

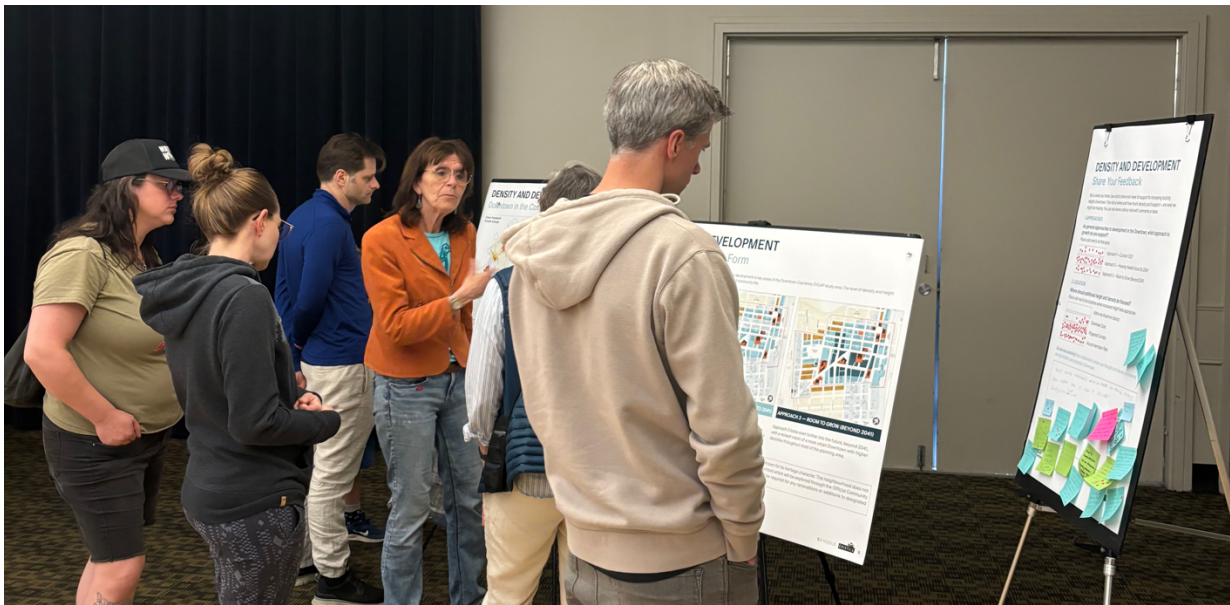
City of Courtenay Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan

Phase 2 What We Heard Report October 2025



Public Engagement Snapshot

The City of Courtenay is developing a Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan (DVLAP) to provide a detailed understanding of the physical constraints and opportunities to support community development in the downtown. The planning area includes four key districts: Riverfront, Downtown Core, Fitzgerald Corridor, and Harmston Park. The Public engagement took place between May-June 2025. The input collected will help shape the draft DVLAP in Spring 2025. This report summarizes what was heard during this engagement period.



WHAT WE DID		
	Community Survey	460 survey responses
	Open House (May 14, 4-7pm)	Over 130 attendees
	Interest-Holder Session (May 14, 1-3pm)	22 attendees (representing 10 different industries or types of groups)
WHAT WE HEARD (ALL DISTRICTS)		
Balanced Growth	There was strong support for more housing and density, especially to address affordability and inclusivity. Widespread emphasis on keeping development human-scale as residents prefer buildings under 4–6 storeys, especially near green or historic areas. This also includes measures to reduce potential vehicle congestion from increased density, such as adding more parking capacity in the downtown.	
Protected & Expanded Green and Public Spaces	Participants emphasized the importance of accessible green space, natural areas, and community gathering places. There is strong interest in multifunctional public spaces including parks, plazas, markets, and cultural venues that serve all ages and backgrounds.	
Walkability & Safe Mobility	Participants want better pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, (particularly around the Riverfront), trail connectivity, and safe crossings. Accessibility and mobility for all users (especially children, seniors, and people with disabilities) was a consistent concern.	
Safety & Inclusion	Public safety (road-user safety and social well-being) was important, especially in areas with more crime concerns. There was a desire for public spaces to feel safe, inclusive, and welcoming for women, families, and marginalized groups.	
City Look & Feel	There's a strong desire to retain Courtenay's small-town charm, historic identity, and neighborhood feel. Development should reflect local culture and history, with interest in public art, heritage preservation, and community-led placemaking.	

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Introduction

Project Background

The City of Courtenay is evolving to meet the needs of a growing community and accommodate new residents and businesses through a comprehensive approach to land use and community planning in Downtown Courtenay.

Building upon the vision established by the Official Community Plan (OCP, 2022) and the Downtown Courtenay Playbook (2016), **the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan (DVLAP)** will provide a detailed understanding of the physical constraints and opportunities to support community development in the downtown.

The DVLAP focuses on four districts—Riverfront, Downtown Core, Fitzgerald Corridor, and Harmston Park—each offering opportunities to improve public spaces, support housing, enhance transportation, and celebrate community identity.

By strategically guiding development, partnerships, and capital projects, the DVLAP will include actions to support residential and commercial growth, activation of civic spaces and programming, and more connection through downtown.

The Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan is being developed over three phases and will be shaped by feedback from public, interest-holder and K'ómoks First Nation engagement, design analysis, staff input, and Council direction.

The City has recently completed Phase 2, where the DVLAP project team shared draft concepts for community and interest-holder feedback. This input will inform the draft Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan.

Purpose of Engagement

The purpose of engagement in this phase was to:

- Explore key concepts, trade-offs and design directions with community members and interest holders
- Bring the community together to build excitement for the plan and encourage involvement in its development/implementation
- Facilitate both in-person and virtual engagement opportunities to integrate feedback from a broad cross-section of the community and interests

This report summarizes [what we did](#) and [what we heard](#) from public and interest-holder engagement sessions in Phase 2 of the DVLAP planning process.

Public Engagement

What We Did

In May 2025, the City hosted a series of engagement activities to share the key proposed concepts for the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan and seek feedback. The following activities are summarized below.



Public Survey

The community survey was available on the project website and in print form from May 14 to June 4 2025.

Public engagement participation from

engagecomoxvalley.ca/courtenay-downtown-plan.

- **460 engaged participants** submitted a survey (including 1 written copy, 2 emails)
- **3,365 informed participants** visited the project page, contributed to a tool, or downloaded documents
- **10 interested participants** asked a question via the Q&A panel



Open House

(Wednesday May 14,
4-7pm)

At the Florence Filberg Centre, the project team hosted an open house with a presentation starting at 5pm. Participants had the opportunity to:

- Share feedback on early design concepts for each planning district - Riverfront, Downtown Core, Fitzgerald Corridor, and Harmston Park.
- Explore “Big Moves” for downtown through key directions and bold opportunities to enhance public spaces, mobility, housing, and community life.
- Dive into concepts for density, placemaking, and circulation that will shape how people live, move, and connect.
- Interact with engagement stations and boards to share priorities.

Over **130 people** attended.



Interest-Holder Session

(Wednesday May 14,
1-3pm)

Prior to the public open house, the project team facilitated an information session with interest-holders, including downtown community organizations and local businesses to present concept and share feedback via slido live polling program on draft concepts for each planning district.

22 people attended. Groups represented included arts & culture, downtown business & industry, social services, downtown landowners, government, health & essential services, Indigenous serving organizations, and education.

Who We Heard From

We asked demographic questions as part of the survey to understand who we are reaching (and not reaching) through City engagement processes. The demographic results for the Courtenay Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan Survey (Spring 2025) are summarized below.

- *Relationship to City of Courtenay (resident, worker, visitor, etc.)*
 - 80% of respondents are Courtenay residents
 - 16% own or conduct business in Courtenay
- *Percent of respondents broken down by age categories*
 - Almost 50% of survey participants were between 35-54 years
In the City of Courtenay, approximately 23% of residents are in this age category (Statistics Canada).
 - We heard the least from participants aged 0-24 (2%) and 75+ (3%)
In the City of Courtenay, approximately 23% of residents are 24 years or less and approximately 13% are 75 years or more (Statistics Canada).
- *Percent of respondents broken down by how long they have 'lived, played or learned' in Courtenay*
 - Most survey participants (60%) have lived, worked, played or learned in Courtenay more than ten years
- *Percent of respondents by gender*
 - Survey participants who identify as women made up 54% of respondents and those who identify as men made up 38%
In the City of Courtenay, approximately 52% of residents identify as women and approximately 48% identify as men (Statistics Canada).
- *Percent of respondents based on identification (Indigenous, racialized, person with disability, etc.)*
 - 10% of survey respondents are Indigenous
 - 6% identified as a racialized person
 - 17% have a disability
 - 23% identified as LGBTQIA2S
 - 6% are newcomers to Canada
 - 18% are from a low-income background
- *Percent of respondents who attended the public open house*
 - 12% of survey respondents attended the public open house

What We Heard

The following section summarizes what we heard during the community open house, public survey and written feedback, and interest-holder session. It is organized by district and engagement questions, including a summary of close-ended results and key themes from open-ended feedback.

