



WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT THE DRAFT DOWNTOWN AREA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

*Planning and Development
Jan. 30 – Apr. 30, 2023*

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We humbly acknowledge that the land on which we live, learn, work and play is Treaty 8 Territory, the traditional and ancestral lands of the Cree, Dene, and unceded territory of the Métis.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) provides a roadmap to guide the revitalization of downtown Fort McMurray. It provides policy for future development such as housing and retail, active transportation, parks and open space, among others.

Why prioritize the Downtown ARP now?

The Downtown ARP is a statutory plan required by the Municipal Government Act to review it on a regular basis.

The current [City Centre ARP](#) was approved in 2012. Since this time, the region has experienced multiple natural disasters, a global pandemic, economic changes, and more. It was evident to Administration that this plan no longer reflects the needs of the downtown or residents of the region, showcasing the need to engage with residents for a better understanding of what they envision for a future downtown. The Downtown ARP will be a document that responds to the downtown's changing social, economic, and cultural conditions.

Lastly, the draft Downtown ARP aligns with RMWB [Council's Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025](#) and its Downtown Visualization goal. Through an accompanying Action Plan document, the Downtown ARP will set short-, medium-, and long-term action items that will support the implementation of the plan.

Community engagement on this plan started in 2019, and again in 2020. Through a phased process in 2023, the validation stage of engagement was completed and is detailed in this report.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The engagement for the draft Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan was conducted in a phased process to ensure the Municipality had a current understanding of the needs of the downtown area.

Engagement aimed to be as accessible and inclusive to all residents of the region which is why online, virtual, in-person, mailable, and oral (telephone) tactics were made available. As a result of extensive communications, marketing and public engagement tactics implemented, a total of 1,055 engagement touchpoints were achieved during this campaign. In an act of reconciliation, Indigenous partners were invited to engage early in the process – beginning January 2023 – with additional invitations to engage throughout the campaign.

Did you know?

Validation engagement is the final stage of engagement with the objective to verify that the RMWB correctly understood previous engagement feedback.

ENGAGEMENT PARTICIPANTS

Members of the following key stakeholders participated in one-on-one sessions, in-person, and/or virtual engagement opportunities. In addition to the following participant groups, 57 participants from 36 businesses and hundreds of residents joined in-person and virtual opportunities to learn more about the draft plan and share their feedback.

1. Advisory Committee on Aging
2. Arts Council Wood Buffalo
3. Communities in Bloom
4. Community Identification Committee
5. Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce
6. Fort McMurray Construction Association
7. Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Development and Tourism
8. Keyano College
9. Mayor's Advisory Committee on Youth
10. Members of RMWB Council
11. Public Art Committee
12. Regional Advisory Committee on Inclusion, Diversity and Equity
13. Wood Buffalo Development Advisory Committee
14. Wood Buffalo Downtown Revitalization Advisory Committee

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan was presented to the public for initial engagement in 2019 and again in 2020. To ensure the validation stage of engagement was successful, the following tactics were used to promote the opportunity to share any final feedback on the draft plan.

- > Radio Ads
- > Variable electronic message boards
- > Online advertisements
- > McMurray Matters podcast interview
- > Rural newsletters
- > Post card delivery to all downtown addresses
- > Online advertisements (YouTube, Facebook, Harvard Media website)
- > Digital billboard ads in urban Fort McMurray
- > Indigenous Partners Letter of Invitation to Engage
- > Digital screens in urban and rural recreation centres
- > Printed materials delivered to urban/rural areas
- > Floor decal advertisement
- > Direct contact with stakeholders (email, phone)
- > Social media campaign (urban and rural Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter)

ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

- Surveys
- Quick Poll
- Q&A
- Virtual business luncheon
- One-on-one sessions

IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

- Downtown pop-up events
- Open house
- Business luncheon
- One-on-one sessions

ENGAGEMENT IN NUMBERS

88,052

Online impressions*

4.2k

Page views on RMWB engagement portal

213

Survey submissions

269

Quick poll responses

4,562

Invitations to engage**

404

Engagement interactions at pop-up events

573

Virtual & in-person one-on-one participants

1,055

Total engagement touchpoints

**Impressions are the measurable number of times people were made aware of the project through all trackable website and social media channels including urban and rural Facebook pages, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Advertisement including billboard, digital screen, radio ads or rural newsletters are not tracked and not included within these totals.*

