What We Heard

Engagement Summary









Solid Waste Management Plan Step 3B

November 2025

Comox Strathcona Waste Management

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Comox Strathcona Waste Management

1.0 Executive Summary

The Comox Strathcona Waste Management Service (CSWM) is updating its Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) to guide waste reduction, recycling, and diversion programs across the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) and Strathcona Regional District (SRD) for the next decade. This update, mandated by the Province of British Columbia, combines technical analysis, strategy evaluation, and broad community engagement to ensure programs meet regional needs.

Between 2022 and 2023, the CSWM established waste management goals, guiding principles, and a Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee to oversee the planning process. In 2024, the focus shifted to encouraging input on local needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Between September 2 and October 16, 2025, CSWM gathered feedback on eight shortlisted strategies and 33 actions through a mix of online and in-person engagement. The engagement reached more than 1,800 participants. Participants reviewed proposed strategies, indicated their level of support for individual actions, and provided written feedback on how shortlisted strategies would work in their communities.

In-Person Engagement

More than 1,200 residents participated in 19 in-person events held across the Comox Valley and Strathcona Regional Districts. These included open houses, community fairs, booths in malls and public spaces, and municipal council presentations. While there were regional differences, shared themes across the region included:

- Expanded access: Broader curbside organics collection and convenient drop-off options for yard waste, glass, and plastics.
- Reuse and repair: Strong support for free stores, repair cafés, and non-profit pickup programs.
- Education and fairness: Clear communication on accepted materials and consistent, equitable service across the region.

Online Engagement

The six-week online survey received 624 responses from across the region. Key themes included:

- Access and fairness: Ensure consistent, affordable waste and recycling services for all communities.
- Reuse and education: Support free stores, repair cafés, and practical education to reduce waste.
- Producer responsibility: Favor cost-effective, locally managed programs that expand recycling, promote organics collection, and hold producers accountable.

Next Steps

Next steps involve using this feedback to develop the draft SWMP, which will be shared with the community before submission to the provincial government for approval.

2.0 Introduction

The SWMP outlines waste management strategies throughout the Comox Valley and Strathcona Regional Districts, identifying shortlisted strategies and actions to achieve established goals. Creating opportunities to collect feedback is a key determinant of the plan's success.

2.1 CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

In July 2022, a public engagement strategy based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum was developed.

The SWMP planning process has four steps. Through 2022 and 2023, the project team mapped out goals and guiding principles for waste management. A Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee was established and has been helping to guide the process.

CSWM is completing Step 3 - Evaluate Options. Beginning in 2024, the step evaluated financial and resource implications before collecting public feedback about the unique waste management needs, challenges and opportunities of different communities. Shortlisted waste reduction strategies and actions were developed in 2025, and a separate engagement plan was developed to gather public feedback this phase. That engagement was open from September 2 to October 16, 2025.

The Four-Step Planning Process



The final engagement phase will be completed when the draft SWMP is completed and presented to the public for feedback before it is submitted the CSWM board and the Ministry of Environment and Parks for approval.

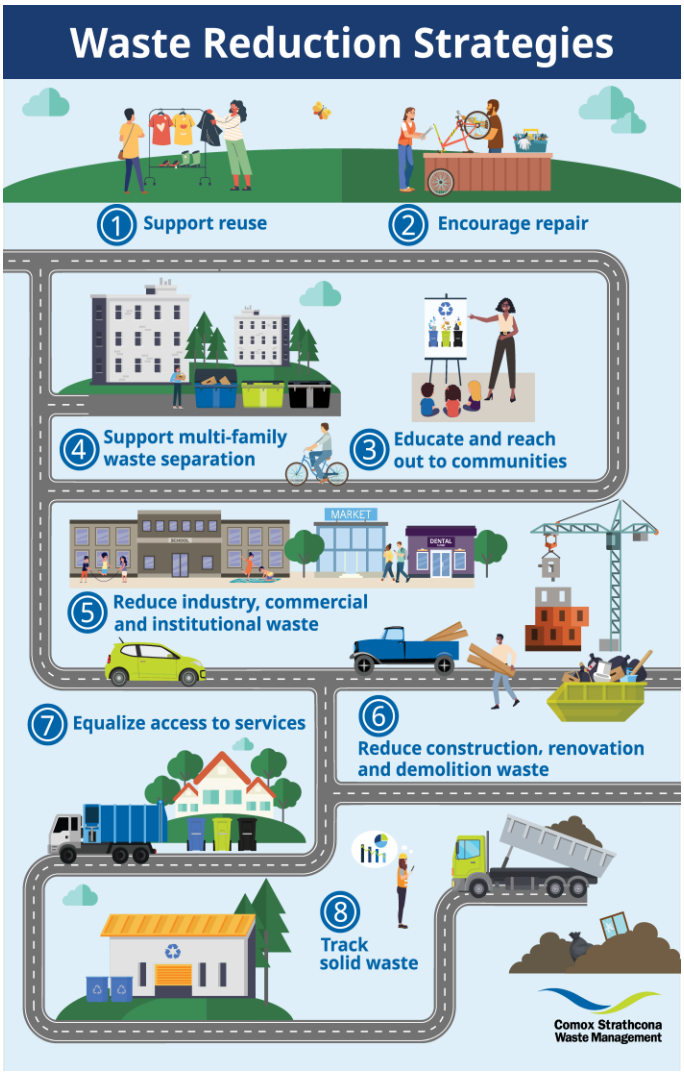
The Engagement Question

From September 2 – October 16, 2025, the Comox Valley and Strathcona residents were asked to indicate their level of support for the Solid Waste Management Plan strategies and actions and provide comment.

To simplify and communicate the eight strategies and 33 actions, a 'roadmap' and background information boards were created to provide context, costs, and relevant details to members of the public who may not be aware of the CSWM's Solid Waste Management Plan.

The background information boards included diagrams of the region and CSWM services (How We Manage Waste), waste composition results (What's In Our Waste), waste diversion goals and contributors (Solid Waste in the CSWM), diversion potential and landfill space (What Could This Cost?), process and next steps (Next Steps).

Boards are available in Appendix 5 and with key information boards available on the following pages.



CSWM Solid Waste Management Plan Roadmap



Strategy Boards

After viewing the 'roadmap' and information boards, participants were shown a more detailed visual of each strategy, with an explanation of what it is, the expected costs, diversion potential, and community benefit before they were asked to indicate their level of support for specific actions and comment on the strategy.

A sample strategy board is below. Images of the remaining boards can be found in Appendix 5.

Sample CSWM Strategy Board

Strategy 1. Support Reuse Initiatives

What is it?