Downtown Density and Development

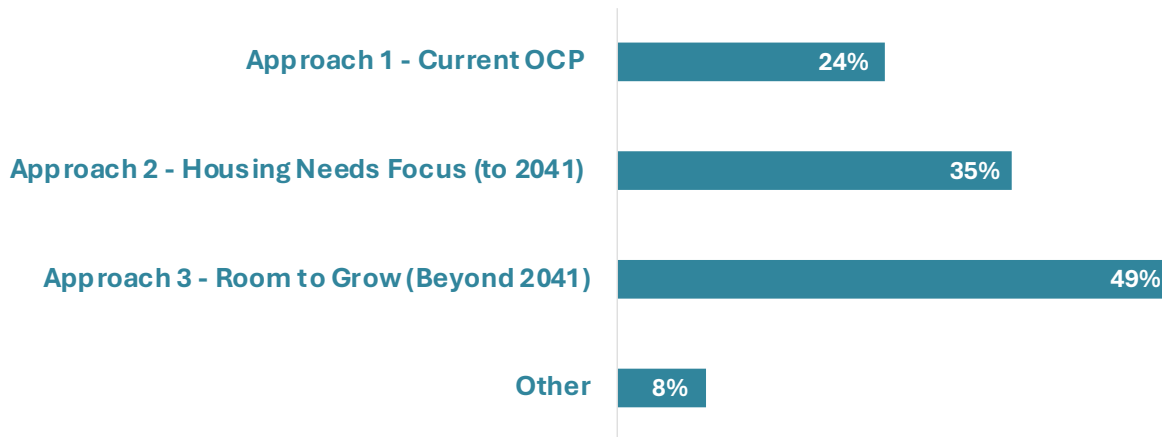
We asked the community for feedback on three approaches to help us explore opportunities for where new housing should go in the downtown. The level of density and height increases from Approach 1 - 3, forecasting different amounts of housing and residents in the downtown. We then asked where additional height and density should be focused.

- **Approach 1** follows most closely the vision established in the Official Community Plan in which low-rise buildings are along 5th Street and adjacent urban neighbourhood areas, and where mid- and high-rise buildings are considered for only select areas of the downtown.
- **Approach 2** would allow for more housing needs to be accommodated in the downtown, while still maintaining low-rise buildings along 5th Street and within the Riverside district south of the 5th Street Bridge.
- **Approach 3** looks even further into the future, beyond 2041, with a revised vision of a more urban downtown with higher densities throughout most of the planning area.

Public Survey Results

As general approaches to development in the downtown, which approach to growth do you support? Select all that apply.

451 responses

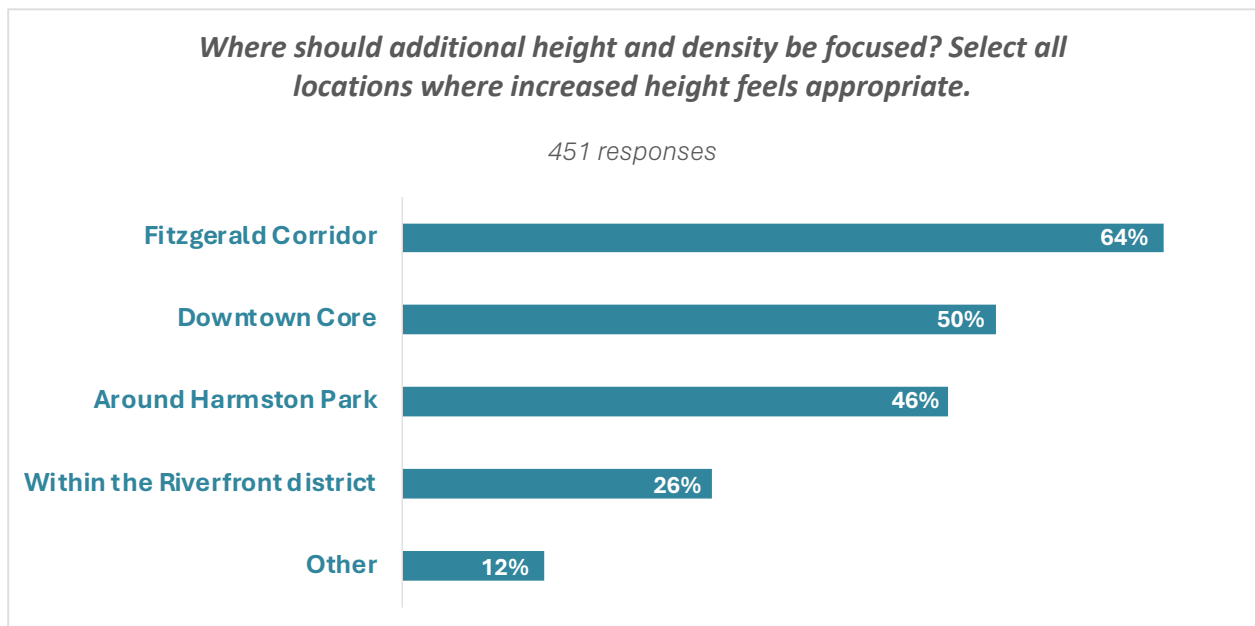


Common themes among the "other" responses (43) include concerns about overdevelopment and high-rise buildings, insufficient infrastructure and services to support growth, and a call for more thoughtful and balanced densification (e.g., infill, low-rise housing). Participants also mentioned the need to preserve neighborhood character and green space, consider affordability, and minimize environmental impacts.

Open House Feedback. Results from the Community Open House varied from the survey where “Approach 2- Housing Needs Focus (to 2041)” was most preferred by participants (30 selections), followed by ‘Approach 3’ (15) and ‘Approach 1’ (11).

Where should growth be focused?

Public Survey Results



‘Other’ responses (54) favored spreading growth throughout the city (especially along transit corridors and commercial zones like Cliffe Ave, Driftwood Mall, and Fitzgerald), avoiding high-rises and dense development in the downtown core and waterfront, protecting natural views and small-town character, and emphasizing the need for infrastructure and transit upgrades before allowing more development.

Open House Feedback. Fitzgerald Corridor was also selected most often by respondents from the Community Open House (40), followed by around Harmston Park (24), Downtown Core (12). There was no selection for within the Riverfront district.

Additional Comments. Participants from the open house and survey were asked if they have any additional comments or ideas for how we can balance density, livability, and character in Downtown Courtenay. The following themes were heard most often (n=259).

- **Transportation & Mobility**
 - Support for closing 5th Street to vehicle traffic and transform it into a fully pedestrian-friendly, walkable, and vibrant mixed-use public space (30)
 - Support for improved transit service, increased density with reduced car dependency to support a vibrant, accessible, and sustainable urban core (21)
 - Support for expanding protected bike lanes, improving pedestrian-friendly streets, adding traffic calming measures like roundabouts, and develop mixed-use, walkable downtown areas with convenient parking on the outskirts to reduce car dependency (14)
- **Public Amenities & Spaces**
 - Support for preserving and expanding green spaces, community gardens, and riverfront parks while enhancing transit and creating vibrant, people-focused outdoor gathering areas (48)
- **Housing Need**
 - Emphasis on the urgent need for affordable, diverse housing options, including small multiplexes, purpose-built rentals, and mixed-use developments while balancing modest density increases with livability, transit improvements, and protections against unaffordable high-rise overdevelopment (16)
- **Community Impacts of Growth**
 - Concerns about downtown safety, while preserving low-rise character, maintaining views, and ensuring that residential development does not displace businesses or compromise commercial vitality (15)
- **Economic Development**
 - Support for mixed use buildings, small businesses, retail, cafes, and restaurants downtown and along the riverfront; comments that having more population downtown would help businesses thrive (23)
- **Neighbourhood Character**
 - General desire to preserve existing neighbourhood character and culture, ensuring that development fits in with the surrounding neighbourhood and environment (48)
 - Support for removing business parking requirements to create vibrant, low-rise, community-focused spaces (17)