***Invitations to join engagement were sent to Indigenous partners, stakeholders, and subscribers of the RMWB engagement portal. Post cards were mailed to all residential and commercial addresses in the downtown area. This number reflects the trackable invitations sent by RMWB staff.*

KEY THEMES OF ENGAGEMENT



DIVERSE RETAIL OPTIONS



RECREATION AND
BEAUTIFICATION



PARKS &
OPEN SPACE



TAKING ACTION



ALL-SEASON
ACCESSIBILITY



SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMMING
FOR BUSINESSES



SAFETY &
ACCESSIBILITY

Note: Engagement dating back to 1999 revealed the same themes were of significant value to the community. Even as time progresses, residents of the region still have the same aspirations for the downtown.

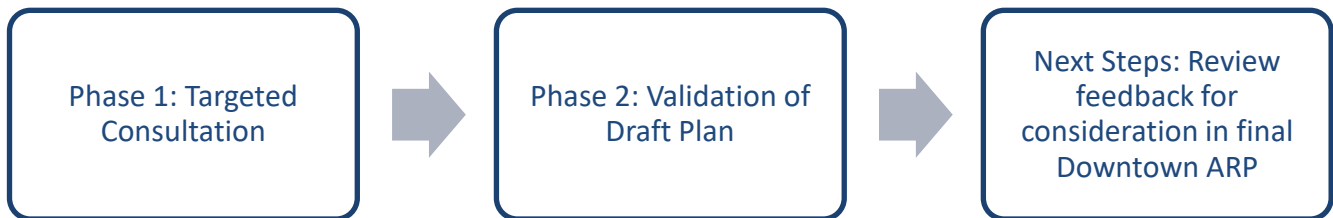
INTRODUCTION

Engagement findings from the validation stage of engagement on the draft Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan in 2023 have been gathered and are reviewed below in detail. This information includes feedback from an in-person open house, business luncheon and workshop, an exploratory survey for Keyano students and staff, a validation survey for key stakeholders and the public, one-on-one discussions with Members of RMWB Council and key stakeholders, and pop-up engagement events held at Keyano College, MacDonald Island, Peter Pond Mall, and Keyano Theatre.

Engagement completed from Jan. 30 – Apr. 30, 2023, are shown below.

- One (1) in-person open house
- Twelve (12) one-on-one engagement sessions (in-person/virtual)
- Two (2) online surveys
- One (1) online quick poll
- Five (5) community pop-up events
- One (1) In-person business luncheon
- Three (3) virtual workshops

Engagement process



PHASE 1: TARGETED CONSULTATION (January – March 2023)

The Downtown ARP project team identified an opportunity to conduct further targeted engagement with Keyano College administration, staff, and students before finalizing the draft plan. Members of RMWB Council and Council Appointed Committees were then invited to learn more about the project's progress and provide additional comments prior to the draft plan being made available for public review. Following is a review of this targeted engagement.

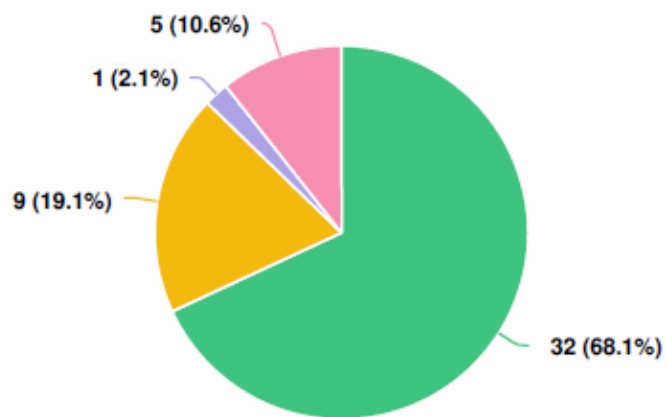
Keyano College consultation

Targeted engagement with Keyano College was created to further important conversations and resulting feedback was captured within the draft Downtown ARP prior to public review. Following a workshop on Jan. 30 with college leadership followed by two pop-up sessions conducted in a high-traffic area of the college for students and staff on Jan. 31 and Feb. 2. Students visiting from Fort McMurray Composite High School also stopped by to share their thoughts too.