Work with existing reuse organizations, share sheds, and non-profits to keep reusable waste out of the landfill.



Community Benefit

- Reusable waste is a valuable resource and should be prioritized over recycling
- Reuse facilities have proven to build community and divert waste

Actions

1. Continue to advocate and promote donations to existing reuse establishments in the region.

   Cost $$$ Diversion potential

   Costs: $5,000 annually

2. Set up a pilot project where a local non-profit picks up reuseable materials at the Comox Valley Waste Management Centre.

   Cost $$$ Diversion potential

   Costs: $65,000 initially staff + $20,000 materials

3. Provide $1 per permanent resident to volunteer organizations and local governments who run remote share sheds.

   Cost $$$ Diversion potential

   Costs: $10,000 to $15,000 annually

Who is most affected?

- Rural residents and communities
- Non-profit organizations
- CSWM staff

engagecomoxvalley.ca/swmp

Comox Strathcona Waste Management

2.2 ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The SWMP Engagement Plan is based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement. The level of engagement for Phase 3 Consultation is to INFORM, INVOLVE and CONSULT on the IAP2 Spectrum.

In 2025, the following engagement objectives were developed to give the community opportunities to provide input on proposed strategies before developing a draft Solid Waste Management Plan for the region. They are as follows:

- To INFORM the community about the Solid Waste Management Plan, its objectives, and the actions that will support outcomes.
- To INFORM the community on how feedback will be received and considered, and how community input will influence the final decision.
- To INVOLVE the community through accessible opportunities for active public involvement within clear feedback windows.
- To CONSULT the community on proposed strategies and actions and their cost impacts, collecting comments and questions to be considered in the next steps of decision making.

2.3 ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

A wide range of tools and materials generated constructive feedback from participants with a range of solid waste management understanding. The public was encouraged to take part using materials and promotional tools in Section 2.4.



ONLINE SURVEY: As a key engagement tool, the survey was available at www.engagecomoxvalley.ca from September 2 to October 16. The survey provided background on solid waste management service, identified the proposed strategies and actions, their potential diversion opportunities, and perspective costs. Participants were invited to select their level of support for each action and provide feedback.



VIDEO RECORDING: A presentation was recorded to support residents unable to attend an in-person meeting, or who wanted more information before completing the survey. The presentation was available on the engagement site, along with informational videos from previous rounds of engagement.



COUNCIL PRESENTATIONS: Presentations and meetings outlining the plan's progress, strategies and actions were offered to First Nations and municipal councils within the CSWM service area. In total, presentations were made to seven local municipalities (Comox, Cumberland, Courtenay, Campbell River, Zeballos, Gold River, and Sayward).

Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee



Ongoing consultation has also taken place through the involvement of the Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee (RSWAC). The committee provides advice to the Comox Strathcona Waste Management (CSWM) Board as it updates the Solid Waste Management Plan. Acting as a community "sounding board," the committee shares ideas, raises questions, and offers feedback on waste reduction, recycling, and other environmental strategies to help shape a practical, community-focused plan.

In April 2025, RSWAC reviewed the strategies and made recommendations to the Board.

The committee includes up to 15 community members from a range of regions and sectors in the Comox Valley and Strathcona Regional Districts as well as technical staff from regional and provincial agencies. Representatives from the 10 First Nations in the region are invited to participate and meeting minutes are distributed to First Nations with traditional territories in the CSWM service area. The CSWM Board Chair and Vice-Chair also serve as the committee's Chair and Vice-Chair, ensuring coordination between community advice and regional planning.

Community Outreach Events



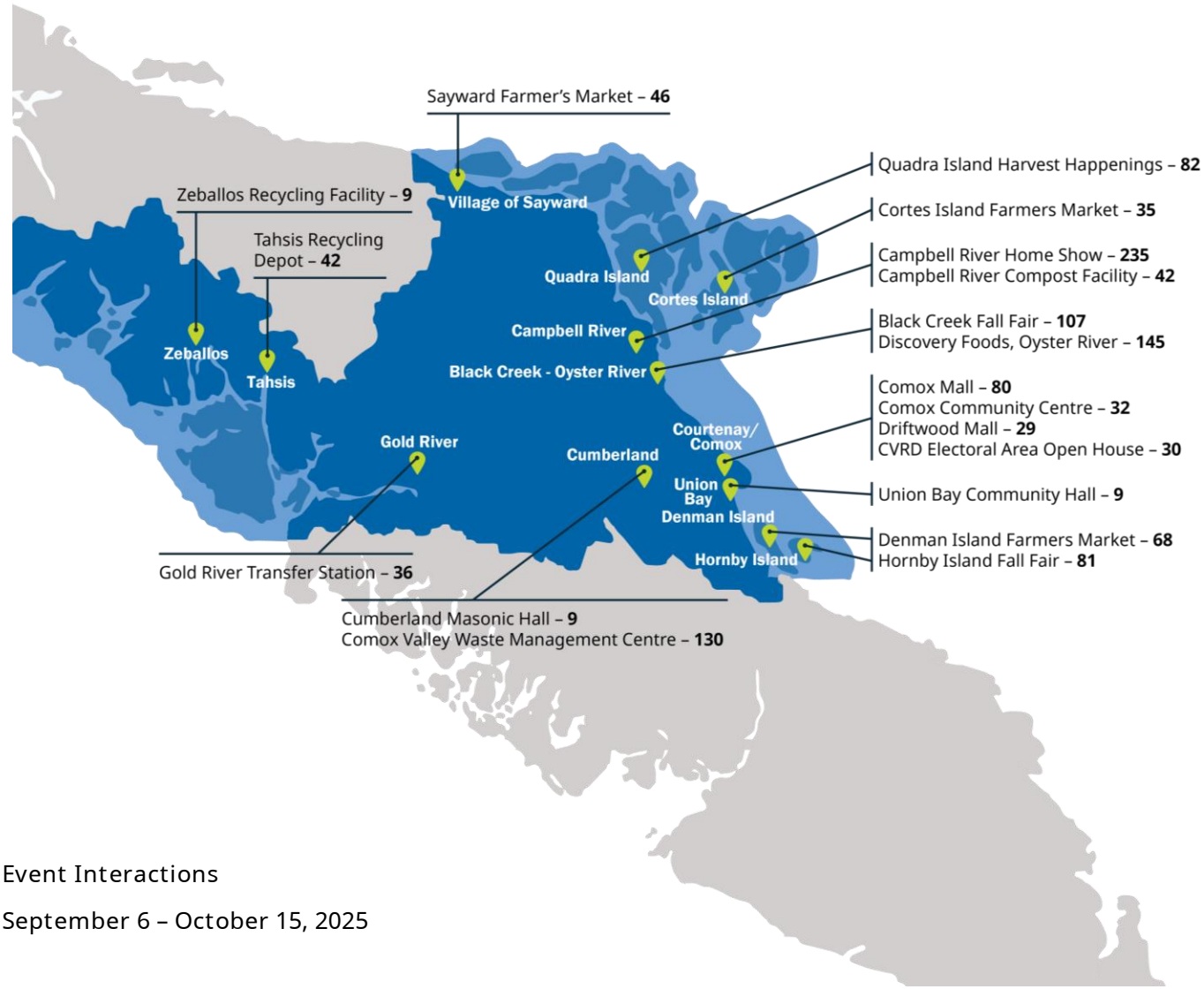
Extensive efforts were made to provide in-person engagement opportunities in communities in the Comox Valley and Strathcona Regional Districts. Nineteen events were held from September 6 to October 15 in communities across the region. They featured opportunities to learn about and discuss SWMP strategies and actions, provide feedback, fill out a survey in person or online, and enter a draw for one of two $100 grocery store gift certificates.