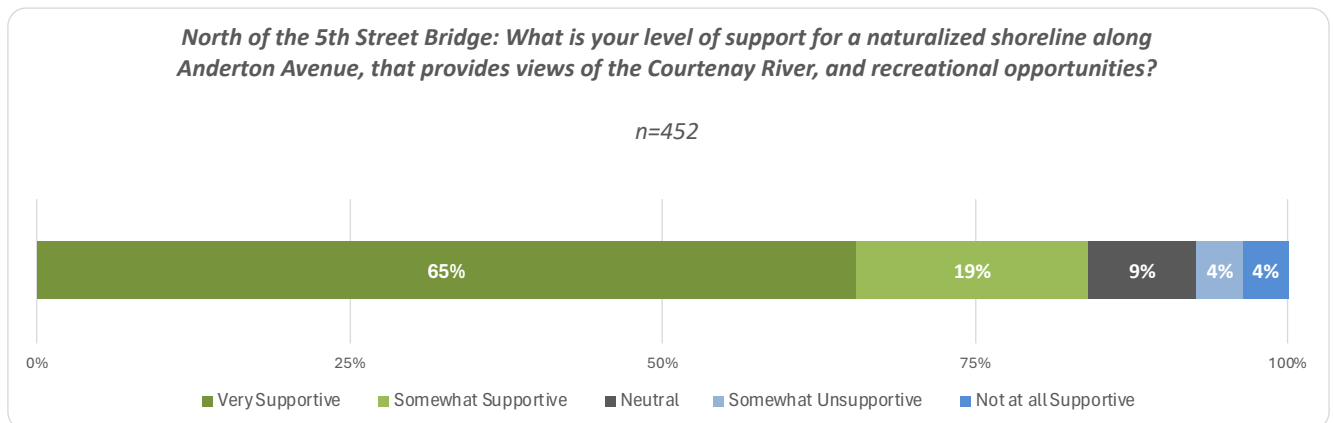
Riverfront

Proposed Approach: To transform the Courtenay River Riverfront into a vibrant, accessible destination by:

- improving public access.
- enhancing recreational amenities.
- fostering development that integrates natural and cultural assets.
- activating underutilized spaces and implementing flood-resilient infrastructure.
- There are different opportunities and development concepts for areas north and south of the 5th Street bridge.

Riverfront North

Public Survey Results



Open House Feedback. Open House participants expressed similar level of support with 30 selections of 'very supportive' and 4 selections for either 'somewhat supportive' or 'neutral'.

Please tell us why. (n=297)

For the Riverfront North proposed approach, the themes we heard most often from public survey respondents and open house participants are summarized below.

General Support

- Desire for public gathering space with access to green space, natural area, and the river (164)
- Support for naturalizing the area to further benefit wildlife and habitats in the area (52)
- Value having a walking path along the river, suggestions to improve connectivity to the downtown (36)

General Concerns

- Concern with the proposed pedestrian bridge including the potential impact on traffic, the cost and who will use it (9)
- Would like to see more housing development in the area, while providing natural areas (7)

Considerations

- Consideration of how naturalizing the shoreline will impact existing residents and who will have access to the shoreline (9)
- Comments to ensure that access to and use of the shoreline walkways are safe and comfortable for public enjoyment (7)

Riverfront South

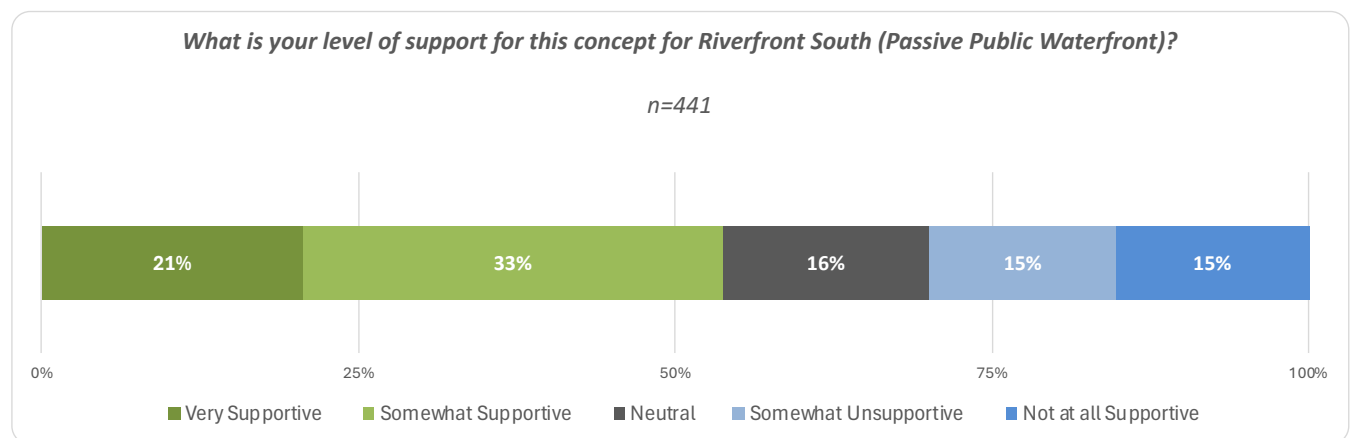
Proposed Approach: The City is exploring two concepts for Riverfront South. These concepts explore development ideas for the area south of the 5th Street Bridge, including the Central Builders site, the City Hall site, and adjacent parking lots.

Concept One for Riverfront South - Passive Public Waterfront

A passive waterfront experience with trails, boardwalks, and seating along the river's edge. This includes:

- Townhomes form the first row of buildings, with front doors oriented toward the public walkway and waterfront.
- Larger residential buildings are terraced up the slope behind, extending toward Cliffe Avenue
- The Courtenay Riverway Trail connects to the riverfront in two locations, integrating with the public waterfront experience.
- The trail and riparian corridor extend north to the 6th Street Bridge and continue under the 5th Street Bridge along Anderton Avenue.

Public Survey Results



Please tell us why (n=241). For the ‘Riverfront South-Passive Public Waterfront’ proposed concept, the themes we heard most often from public survey respondents and open house participants are summarized below.

General Support

- Support for creating more vibrant, walkable neighborhoods with mixed-use spaces, green areas, and public riverfront access, as long as building height and density remain moderate (35)
- General support for the concept, noting that anything done to improve its current state is welcomed (27)
- Support for a walkable, vehicle-free community with peaceful riverfront paths and natural green spaces (26)

General Concerns

- Concerns about the proposed 6th Street pedestrian bridge due to its high cost, proximity to 5th St bridge, and concerns about public safety in the area (37).
- Concern that with private residences, it would be less accessible or welcomed to the public and need for more accessible, public riverfront space with limited residential development to preserve community areas (35).
- Concerns about overdevelopment of the riverside from to environmental risks, high costs, loss of public space, and a lack of affordable, accessible housing alternatives (14).

Considerations

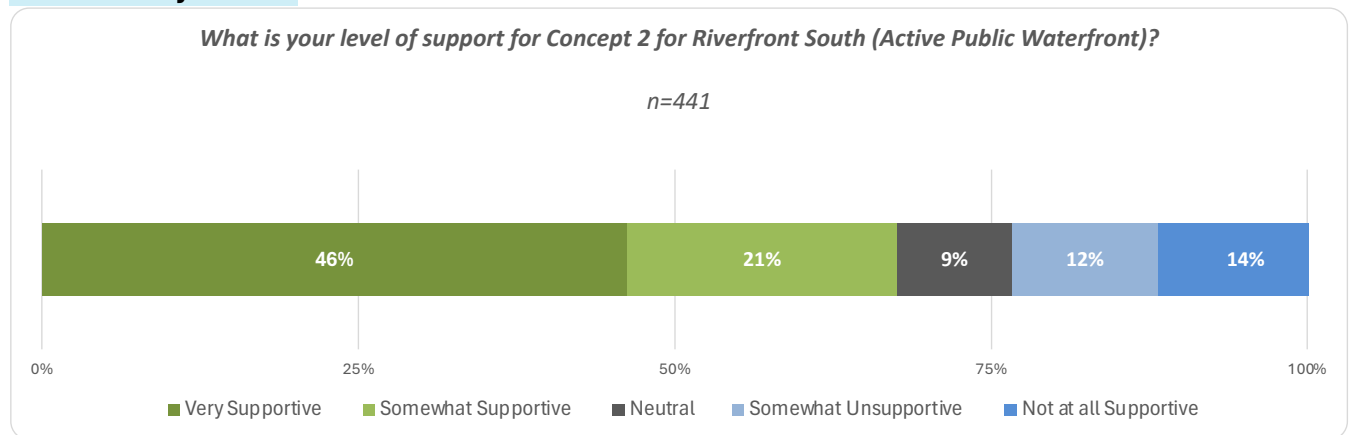
- Questions about how the perceived lack of safety and security would be addressed, prior to implementing plans (8)

Concept Two for Riverfront South – Active Urban Waterfront with More Public Space

An active public riverside street lined with retail, restaurants, a linear park, cultural spaces, and recreation opportunities. This would mean:

- The existing Courtenay Riverway Trail behind City Hall is moved to make way for additional land along the river, creating a generous public zone that supports both community use and riparian protection.
- Taller mixed-use apartments help shape a vibrant urban waterfront that complements the adjacent park and natural landscape, supporting both local and destination-oriented activities year-round.
- Courtenay is a prominent and accessible public waterfront destination.

