

ST. JOHN'S

Cowan Heights Neighbourhood Plan

Phase 1 Engagement
What We Heard Report
January 2025



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Project Overview

The City of St. John's is developing a Neighbourhood Plan for the community of Cowan Heights. The Neighbourhood Plan will set out a clear vision for land use, transportation, open space, and growth in the area. This plan will be shaped by the existing policies of the Envision St. John's Municipal Plan, analysis of local conditions, and engagement with the neighbourhood and wider community.

To be successful, the vision and plan for Cowan Heights must be grounded in an understanding of the unique characteristics of the community. The plan will incorporate the needs and desires of the people who live, work, and play in these neighbourhoods.

The Neighbourhood Plan for Cowan Heights is being completed at the same time as the Neighbourhood Plan for the University Area, and engagement phases are occurring at the same time. The project involves two main phases of public engagement prior to the release of a draft plan. This is the What We Heard Report for the first phase of engagement. The focus of Phase 2 engagement, in Spring 2025, will be validating initial recommendations for Cowan Heights. Following this, a draft of the Neighbourhood Plan will be released publicly in fall 2025.



Figure 1. Cowan Heights Neighbourhood Plan Boundary



**Phase 1
Engagement**

Fall 2024



**Phase 2
Engagement**

Spring 2025



**Draft Plan
Release**

Fall 2025

Engagement Approach

The Phase 1 Engagement took place between **November 12 to December 8, 2024**. This was the first opportunity to engage on both the Cowan Heights and the University Area Neighbourhood Plans. The focus of this engagement opportunity was to gather feedback on the strengths and challenges in each neighbourhood and foster initial ideas to help inform future recommendations for each plan.

In this phase, we asked about:

- **Your Neighbourhood Today:** What are the strengths and challenges of this neighbourhood?
- **Imagining the Future:** What are the opportunities for improvements? What do you want your neighbourhood to look like in the future?
- **Intensification Areas:** Where should intensification (mixing land uses and increased density) go and what should it look like?
- **Active Transportation:** How could the mobility network be improved in this area?



How We Engaged

A variety of methods were used to promote the project and collect feedback from the public and a diverse range of interested parties. Tactics included online engagement, in-person engagement, and a range of outreach and communications tactics. The following pages provide additional details about each of these components, including the number of participants who engaged.

Online Engagement

Activity		Description	Outputs
	Online Public Survey	The online survey was available on EngageStJohns.ca from November 12 to December 8, 2024. Hardcopies were available upon request.	720 responses
	Online Map Tool	The online map tool was available on EngageStJohns.ca from November 12 to December 8, 2024. Participants could provide place-specific responses to engagement questions on the map.	97 comments 19 participants
	Virtual Information Session	One online information session was hosted for Cowan Heights.	5 participants

In-Person Engagement

Activity	Description	Outputs
 Focus Group Sessions	Five Focus Group sessions were hosted jointly for both Neighbourhood Plans: - November 20 Council Committees - November 25 Youth Engagement Working Group - November 26 Social & Cultural - November 27 Economic Development - November 28 Mobility & Recreation	9 organizations & 7 Council Committees
 Interviews	One-on-one interviews were held with a range of interested parties throughout the week of November 25th for both Neighbourhood Plans. Some were in person and some virtual.	7 organizations
 First Light Lunch	The project team hosted a lunch with First Light staff on November 29 to discuss Indigenous perspectives on both Neighbourhood Plan areas.	10 First Light staff participants
 Open House	An open house took place on November 28, 2024 from 5-8pm at École St. Matthew's School (119 Cowan Avenue) for the Cowan Heights Neighbourhood.	13 participants
 Pop-Ups	Two popup events were held for both Neighbourhood Plans: - November 27, from 1-5pm at the Community Market - November 29, from 11am-1pm at the Memorial University Student Centre	80+ participants

Outreach & Communications

	Activity	Description	Outputs
	Project Website	EngageStJohns.ca was available for the duration of the engagement and included information about events, how to get involved, and all survey and map links. The project page also linked to the University Area project page.	1800 page visits
	Email List	Three email updates were sent to EngageStJohns.ca subscribers on November 12, 15, and December 3, 2024.	Nov. 12: 4465 people, open rate 61.2% Nov. 15: 4479 people, open rate 50.7% Dec. 3: 4057 people, open rate 52.6%
	Posters	Posters were put up in various community locations throughout the two neighbourhoods.	10 posters
	Media Release	A media release was posted on the City's website on November 12 and December 4.	1 release
	Social Media	The City of St. John's posted on Facebook, Instagram, and X throughout the engagement phase from November 12 to December 8, 2024.	Link clicks: 1,100 Impressions: 60,478 Unique reach: 13,058

Key Themes

Four main themes were identified from the feedback received across all in-person and online engagement activities, including all audiences. While all feedback received will help inform project next steps, these main takeaways represent the most significant findings from this phase of engagement, and are summarized below.



Parks and trails are the heart of the neighbourhood

Cowan Heights has a uniquely connected series of parks and pathways within the neighbourhood and good proximity to other major park spaces like Bowring Park. Access to this open space network is one of the main reasons people love the neighbourhood and is a big part of quality of life for those living and working in Cowan Heights. The trails provide many opportunities for cycling, walking, and connecting with nature. It is important to both keep these parks and continue to improve them as the community grows and changes. There are also opportunities to provide better wayfinding and information about the amenities that exist now and to update the amenities to align with new community needs.



Enhancing safety and access by for walking and wheeling is a priority

Though Cowan Heights was rated as being easy to access by vehicle, participants felt that there are opportunities to strengthen walking, cycling, and transit connections and provide traffic calming on busy roads. Accessibility was a primary focus, with many participants wanting to see pathways improved and cleared better in the winter for people with reduced mobility, especially to destinations like the grocery store. Another frequently raised concern was about the safety of pedestrian crossings. There was a desire to see speed enforcement, lighting, or raised pedestrian bridges to make crossings safer. Many specific trail and pathway connections were identified to fix gaps in the existing network.



Safety is a growing concern

There are growing concerns around the perception of safety in Cowan Heights. Many engagement participants said that they have been experiencing higher levels of crime in the area, including theft, violent crime, and drug use. There were concerns that this growing perception may prevent more families from moving to the area. Some suggestions to make the area feel safer were more security and police presence, better lighting along trails and in public spaces, and more social and health services in the area. Additionally, there was a perception that home and yard maintenance is becoming more of a problem and there are growing challenges with rats in the area.



