

Vaughan Greenspace Strategic Plan

PHASE 1 WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

February 2024



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About the Project

Project Background

The City of Vaughan is preparing a Greenspace Strategic Plan (GSP) that will set out a vision for the future of Vaughan's parks and green spaces, guiding the expansion, development, and operations of Vaughan's parks system as the city grows. The first phase of engagement provided an opportunity for stakeholders, council members, and members of the public to provide their perspective on parks and greenspaces and how they can be improved as the city's population continues to grow and change, and provincial legislation changes how greenspace is provided and funded. This What We Heard Report will focus on the public engagement portion of the first phase.



Executive Summary

Project Background

The Greenspace Strategic Plan (GSP) will set out a vision for the future of Vaughan's parks and greenspaces, guiding the expansion, development, and operations of Vaughan's greenspace system as the city grows.

The goal of the first phase of engagement was to understand how residents currently use Vaughan's parks and greenspaces, the needs and wishes of park visitors, and the barriers people face to accessing these spaces.

Methods

The first phase used a variety of methods of engaging with the public including an online webpage, surveys, an online interactive map, and in-person events such as community pop-up events and a community walk.

Results

The project team engaged with **462** participants through online means, and **196** participants through in-person events.

Key feedback received from respondents includes:

- Participants highly value parks' activities, amenities, sense of place, and walking and rolling connections in Vaughan's greenspaces.
- Respondents suggest that greenspaces could be improved by implementing new park amenities and activities, improving park maintenance, and further improving walking and rolling connections throughout the greenspace system.
- Some members of the public wanted more parks and greenspaces near high intensification areas.

Next Steps

The public feedback will be used to inform report recommendations. The project will start Phase 2 of engagement in Spring 2024 to collect feedback on the GSP framework.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Purpose of Engagement

The aim of Phase 1 engagement of the Vaughan GSP was to develop a shared vision for the future provision of parks and greenspaces in Vaughan by listening and learning about what matters to the community. Through this process, the goal was to understand how residents currently use Vaughan's parks and greenspaces, the needs and wishes of park visitors, and the barriers people face to accessing these spaces. The inputs and insights will be essential in the development of the GSP to ensure the principles, policies and recommendations reflect the lives of Vaughan's residents.

Engagement Principles

All engagement aimed to be:

- **Inclusive:** By creating a welcoming space for conversation that respects the diverse lived experiences of all participants.
- **Accessible:** By making it easy to participate and access information, by considering diverse abilities, learning styles, and amount of time required.
- **Meaningful:** By providing opportunities for participants to share ideas and concerns openly and authentically.
- **Transparent:** By providing clear information about the process, how decisions are made, and report back on what we heard.
- **Adaptive:** By being flexible to respond and adapt to the changing needs of participants over the course of the project.

Overall Engagement Goals

Provide opportunities throughout the project for participants to provide meaningful, appropriate, and actionable input that will be used to complete the Greenspace Strategic Plan. The purpose of engagement is to:

- Ensure broad awareness of the project.
- Make all relevant information about the process readily available to interested parties.
- Gather meaningful input from a wide range of interests, areas, and partnerships.
- Authentically incorporate input into the creation of the Greenspace Strategic Plan.
- Ensure all engagement reporting is clear, concise, and transparent and reflects both qualitative and quantitative information.

Measures of Success

Engagement will be considered successful when:

- Project awareness has increased, and participants feel well-informed about the process.
- The public and interested parties had a range of diverse opportunities to contribute.
- Council, interested parties, and the community are active participants throughout the process.
- Project team demonstrates how public input has been considered to inform the development of the plan strategies and recommendations.
- Satisfaction response increases on the citizen satisfaction survey.

Timeline

Phase 1 (Fall 2023)

WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE NEED TO GO

Phase 1 focused on engaging Vaughan residents and stakeholders to raise awareness about the GSP, assess how greenspaces are currently used and valued, and identify satisfaction levels, challenges, and opportunities.

Phase 2 (Spring 2024)

HOW WE ARE GOING TO GET THERE

This phase of engagement aims to prioritize and gather feedback on the components of the framework that will be used to develop the GSP.

Phase 3 (Summer/Fall 2024)

CONFIRMING THE PLAN

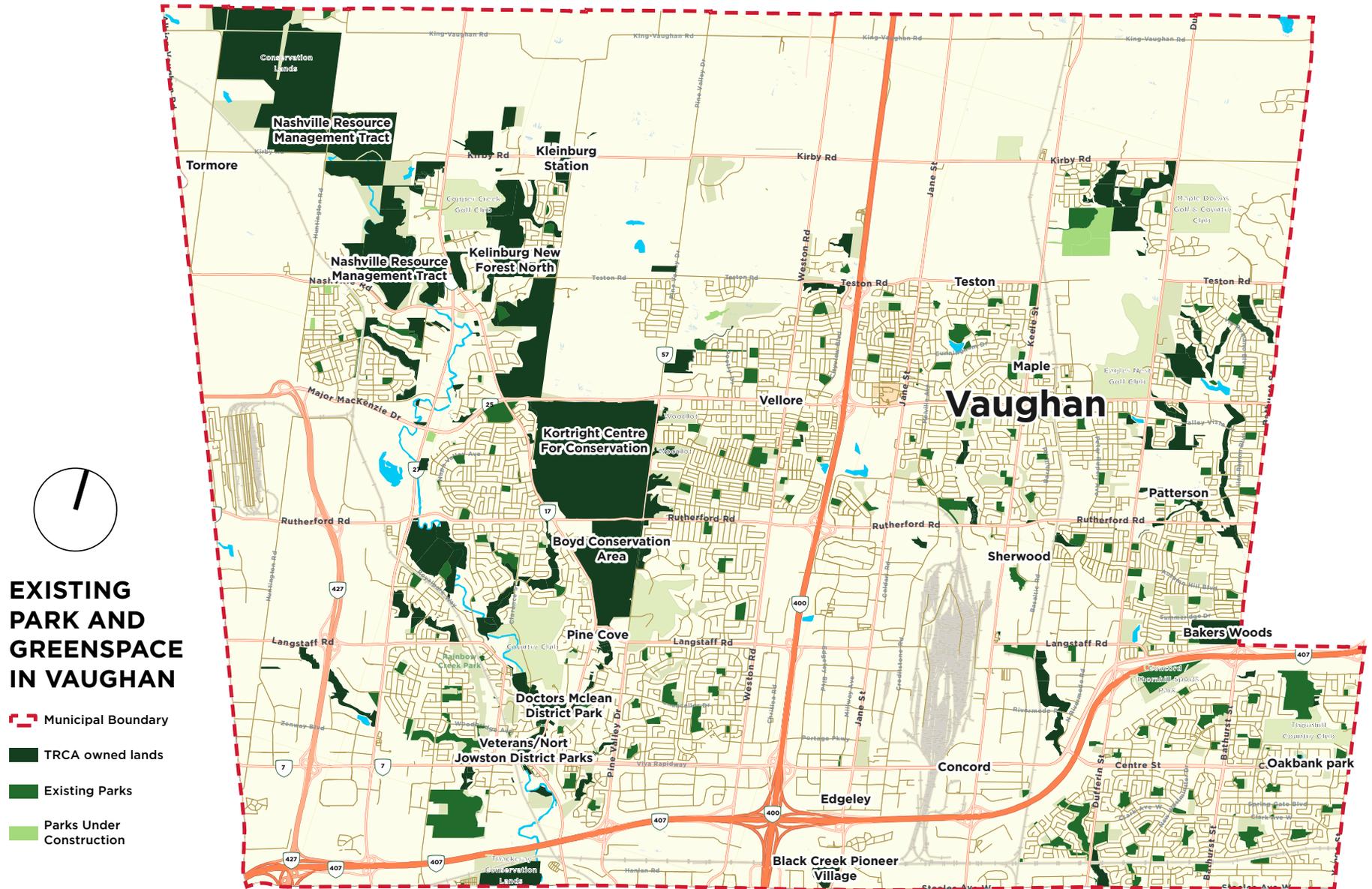
In this phase, engagement activities aim to share and validate elements of the draft plan. The phase will focus on gathering feedback regarding guidelines, policies and strategies included in the GSP, identifying any missing elements, and addressing potential changes to ensure alignment with community preferences.

Phase 4 (Winter 2025)

CELEBRATING THE PLAN

This phase will close the engagement process through a community event to share and celebrate the approved Greenspace Strategic Plan with Vaughan.

Project Study Area Boundaries



How We Engaged

To obtain a wide range of feedback and input, a variety of engagement methods and tools were used, ensuring there were multiple avenues in which to participate.