Public Survey Results



Please tell us why (n=241). For the 'Riverfront South-Active Public Waterfront' proposed concept, the themes we heard most often from respondents are summarized below.

General Support

- Support having access to public space, the river, and green space, with suggestions to ensure that it will be maintained as public and not privatized (107)
- Mix of support for proposed density, some suggestions for lower density to maintain views (22)
- Support for improving access through walkability and active transportation (21)

General Concerns

- Concerns about adding a pedestrian bridge as an unneeded expense and potentially attract crime and drug use (20)
- Concern that the concept is too urban for the community and potentially have negative impacts on existing residents and businesses (18)
- Concern that the proposed density is too high for the area, leading to obstructive views and strain on infrastructure (13)

Considerations

- Ensure that public space will remain public space and not privatized (10)

Open House Feedback. Participants were asked about the elements of each Riverfront South concept that they support. The tables below summarize the feedback.

<i>Concept 1 – Passive Public Riverfront</i>	<i># of selections</i>
Boardwalks, trails, and seating along the river	48
A quieter, nature-focused experience	31
Townhomes fronting directly onto the river path (3 storeys)	1
Prioritizing low-intensity activities, views, and green space	12

<i>Concept 2 - Active Urban Riverfront</i>	<i># of selections</i>
A public riverfront street with shops and gathering space	17
Restaurants, retail, and cultural amenities near the water	31
4-6 storey mixed-use buildings with housing above	16
Active year-round destination for local and visitors	13

Interest Holder Feedback. During the interest-holder session, participants were asked what implications and impacts should be considered as part of the implementation of the proposed Riverfront concept and what is most important as we think about opportunities for the Riverfront.

Interest-holders emphasized the need for **equitable access, environmental stewardship, and integrated urban design** that connects people, nature, and downtown.

Additionally, the importance of **accessible green spaces, cultural venues, and mixed-use developments** (e.g., business below residential) that support a **vibrant, inclusive community** was clear.

There is broad support for **affordable and diverse housing**, especially alongside **public waterfront access**, while highlighting the need to address **safety**, especially for women and marginalized groups. Participants called for **strong connections to the recreational, cultural, and environmental uses of the river**—including swimming, tubing, paddle-up access, and **multi-generational gathering spaces**—particularly in **Riverfront South**, which is envisioned as a welcoming and **recreation-focused community anchor**.

However, **access challenges across Cliffe Avenue** are seen as a major barrier, and safe, intuitive pedestrian and cycling connections are a priority. There is also concern about the **environmental impact** of development near the river, with calls for **riparian protection, climate adaptation, and native planting**.

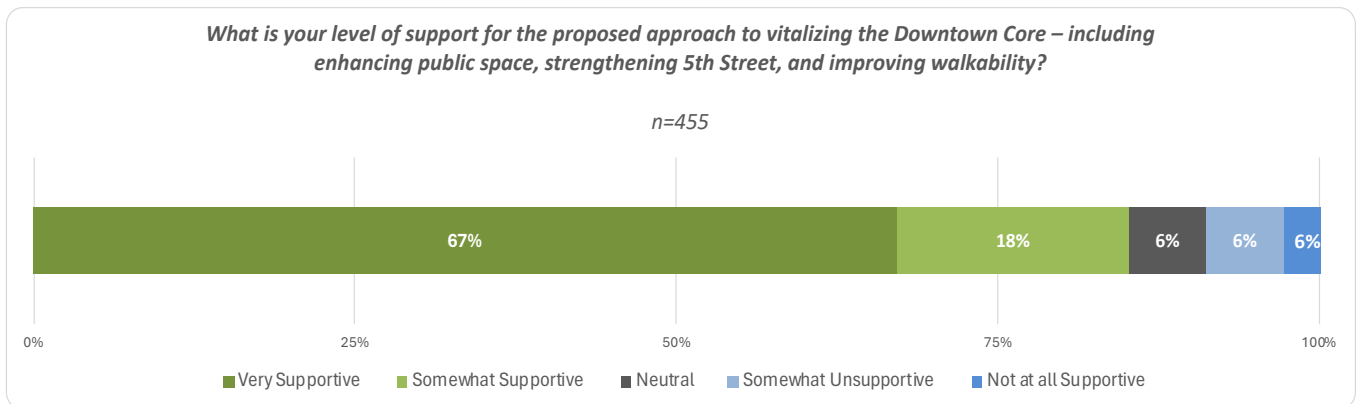
Interest-holders also want to see the area reflect **Indigenous cultural identity**, through **art, gathering spaces, and public programming**. There is overall strong support for ensuring the riverfront feels like a **natural extension of downtown**, helping Courtenay celebrate its identity as a **city on the river and ocean**.

Downtown Core

Proposed Approach: To vitalize the Downtown Core through:

- public realm enhancements.
- green space creation through greenways and multi-modal corridors.
- pedestrian-friendly infrastructure to prioritize the pedestrian environment experience and reduce vehicle dominance.
- spaces for public art, placemaking, and events to support downtown as a cultural hub.
- strengthened urban forest canopy preservation and heritage within Old Orchard.

Public Survey Results



Open House Feedback. Participants from the Open House also supported the overall direction of the Downtown Core with 36 selections of ‘very or somewhat supportive’, 1 selection for ‘neutral’ and 1 for ‘somewhat supportive’.

Participants were then asked their level of support for different place-making concepts within the Downtown Core, including:

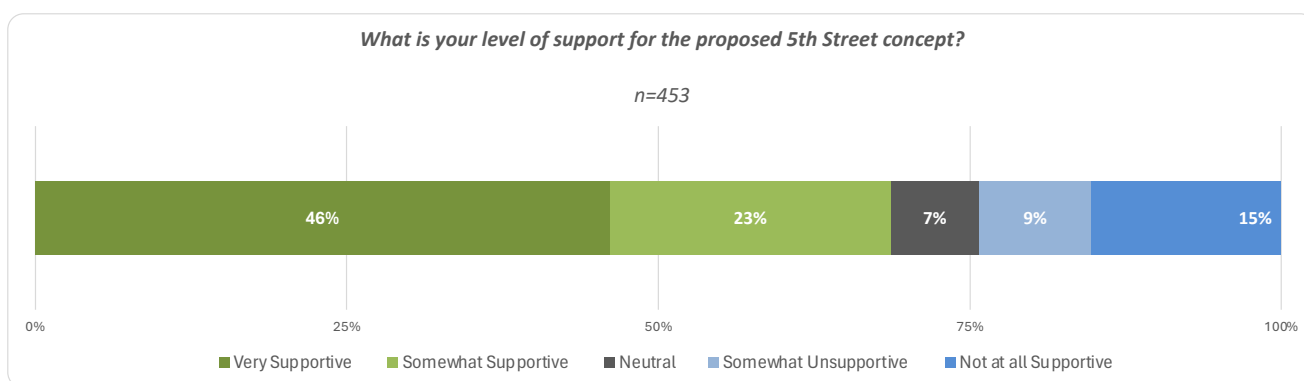
- 5th Street- the Heart of Downtown
- Duncan Common and Mews
- Cultural Square
- Courthouse Transit Plaza

5th Street

Proposed Approach: To make 5th Street a key destination with a walkable, small-scale commercial character by:

- considering locating regular temporary street markets on 5th Street (e.g., Farmer's Market).
- permanently closing 5th Street to vehicle traffic.
- balancing new development with character preservation.
- supporting 6-storey mixed-use buildings with upper floors stepped back from the street

Public Survey Results



Open House Feedback. Participants were asked about the elements of the 5th Street concept that they support. The tables below summarize the feedback.