Events took one of four formats:

- Indoor Open Houses: Open House events were held in Union Bay (September 18) and Cumberland (September 22), with information about the waste management service and how it manages waste, what's in our waste, costs, diversion potential, strategies and actions.
- Outdoor Events at CSWM Facilities: Events were also held at CSWM facilities, including the Comox Valley Waste Management Centre (October 4) and the Campbell River Compost Facility (September 28) as well as the Zeballos Transfer Station (October 3), Tahsis Depot (October 9), and Gold River Depot (October 10).
- Attendance at Community Events: CSWM representatives hosted tents at fall fairs, farmers markets and events starting with the Black Creek Fall Fair (September 6), Quadra Island Harvest Happenings (September 7), Denman Island Farmers Market (September 13), Hornby Island Fall Fair (September 14), Cortes Island Farmers Market (September 19), Campbell River Home Show (September 26-27), and CVRD Electoral Area Open House (October 2).
- Hallway Awareness Events: CSWM representatives made themselves available at common commercial and public locations to capture the general population during their daily activities. Events were held at the Comox Mall (September 20), Comox Community Centre (September 21), Driftwood Mall (October 15) and Oyster River Discovery Foods (October 7).

Weigh In On Waste Event Interactions

The map below outlines community interactions from September 6 to October 15, 2025. In total, there were 1,247 interactions with the public on solid waste initiatives in the region.



Event Interactions

September 6 – October 15, 2025

2.4. MATERIALS AND PROMOTION

The project team prioritized effective engagement and promotional tools via a wide range of sources. Community-specific tools were used wherever possible. For examples of promotional materials, see Appendix 6.



WEBPAGE: The CSWM continued to use www.engagecomoxvalley/swmp as its engagement home, while embedding links on the Comox Strathcona Waste Management website. The engagement site hosts the survey, video and media release, as well as a Q&A tool, information on goals, costs, timelines, events, project news, links to the Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee, and document library.



MEDIA: A media release was distributed to news outlets on September 2 across the region to announce the engagement opportunity; this release was posted to the CSWM website, www.engagecomoxvalley/swmp and distributed to page followers. News updates and interviews also supported local engagement.



PRINT ADS: Print ads ran in 19 publications across the region, including the Comox Valley Record, Campbell River Mirror, Currently Cumberland, Denman Grapevine, Hornby Tribune, Down By the Bay newsletter, Fanny Bay Flyer newsletter, Discovery Islander, The Bird's Eye (Quadra), Cortes Marketer, Cortes Tideline newsletter, Cortes Current website, Sayward News newsletter, Daily Gold website, Gold River Buzz website.



DIRECT MAIL: A direct mail newsletter was distributed to 4,085 residents on Hornby, Denman, Cortes Island, Zeballos, Sayward, Tahsis and Gold River. It included information about upcoming meetings, and links to the survey and engagement site.



POSTERS AND POSTCARDS: Posters were distributed at ferry terminals, coffee shops, community bulletin boards, grocery stores, recreation facilities, and local waste management centres to inform the public about engagement opportunities.



SOCIAL MEDIA: Social media posts announced the engagement opportunity in each community.



DIRECT INVITATION: Emails were also sent to First Nations governments, industry and affected groups supporting participation and encouraging residents to take the survey.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT: Several local governments, business associations and chambers of commerce shared the release with their residents via online websites and email newsletters. These included the Village of Gold River, Village of Tahsis, Village of Zeballos , Town of Comox, Comox BIA, Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce, and SRD Area C- Discovery Islands and Mainland Inlets.

We heard anecdotally that many in-person attendees learned about events in the community through social media. Nearly half (49%) of online survey respondents learned about the engagement through social media. Others heard about the online survey via local media (19%), community newsletters (18%), events (10%), government websites (7%), word of mouth (4%), or posters (2%).

3.0 Consultation Results

The consultation phase of the Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) update gathered input from residents, local governments, and First Nations across the Comox Valley and Strathcona Regional Districts. Conducted between September 2 and October 16, 2025, the engagement sought feedback on eight shortlisted strategies and 33 supporting actions aimed at advancing waste reduction, recycling, and diversion over the next decade.

A mix of in-person outreach and online participation ensured diverse representation from both urban centres and remote communities. The results presented in this section summarize both the quantitative survey data and qualitative feedback collected throughout the engagement. They reflect community feedback on priorities and practical solutions tailored to local conditions.

3.1 IN-PERSON RESULTS

Over the course of the engagement, feedback was sought directly from the public at community events in large municipalities, as well as smaller municipalities and electoral areas.