	FORMAT	DESCRIPTION	INFORM/ ENGAGE	AUDIENCE
	Project Webpage	The online hub for all project information and engagement opportunities. https://www.vaughan.ca/greenspaceplan	Inform	Public
	Sign Advertising	Digital and mobile signs were displayed across Vaughan to raise awareness of the project and its engagement opportunities.	Inform	Public
	Project Invitation Emails	Emails were sent to interest groups, stakeholders and organizations to raise awareness of the project and highlight ways to participate.	Inform	Stakeholders and interest groups
	Social Media Campaign	Social media posts were used to raise awareness of the project on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.	Inform	Public
	Community Pop-ups	Two pop-ups were held in each ward (10 total) in Vaughan between September 26 and October 11 at libraries, community centres and farmer's markets.	Engage	Public
	Community Walk	A walk was hosted by City staff to showcase some of Vaughan's greenspace surrounding Marita Payne Park and Dufferin District Park on October 14.	Engage	Public
	Online Interactive Map	The online interactive map enabled residents and stakeholders to pin-point areas that are good examples of greenspace or need more attention.	Engage	Public
	Discussion Guides	Booklets with key project information and interactive form fields were provided to invited organizations to collect written responses and questions.	Engage	Key community organizations and stakeholders
	Online Survey	The online survey asked members of the public how they interacted with parks, which parks were their favourite and what future parks they would like to see, among other questions.	Engage	Public

Who We Engaged

The City values the voice of Vaughan’s diverse community and is committed to engaging residents and community members in municipal decisions that interest or impact them. The following groups were invited to provide feedback in Phase 1 of the GSP, sharing their perspectives on park typology, parkland supply and acquisition, park maintenance, park amenities, and partnerships.

General Public

All of Vaughan residents with an interest in parks and greenspaces were invited to participate in engagement opportunities. Opportunities included in-person pop-up events, online surveys and maps, and a community walk. These engagement opportunities provided residents with the ability to choose an engagement method that worked best for them.

Indigenous Partners

Recognizing the importance of reconciliation and Indigenous engagement, the Vaughan GSP sought to share project information with Indigenous partners and ask how they would like to be involved. Further engagement and consultation will be held with Indigenous partners in the following stages of the project.

Regional Stakeholders and Community Groups

Regional stakeholders and community groups were invited to complete a workbook containing questions about how their organizations use greenspaces in Vaughan and what changes may encourage greater use. The workbook was sent to many community groups and regional stakeholders such as ratepayer groups and social service organizations. The project team received three completed workbooks. The SpringFarm Ratepayers Association, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and Filipino Seniors Club of Vaughan completed the stakeholder workbook to provide additional feedback for the first phase of engagement.

462

Online
Participants

3

Completed Stakeholder
Workbooks

196

In-person
Participants



WHAT WE HEARD

In-Person Pop-Up Events

Ten in-person community pop-up events (two in each ward) were held during the first phase of engagement. This allowed members of the public to provide comments through the use of sticky notes which were placed on the display boards, or via discussions with staff. The board prompted participants by asking them:

- How would you prioritize new locations for parks and greenspaces in Vaughan?
- Are there additional experiences missing in Vaughan parks?
- Are there additional actions that should be prioritized for Vaughan parks?

The comments were then collected and categorized into themes, shown in the table provided.

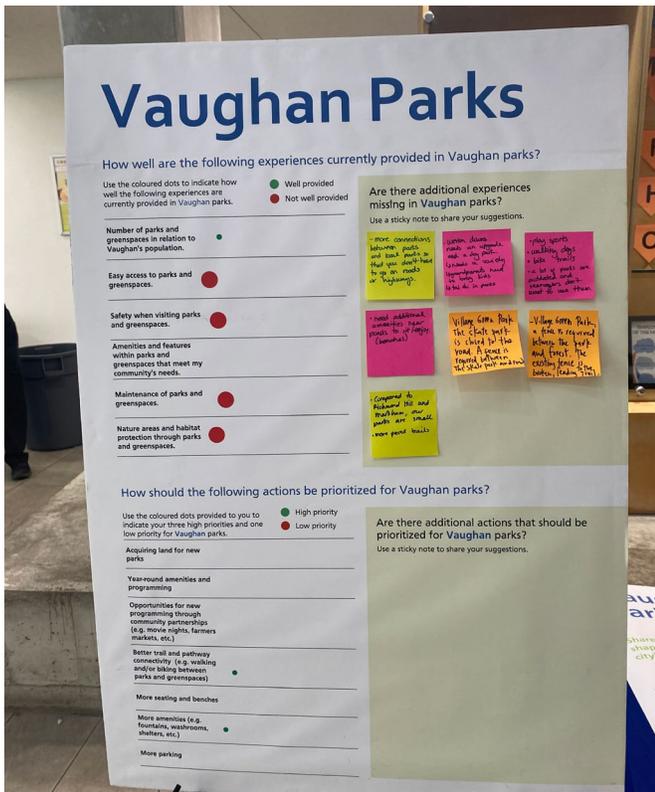
Most comments related to park amenities, park connectivity, sports and activities in parks, and the maintenance of parks. Suggested amenities included shade structures, community gardens, dog parks, outdoor workstations for people to work or study online, outdoor pools and splashpads, and better seating. Almost all connectivity comments related to improving trail connections between parks for pedestrians and cyclists. Suggested sports and activities include skateboard parks, disc golf, pickleball courts, yoga, concerts, ziplines, and facilities for year-round tennis. Finally, the accessibility comments suggested that more benches and seating be built in parks, and that parks be inclusive for all ages and abilities.

THEME	FREQUENCY
Park amenities	19
Connectivity	19
Sports/Activities in parks	16
Accessibility to parks	14
Parks maintenance	12
More parks	11
Protect natural environment	9
Dog parks	7
Trail quality	6
Multi-use of parks	5
Creative idea for greenspace	3
Signage	3
Parks for community bonding	2
Enforcement	2
Parking	2
Partnerships	2
More trees	2

Table 1: Community pop-up comment themes.

WARD	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
1	Kleinburg Library	8 people
1	Civic Centre Library	18 people
2	Woodbridge Village Farmers Market	52 people
2	Pierre Berton Library	16 people
3	Vellore Village Community Centre	14 people
3	Chancellor Community Centre	10 people
4	Transit Square at Vaughan Metropolitan Centre	13 people
4	North Thornhill Community Centre	19 people
5	Promenade Mall	25 people
5	Dufferin Clark Community Centre	14 people

Table 2: Pop-up engagement participation.



Community Walk

On Sunday, October 14, 2023, City Staff and the O2 Planning and Design (GSP team) hosted a community walk with residents through the Dufferin Clark/Glen Shields neighbourhood. The City advertised the walk to the public for two weeks prior, noting that it was a free event inspired by fall colors and intended to bring the community together to provide their feedback. This event was attended by 5 residents. The overall route was approximately 4.5km and was chosen for its accessible pathways, as well as diverse park components. The community walk was facilitated to share and engage discussions on the amenities that the parks network provides residents. This neighbourhood provides a variety of parks and greenspaces, offering an opportunity to explore and discuss the state of current parks and ongoing park investments. The walk originated and concluded at Dufferin Clark Community Centre and included points of discussion at various spots along the route, including:

- David Lewis Park
- Marita Payne Park
- Glen Shields Trail
- East Don River Natural Heritage Corridor and Pedestrian Bridges
- Newly Renovated Glen Shields Park
- Trail Access from Local Street
- Trail Tunnels under Municipal Streets
- Sports Fields and Recreational Uses

To support the Greenspace Strategic Plan, participants were encouraged to discuss five primary questions throughout the walk:

1. Do you feel parks and greenspace in Vaughan are safe and welcoming to all?
2. What makes parks and greenspaces memorable or special? How can parks and greenspaces play a greater role in creating a sense of community?
3. In what ways do you think parks and greenspaces will change as Vaughan's population grows?
4. What do you like or dislike about the redevelopment of Glen Shields Park?
5. Please share historical knowledge or stories you have about the parks we visited today.

Major themes that emerged from the walk included:

Improved connections – Participants discussed the challenge of wide arterial roads, such as Dufferin Street, acting as major separations between parks and trail networks throughout the City. They emphasized the importance of considering better connections and wayfinding to create seamless links between parks and greenspaces across the City.

Park ecology and biodiversity - While in Martina Payne Park, located in the flood plain of the East Don River, participants reflected on the significance of supporting watershed protection while also providing trails and other passive uses. They felt it was crucial to prioritize the protection of watersheds while still accommodating passive uses through trails.