In total, 216 meaningful in-person interactions took place, 47 survey submissions, 37 quick poll responses, 102 ideas shared on printed maps, and five map post card submissions were received. This feedback was reviewed carefully before considering updates to the draft plan. Any feedback shared that did not relate to the plan was passed to the appropriate department for follow-up.

The survey was specifically developed with college students in mind. Staff, students, and visiting high school students completed the survey during one of the two pop-up events. Alternatively, students could take a printed survey or post card map with them, submitting it before Feb. 10, 2023. Following are the results of this survey.

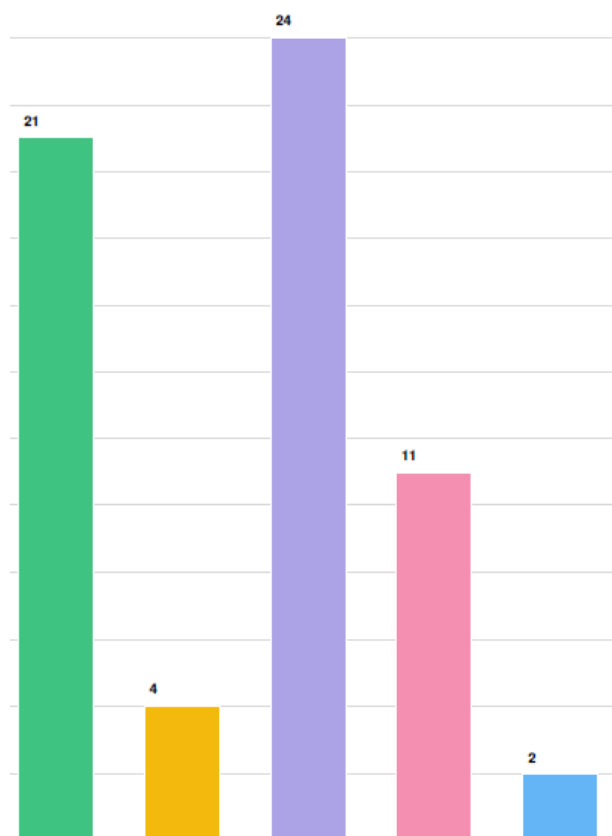
1. Of the options provided below, which best describes you?



Question options
(Click items to hide)

- I'm a current student at Keyano College
- I currently work at Keyano College
- I current work at Keyano College and am a student at Keyano College
- Other (please specify)
- I use public transportation

2. Based on the options provided below, how do you typically use transportation to get to and from the college?
Check all that apply.

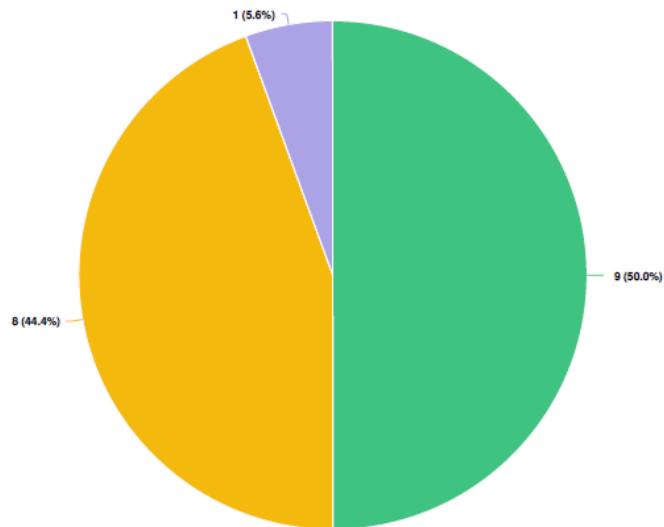


Question options
(Click items to hide)

- I drive a personal vehicle
- I carpool with friends and/or family
- I use public transportation
- I walk
- I use a bicycle, scooter, e-bicycle or e-scooter
- Other (please explain)