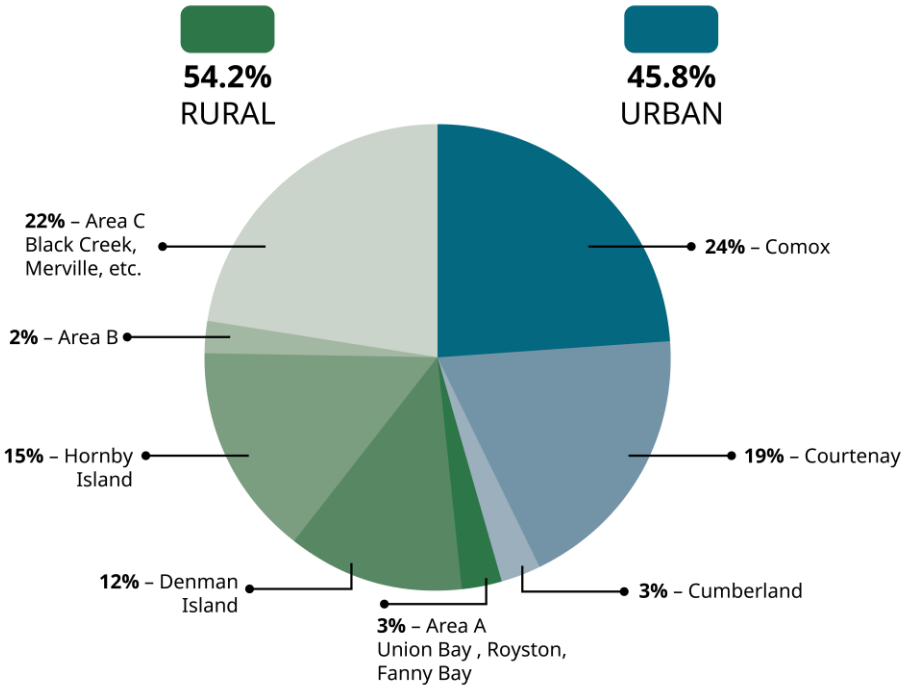
Quick Numbers



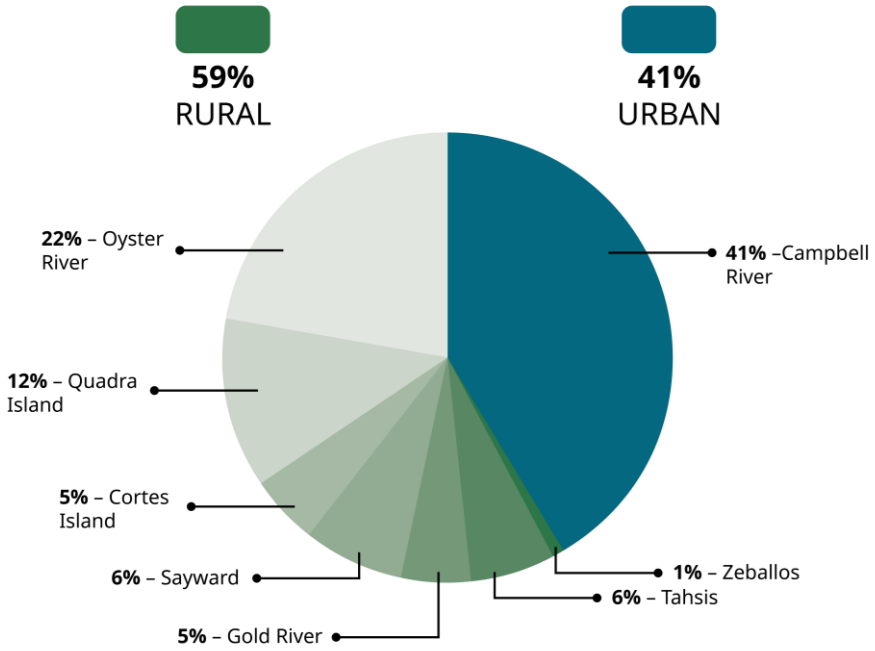


Community Participation, by Region

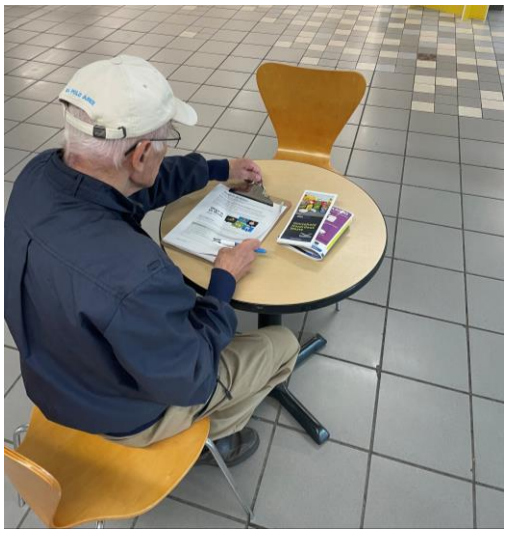
Comox Valley Regional District (575 Interactions)



Strathcona Regional District (672 Interactions)



Sample Event Photos













In-Person Comments

Community feedback collected at events across the SRD and CVRD revealed strong regional alignment on waste management priorities, with some notable differences based on geography and service access.

1. Shared Regional Priorities

Across all communities, participants expressed a consistent interest in improving accessibility, affordability, and clarity in waste and recycling services.

Key shared priorities from in-person events included:

- Expanded curbside and organics collection to reduce reliance on private haulers.
- Convenient drop-off options for yard waste, glass, and flexible plastics.
- Improved education and communication, particularly around what materials are accepted and how recycling is processed.
- Greater reuse and repair opportunities, with free stores, repair cafés, and non-profit pickup programs widely supported.
- Fairness and consistency in regional service delivery and cost.

2. Themes From Larger Urban Centres

Community feedback from Campbell River, Comox, Courtenay, and Cumberland emphasized convenience, transparency, and fairness in waste and recycling services.

a. Depot and Infrastructure
    - Strong desire to reinstate or upgrade depots, especially in Comox, for materials not accepted curbside. (glass, flexible plastics, foam).
    - Interest in centralized reuse centres and databases, such as Edmonton's Reuse Centre or the Resource Council of BC recycling resource.
    - Calls for clearer signage and sorting systems at depots to improve usability.
b. Collection and Access
    - Frequent requests for organics collection in multi-family housing and apartments.
    - Residents in Comox and Courtenay cited difficulty handling glass and soft plastics, supporting expanded curbside.
c. Education and Outreach
    - Education was a major focus, including school programs, facility tours, and public communication.
    - Need for consistent messaging about accepted materials and recycling outcomes to build confidence.
d. Cost, Equity, and Policy
    - Concerns about inequitable fees and high landfill costs.
    - Support for enforcement on unsecured loads and better construction waste management.
e. Reuse and Circular Economy
    - Support for reuse centres, repair programs, and corporate accountability to simplify recycling and reduce waste.