Update programming – Participants highlighted the need for programmed facilities and amenities to evolve with the changing needs of the community. They

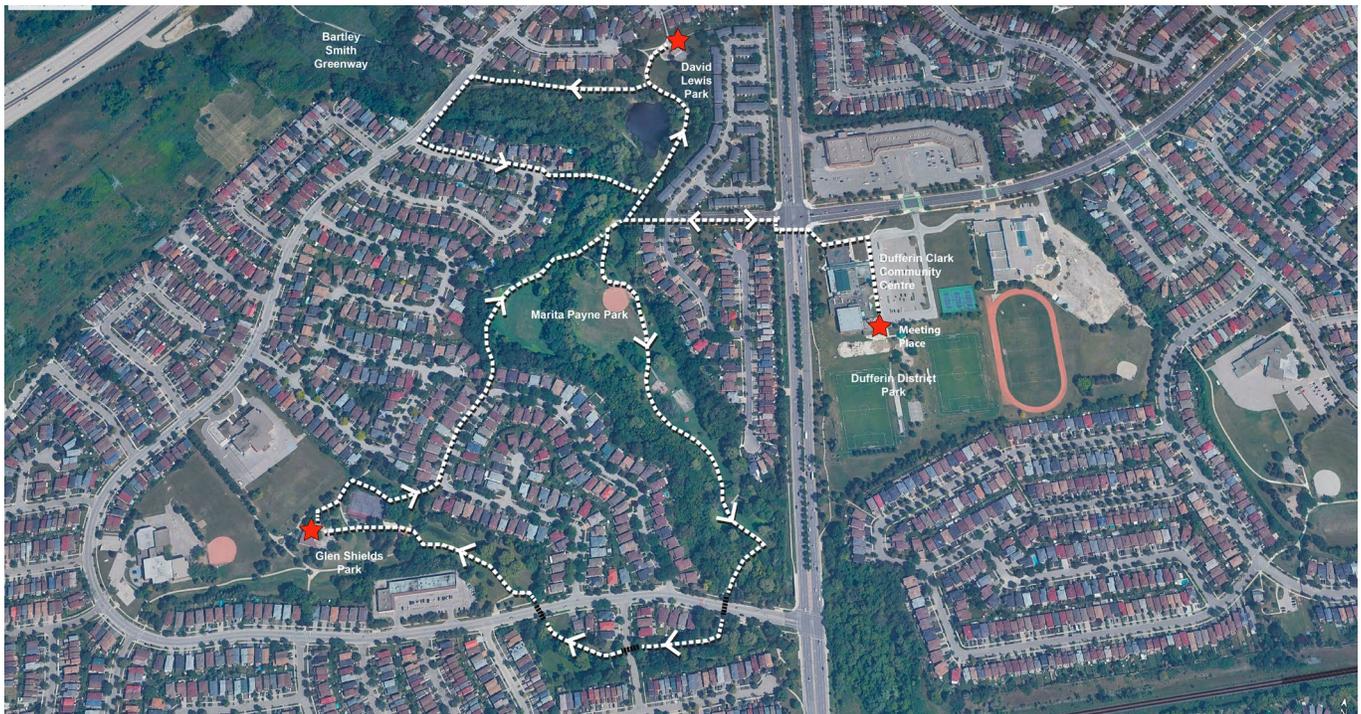


Figure 1: Community walk route and group discussion stops

cited the example of the update to Glen Shields Park as one of many instances where the City has adapted parks' programming and amenities to respond to the community's updated needs. They emphasized the community's role in helping plan for the best recreational and sports facilities, passive and active uses, playgrounds, spray pads, and supporting amenities.

Urban Forestry and Naturalization –

Participants expressed a priority for the City to understand the inventory of underutilized lands within the park network. They discussed utilizing these spaces to expand the urban forest canopy and naturalize areas, aiming to reduce the urban heat island effect, enhance biodiversity, improve watershed health and slope stabilization, and decrease the city's maintenance and operations.

Safety – Participants emphasized the importance of overall safety for park users in the neighbourhood. They noted that parks in the Glen Shields Neighbourhood are often bound by residential properties, leading to obscured visibility into parkland. They stressed the need for conscious efforts to ensure park safety. Special consideration was given to trails, including existing tunnels under municipal streets in the Glen Shields Area.

Survey Findings

The online survey was open between September 11 and October 31, 2023 and received 206 responses. The survey contained 21 questions which asked participants how they access parks, how to improve parks, and how to plan future park space. The survey responses consisted of multiple-choice responses and open-ended responses which were coded by theme. The multiple-choice responses indicated how respondents currently interact with parks, what they like about the greenspace network, how it can be improved, and ways the City can share information about parks and greenspaces programming and updates.

Types of Parks Visited

Survey participants were asked which types of parks they visited the most. Neighbourhood parks were the most frequently selected as visited “often,” followed closely by district parks. Public squares, regional parks and urban parks were the least visited.

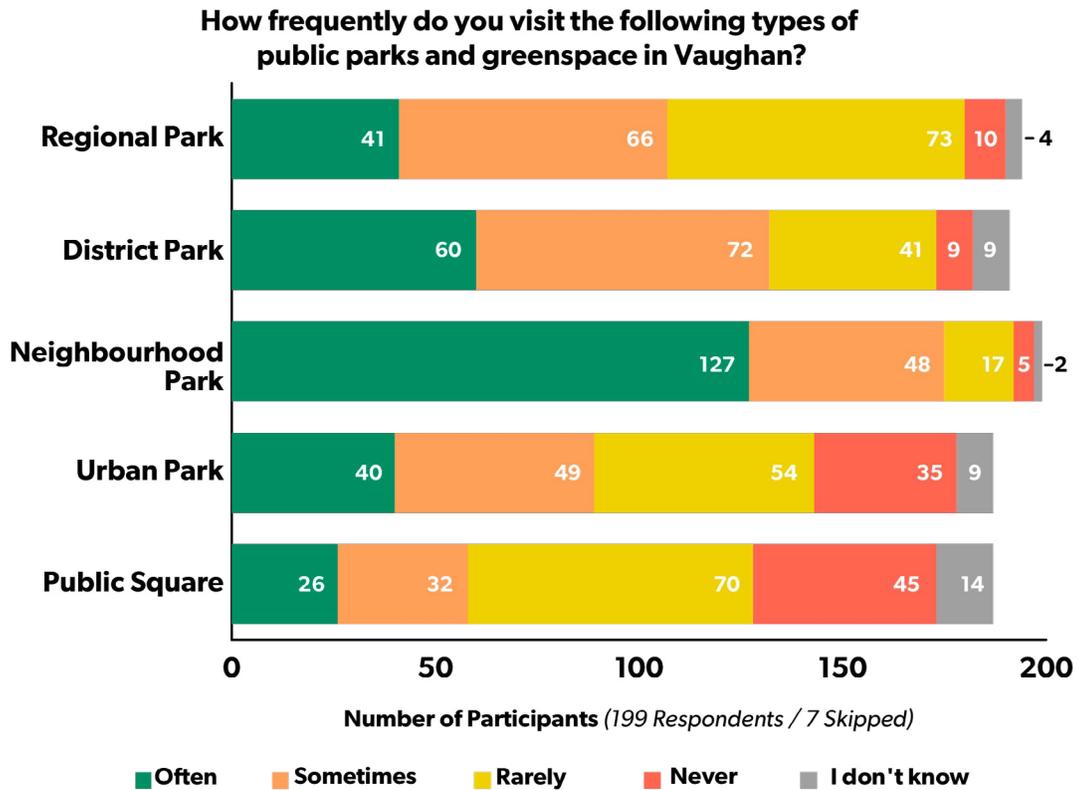
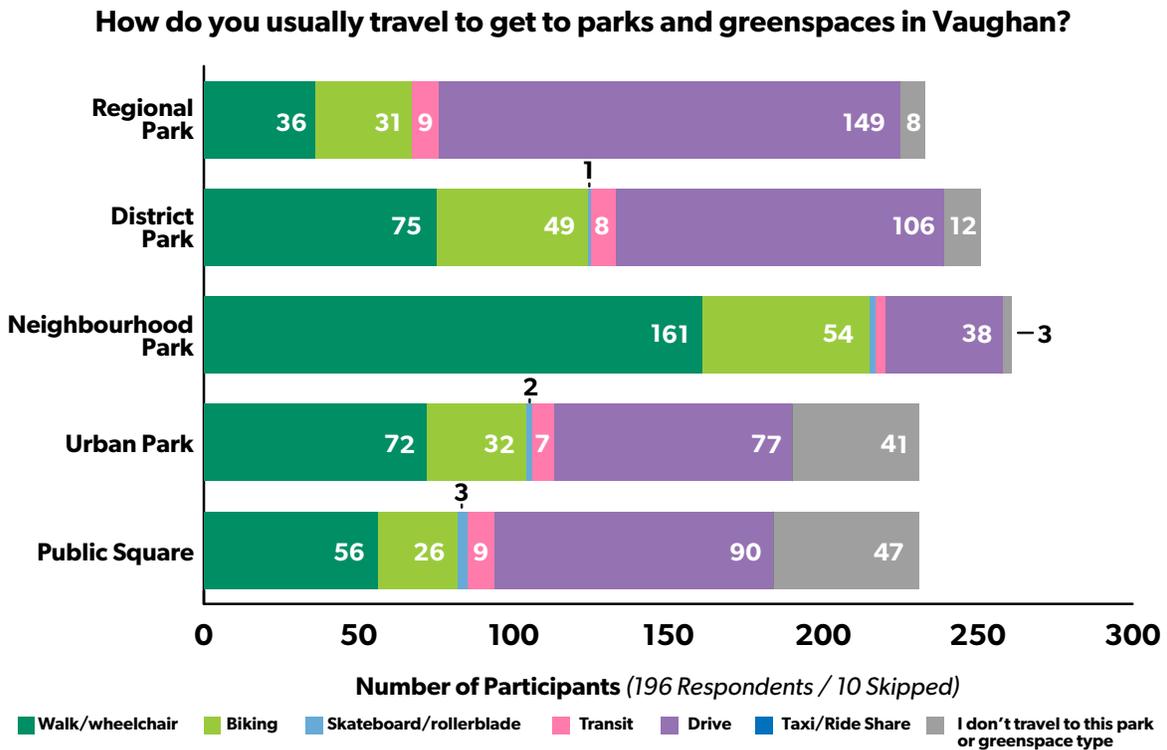


Figure 2: Survey responses to “How frequently do you visit the following types of public parks and greenspaces in Vaughan?”