Intensification should be focused on the edges of the neighbourhood

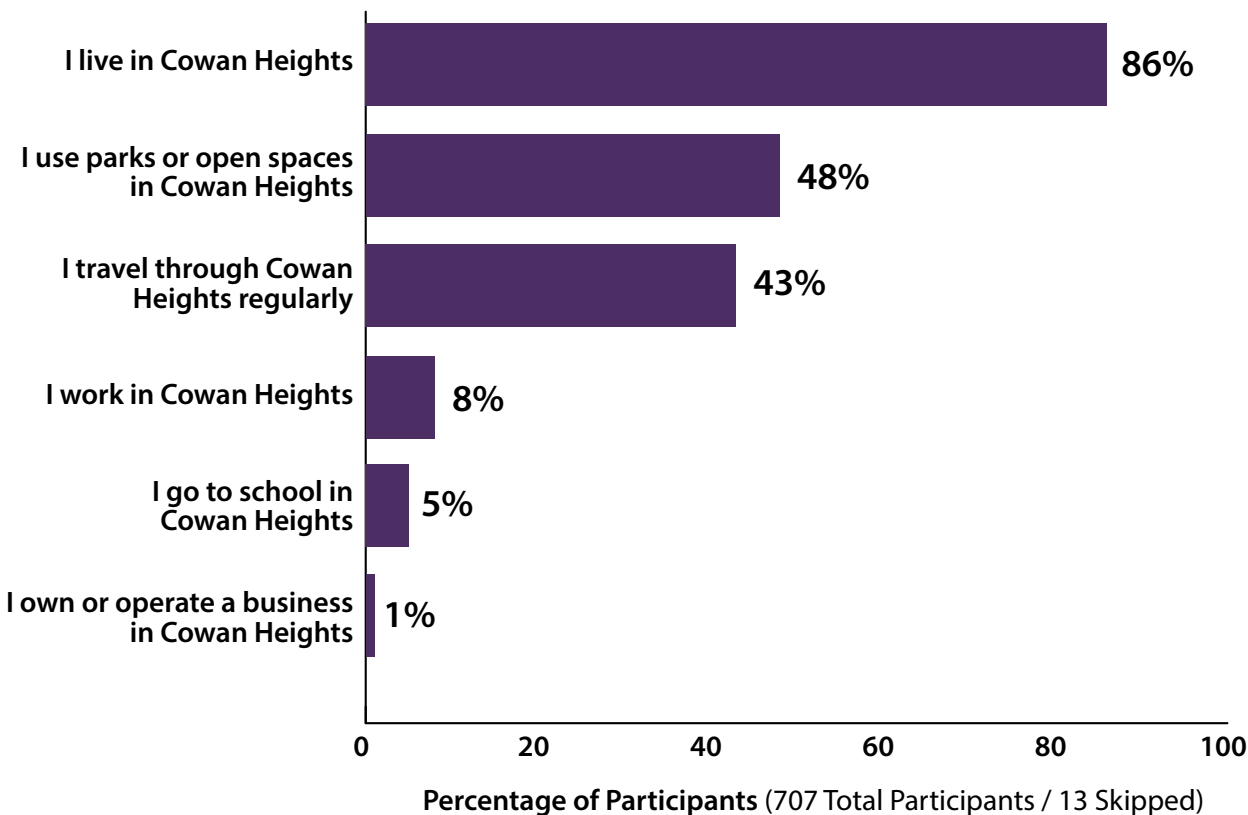
In general, there was a desire to see additional density and mix of uses on the edges of the neighbourhood to provide more housing options and amenities. The Village Shopping Centre area was seen as a good place for apartments as part of walkable mixed-use development tied to an improved transit hub; however, it was important to participants that there is still room for commercial uses in those areas to serve the community. In addition to the Village Shopping Centre area, there were some suggestions to allow some additional density and mixed use development along Topsail Road and Blackmarsh Road. There was a desire to ensure that any new development has a high quality of design, provides new open space, and is highly walkable.

In the single-family areas, there was some support for “hidden density” such as secondary suites, but there was a general desire to see these areas retain their current scale and character.

Your Neighbourhood Today

The first series of questions asked respondents about Your Neighbourhood Today. In these questions, the project team sought to understand the connection participants have to the neighbourhood and how they move through and experience the area.

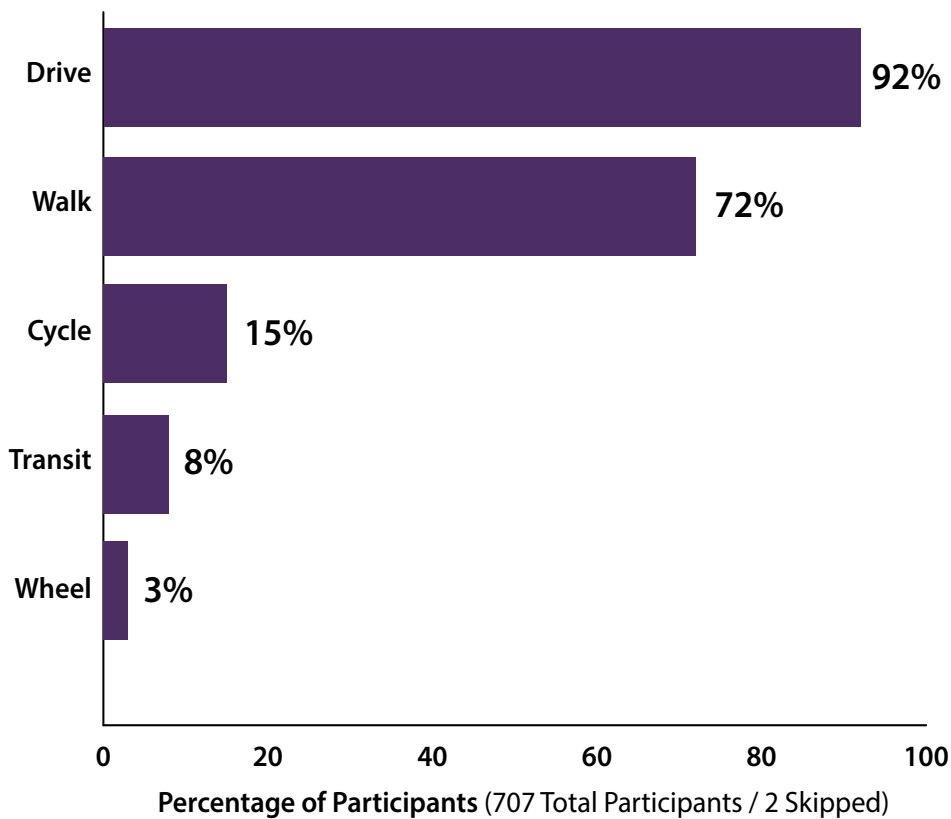
What is your connection to Cowan Heights?



Over 80% of survey participants said they live in Cowan Heights. Just under 50% of participants use the parks and open spaces and a little over 40% travel through the area. There were few participants who work, go to school, or own a business.

- The “other” responses included:
- Live nearby
 - Previously lived here
 - Family lives here
 - Kids attend school here
 - Attend church here
 - Own property here
 - Shop here
 - City staff
 - Just interested in the area

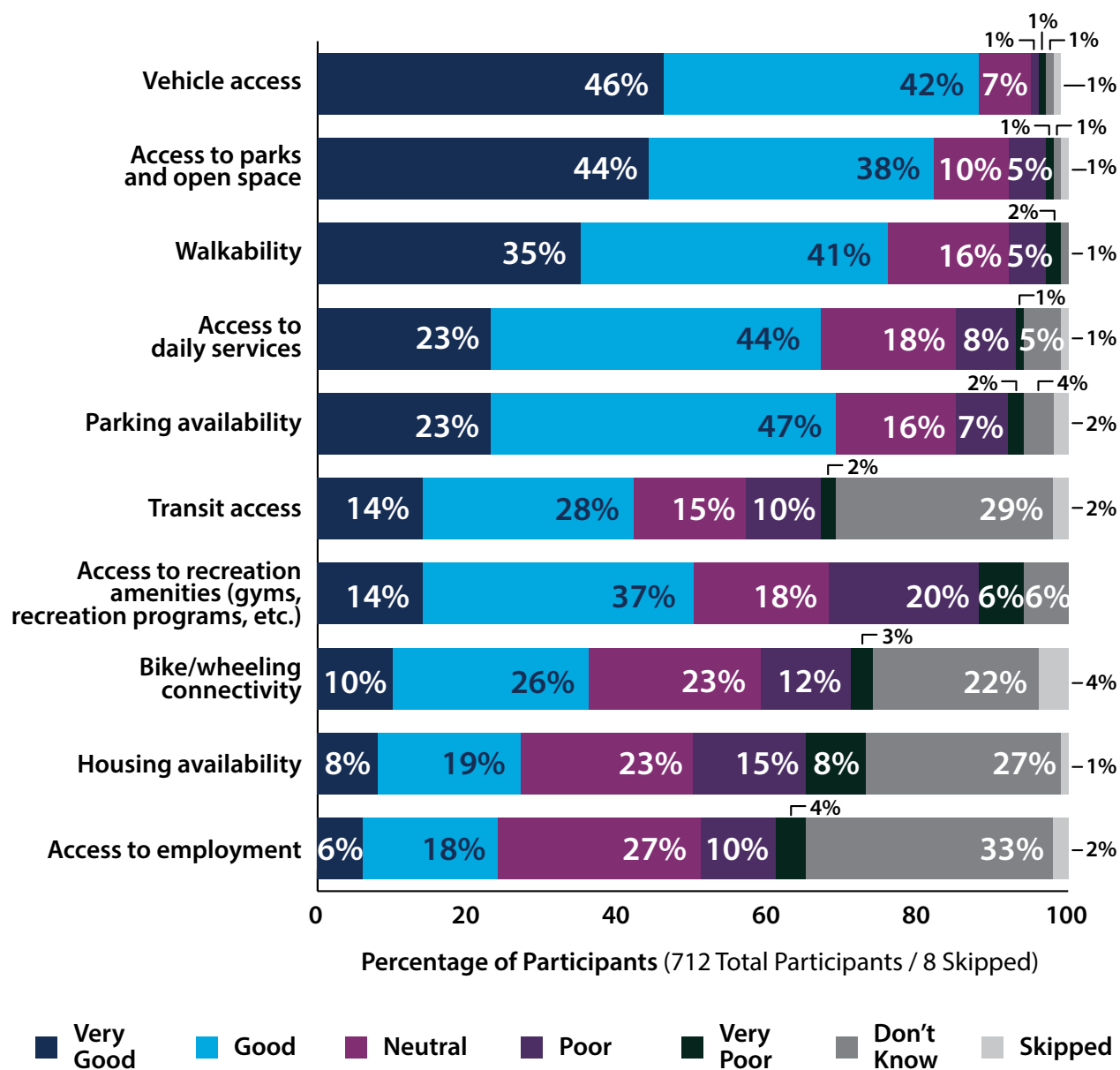
How do you typically travel in your neighbourhood?