3. Rural Feedback Themes

In-person engagement across smaller municipalities and Electoral Areas in the CVRD and SRD revealed shared priorities around improving access, waste diversion, and public education.

a. Depot Operations and Infrastructure
   - Strong support for the Oyster River Depot upgrades, with requests for progress updates and clear signage.
   - High satisfaction with clean, accessible depots, particularly in Denman, Sayward, and Hornby.
   - Several communities, including Quadra and Zeballos, sought local drop-off options to reduce hauling and illegal dumping.

b. Collection, Composting, and Organics
   - Curbside expansion was widely supported, especially in Electoral Areas with costly private collection.
   - High demand for organics collection or drop-off, especially on islands. (Denman, Cortes, Quadra).
   - Seasonal yard-waste and branch pickup suggested to reduce burning. (Oyster River, Tahsis).
   - FireSmart partnerships recommended for chipping and distributing Supernova mulch. (Cortes, Hornby, Tahsis).
   - Interest in agricultural and flexible plastics recycling and drop-off at the Campbell River facility.

c. Education and Outreach
   - Education was one of the most consistent themes across locations. Residents called for stronger messaging on diversion programs, school engagement, and clarification around plastics and incineration (Hornby, Black Creek, Denman).
   - Suggestions included school-based waste reduction programs, public tours of facilities, and community competitions to motivate diversion (Cortes).

d. Reuse, Repair and Policy
   - Free stores received strong praise, particularly for Hornby, Denman, and Sayward, with requests to expand and improve facilities (e.g., heating, more space).
   - Interest in repair cafés and reuse incentives, including rebates for compost bins and local “right-to-repair” initiatives (Denman, Cortes).
   - Participants emphasized the need for consistent regional standards across SRD and CVRD, including garbage and recycling collection (Union Bay).
   - Support incentives for diversion, corporate responsibility (Cortes, Union Bay), and policies addressing construction waste and rural burning.

Council Presentations

Public presentations were given to seven municipal councils from October 1 – December 1, 2025. Councils were given the opportunity to ask questions and provide comment. While many of the questions were community specific, several key themes emerged across communities.

These included conversations about:

- Contamination and overflow at depots (Comox, Zeballos, Sayward)
- Questions focused on staffing for deconstruction, timeline for ICI compost pickup, business and multi-family access to recycling and compost programs. (Comox, Courtenay)
- Organics education in schools (Courtenay)
- Diversion results by community (Comox, Campbell River)
- Landfill management: Current waste management centre lifespan, conserving air space and construction and demolition diversion (Cumberland, Sayward)
- Landfill costs, diversion economics, and waste to energy (Campbell River)
- Solid waste management funding model (tipping fees vs taxation): (Courtenay)
- Construction waste transport (Campbell River)
- Reuse pilot project at the CV Waste Management Centre (Cumberland)
- Free store / share shed funding (Sayward)
- Capacity and resources: Waste facility limits, staffing, and contractor planning (Zeballos)
- Policy coordination: Bylaw template development to help with consistent regional implementation. (Cumberland)

A summary of questions and responses list is available in Appendix 2.