Mode of Travel

The survey results revealed distinct travel patterns to parks based on their scale. For regional parks, the majority of participants expressed a preference for driving, whereas walking and wheelchair use remained the predominant modes for reaching neighbourhood parks. Among those visiting regional parks, 42% reported travel times of 'less than 15 minutes,' while approximately 39% indicated '15-30 minutes.' A minority reported journeys taking more than 30 minutes. In contrast to the responses received for regional park, 28% of respondents opted for biking as their mode of travel to neighbourhood parks.



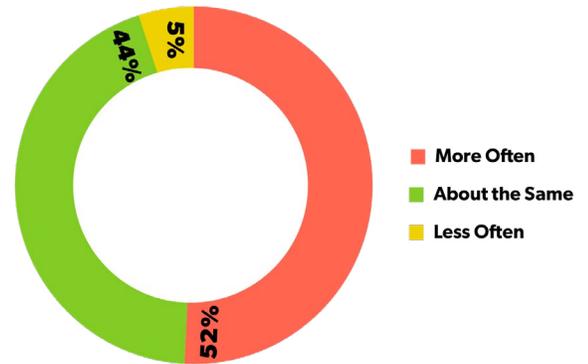
Note: 0% of people use taxi/ride share to get to parks and greenspaces

Figure 3: Survey responses to “How do you usually travel to get to parks and greenspaces in Vaughan?”

Impacts of COVID-19

Survey participants were asked if their use of parks changed during the pandemic. About 51.5% said their use increased while 43.6% said their use remained the same. 5% said their use decreased.

To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic changed how frequently you use parks and greenspaces in Vaughan?



Percentage of Participants (202 Participants/4 Skipped)

Figure 4: Survey responses to “To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic changed how frequently you use parks and greenspaces in Vaughan?”

Agree/Disagree Statements

The agree/disagree statements below offer insight into residents’ current perceptions of parks in Vaughan. Among the responses, a standout trend is the belief that there’s inadequate protection for natural areas and habitats. Additionally, residents generally agree that parks and greenspaces are well maintained, amenities meet their needs, and these areas are safe. However, there’s a strong consensus that there is a significant need for more parks and greenspaces in Vaughan.

To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

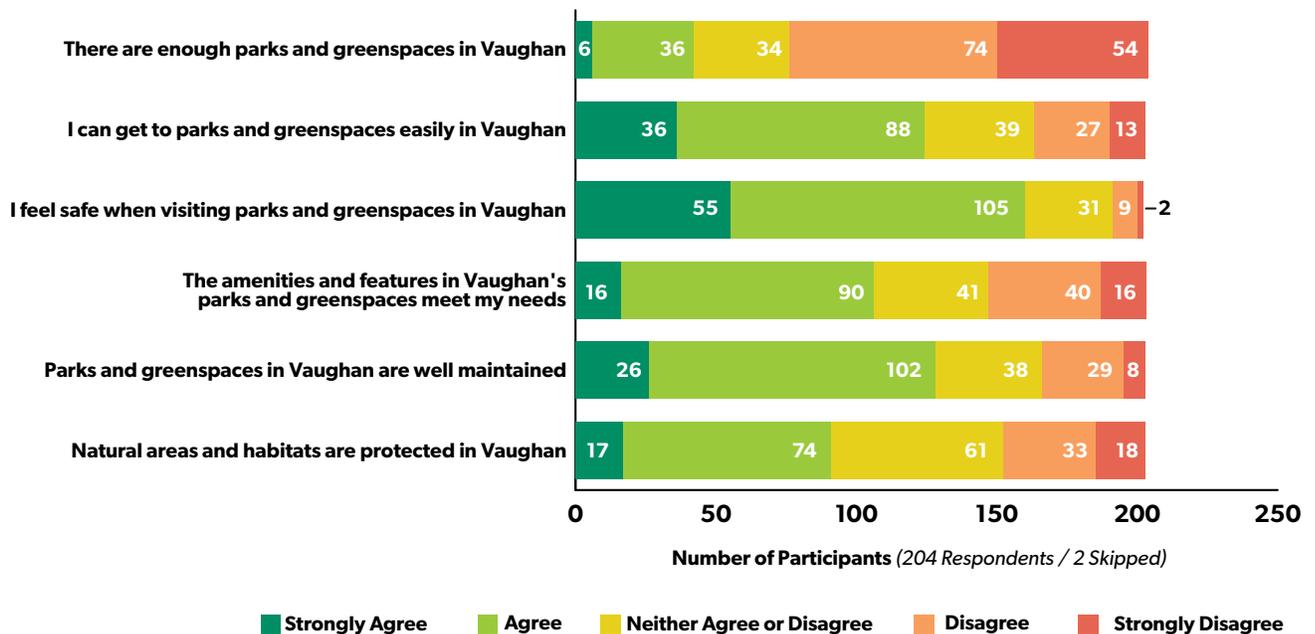


Figure 5: Survey responses to “To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements.”

Favourite Greenspace

Respondents were asked to identify their favourite park in Vaughan. With the exception of North Maple Regional Park, the results show a preference for large natural areas with continuous pathways found along the William Granger Greenway, such as Boyd Conservation Area, Kortright Conservation Area, and Bindertwine Park.

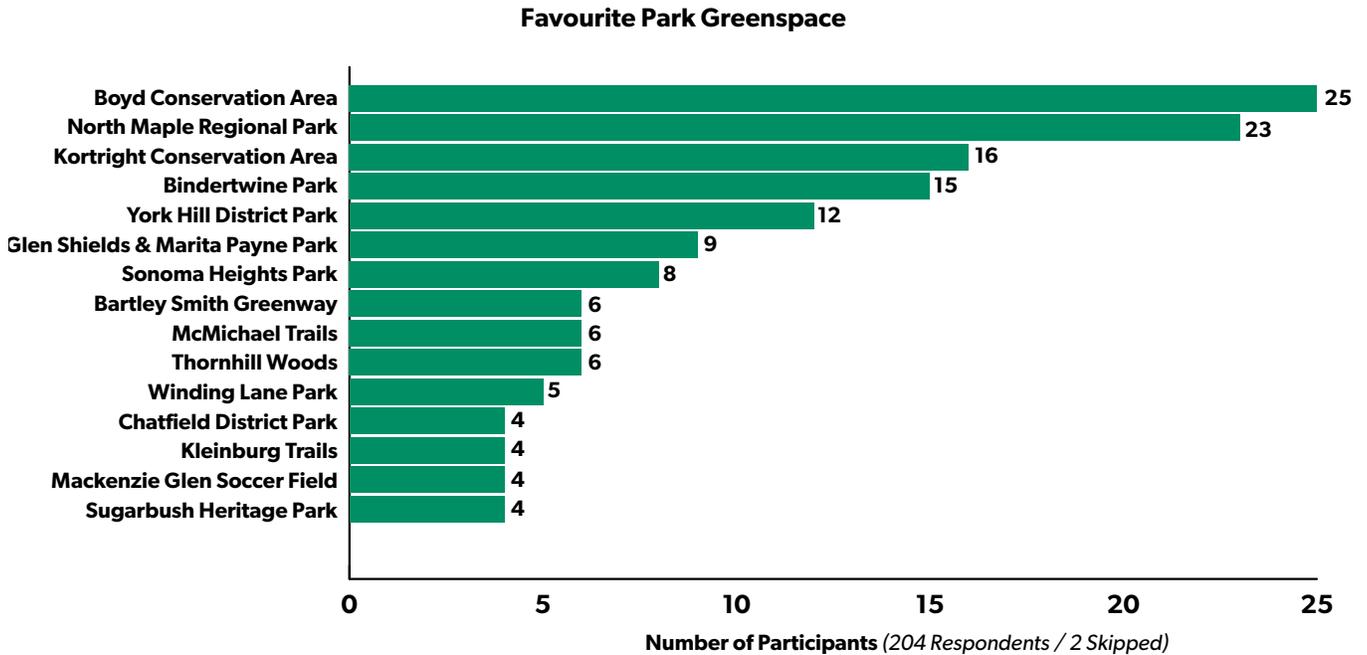


Figure 6: Survey responses to “Identify your favourite greenspace in Vaughan”

Favourite Park Features

Respondents were asked what they liked most about their favourite parks. Most responses related to relaxing outdoors, spending time connecting with nature, and swimming or playing in the water. These reasons help explain why the parks along the William Granger Greenway were so popular among survey respondents, as they feature trail connectivity, natural environments, and places to relax outdoors.