Driving and walking were the top methods of travel selected, with over 90% driving and over 70% walking. Cycling and transit were a smaller portion of the mode share, with 15% cycling and 8% using transit to travel. Participants could select more than one response to the question.

- The "other" responses included:
- Running
 - Motorcycle
 - Pushing a stroller
 - Micro mobility such as electric skateboard or scooter
 - Skating / roller blading
 - Mobility scooter

How would you rate the following in your neighbourhood?



The top three highest rated attributes of Cowan Heights were vehicle access, access to parks and open space, and walkability. Parking availability and access to daily services were also ranked relatively high.

The lowest ranked on average were housing availability and access to employment. These had also had a high proportion of “neutral” and “don’t know” responses. Access to recreation amenities had the highest number of “poor” responses, but still had more “good” responses overall.

Imagining The Future

In the Imagining The Future section of the survey, respondents were asked to share what they value most about the neighbourhood, what they would like to see changed, and what their ideas are for the future of the area.

What do you value the most about your neighbourhood today that you would like protected or enhanced in the future?

547
comments

Trails and parks are the most valued attribute of Cowan Heights that participants want to see protected and enhanced. The current open spaces in Cowan Heights provide a range of opportunities for walking, playing sports, and connecting with nature year-round and they contribute to the quiet and peaceful nature of the area. Several comments mentioned the mature trees, creek, and ponds.

There were many suggestions on how the open space system could be further enhanced, through additional maintenance, garbage cans, lighting, and snow clearance to make it safer and more enjoyable for all.

Additional values from the comments are summarized below.

Vehicle Access

- Central location / ease of access to other parts of the city
- On street parking
- Decent snow removal of streets
- Wide streets
- Traffic okay

Active Transportation

- Trails
- Cycling paths
- Walking access to amenities

Parks & Recreation

- Access to nature
- Trout in the creek
- Parkside community center
- Playgrounds
- Sports fields and ball park

Sense of Pace

- Quiet / peaceful
- Safe
- Green
- Family & community oriented
- Not crowded

- Friendly / neighbourly
- Single family homes
- Beautiful
- Inclusive / diverse

Amenities

- Corner stores
- Commercial areas / mall
- Restaurants
- Drug stores
- Easy access to services and amenities
- Schools



What are the greatest challenges in your neighbourhood today that need to be addressed?

568
comments

The greatest challenges identified in the comments for Cowan Heights were crime and safety. Many comments indicated that there has been an increase in visible drug use, petty and violent crime in the area, and that it is impacting the feeling of safety and security in the neighbourhood. Participants felt there is a need for better lighting and more police presence and enforcement in the area.

Other concerns were about housing upkeep and rats. Some participants noted that property owners are also aging and not as able to upkeep their properties. Rats have become an increasing concern in the area for residents in the past several years.

From a mobility perspective, the greatest challenge identified was speeding in the area. A variety of pedestrian improvements were also suggested, including better snow clearance, crosswalks, and connections. Additional themes from the comments are summarized below.

Crime & Safety

- Feels less safe / increase in crime
- Concerns about drug use / sharps, violence, vandalism, break-ins and theft
- Wish there was greater police / security presence
- Need to create more of a sense of community

Cleanliness & Upkeep

- Concerns that properties are not being cared for

- Rat problems in the area
- Area needs beautification
- Aging homeowners

Vehicle Access

- Speeding problems (Frecker Drive, Canada Drive, Forbes Street, Hamlyn Road, Harrington Drive)
- Streets too wide
- Want to see commercial traffic using Team Gushue

Highway versus Blackmarsh Road

- Better road maintenance needed
- Need advanced arrow from Columbus Drive turning onto Canada Drive or Captain Whelan Drive
- Need protected left turn onto Blackmarsh Rd out of Cowan Heights
- Need better school drop off / pick up areas

- Lack of street parking in the winter / too many people parking on the street
- Traffic congestion near Village Shopping Centre
- Lack of parking at Cowan Park

Transit

- Need better transit access (more frequent, closer to home)
- Better bus terminal needed at Village Shopping Centre (sheltered)

Parks & Recreation

- Keep Bowring Park open longer
- Need a dog park
- More garbage cans
- Need a recreation facility
- More kids programming, including for kids with special needs (not enough spaces for swimming, etc)
- More seniors programming (indoor walking areas)

- Concerns about loss of green space
- Lack of “third places” / indoor gathering places
- Infrastructure needs better maintenance (resurface courts, trails, etc)
- More pickleball courts
- Sledding hill a good asset, but causes parking issues on Frecker and Canada Drive
- Harrington Park washed out

Active transportation

- Concerns about shared use path on Canada Drive not being well designed or used / taking up parking, think it should be on Frecker Drive
- Would like to see better protected / dedicated bike routes
- Trails and sidewalks need maintenance to make them more accessible

- More seating along pathways
- Need better snow clearance of sidewalks
- Need to enforce no parking in bike lanes
- More lighting of trails
- Concerns about City driving trucks on trails
- Need to fix pedestrian connections along Blackmarsh Road where sidewalks are missing
- Too much NIMBYism towards improvements that are not car-oriented
- Lack of convenient and safe crossing between Forbes and Village Shopping Centre
- Missing link between Cowan Heights and Mount Pearl trails over Team Gushue Highway



- Need better connections between travel modes
- Need a crosswalk across Cherrington at the intersection with the walking trail
- Hill makes walking difficult
- Topsail Rd. hostile for pedestrians

Land Use

- Too much social / affordable housing in one place
- Need more affordable housing
- Concerns about rentals (tied to lack of upkeep)

- Aging population and need for more seniors and accessible housing
- Housing is dated and difficult to retrofit for accessibility
- Concerns about additional density without additional services
- Vacant commercial space and loss of anchor stores
- Need more shopping options (banks, restaurants, groceries)
- Commercial areas too far to be walkable from neighbourhood

- Concerns about undocumented businesses in homes

Other

- Loss of the water tax exemption
- Suggest providing grants to improve business buildings
- Drainage problems from the highway
- Concerns about church food pantry near schools
- Should rotate garbage pickup days



If you could change one thing about your neighbourhood, what would it be?

494
comments

There were a wide range of responses to this question, from specific mobility improvements to programming ideas. Some of the most frequent comments were about the need for better snow clearing, more accessible sidewalks, and better lighting of trails and crosswalks at night. Another common idea was about the need for more community spaces, such as a community or recreation center, gathering place, or more walkable amenities like coffee shops that can serve as unofficial gathering places in the area.

Similar to the challenges identified in previous questions, participants also wanted to see the City address things like speeding, crime, and rodents through enforcement and other interventions.

Some differences of opinion were also identified in the comments, especially around affordable housing, bike routes, and density in the neighbourhood. Additional themes are reflected below.