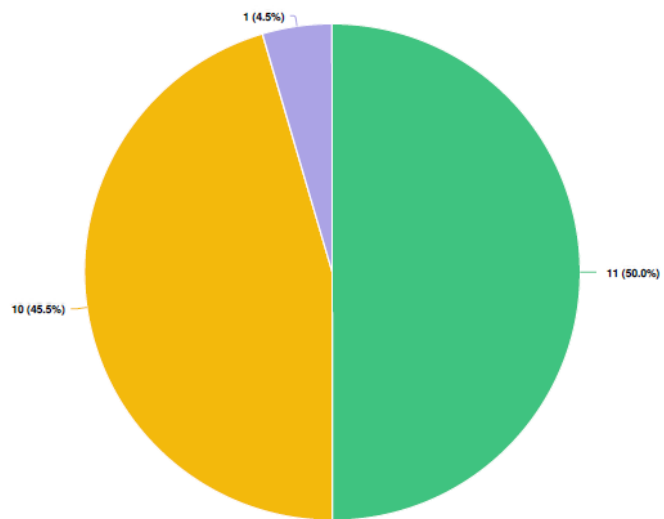
3. Do parking options satisfy your needs?



Question options (Click items to hide)

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain)

4. Does public transportation satisfy your needs?

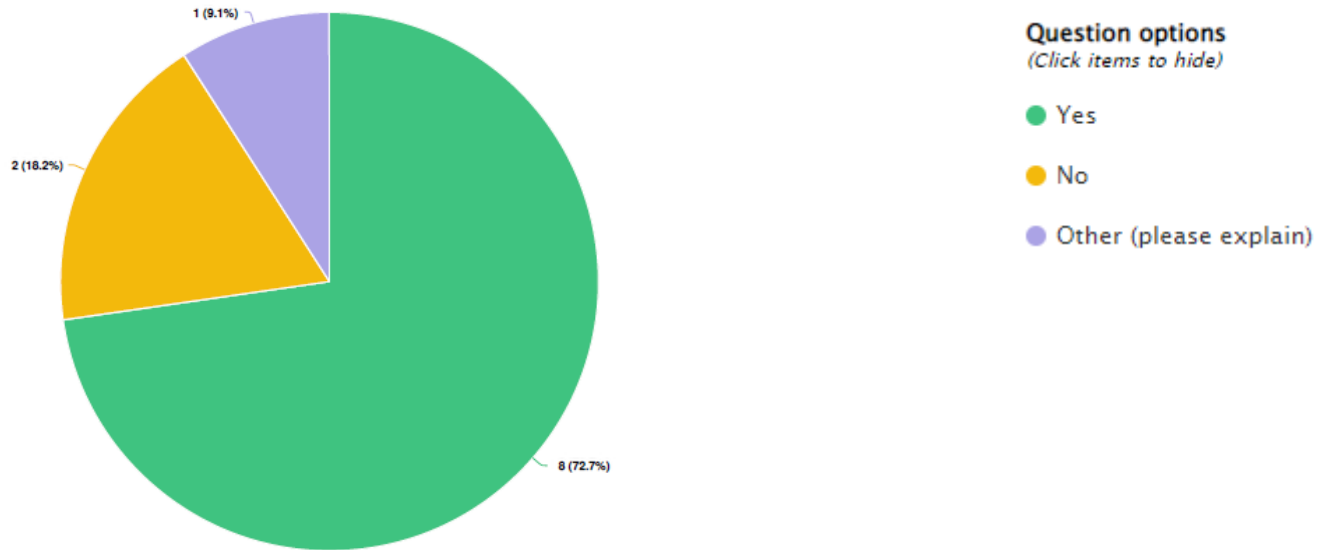


Question options (Click items to hide)

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain)