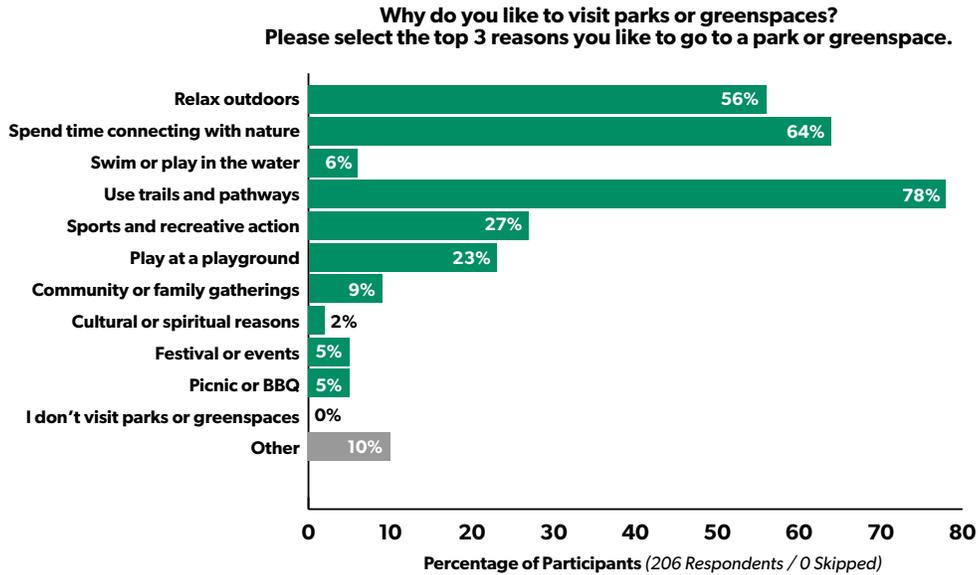


Figure 7: Survey responses to “Why do you like to visit parks or greenspaces? Select the top 3.”

Barriers to Accessing Parks

The results shown below highlight how park access and barriers vary widely in Vaughan. Many respondents indicated they are not aware of the parks and greenspaces available in Vaughan or don't live close to parks and programs and do not live close to parks. Most responses in the “other” category related to access and connectivity challenges (e.g. needing to cross large roads as a pedestrian), safety concerns (lighting, coyotes, and traffic), and park maintenance concerns.

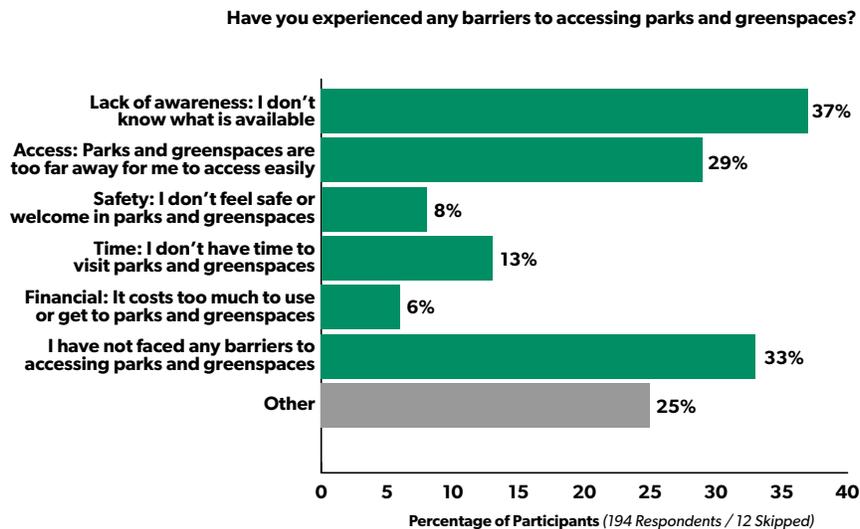


Figure 8: Survey responses to “Have you experienced any barriers to accessing parks and greenspaces?”

Park Improvements

In terms of popular park improvements, respondents expressed a strong preference for enhancing trail and pathway connectivity, planting more trees, and constructing additional parks. Specifically, 40% of respondents highlighted the importance of adding more trees, while 25% emphasized the development of additional parks. This emphasis on trail and pathway enhancements aligns with respondents' favorite park features, underscoring the significance of further building upon this strength of Vaughan's parks and greenspaces.

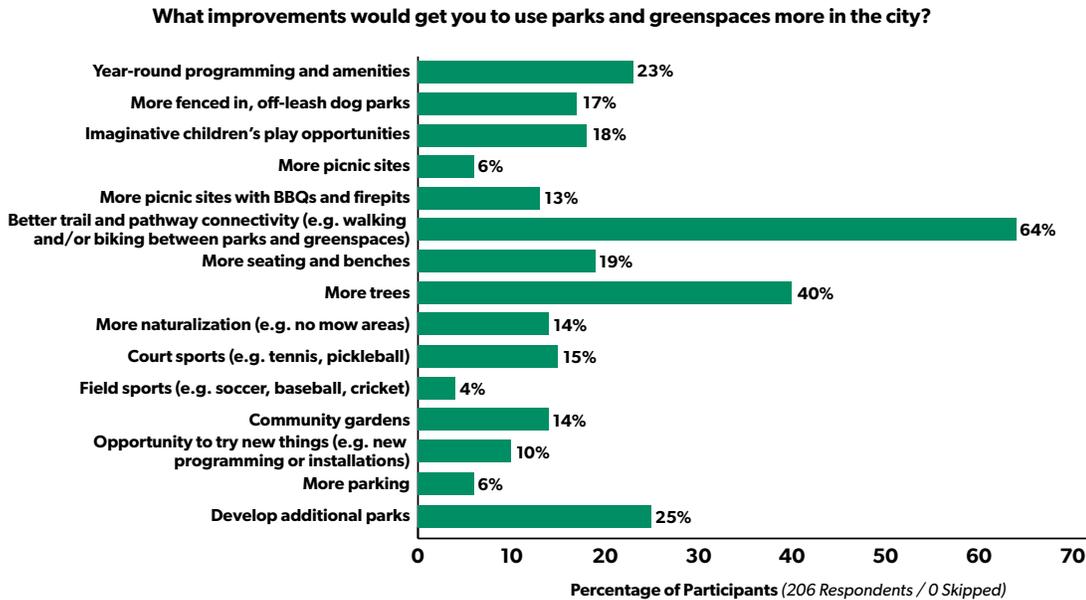


Figure 9: Survey responses to “What improvements would get you to use parks and greenspaces more in the City?”

Greenspace Communication Preferences

When asked about their communication preferences, respondents highlighted that the most effective means of staying informed about parks and greenspaces, programming, facilities, and locations offered in Vaughan were through website updates and social media. Following closely behind were emails and newsletters.

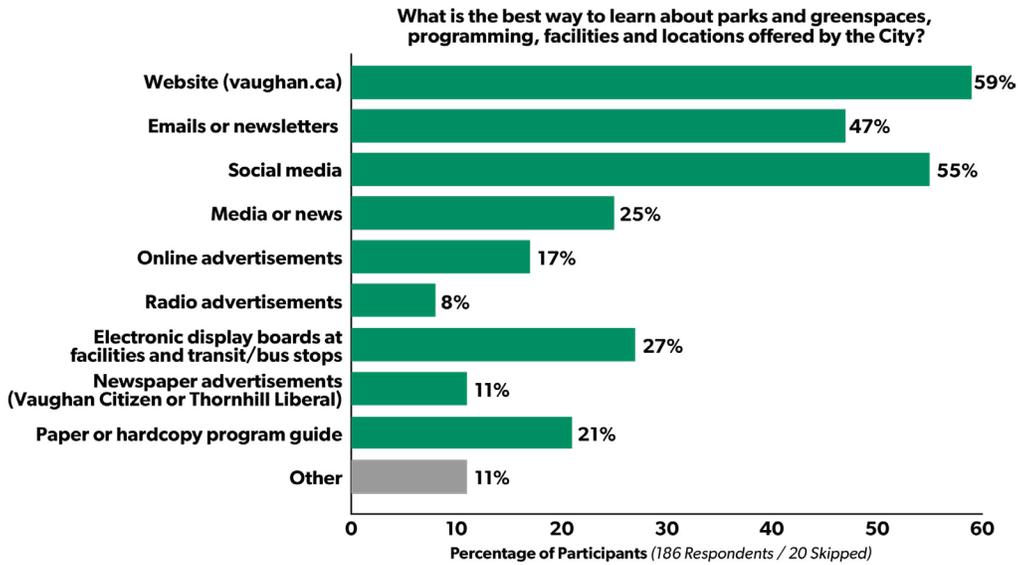


Figure 10: Survey responses to “What is the best way to learn about parks and greenspaces, programming, facilities and locations offered by the City?”

Online Survey Open-Ended Responses

Both the online survey and interactive mapping tool provided respondents the opportunity to add additional comments. The following section summarizes the most common response themes across the 718 open-ended comments. These themes are “Activities and Amenities,” “Development and Land Use,” “Operations and Maintenance,” and “User Experience.”

Amenities and Activities

A total of 125 comments were collected through the survey about amenities and activities making it the most common theme across all open-ended comments. Nearly a third of these comments spoke to leisure and passive recreation, suggesting more dog parks, community gardens, water features, and walking paths within Vaughan greenspaces. Other comments focused on sports and recreation, requesting more pickleball courts and pump tracks, and improved park trails, tennis courts, and playgrounds. The remaining comments suggest respondents appreciate greenspace as it provides opportunities to get outside for spontaneous or planned activities. However, respondents also expressed the desire for more creative and modern activities that meet their needs today, such as pickleball, dog parks, and “no-mow” zones where the City leaves the grass to grow naturally.