Crime & Safety

- More police presence
- More enforcement of speed limits
- City pest control
- Crack down on crime and speeding

Cleanliness & Upkeep

- Clean up garbage
- Address rat problem

Parks & Recreation

- Dog park
- More benches or shelters (like a gazebo)
- Permanent bathroom in Kitty Gaul Park
- Upgrade / maintain parks
- Community gardens
- More trees
- Splash pad
- Pickleball courts

- More gathering spaces
- Crosswalks to connect to parks
- Add recreation complex or community centre
- Arts spaces
- Move the library into the Village Shopping Centre
- Upgraded and accessible playgrounds



Active Transportation

- Snow clearing
- Better sidewalks
- Add flashing lights to the dark crosswalk at Frecker Drive near the United Church
- Pedestrian bridge at Topsail and Cowan Road
- Shared use path on Blackmarsh Road
- Lighting of trails and crosswalks
- Dedicated cycle routes
- Better bike connection to George's Pond
- Shared use path through Grose Morne Park and Greenspond Drive
- Get rid of bike lanes
- More landscaping / greenery along Canada Dr.
- Add emergency call stations
- Traffic calming

- Fix traffic flow around schools and add signalized crosswalks

Transit

- Better transit
- Better bus station at Village Shopping Centre
- Align bus stops with mailboxes for snow clearing

Vehicle Access

- Better parking in winter
- Education on how to use roundabouts
- Align parking lot exit on Ferryland Street W
- Add three way stop on Burgeo Street
- Restrict the number of vehicles / trailers per lot
- Repave the roads

Land Use

- More stores
- Reduce housing density
- Centralized convenience store

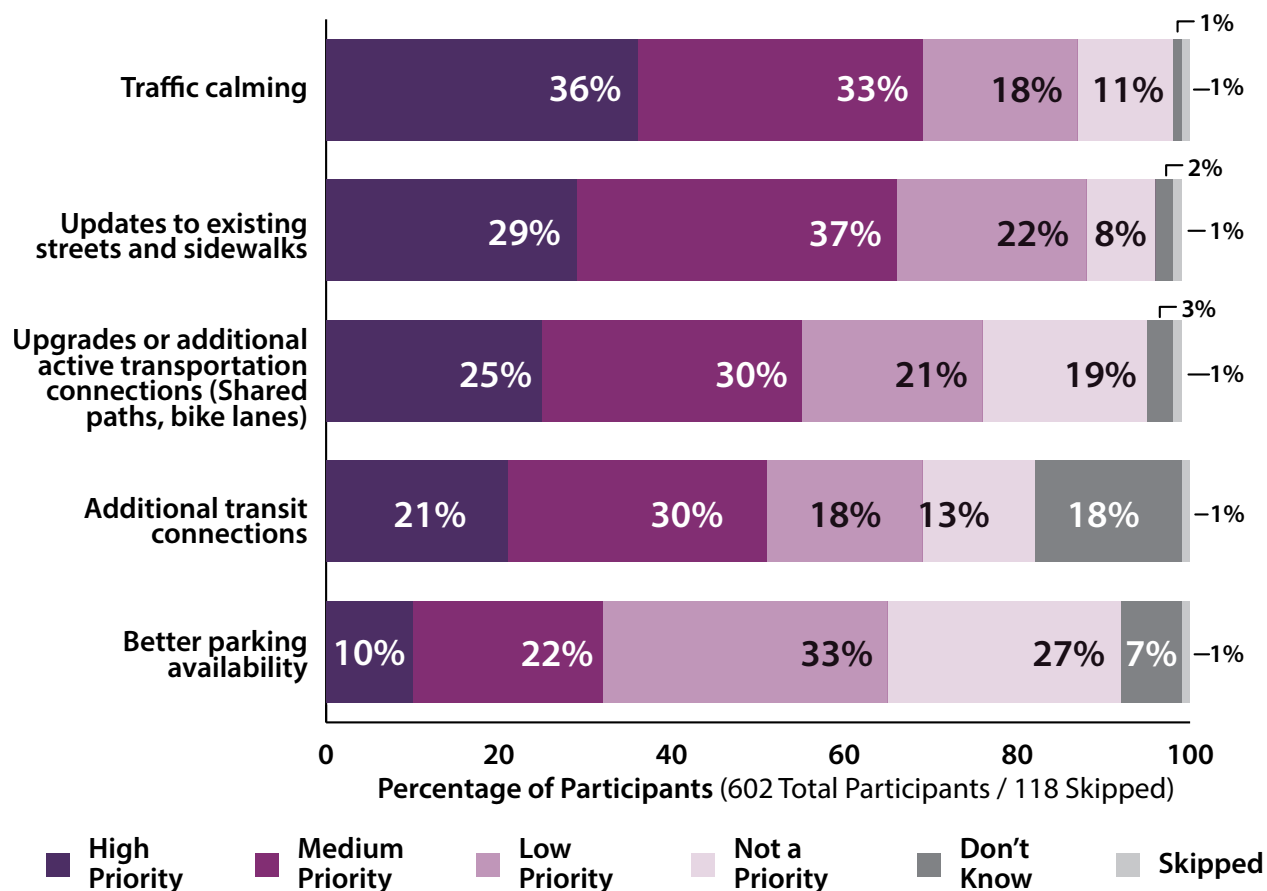
- Community center
- No more affordable housing or rentals / Add more affordable housing
- Add apartments / density
- Closed the gentleman's parlour
- Address rental greed
- Attract more retail to Village Shopping Centre
- Move the food pantry
- More services within walking distance (not just on Topsail Rd.)

Other

- Provide neighbouring activities / community building
- Stop cutting down trees
- Encourage more families to move in
- Promote more on the Cowan Heights Facebook Page

Which of the following mobility and connectivity improvements should be prioritized in your neighbourhood?

309
comments



The top mobility and connectivity priorities in the survey were traffic calming and updates to existing streets and sidewalks. Parking was considered the lowest priority. From the comments, the other priorities were snow clearing and improving the accessibility of sidewalks. Increasing transit frequency and enforcing speed limits were additional themes.

Active Transportation

- Better snow clearing
- Improve / resurface trails and sidewalks and reduce curb cuts to be more accessible
- Better connections on Canada Drive and Frecker Drive
- Separate different users on shared-use paths
- Complete sidewalk on Blackmarsh Road
- Make crosswalks safer, lit, and aligned with pathway connections
- Disagree with bike lanes
- Continue improving bike lanes and enforce no parking in them
- Better pathway connection to Mews Centre
- Escalator up Hamlyn Road
- Need connection over Team Gushue



Transit

- Add bus shelters
- More frequent and express routes
- Better transit hub at Village Shopping Centre and connection over Topsail Road

Vehicle Access

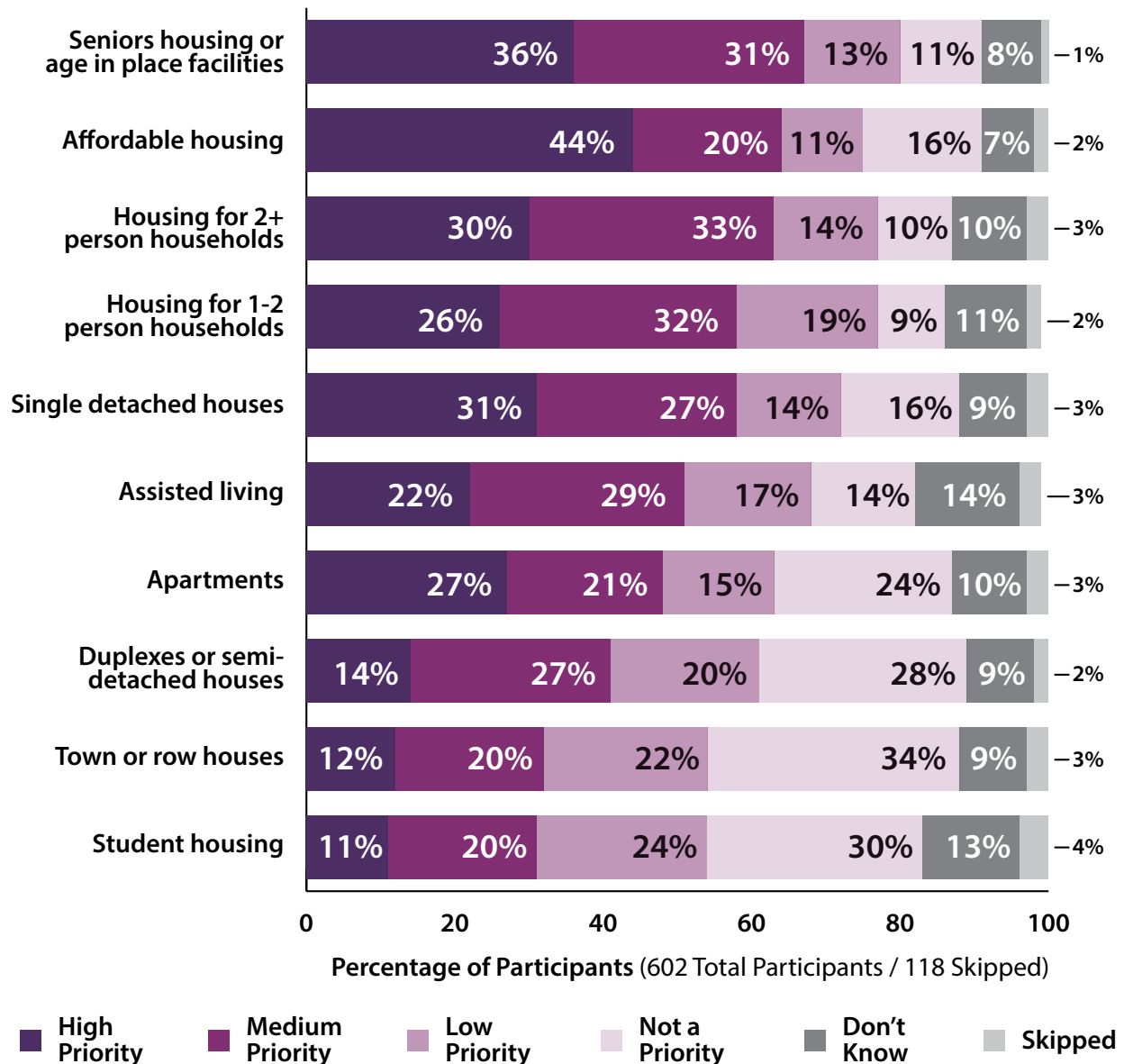
- Put a roundabout at Captain Whelan Drive-Hamlyn Road-Blackmarsh Road intersection
- Enforce speed limits
- Traffic calming near schools and in residential areas
- Stop removing street parking / need to allow more street parking
- Make intersections safer / not too narrow
- Add EV chargers