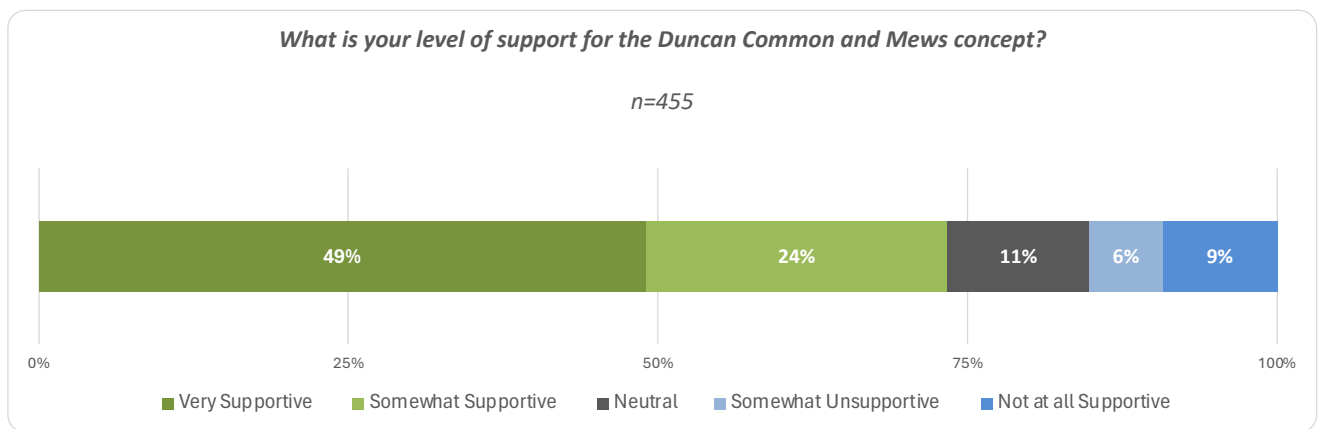
	<i># of selections</i>
Consider locating a street market on 5th Street	7
Permanent closure of 5th Street to vehicular traffic	46
Maintain its small-scale, walkable, commercial charm	32
Balance new development with character preservation	30
6-storey mixed-use buildings with upper floor stepped back from the street	17

Duncan Common and Mews

Proposed Approach: To build on the OCP vision for a public gathering space at 6th Street and Duncan Avenue, including:

- a series of ‘outdoor rooms’ or terraces that function as an outdoor extension of the Art Gallery and Library
- a focus on art installations, sculptures, murals, and quiet reading spaces
- seating for individuals and small groups to read or socialize in a green urban setting

Public Survey Results



Open House Feedback. Participants were asked about the elements of the Duncan Common and Mews concept that they support. The tables below summarize the feedback.

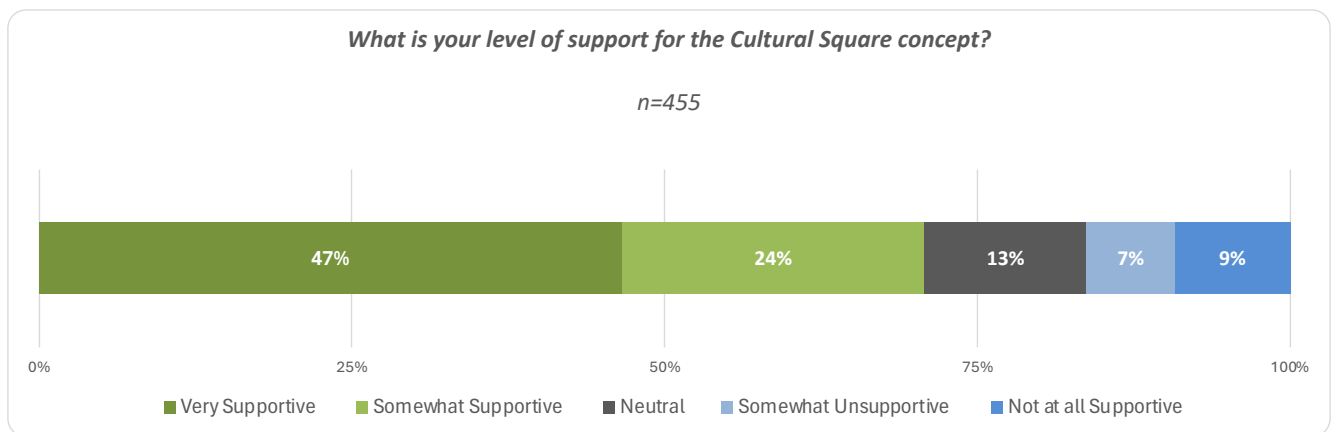
	# of selections
Terraced pocket park featuring art installations	7
Permanent seating and furniture to support socializing	18
Public art at opportunities - sculptures, murals, and creative features to animate the mews	10

Cultural Square

Proposed Approach: The concept for the Cultural Square,

- establishes a meaningful anchor at the end of 4th Street.
- serves as a central gathering space in the cultural heart of downtown.
- highlights and celebrates local arts and culture.
- acts as a key pedestrian connection between downtown and the Riverfront.
- creates potential for a new public parking structure between the Filberg Centre and the Square to support downtown parking needs.

Public Survey Results



Open House Feedback. Participants were asked about the elements of the Cultural Square concept that they support. The tables below summarize the feedback.

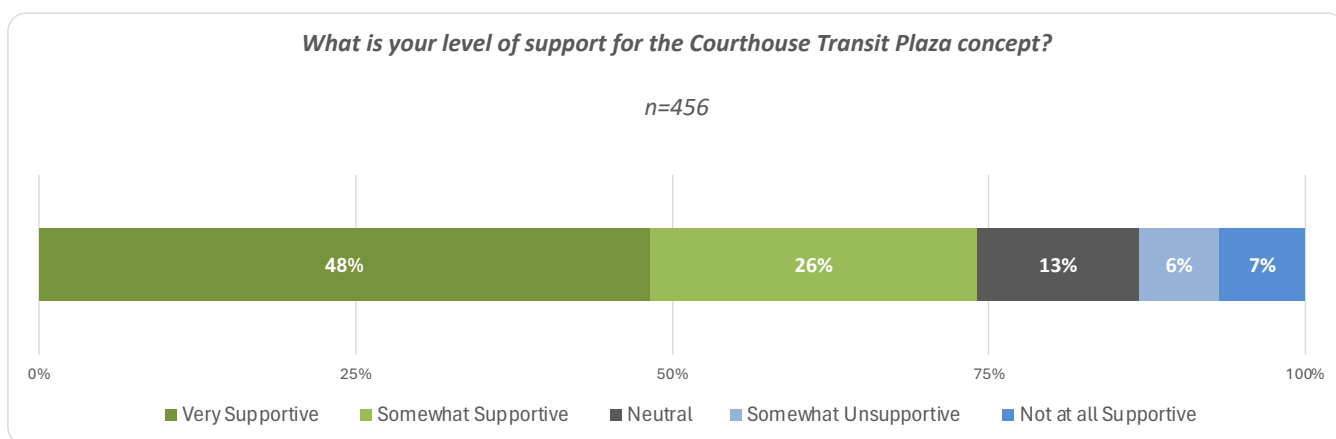
	# of selections
A meaningful anchor at the end of 4th street	13
Central gathering space in Downtown's cultural core	23
Opportunity to highlight local arts and culture	12
Strong pedestrian connection from Downtown to the Riverfront experience	40

Courthouse Transit Plaza

Proposed Approach: The concept for the Courthouse Transit Plaza includes:

- a meaningful gathering space in front of the Courthouse (at the intersection of Cumberland Road, 6th Street, and England Avenue).
- a new bike and pedestrian pathway and enhanced green space by extending the Cumberland corridor.
- connection to the new plaza and transit loop.
- coordination and engagement with the provincial government to improve the open space.

Public Survey Results



Open House Feedback. Participants were asked about the elements of the Courthouse Transit Plaza concept that they support. The tables below summarize the feedback.

	<i># of selections</i>
Gathering space in front of the historic courthouse	15
A new cycling/pedestrian pathway along Cumberland Road	27

Additional Comments. Participants from the open house and survey were asked if they have any additional comments or ideas for how we can balance density, livability, and character in the Downtown Core. The following themes were heard most often (n=290).

Mobility & Accessibility (142 mentions)

- *Parking and Roads (85).* Strong interest for more parking in the Downtown and strategies to reduce vehicle congestion. Within these responses, there was some opposition to road closures.
- *Pedestrian Infrastructure (37).* Support for improving pedestrian infrastructure and use of roadways with some opposition towards the pedestrian bridge at 6th. Concern that 5th Street is already accessible to pedestrians, and that increase pedestrian would diminish accessibility for other road users, especially those with mobility constraint.
- *Cycling Infrastructure (20).* Mixed interest for the provision of more cycling infrastructure

Safety (74 mentions)

- Concern about the perceived safety of gathering places downtown. There was also some concern about the safety for road-users, specifically cyclists and pedestrians (37)
- Strongly concerned about the lack of solutions for the unhoused and a desire to resolve this challenge (37).