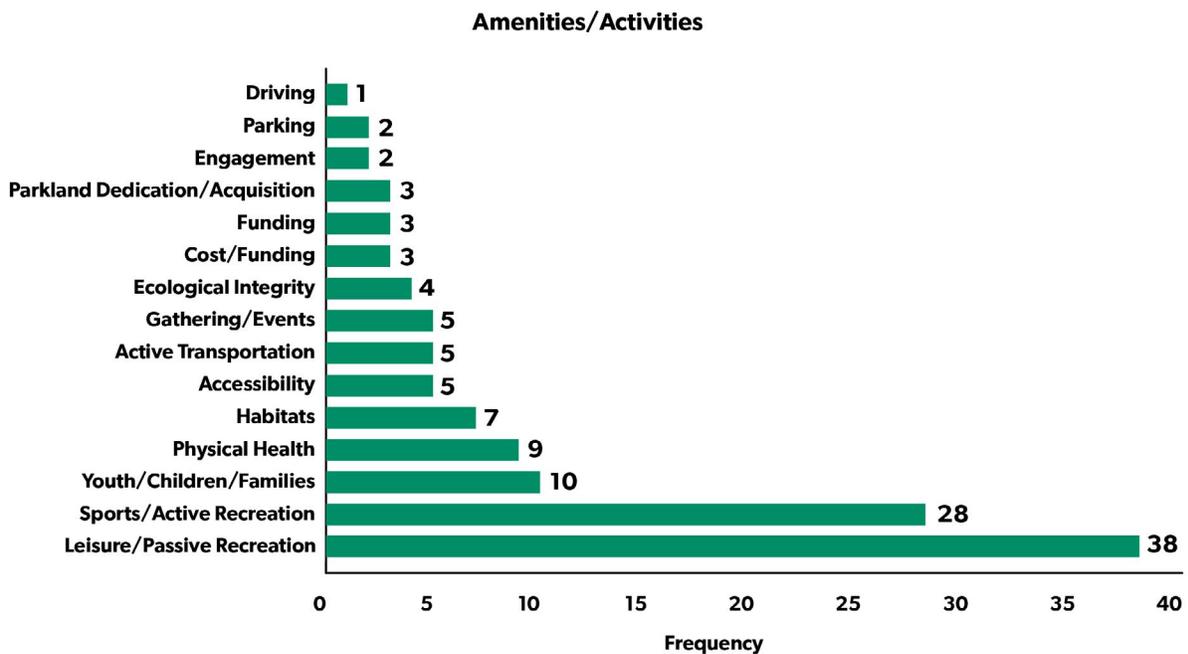


Figure 11: Survey responses identifying activities and amenities people would like to see more of.

Development and Land Use

The development and land use theme comprised of 102 comments, representing 15% of all open-ended comments. Parkland dedication and acquisition represented an overwhelming majority at 44%. The majority of the parkland dedication and acquisition comments advocate for more parkland in general and tying parkland acquisition to population density around growth areas. While some comments noted that parkland in their neighbourhoods are often congested, others stated their communities lack sufficient parkland. Other comments advocated for better walking and cycling connections between parks and neighbourhoods allowing for safer commutes while relying less on vehicle use to get to and from parks and greenspaces.

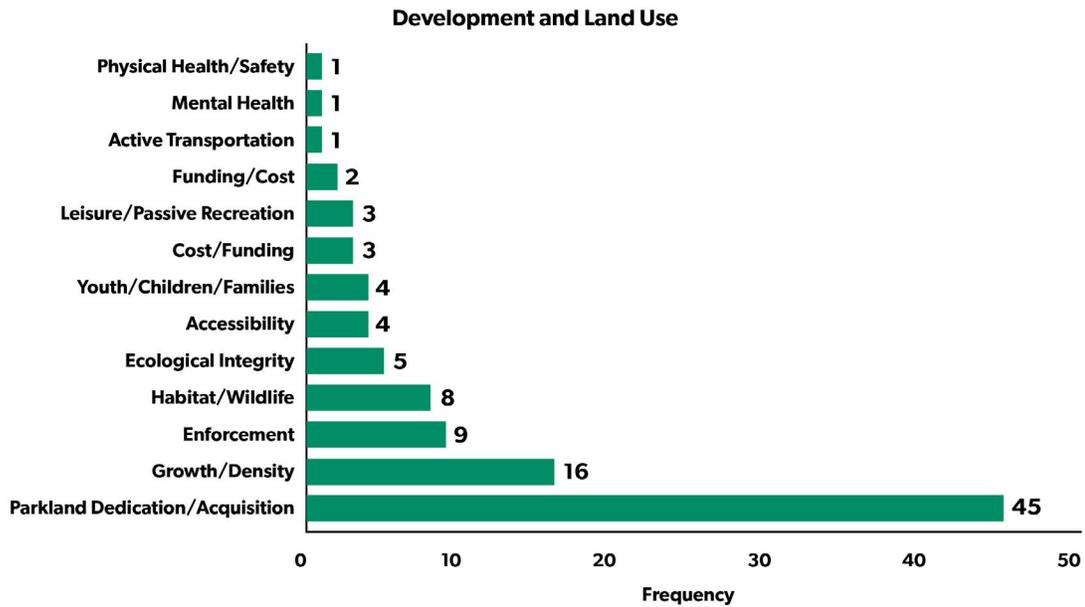


Figure 12: Survey responses identifying park and greenspace concerns related to development and land use.

Operations and Maintenance

A total of 82 operations and maintenance - related comments were provided by respondents, representing 12% of all open-ended comments. Of the comments received, ecological integrity, specifically concerns relating to tree canopy cover (e.g., health of Vaughan's trees and the number of which are being cut down), were raised. Other comments provided through the online interactive map suggest the need for better park enforcement relating to garbage pickup and overall increased maintenance. Many of the remaining comments advocated for improved maintenance of park amenities (sports fields, benches, and playgrounds) and for more garbage cans and washrooms to be installed.

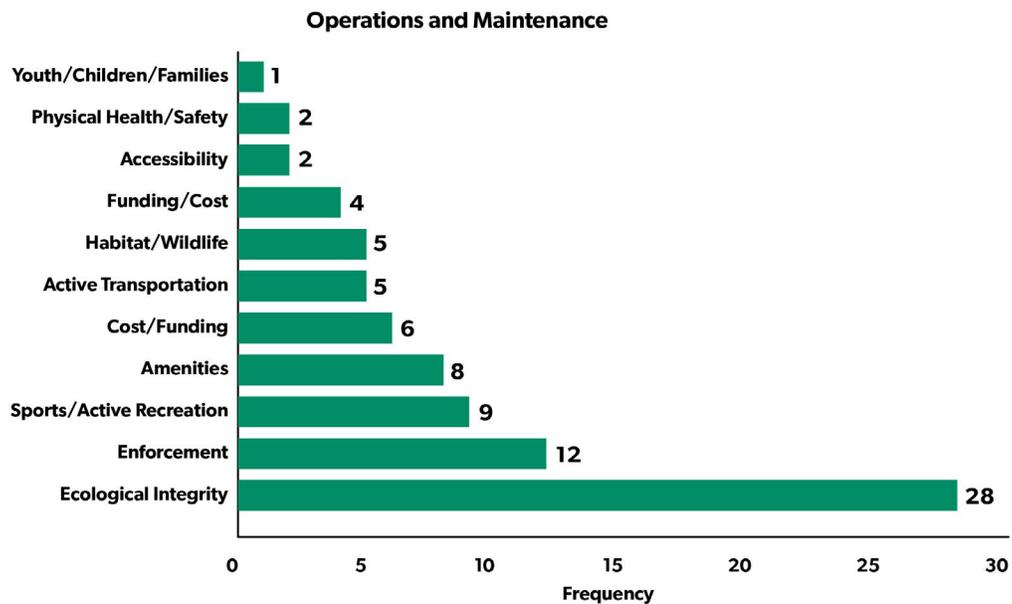


Figure 13: Survey responses identifying comments related to the operations and maintenance of greenspaces.

User Experience

50 comments about user experience were received, representing 7% of all open-ended comments. These comments conveyed how community members interacted with parks and what they meant to them. The most common topic was ecological integrity, which was also the significantly covered in the 'Operations and Maintenance' survey theme. Many shared that trees and the shade they provide offers an escape from city life and a place to rest during the summer. Other comments emphasized leisure and recreation, noting that trails and greenspaces provide scenic opportunities for physical activity. Additionally, participants suggested improvements for leisure and recreation, such as installing lighting and public art along walking paths, and extending and connecting trails. Lastly, some suggestions included installing creative amenities such as ping pong tables, public art, and decorative lights.