Other

- Indoor walking track / recreation center / gym
- More accessible playgrounds
- More garbage clean up
- Beautification
- Maintain greenspace

What types of housing are needed and should be a priority in your neighbourhood?

50
comments



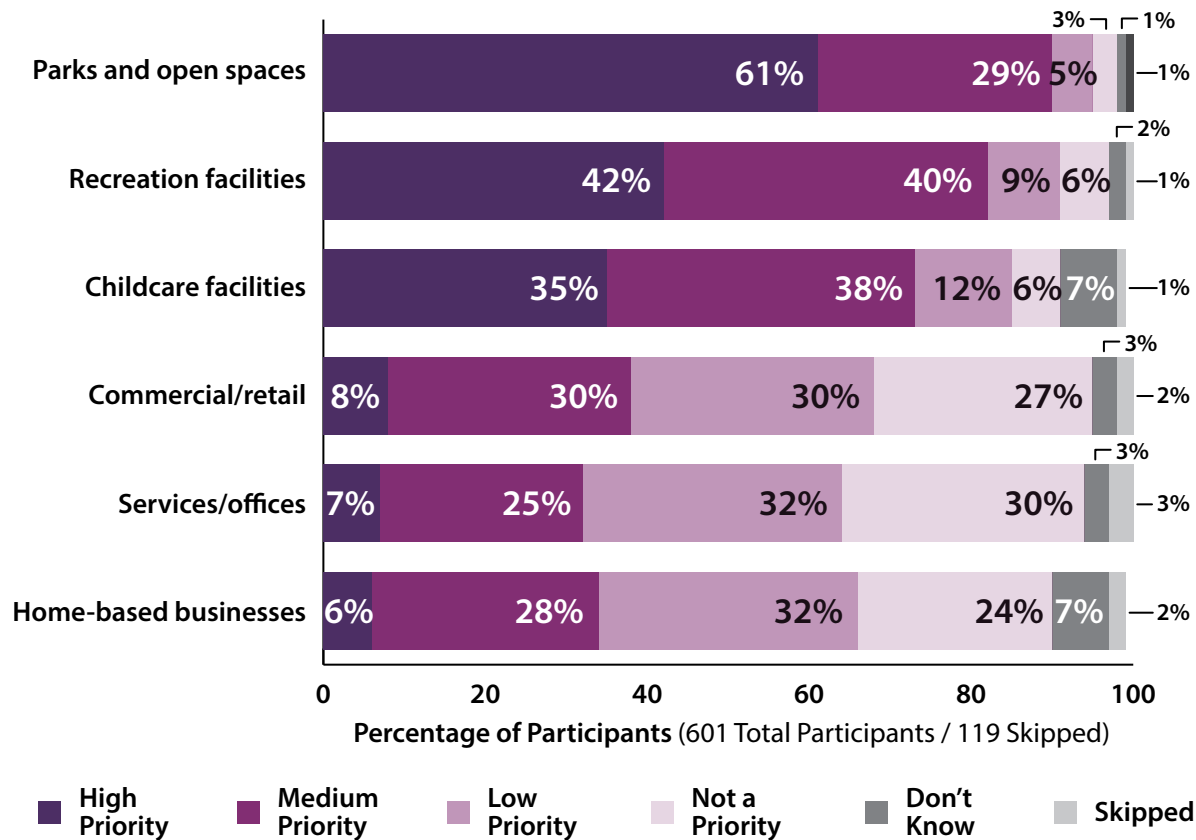
The top housing priorities were seniors housing or aging in place facilities and affordable housing. The lowest ranked priorities were town and row houses and student housing.

The "other" responses included:

- Accessible housing
- Concerns about losing parkspace or commercial area for housing
- Wanting to see a ban on airbnbs
- Concerns about too much affordable housing in one area
- Tiny homes
- Mixed use development
- Concerns about landlords and property upkeep / living conditions and lack of enforcement
- Facility like Bishop Gardens

What types of land uses should be prioritized in your neighbourhood?

237
comments



The number one priority was parks and open spaces, followed by recreation facilities, then childcare. Commercial/ retail, home-based businesses, and services/offices were seen as lower priority in the survey responses.

The "other" responses are summarized below.

Vehicle Access

- Put a roundabout at Captain Whelan Drive and Hamlyn Road

Other

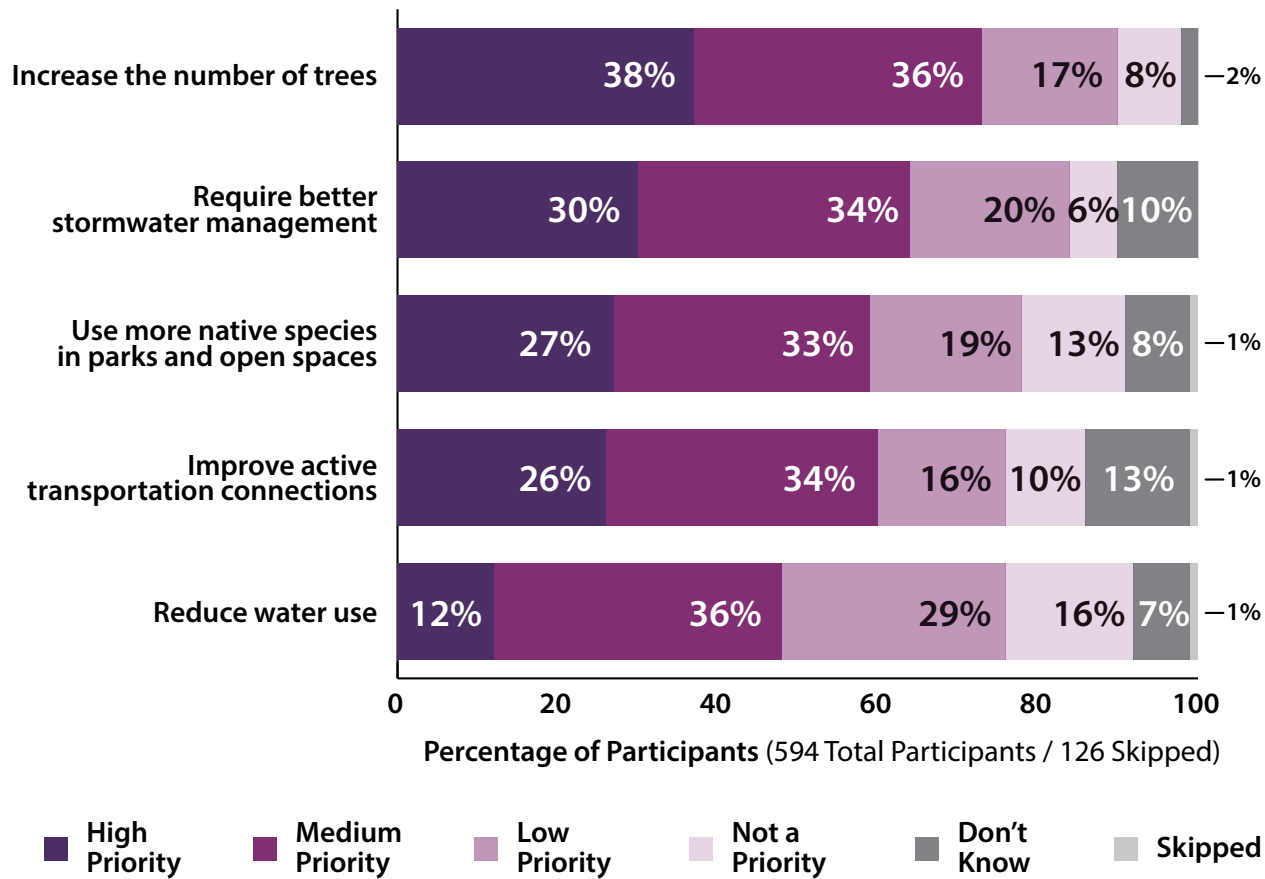
- Retain existing parks and trails
- Connected open space and trail network
- Dog park
- Medical facilities