5th Street Closure (61 mentions)

- General opposition to closure of 5th street to vehicle access. Concern that this would lead to increased vehicle traffic on other streets and need to ensure accessibility for all road-users (31).
- General support for road closure, or partial closure, of 5th street to vehicle access to support the vibrancy of the area (30).
- Mixed opinions regarding the effect of streets closures on local businesses and ultimate need to support local businesses (13).

Amenities & Services (41 mentions)

- General support for more gathering-places and places to support events and arts and cultural programming. However, there were comments on the need to ensure spaces are safe, welcoming and accessible (24)
- General interest in improving and expanding greenspace and parks to help provide more gathering-place and attract visitors (15)

Interest Holder Feedback. During the interest-holder session, participants were asked what implications and impacts should be considered as part of the implementation of the proposed Downtown Core concept and what is most important as we think about opportunities for this district.

Interest-holders emphasized that the successful implementation of the Downtown Core concept requires careful attention to **maintaining and supporting existing social services**, especially for vulnerable populations, ensuring the downtown remains inclusive and accessible to all.

Parking solutions are also important as many participants called for a **parkade (such as behind the Florence Filberg Centre)** to relieve on-street parking pressures.

There is opportunity to enable more pedestrian-friendly spaces, including a **potential 5th Street closure** that could transform the area into a vibrant cultural and social hub.

Managing **traffic flow** is a major concern, with strong support for **diverting vehicle traffic away from 5th Street**, improved **transit and active transportation options**, and re-routing arterial traffic along 8th Street to reduce congestion.

Higher-density, multi-story development is generally favored for financial feasibility, but there is a strong desire for **design guidelines that protect sunlight, incorporate green spaces, and promote human-scale architecture**.

The integration of **green infrastructure**, including increased tree canopy, green/white roofs, and public art, is essential to enhance the downtown's character and climate readiness.

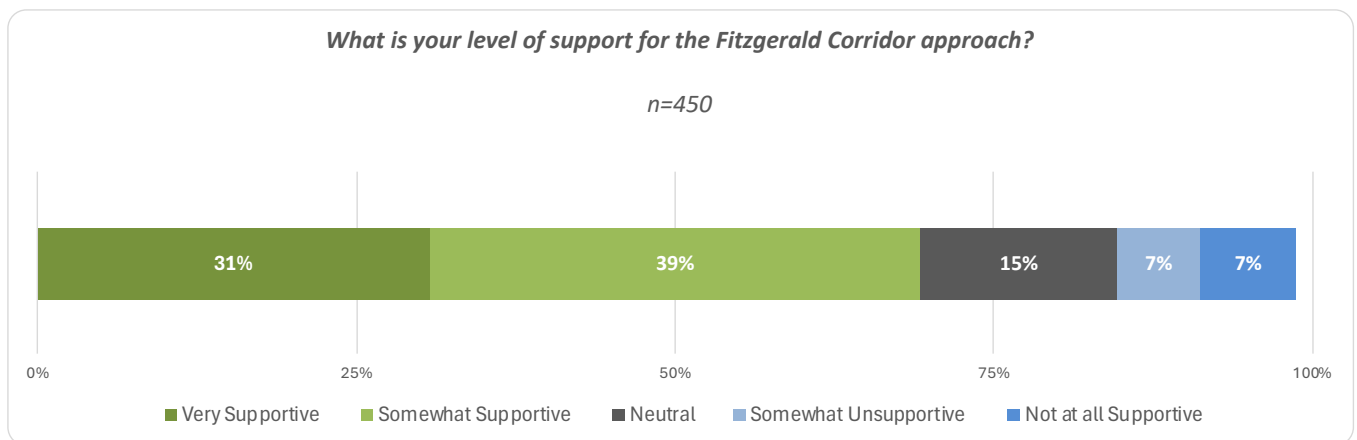
Additionally, respondents emphasized the need for **clear permitting processes** to encourage development, **affordable housing provisions**, and preservation of **heritage buildings**.

Fitzgerald Corridor

Proposed Approach: To elevate Fitzgerald Avenue's role as a 'gateway' to downtown by:

- Continuing active transportation upgrades and streetscape improvements.
- Encouraging additional commercial and mixed-use development.
- Building upon existing wayfinding signage programs to support navigation.
- Improving crossing opportunities to better connect downtown with Harmston Park.
- Exploring partial street closure between 3rd and 4th Streets to create a pocket park and public space.

Public Survey Results



Please tell us why. For the Fitzgerald Corridor proposed concepts, the themes heard most often from respondents from the open house and public survey are summarized below (n=198).

General Support

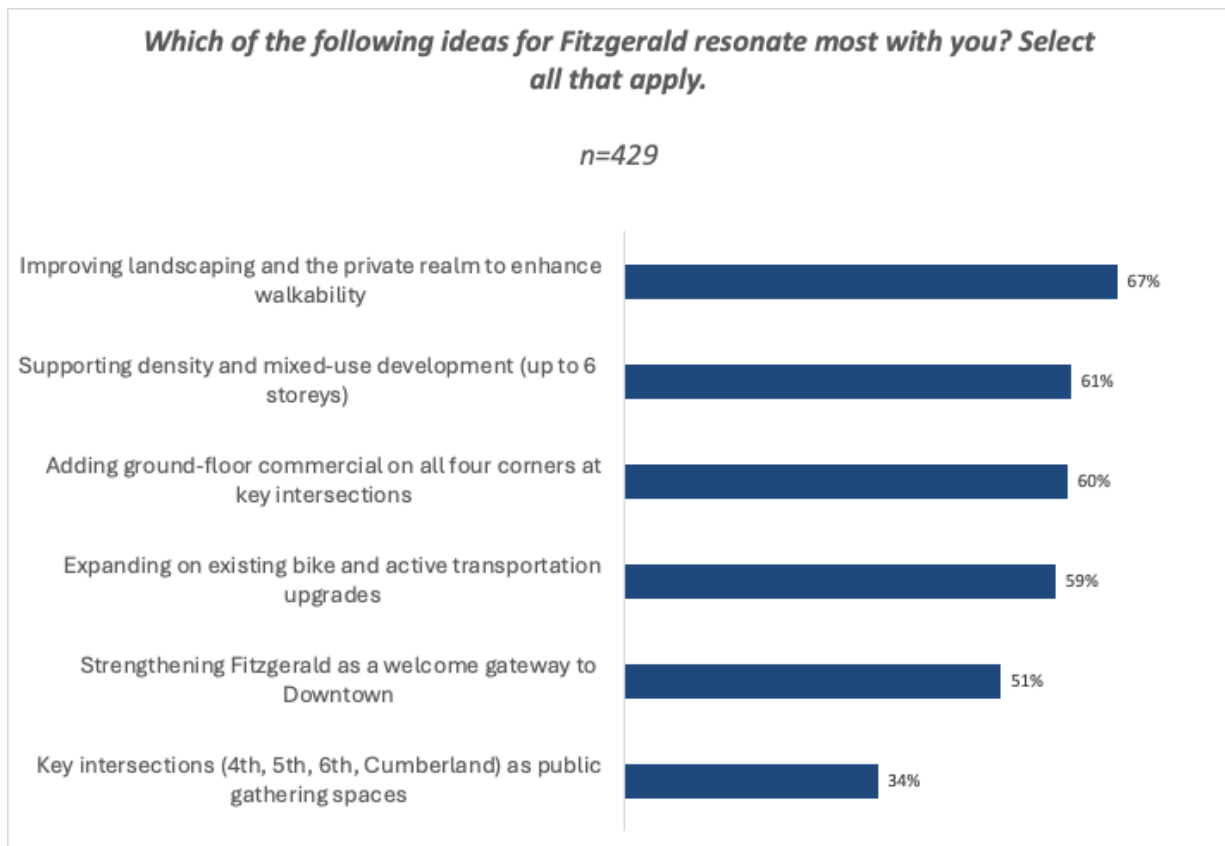
- Interest in more parking and traffic calming measures, improved road infrastructure, and vehicle accessibility. Suggestions to improve road usability and safety (e.g., roundabout or traffic light at 5th and Fitzgerald, fix turning lane from westbound 8th to southbound Fitzgerald) (55 mentions)
- Support for the proposed approach for Fitzgerald Avenue as an entrance and primary corridor to the Downtown (37 mentions)
- General desire to attract people coming into the downtown or visiting the area by supporting ways they get around (13 mentions)

General Concerns

- Concerns about nighttime safety, traffic and road-user safety, theft and crime, drug use. Generally, unsupportive of intersections as safe gathering-places (16 mentions)
- Concern with potential for displacement, and the risk of promoting large development in this district (with preference to focus development in other areas) (13 mentions)

Considerations

- Desire to improve walkability and active transportation throughout the area, including elevated cross walks, pedestrian barriers, and pedestrian focused development (27 mentions). However, there was some opinion that new active transportation infrastructure should be focused in other areas of the downtown, not Fitzgerald.
- Mixed feedback on bike lanes. Interest in connecting bike facilities and infrastructure and ensure bike lane safety (15 mentions)
- Increasing density was generally supported, however there was some interest in preserving historic downtown and limiting building height to under 6 storeys (12 mentions)



Open House Feedback. Feedback on the proposed Fitzgerald Corridor concept from the Open House was similar where 25 out of 26 selections were ‘somewhat supportive’ of the concept. Most concept ideas were equally supported (with 20-22 selections), except for ‘strengthening Fitzgerald as a welcome gateway to Downtown’ (11 selections) and ‘key intersections as public gathering spaces’ (12 selections).