3.2 ONLINE RESULTS (SURVEY)

Quick Numbers

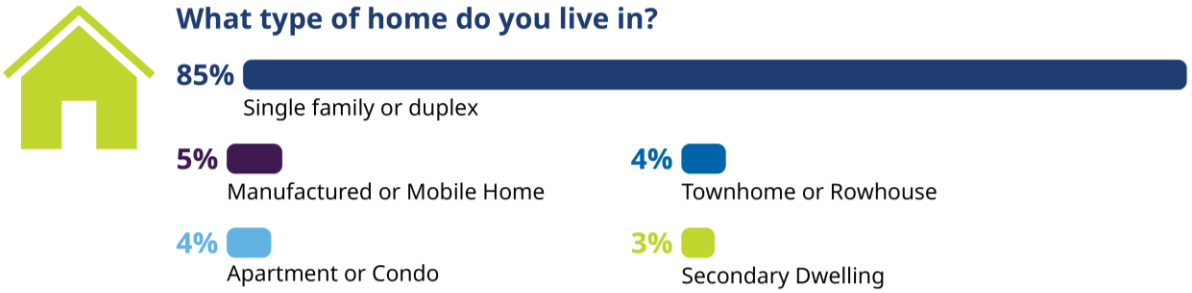


Survey Participant Information

98.9% Answered as a resident

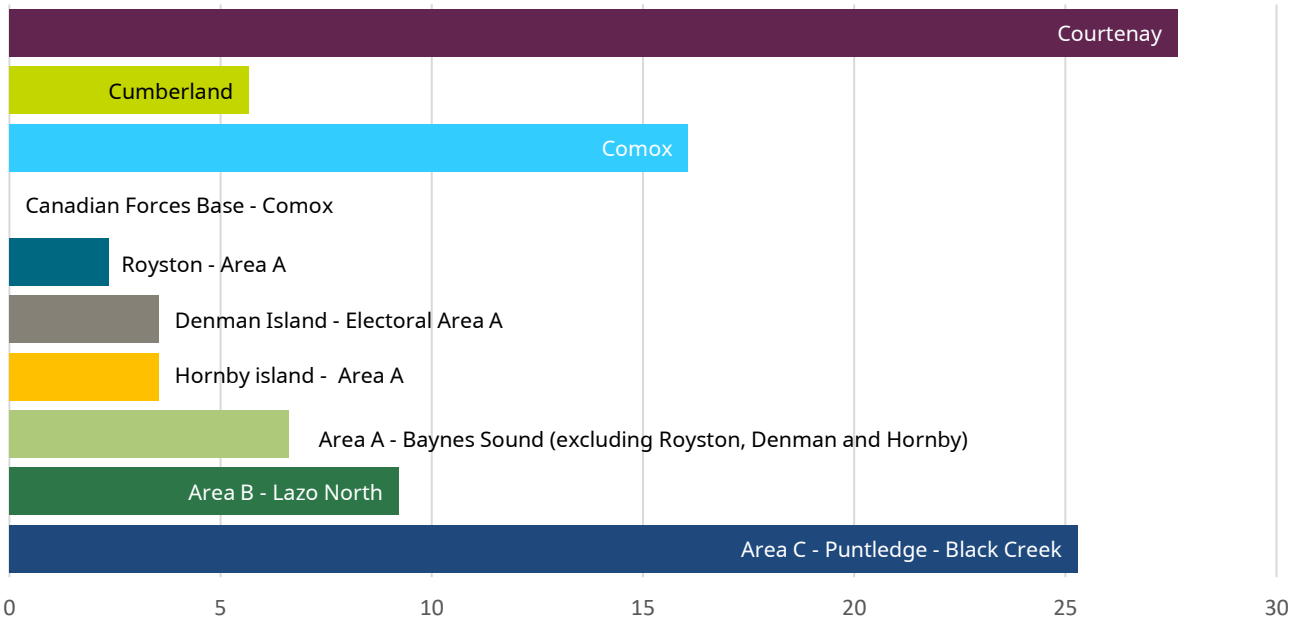
0.8% Answered on behalf of a

**0.3% of respondents indicated other / both.*

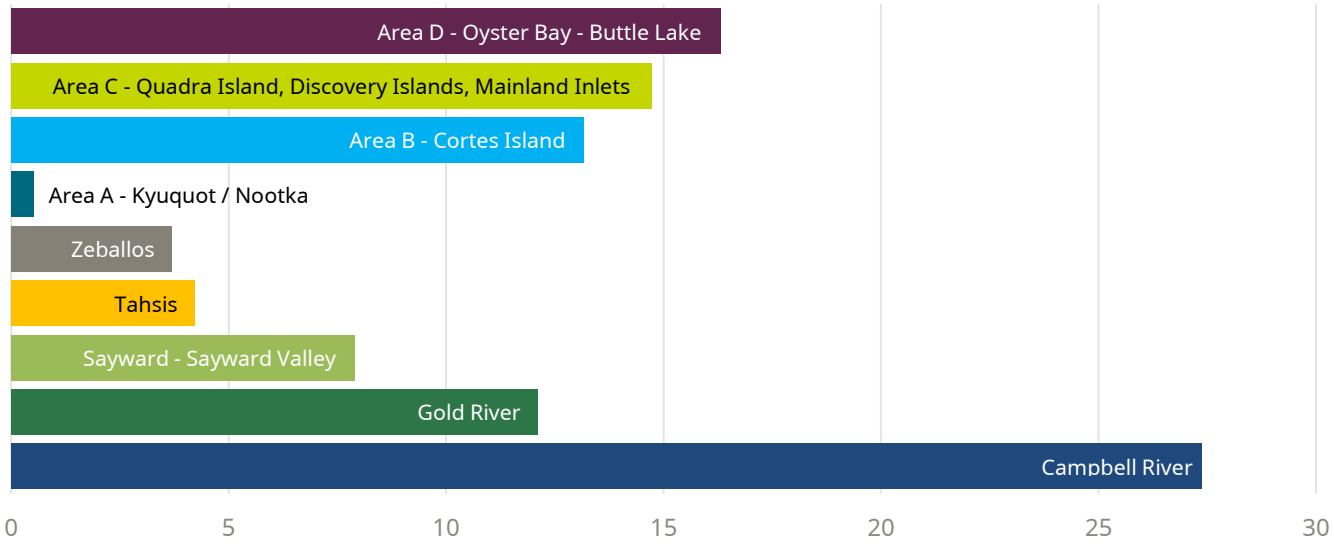


Survey - Community Participation

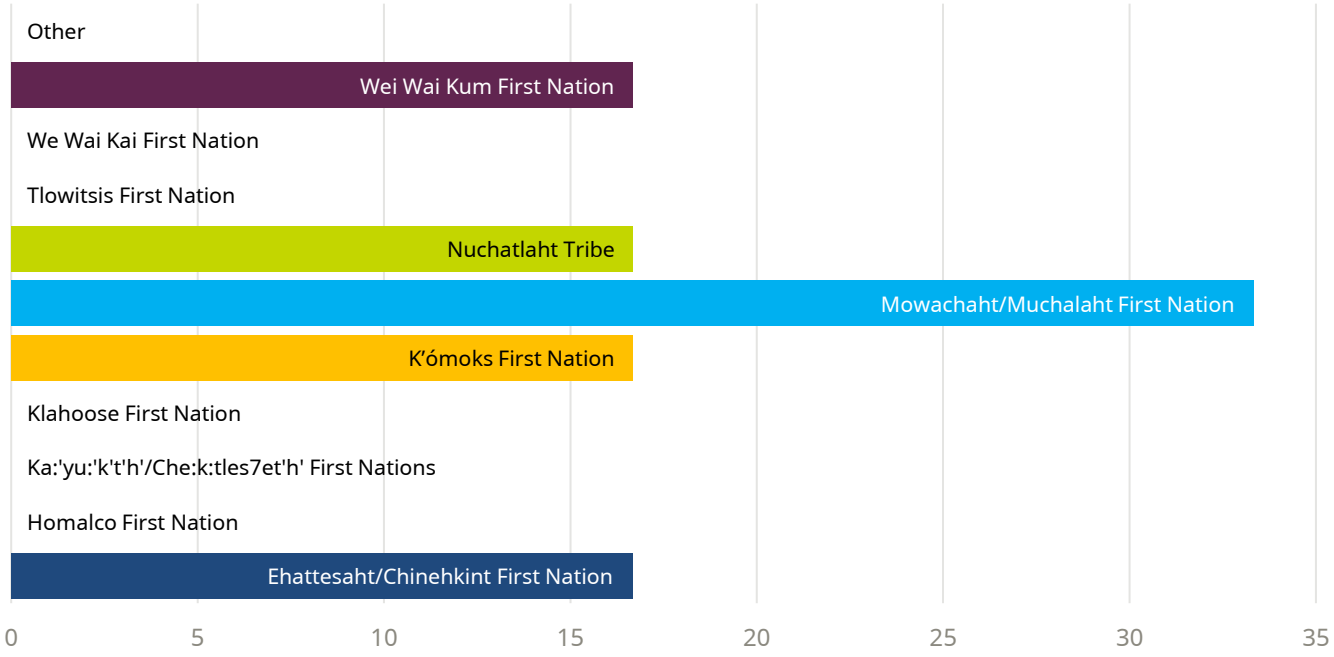
Communities in the Comox Valley Regional District, by Percent