- Skate park
- Community centre / gathering place and programming
- Arts & culture space
- Gym
- Outdoor rink
- Pickleball
- Community garden
- Splashpad

- New store in old Walmart building
- Affordable retail spaces
- Spa
- Police station
- Restaurants
- Want to see / don't want to see high density housing
- Places for snow storage
- Mixed use
- Multi-cultural BBQ

Which of the following environmental and sustainability initiatives should be prioritized in your neighbourhood?

22
comments



Increasing the number of trees was the top priority. Reducing water use was not seen as a priority. From the comments, the additional priority was maintaining existing greenspaces.

- Other
- Maintaining and enhancing existing green spaces
 - Better bus terminal
 - Water tax is unfair
 - More street cleaning
 - Better sidewalks and snow clearing
 - More community stewardship
 - Expand recycling program

Do you have any other suggestions for small improvements that you feel would improve your neighbourhood?

242
comments

The most frequent suggestions for small improvements were generally related to safe walking and active transportation. Many comments echoed the need for better sidewalk surfacing, snow clearance, and accessibility. Night time mobility was also a concern, with many participants wanting to see more lighting, especially along trails and crosswalks.

Parks & Recreation

- Host more community / children / seniors programming and events
- Upgrade playgrounds
- Plant fruit trees
- Community farm / gardens
- Snow clear the parking lot at Kitty Gaul Park
- Complete pickleball court

Crime & Safety

- Reduce crime / more police
- Neighbourhood watch
- Address drug problem
- Relocate food pantry
- More community and health services / programs

Cleanliness & Upkeep

- Enforce property upkeep
- Resolve rat problem
- More street sweeping in the fall
- Landscaping and beautification
- More and nicer garbage cans
- Organize a community litter clean up

Vehicle Access

- Repave major roads
- Add reflective lines to roads
- Address drainage / pooling water on roads

Transit

- More bus stops / routes
- New / better transit terminal

- Traffic calming / reduced speed limits

Active Transportation

- Snow clearance
- Complete pathway network
- Make sidewalks / trails accessible
- Better lighting of paths and crosswalks
- Complete sidewalk along Blackmarsh Road
- Put parking at rear of commercial buildings

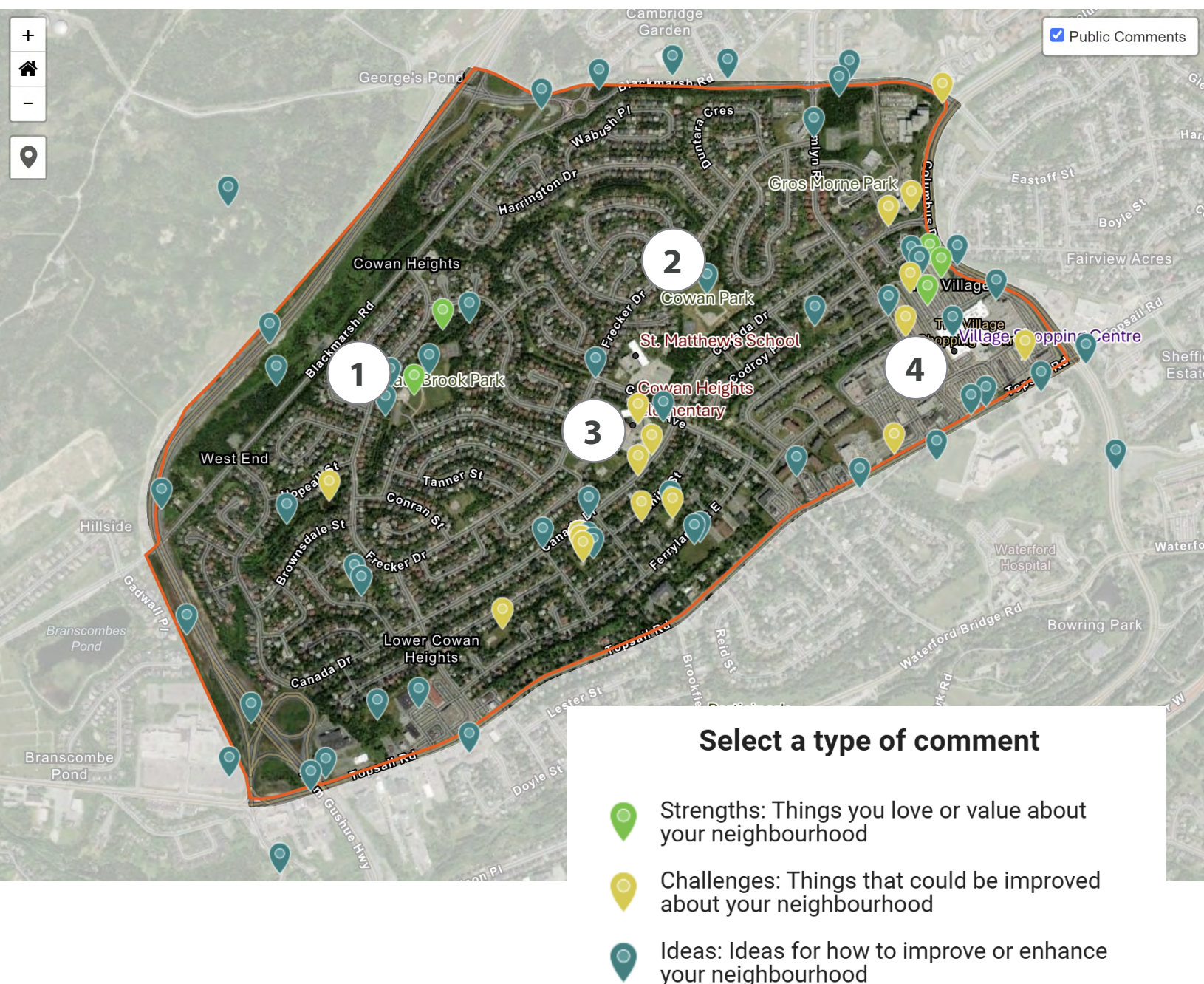
Other

- Lower taxes
- More communication about neighbourhood improvements

Online Map Findings

97
comments

The second main engagement tactic was an online mapping tool. This platform allowed respondents to share location-specific information with the project team that responded to a range of questions. Some questions were similar to those posed in the Imagining The Future portion of the survey, while additional questions asked respondents their thoughts on the identified Intensification Areas within and surrounding Cowan Heights as well as the proposed and existing active transportation infrastructure in the neighbourhood.



Strengths, Challenges and Ideas

The first mapping activity asked respondents to identify the strengths, challenges, and big ideas they had for Cowan Heights. This activity helped the project team to capture location-specific comments about areas and opportunities for change throughout the community.