Interest Holder Feedback. During the interest-holder session, participants were asked what implications and impacts should be considered as part of the implementation of the proposed

Fitzgerald Corridor concept and what is most important as we think about opportunities for this district.

Key considerations for the Fitzgerald Corridor emphasized by interest-holders include **safe and accessible pedestrian crossings**, supported by traffic calming measures like **roundabouts** (especially at 5th & Fitzgerald) and **island medians** to improve navigation and safety.

There is strong support for **maximum residential density** paired with **underground parking** to ease on-street parking demands. There is support for **mixed-use development** along the corridor that blends **commercial and retail spaces with housing**, enhancing vibrancy while requiring thoughtful planning for **parking, transit, and shuttle options**.

Improving **traffic flow and connectivity**, especially as an alternative to congested routes like Cliffe Avenue, is critical, along with creating safe pedestrian links between the north and south sides to foster a more **active and accessible urban corridor**.

The **5th and Fitzgerald intersection** is a key pressure point needing redesign to reduce peak-hour congestion. Enhancing the area's **aesthetic appeal, walkability, and gathering spaces** will help transform Fitzgerald from a traffic corridor into a welcoming and vibrant urban destination that supports local businesses and housing growth.

Harmston Park

A separate planning process for Harmston Park is underway that includes additional opportunities for engagement. Visit the project webpage for more information:

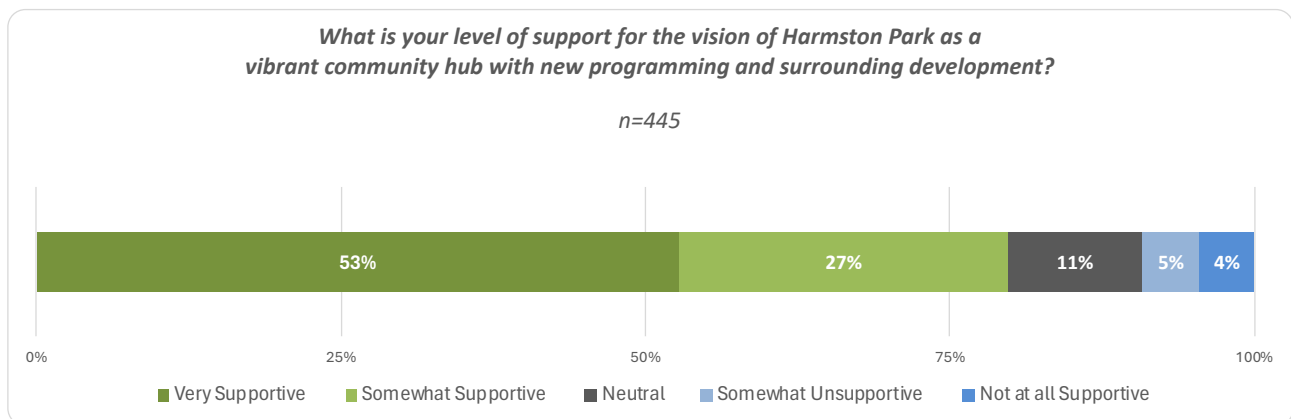
<https://engagecomoxvalley.ca/harmston-park>.

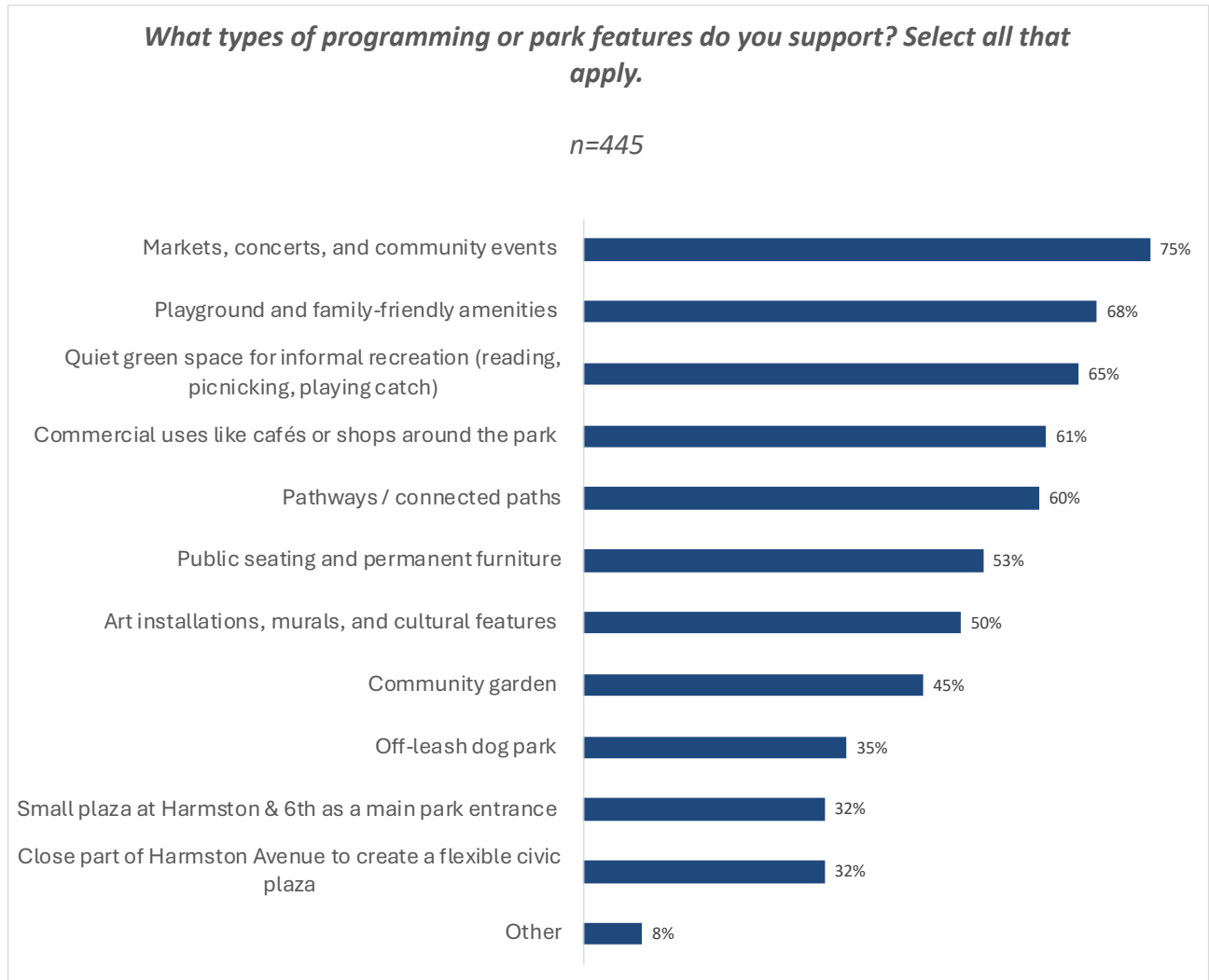
Proposed Approach: To design and develop Harmston Park as a dynamic community hub, supported by enhanced programming and infrastructure. Opportunities for higher-density housing and innovative uses for adjacent municipal lands, such as partial street closures, can further integrate the park into the community fabric.

Opportunities include:

- Detailed design and activation of Harmston Park.
- Introduce regular programming and events in the park.
- Enable infill residential and mixed-use development around the park.
- Enhance trail connections, including strengthening access to Rotary Trail and McPhee Meadows.
- Historic Train Station provides a placemaking opportunity with economic potential.