Communities in the Strathcona Regional District, by Percent



First Nations Communities, by Percent



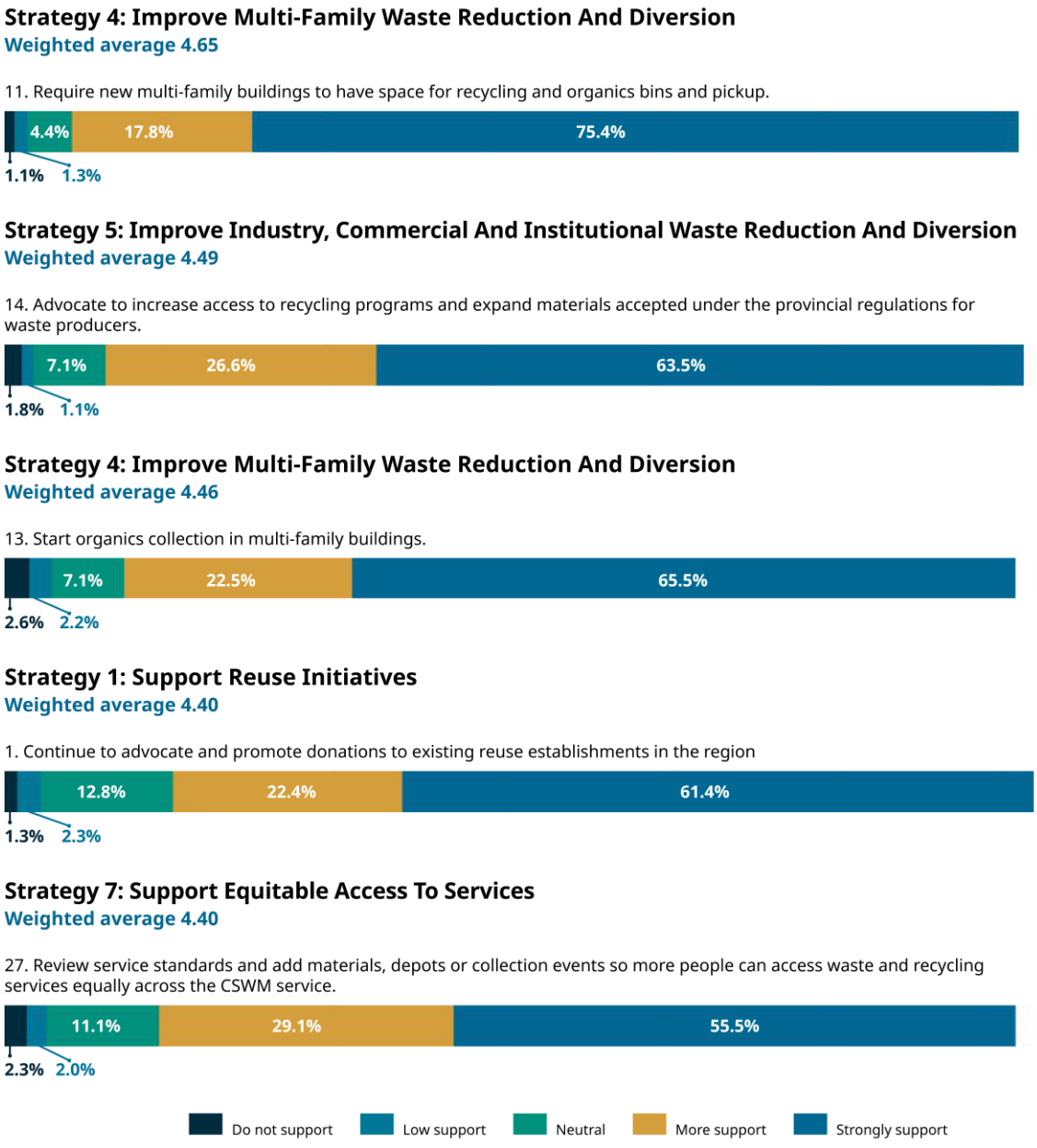
ONLINE STRATEGY SUMMARY

Survey respondents had an opportunity to gauge their level of support on each of the 33 actions from 'Do not support' and 'Low support' on one end, to 'More support' and 'Strongly Support' on the other. A 'Neutral' option in the middle for those who did not feel strongly one way or the other was also available. Respondents could also choose to skip a question entirely, a different number of respondents for each question, ranging from 621 to 607 respondents.

Highest Supported Actions

When looking at actions with the highest weighted average of support, two of the most supported actions were from Strategy 4: Improve Multi-Family Waste Reduction And Diversion. Additionally, actions from Strategy 1, 5, 7 also made the top 5, as follows:

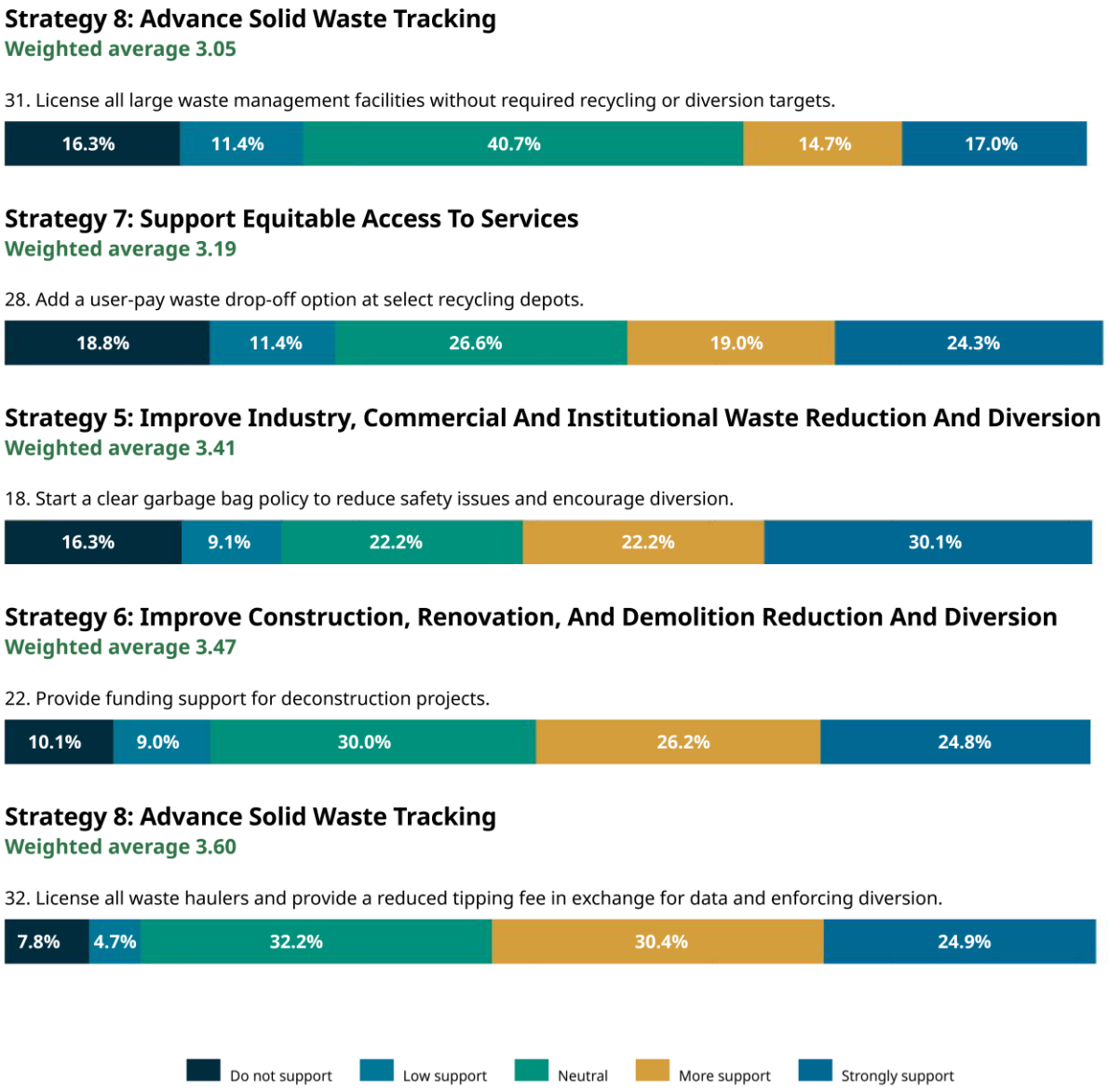
Most Supported Actions, by Weighted Average