1. Kitty Gaul Brook Park

- Expand the field for adult sports

2. Cowan Park

- Add disc golf

3. Schools

- Grounds need maintenance in summer
- Should be used for social programming / community events

4. Village Shopping Centre

- Put housing in front of mall, not behind
- Keep parking areas for future commercial development
- Want to see proposed housing development happen
- Align strip mall entrance on Barachois Street
- Fix traffic issues in the parking areas
- Add more green space

- Add hotel, entertainment, and fountain to the mall

Fermeuse Street Park

- Add play structures
- Add trees
- Connect disconnected trails

Ferryland Street East Park

- Add trees and amenities
- Trail leads nowhere

Trail System

- Trails are the heart of Cowan Heights
- Need lighting
- Need signage about not feeding wildlife
- Make more bike friendly
- Add garbage cans
- Need to be cleared better in winter

Topsail Road

- Change zoning to allow apartments / mixed use in commercial areas

- Add bus terminal on Topsail near Team Gushue Highway

- Commercial area parking lots should be connected to each other
- Maintain islands better
- Need pedestrian bridge to connect to high school
- Concerns with jaywalking
- Want to see residential on both sides

Canada Drive

- Make access wider
- Move bike lanes to Frecker Drive
- Add signs and enforce school zones
- Add stop signs at intersections
- Fill in townhouse areas

Blackmarsh Road / Captain Whelan Drive

- Allowed mixed use above Blackmarsh Rd.
- Add park near roundabout
- Allow commercial near roundabout
- Would like to see residential on the other side and in forested area at Hamlyn Road and Captain Wheland Drive
- Concerns with people running across the road

Frecker Drive and Hamlyn Rd

- Suggest a roundabout

Team Gushue Highway

- Add a South onramp from Dunns Road to highway
- Add walking paths and trees / make more pedestrian friendly
- Modify highway overpass over Topsail to include pedestrian crossing
- Add northbound onramp from Blackmarsh Road

Church

- Would like to see field upzoned
- Would like to see more amenities

Outside study area

- Encourage redevelopment of the Avalon mall to include residential units along the Topsail Road property line.
- Move Michael Donovan Library to a walkable area inside Cowan Heights with adequate access and more room
- Continue bike path along Columbus Drive



Intensification Areas

2 comments

The second mapping activity asked respondents to identify where they believed intensification areas in Cowan Heights should be located.

Two areas were identified by respondents as being appropriate for future intensification: the Village Shopping Centre site and Blackmarsh Road. Feedback from in-person conversations is included in the summary below.

1. Village Shopping Centre

- The role of this location for further commercial uses was universally supported
- General support for adding residential uses to the site
- Some concern about losing services and stores to residential development

2. Blackmarsh Road

- Lands north of Blackmarsh Road against the Gushue Highway are an opportunity for mixed-use development

General

- Concern that residential development should not be allowed to compromise neighbourhood character
- Opportunity for some additional density along Topsail Road



Active Transportation

3 comments

The third mapping activity asked respondents to share their thoughts on the existing and proposed active transportation connections throughout Cowan Heights. Three comments were received on this activity.

1. Blackmarsh Road Opportunity

Support was expressed for the proposed cycling infrastructure on Blackmarsh Road, particularly west of the Marie's at Frecker Drive.

2. Frecker Drive, Not Canada Drive

Concern was expressed about placing further cycling infrastructure on Canada Drive.

Instead of using the main arterial in and out of Cowan Heights, this respondent argued that Frecker Drive is a more appropriate location for future cycling infrastructure to be developed.

This route could then loop through the community and up to Blackmarsh Road.

3. Keep Cyclists On Roads, Not In Parks

Critique of locating future

cycling infrastructure along Kitty Gaul Brook and the green corridors throughout Cowan Heights was shared.

This commenter believed that bike lanes should remain on roads, and not in parks.

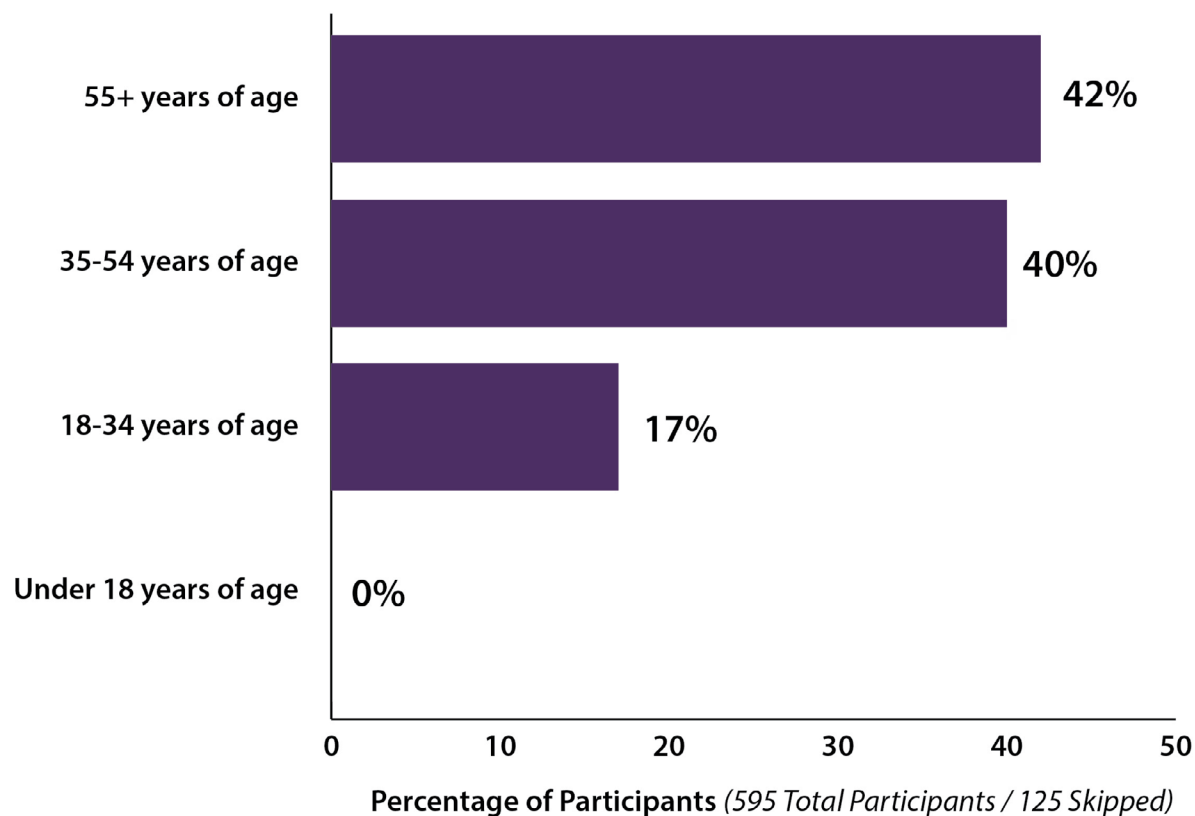
Concerns around bike paths through parks included the potential negative impacts of improving pathways, such as tree removal to widen paths and new paving that could become icy in winter.



Survey Demographics

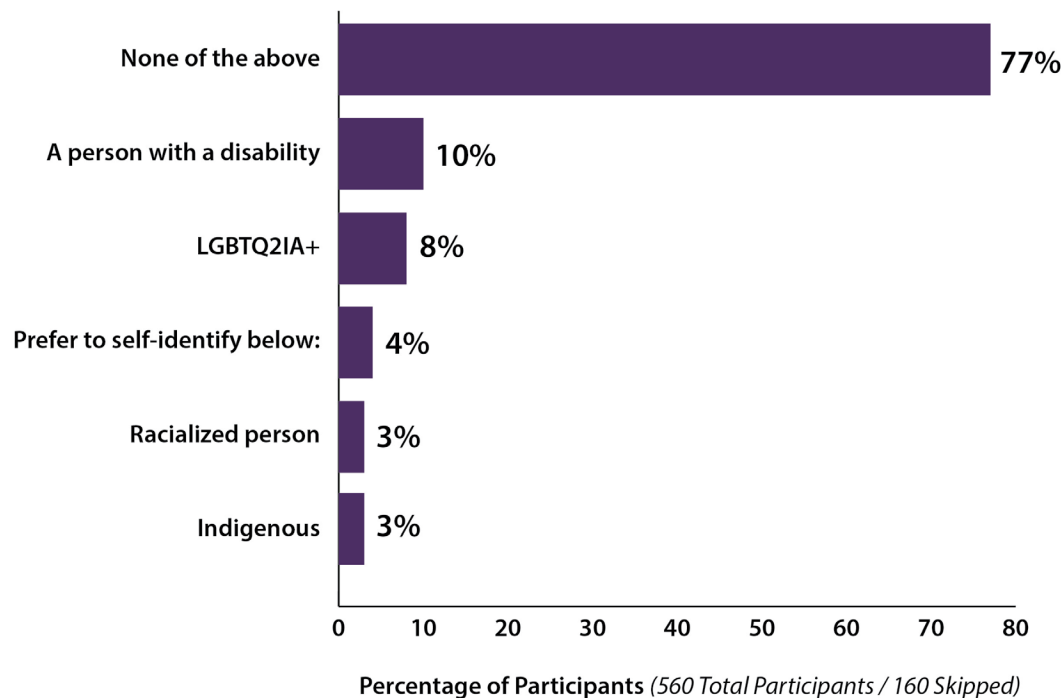
The following demographics information is drawn from the survey results. Respondents were asked to share their demographic information if they were willing. Demographic data helps the project team to better understand who respondents were and to ensure the voices of the whole community are being reflected in engagement.