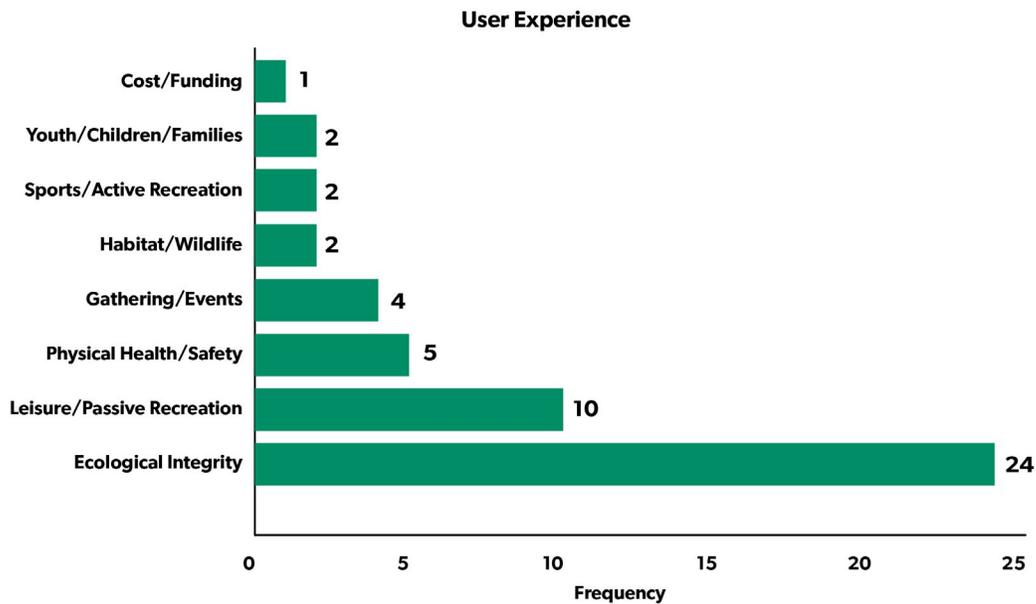


Figure 14: Survey responses identifying comments related to user experience in greenspaces.

Stakeholder Workbooks

To facilitate engagement with stakeholders and special interest groups, we created a workbook/discussion guide. The purpose of this workbook was to gather insights at a high level on how these groups utilize Vaughan's parks and what measures could be implemented to enhance their organization's utilization of greenspaces. Three stakeholder groups completed the workbooks, providing valuable input on their park usage and potential enhancements to increase their organization's utilization of greenspaces.

The discussions highlighted opportunities related to greenspaces, with a focus on improving partnerships with the City to enhance parks in Vaughan. Additionally, there was consensus among different groups on priorities such as preserving park system integrity, enhancing connectivity with bike paths, and promoting physical exercise opportunities.

In terms of opportunities, the following items were also mentioned by the community groups:

- maintaining the parks facilities and services
- promoting walkable environments and walk programs
- planting native plants in parks

Conclusion

Phase 1 engagement provided a variety of methods for the public, stakeholders and various interest groups to provide feedback on the project. This in turn brought about a wide variety of perspectives on the uses of parks and greenspaces.

Through the various engagement opportunities hosted, the following findings emerged:

- A desire for more passive and active recreation amenities, especially new and creative ones (pickleball, dog parks, public art, ping pong, etc.).
- An interest in Vaughan's existing walking and cycling trails, but would like to see greater connection between parks and greenspace areas.
- A desire for more parkland, especially near growth/intensification areas.
- Concerns over park maintenance related to garbage, and park amenities.
- Respondents primarily value parks for their natural features, gathering places, and trails. Suggestions for improving natural features included expanding the tree canopy and naturalizing underused areas.

These findings will be considered throughout the following project phases and inform the recommendations proposed by the project team. This feedback provides a comprehensive source of information that will help shape a multi-faceted strategy for directing the future of Vaughan's parks and greenspace.



APPENDIX: DEMOGRAPHICS

Including yourself, how many people within each age group live in your household?

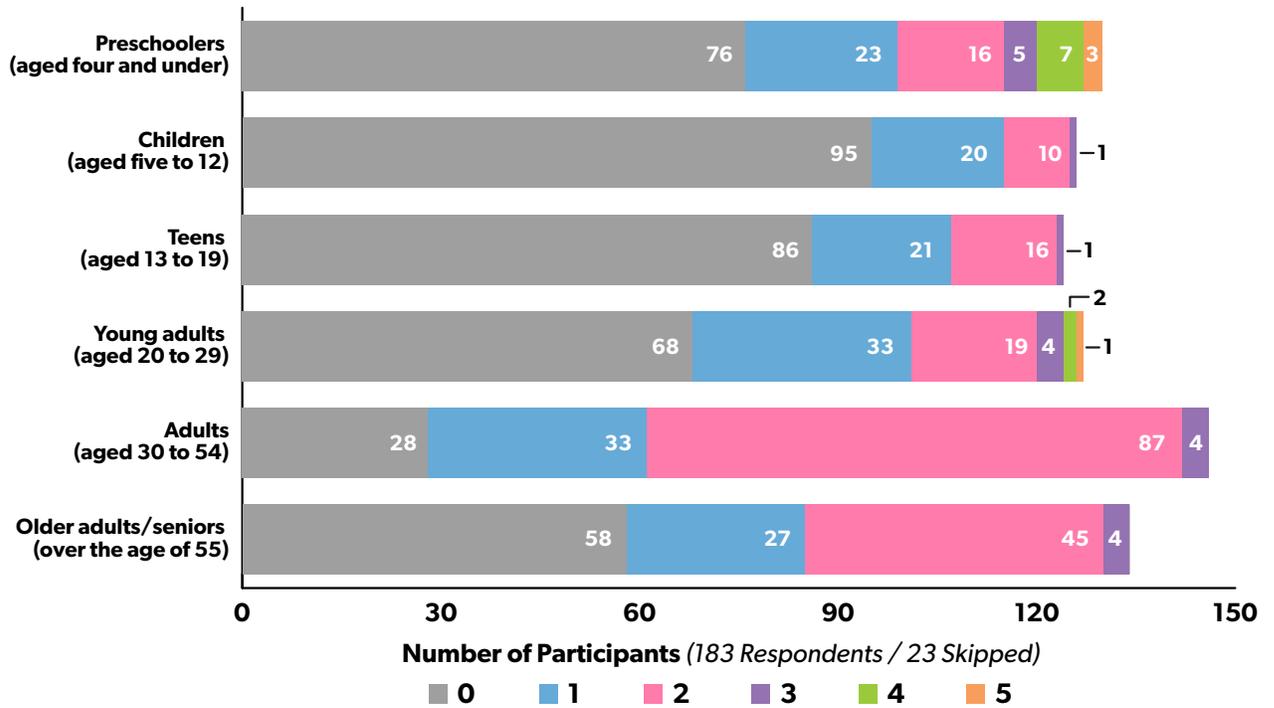


Figure 15: Survey responses to the question “Including yourself, how many people within each age group live in your household?”

Please select any of the following that apply to you.

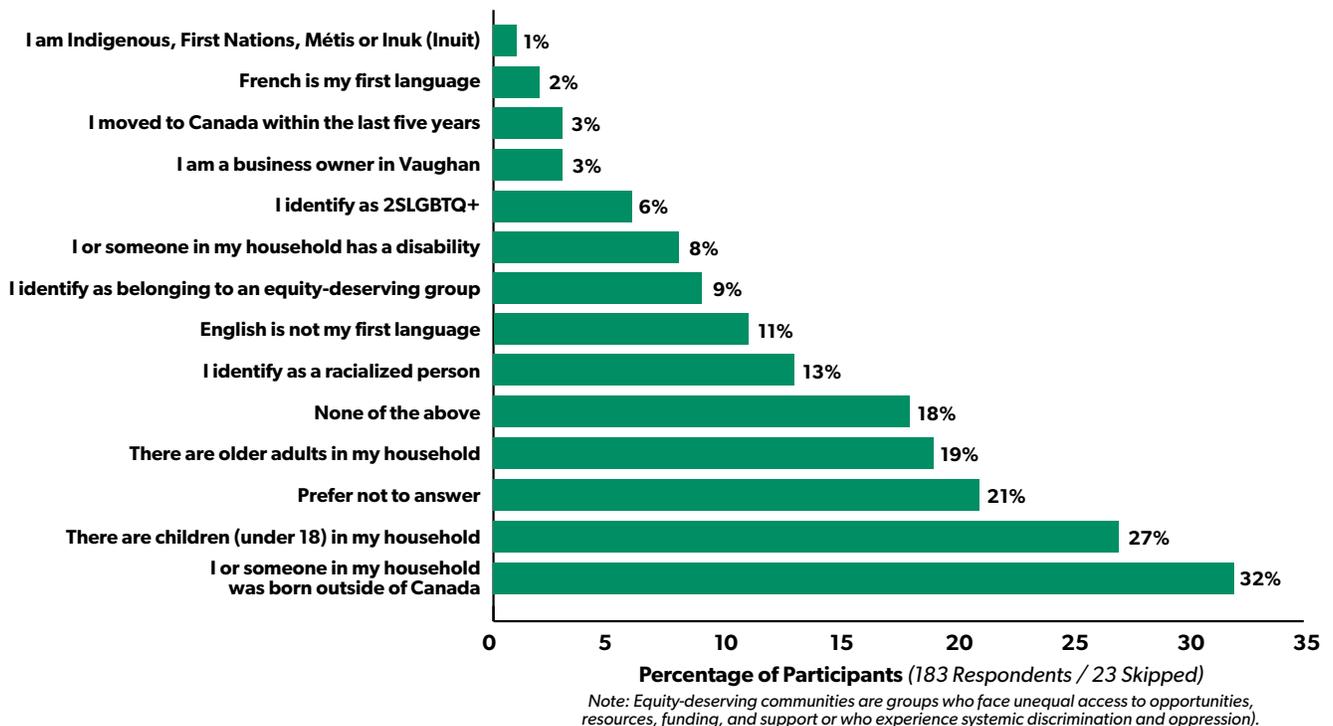


Figure 16: Survey responses to the demographic question “Please select any of the following that apply to you.”