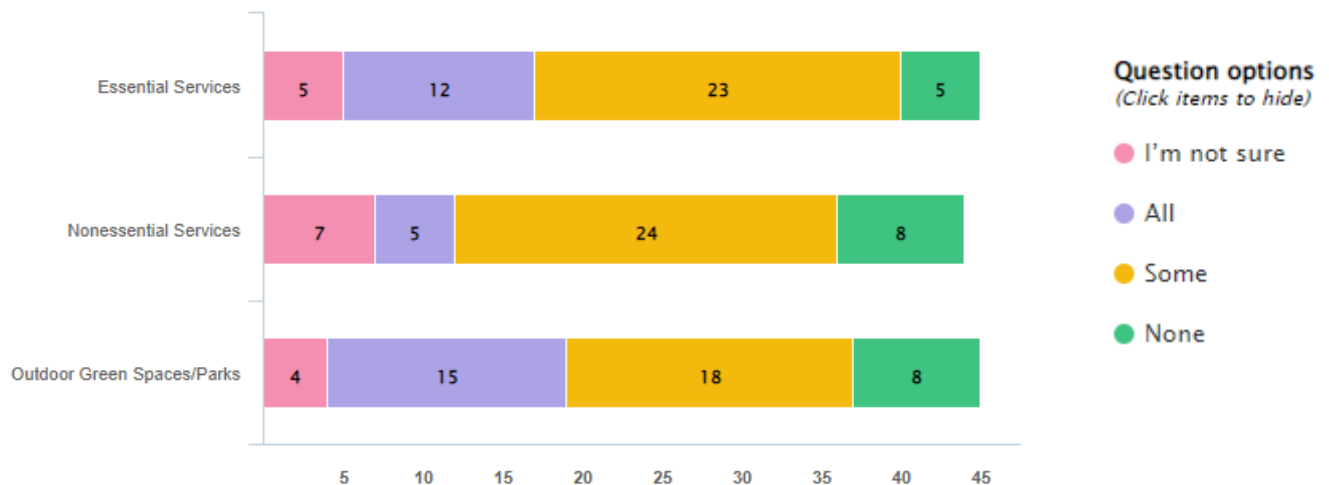


5. Do sidewalks and pedestrian crossings satisfy your needs?



6. Based on the [following] definitions, are these services available to you in the college area?

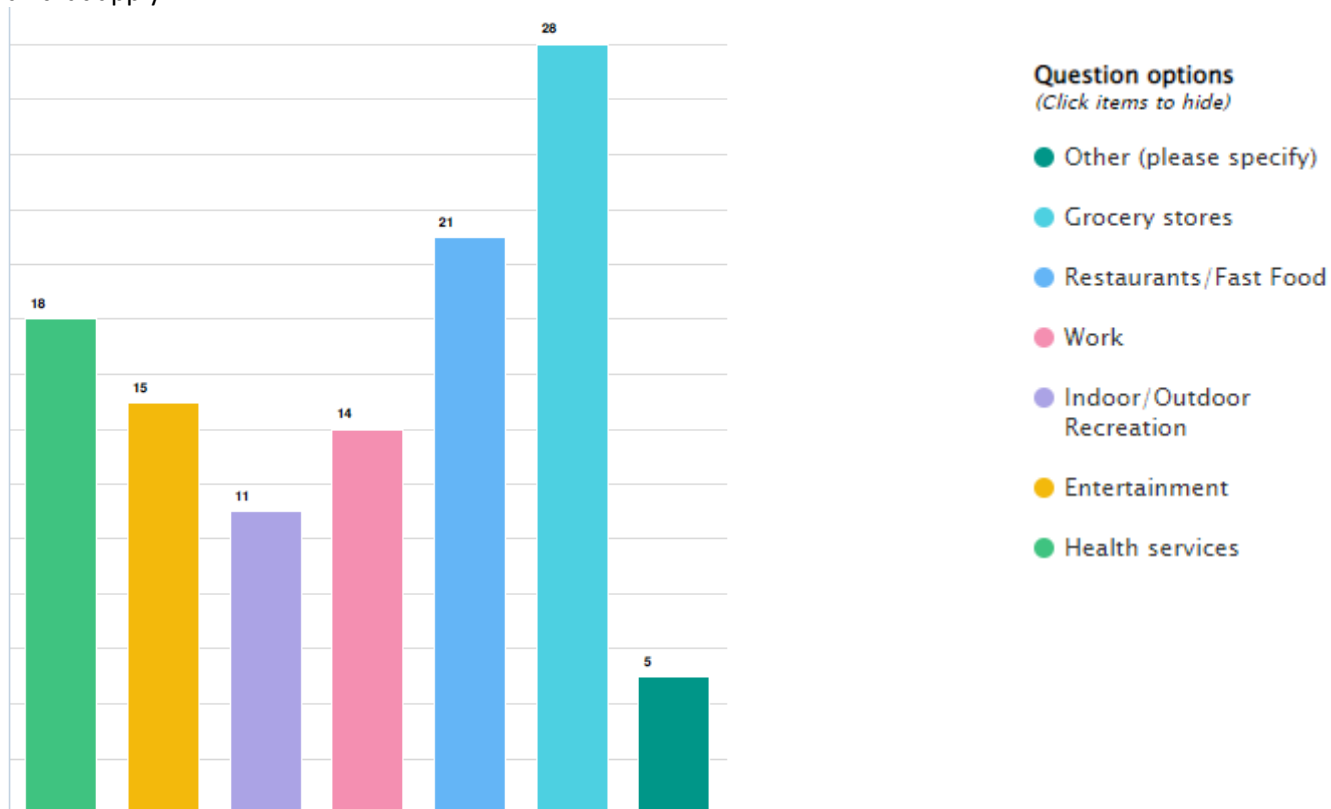
- **Essential services** are those daily services essential to preserving life, health, public safety and basic societal functioning. This could include health clinics and hospitals, grocery stores, police stations, banks, gas stations and more.
- **Nonessential services** include public-facing industries like entertainment, hospitality, and recreation facilities. This could include theaters, art venues, salons, and more.
- **Outdoor green spaces/parks** are open areas with grass, trees, or other natural elements. They may include benches, chairs and tables, and more.