Public Survey Results





Open House Feedback. Feedback on the proposed Harmston Park approach and programming from the Open House was similar where 28 out of 30 selections were ‘very supportive’ or ‘somewhat supportive’ of the vision. The most preferred programming or park features included:

- Markets, concerts, and community events (29 selections)
- Close part of Harmston Avenue to create a flexible civic plaza (22 selections)
- Quiet green spaces for informal recreation (reading, picnicking) (23 selections)

The City is considering two concepts to explore potential density approaches surrounding Harmston Park. Please note: The massing model illustrations show where added height and density could be supported—they do not represent the final built form.

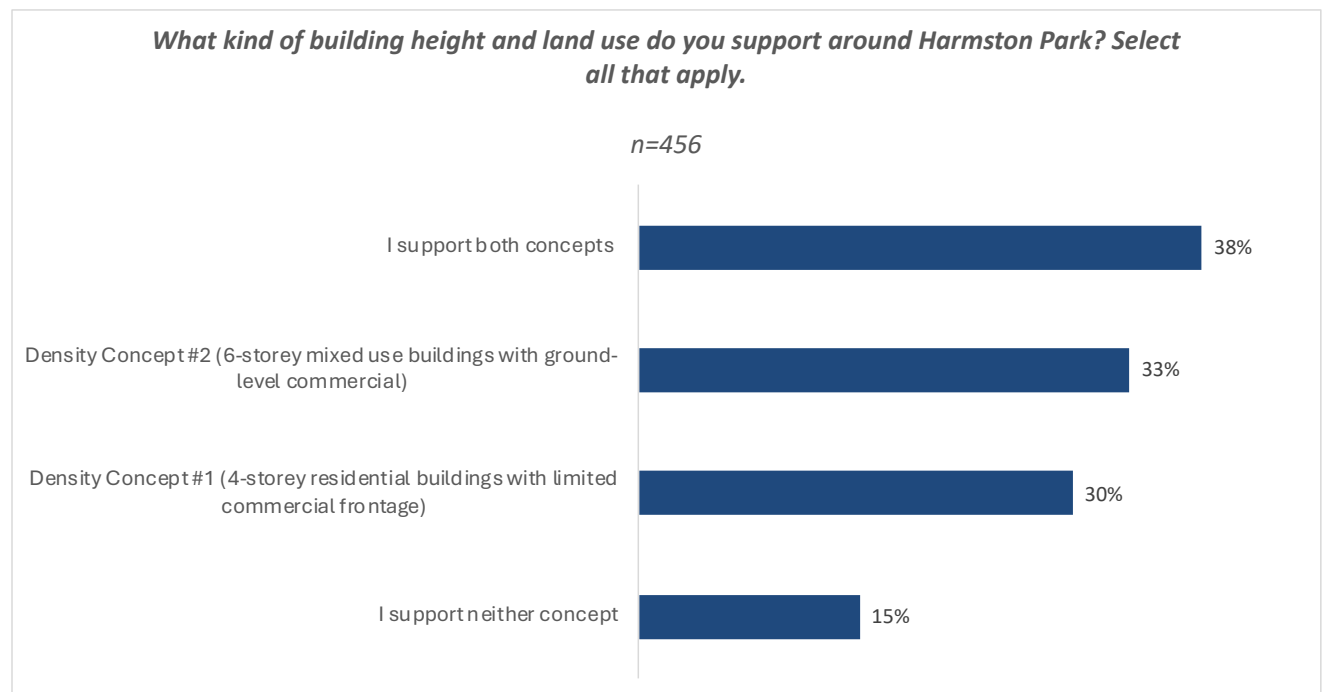
Density Concept 1 – Four Storey with Limited Commercial

This concept proposes a consistent four-storey building form around Harmston Park and along McPhee Avenue. Commercial uses would be limited to buildings fronting the park and McPhee Avenue, encouraging some public use without making it a focus of the area. The added residential density would help animate the park and offer housing close to community amenities.

Density Concept 2 - Six Storey Mixed Use

This concept introduces six-storey mixed-use buildings surrounding Harmston Park. Ground floors would feature commercial uses throughout, activating the park edges and bringing shops and services closer to residents. More people living downtown through higher density options can support a wider range of amenities, helps build a stronger sense of community, and can reduce car-dependency when part of a mixed-use complete neighbourhood.

Public Survey Results



Open House Feedback. Participants from the open house selected ‘Density Concept 2’ most frequently (21 selections), followed by ‘Density Concept 1’ (16 selections) and ‘I support both options’ (17 selections).

Additional Comments. Participants from both the open house and public survey were asked if they have any additional comments or considerations on the proposed approach to the lands surrounding Harmston Park. Below are the most common themes from the responses (n=198).

Housing Need (78 mentions)

- Although there was support for the higher density concepts, there was also some general opposition to building heights over 4 storeys, with some comments suggesting a maximum of 4 storeys and preference for 1-3 storeys (39)
- General support for increased density in the downtown, with a variety of housing and building options (23)
- Need for a variety of affordable housing types including infill and townhouses, co-op housing, non-market housing, purpose-built rentals, shelters, low-income housing, tiny homes/small-scale village, housing for seniors and people with disabilities (16)

Amenities & Services (46 mentions)

- Protection of existing greenspace in the park, as well as community gardens. There was interest in keeping the park as a gathering place, adding recreational spaces and a playground (30)
- Support for increased amenities in and around the park, as well as active transportation. Suggestions included a community arts centre, space to support pop-up concerts, community bulletin board, and bookable yoga community classes (14)
- Need for more schools and daycares (2)

Mixed Use Development (33 mentions)

- Support for more commercial, mixed use space that benefited the downtown core, but mixed support for this type of development being located at Harmston Park
- Some concern that not enough commercial space currently existed to support Concept 2, but there was also sentiment that this concept could encourage commercial (e.g., convenience stores, restaurants, coffee shops, cafes, farmer's markets, museum)

Mobility & Accessibility (32 mentions)

- Desire for increased parking, specifically off-street parking and traffic reduction (13)
- Reduce car dependency and increase density of residential, amenities and commercial uses to promote walkability and connected cycling infrastructure (5)
- Support for increased transit options to and through Courtenay (with some comments to restore the Island Rail corridor as a passenger train) (14)

Neighbourhood Character (29 mentions)

- Concern that development in and around Harmston Park would negatively impact the existing neighbourhood charm and amount of sunlight. There were requests to create development that was unique, under 6 storeys, mixed use, but that also integrated well with the current form and surroundings of the park

Interest-Holder Feedback. During the interest-holder session, participants were asked what implications and impacts should be considered as part of the implementation of the proposed Harmston Park concept and what is most important as we think about opportunities for this district.

Implications & Impacts

- Interest-holders emphasized **affordable and accessible housing** as a top priority, with strong support for **higher-density development**, particularly around park spaces, balanced with thoughtful planning for families versus lower-occupancy residences.
- There is a clear emphasis on **public and green spaces**, including community gardens, shaded areas, and infrastructure to support events and everyday use.
- Respondents also stressed the importance of **social inclusion and equity**, calling for gender-neutral washrooms, Indigenous representation, and recognition of 2SLGBTQIA+ culture.
- While there is interest in **commercial integration**, particularly small-scale uses like cafés that activate public space, some caution was expressed about the DVLAP needing to maintain a **residential focus**.
- Considerations around **infrastructure and traffic flow**, including parking, road closures, and rerouting of pedestrian traffic, were seen as essential to ensuring safety, functionality, and long-term community benefit.

Opportunities

- As Harmston Park evolves, the most important opportunities identified by interest-holders center on creating a **welcoming, inclusive, and connected community space**.
- There is strong emphasis on **accessible and affordable housing**, including supportive options for seniors, alongside **affordable commercial and childcare spaces** to promote a “whole community” model.
- **Safety and accessibility** are seen as essential to ensure the park is usable and inviting for all. Respondents also envision **mixed-use development** that encourages **diverse residents and small businesses**, helping to build social connection and economic vitality.
- The integration of **green infrastructure and natural features**, including **more trees**, shaded areas, and covered event space, was widely supported.
- Cohesive planning to connect Harmston with other areas, specifically Simms and Riverside parks, via **safe pedestrian and cycling routes** with **adequate infrastructure and parking**, is viewed as critical to unify the downtown core and increase overall use.

Next Steps

Feedback from this phase of engagement will inform the drafting of the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan. The draft plan is expected to be complete and shared with City Council in Spring 2026. Another round of public and interest-holder engagement will follow to receive input on the draft plan.