What is your age bracket?



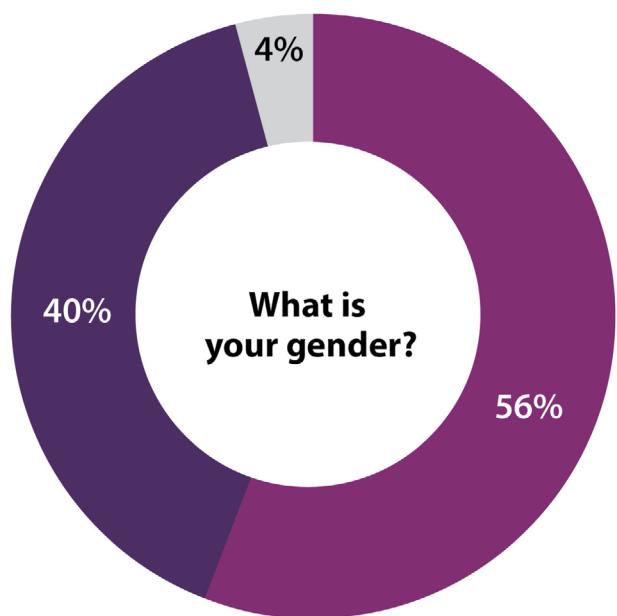
Most survey participants were over the age of 34 with an almost even split between 35-54 and 55+ age groups. Only one participant was under 18 years old.

Do you identify as any of the following?



In addition to the presented options, some participants also identified as:

- Senior
- Retired
- Taxpayer
- Catholic
- Do not wish to answer



Percentage of Participants
(595 Total Participants / 125 Skipped)

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

There were more female survey participants than any other gender identified.

Interested Parties Summary

In addition to the broad public engagement opportunities, the project team met with various community organizations and groups representing different interests in both the Cowan Heights and University areas. A general overview presentation was provided to groups about the two neighbourhoods and participants were asked to share their feedback on strengths, challenges, and opportunities as well as active transportation and intensification areas.

The following groups participated in Phase 1 engagement:

Council Committees

- Healthy City Committee
- Affordable Housing Working Group
- Sustainable & Active Mobility Advisory Committee
- Environment & Sustainability Expert Panel
- Building Safer Communities Steering Committee
- Seniors' Advisory Committee

- City of St. John's Youth Engagement Working Group

Organizations

- NL Housing Corporation
- NL Hydro
- NL Schools
- Stella's Circle
- Heritage NL
- Association for New Canadians
- College of the North Atlantic

- Food First NL
- Ordinary Spokes
- Memorial University
- Grand Concourse Authority
- Ultimate NL
- Metrobus
- Advantage St. John's

Across the various organizations, the key topics raised for Cowan Heights were housing, active mobility, transit, and opportunities for new land uses and intensification.

Housing

Interested parties noted that Cowan Heights is becoming increasingly sought after for families as the area experiences generational transition. There is interest in promoting additional "hidden" density in the area through secondary suites, but there are servicing, driveways, and parking barriers preventing more uptake. In relation to housing and growth, the addition of more families and newcomers to the neighbourhood is increasing the need for additional social and family services, such as daycares. For any new development, some groups want to see a greater

focus on livability in the design through the incorporation of open space and other amenities for residents.

Transit

Cowan Heights is an important transit hub, especially for newcomers and students. Several different organizations raised the need for more frequent, efficient, and accessible transit services in the area. There is a desire to see an improved bus terminal, potentially integrated with new mixed use development. A new terminal could also provide more amenities for people waiting for transit, such as washrooms and safe sheltered areas, as well as park and ride capacity. Increasing bus service to match rapidly increasing demand has been challenging due to the length of time to acquire new buses and labour shortages.

Active Transportation

Parks and especially trails were considered prime amenities in Cowan Heights. There was some desire from interested parties to see more separation between pedestrians and cyclists on pathways. Some groups suggested that there be more lighting and wayfinding to connect trail and sidewalk networks and make it clearer to find neighbourhood amenities and parks. Specific connection improvements raised were a formalized connection to Bowring Park, safer routes to the grocery store, and a safer crossing over Topsail Road. Any new development should also focus on enhancing walkability in the area and connecting to transit.

Land Use & Intensification

The majority of conversations about land use and intensification were focused on the Village Shopping Centre and other major commercial areas along Topsail Road. For the mall area, there was a general level of support for increasing density through high-quality mixed-use development on the site. Several opportunities were suggested for creating more activity in the mall itself, such as sports and recreation opportunities, coworking facilities, focused or high-end retail, entertainment, and medical facilities. There were also some suggestions to allow mixed use development in the urban expansion area along Blackmarsh Road.

Parks & Recreation

There was generally positive feedback about the parks in Cowan Heights. Two opportunities for improvement were identified: extending the soccer field at Kitty Gaul Park to accommodate adult soccer and adding a disc golf course to Cowan Park.

Indigenous Engagement

The project team met with staff members from First Light to share a meal and talk about the needs of the Indigenous Community in Cowan Heights and the University Area. The session started with a high level overview of the project and process which then led into a discussion about community needs in both neighbourhoods.

The key themes from the conversation were about the value of natural and green spaces, the significance of including arts and culture in planning and the significant housing and transportation needs in both neighbourhoods.

The project team committed to returning to First Light in Phase 2 of engagement on the Plan to present initial plan directions and recommendations for feedback.

Housing

Housing was a key theme within the discussion with First Light Staff. In Cowan Heights, there is a demographic transition happening as seniors are aging and more families are moving in. This is increasing the need for more affordable, accessible, and inter-generational living opportunities. First Light Staff expressed needs for a variety of housing types, from accessible ground-floor units and secondary suites to apartments and tiny homes. School capacity was also flagged as something that needs to be confirmed prior to any significant growth.

Arts & Culture

Access to arts and culture was identified as an important aspect of quality of life that needs to be part of neighbourhood planning. There is not a lot of art or art space in Cowan Heights and there is a lack of visibility of Indigeneity. First Light Staff identified opportunities for using the vacant community centre building for arts and community programming and using art throughout the community as a way to start conversations, make Indigenous People feel welcome, and provide education opportunities.

Parks & Recreation

Green spaces in the area are very important to quality of life for the community. Seniors in particular use the trails and like to sit by the water, so these should be made more accessible. First Light Staff flagged that not a lot of people know that parks and recreation spaces are bookable or how to book them. There was a desire to see a reduction in red tape for bookings and more education and awareness building around available facilities. More spaces like Bannerman Park that can host large outdoor events like Pow Wows were also suggested.

Transportation

Cowan Heights is a major transit hub. The transit terminal at the Village Shopping Centre needs to be improved and there needs to be more amenities like public washrooms for people taking and waiting for transit. In the interim, staff suggested that there should be partnerships with the Village Shopping Centre to create safer gathering spaces. Security staff should also receive inclusivity training to increase cultural safety.

Additionally, First Light Staff highlighted the need for better winter walkways to the grocery store and greater accessibility of trails and sidewalks in the area.



Next Steps

Thank you everyone who participated in this engagement. The findings from this phase of engagement will inform the policy ideas and plan content for the Draft Neighbourhood Plan. Phase 2 engagement will take place in the spring of 2025 and focus on confirming key policy decisions implementation initiatives.

Prior to Phase 2 engagement, the project team will be:

- Updating Council on the Phase 1 engagement findings
- Developing the neighbourhood plan vision and guiding principles
- Identifying key focus areas for further technical analysis and review
- Drafting preliminary policy options and implementation initiatives

Project updates and information will continue to be posted to the project website at **engagestjohns.ca/cowan-heights-neighbourhood-plan**.





ST. JOHN'S