, night markets and creative endeavours
 - Interest in youth-created cultural identity and branding

Other feedback

- **Community, Belong and Inclusion**
 - Feelings of neighbourhood warmth, volunteerism and community spirit
 - Newcomers and international students note feeling isolated, food insecurity, lack of voice
 - There is a need for integrated programs, youth focused social spaces, multicultural partnerships
 - Desire for low-cost, inclusive activities beyond sports, especially for preteens and youth under 19
- **Communication and Engagement Channels**
 - Many are unaware of engagement and volunteer opportunities
 - Strong preference for social media, simple websites, centralized event listings
 - Need clearer, friendlier online communications
 - Tone and responsiveness matters
- **Safety, Services and Systems**
 - Concerns about crime, healthcare capacity And snow clearing, environmental protections
 - Concerns about the pace of change and growth in the City that the systems cannot support and it's impacting quality of life

Next Steps update with accurate steps



Share What We Heard with YEWG, Council, City staff and release publicly



Staff to work with YEWG to develop strategy framework



Bring strategy/framework to Council for approval.



Develop action plan

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Young Adult Engagement

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