Least Supported Actions

Actions with the lowest weighted average Strategy 8: Advance Solid Waste Tracking included two of the five least supported actions, with actions from Strategies 7, 5 and 6 rounding out the actions with the least support.

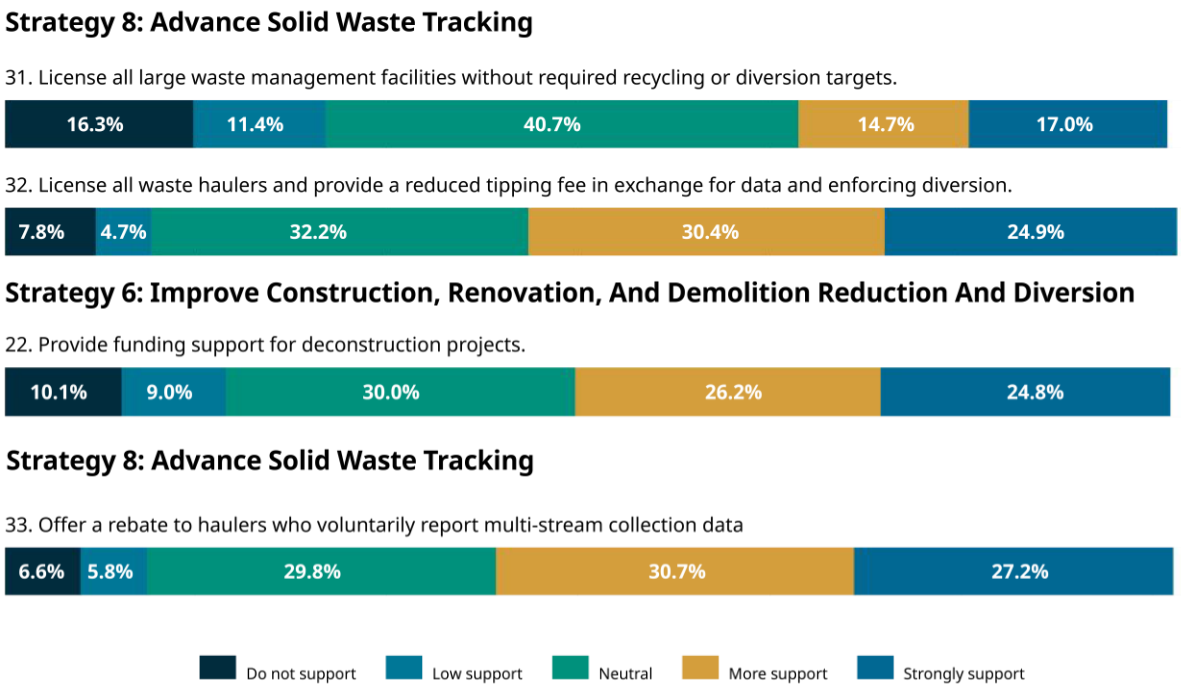
Least Supported Actions, by Weighted Average



High Neutrals

Some actions received a higher number of neutrals than others. While a high neutral response is not the same indicator as the weighted average, several actions were noteworthy because a large number of respondents did not feel strongly about an action, one way or another. The following actions all demonstrated neutral support nearing or above 30%.

Actions with High Levels of Neutral Support



SURVEY COMMENTS

Survey respondents were asked to provide comments about each strategy and the supporting actions, and how they would work in their community. The summary below highlights key themes from the feedback.

Overall, residents favored simple, affordable, and locally managed systems combining infrastructure, education, and community engagement to drive effective waste reduction and diversion. The following is an overview of the comments collected. A more detailed summary of strategy feedback is available in Appendix 1.

Feedback Themes, by Strategy

1. Support Reuse
    - Strong desire to reopen and fund free stores, share sheds, and reuse centres.
    - Partner with non-profits and educate residents to build a reuse culture that reduces waste at the source.
2. Encourage Repair
    - Broad support for right-to-repair laws, local repair cafés, and skill-building programs.
    - Repair seen as key to waste reduction, affordability, and community resilience.
3. Education and Outreach
    - Education valued in schools and community most when practical, with clear signage, accessible infrastructure, and consistent messaging.
4. Multi-Family Waste Reduction
    - Strong support for organics collection in apartments and multi-family buildings.
    - Requires clear education, equitable access, and solutions for odour and pest control.
5. Industrial, Commercial, and Institutional Waste
    - Emphasis on producer accountability, better enforcement against illegal dumping.
    - Desire for expanded recycling options for plastics and construction materials and incentives over penalties.
6. Construction and Demolition Waste
    - Support for material reuse and deconstruction, if affordable.
    - Calls for local reuse depots.
    - Need for simpler permitting, and contractor responsibility for separating waste.
7. Equal Access to Services
    - Widespread concern about fairness and affordability.
    - Request for consistent, convenient, and affordable services tailored to rural and low-income households without new fees.
8. Solid Waste Tracking
    - Mixed views on licensing and data collection; many prefer education and voluntary compliance over regulation.
    - Several comments indicating participants did not understand the actions enough to have an opinion.
    - Some interest in using data to improve regional performance.

4.0 Conclusion

Public engagement for Step 3b of the Comox Strathcona Solid Waste Management Plan highlighted strong regional support for practical, affordable, and equitable waste-reduction initiatives.

Residents emphasized expanding recycling and organics collection, improving depot access, and promoting reuse and repair programs. Education emerged as a key driver of success, with calls for clear communication and school-based learning. While participants expressed caution about added regulation or costs, they preferred locally managed solutions supported by incentives and consistent service delivery.

These insights will guide development of the draft SWMP, ensuring strategies reflect community priorities and strengthen waste reduction across the Comox Valley and Strathcona regions.