How would you best describe your gender identity/expression?

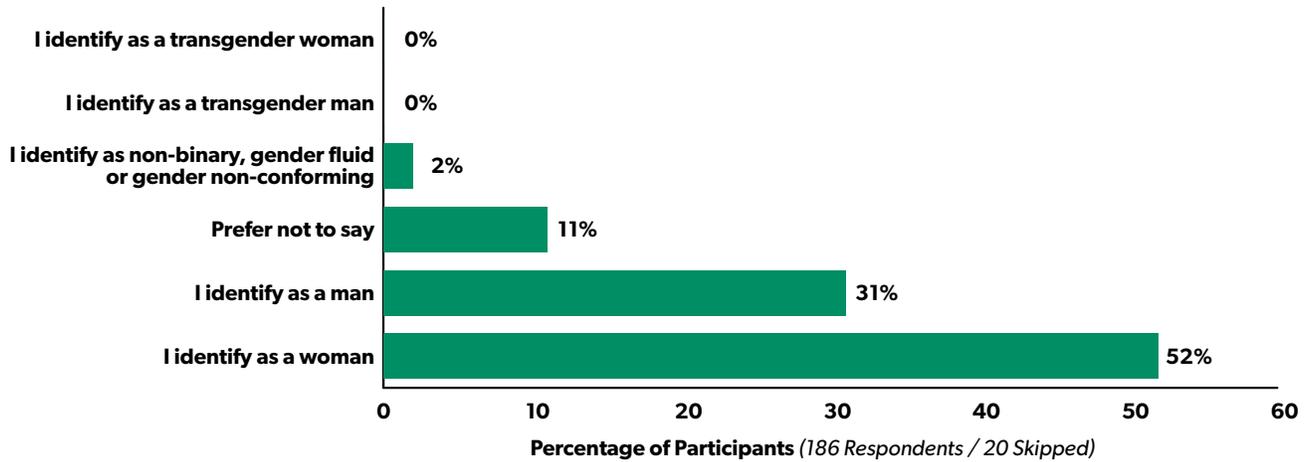


Figure 17: Survey responses to the question “How would you best describe your gender identity/expression?”

What Ward do you live in?

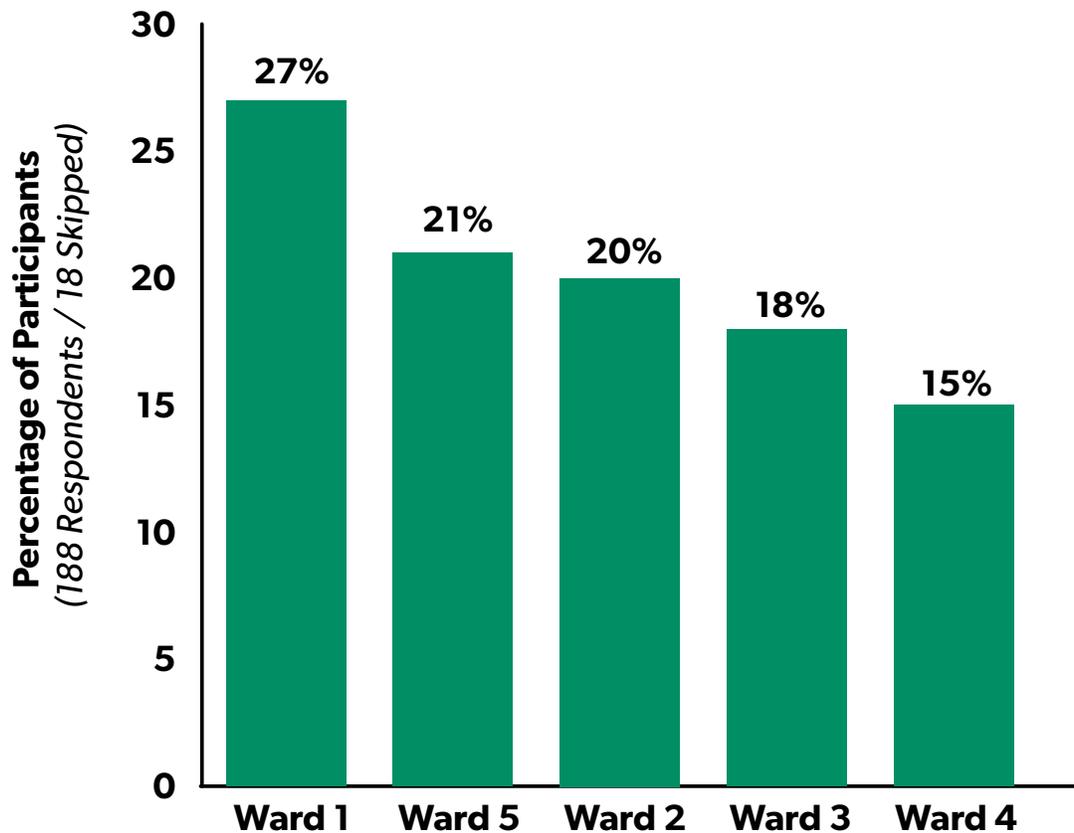


Figure 18: Survey responses to the question “What Ward do you live in?”

What is your age?

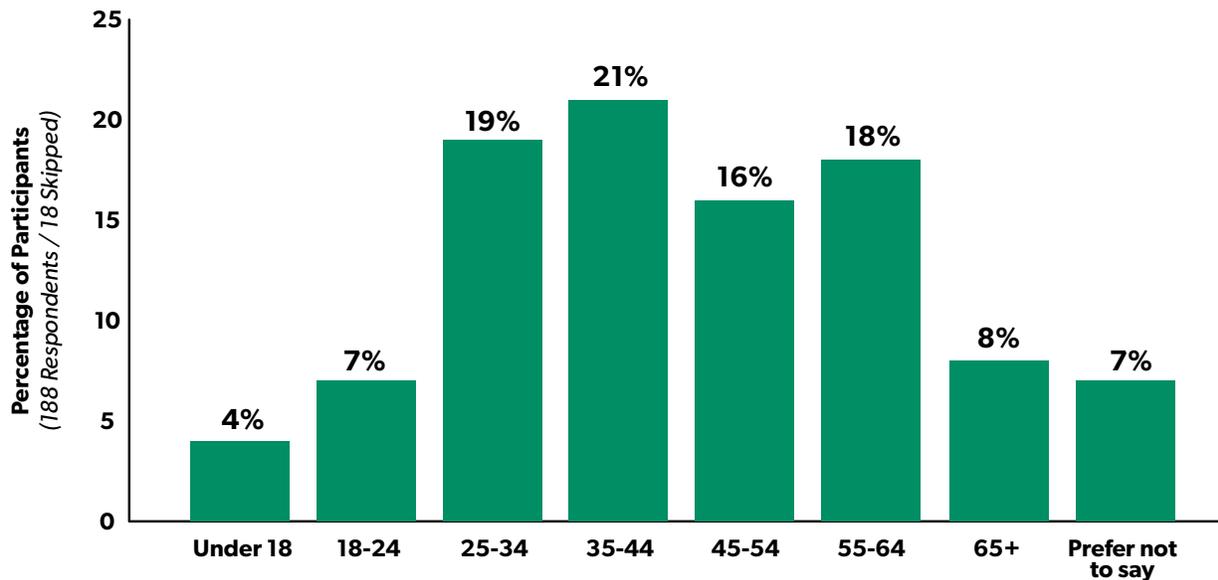


Figure 19: Survey responses to the question “What is your age?”

Do you have access to outdoor space at home?

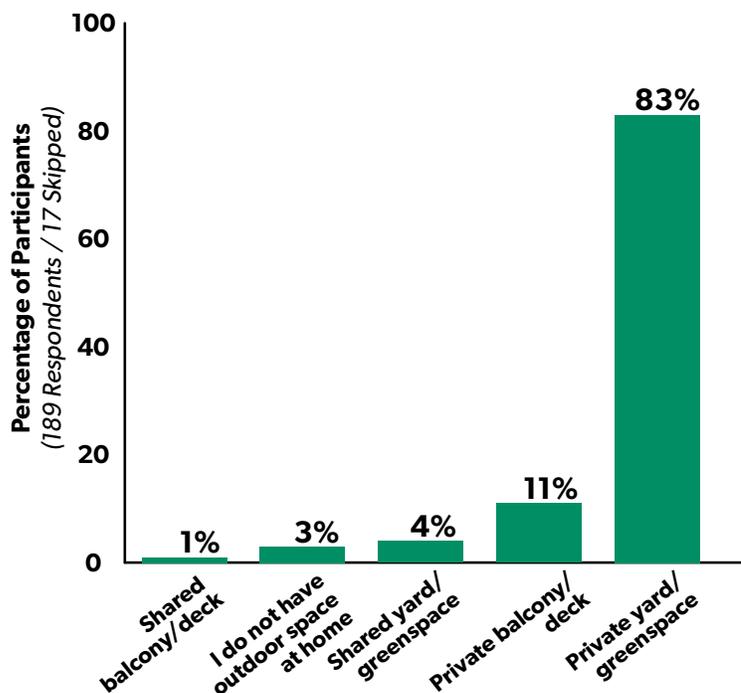


Figure 20: Survey responses to the question “Do you have access to outdoor space at home?”