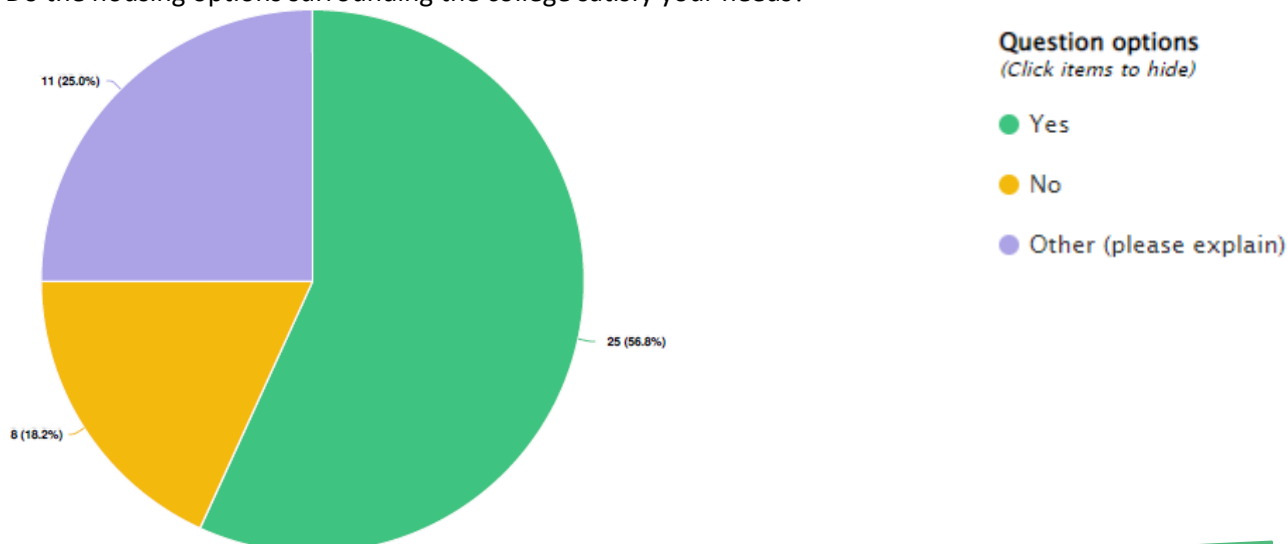
9. Can you picture outdoor green spaces/parks that would enhance your college experience? Tell us what you see here.

- **Themes from this open-ended response include additional events and programming in local green spaces, community gardening on campus, and more pathways and trails.** It should be noted that of the 37 responses, 13 participants either felt neutrally about this question, or didn't believe anything else needed to be done to green spaces and/or parks in the surrounding area.

10. What type of businesses, services, and other amenities do you most frequently use in the downtown? Check all that apply.

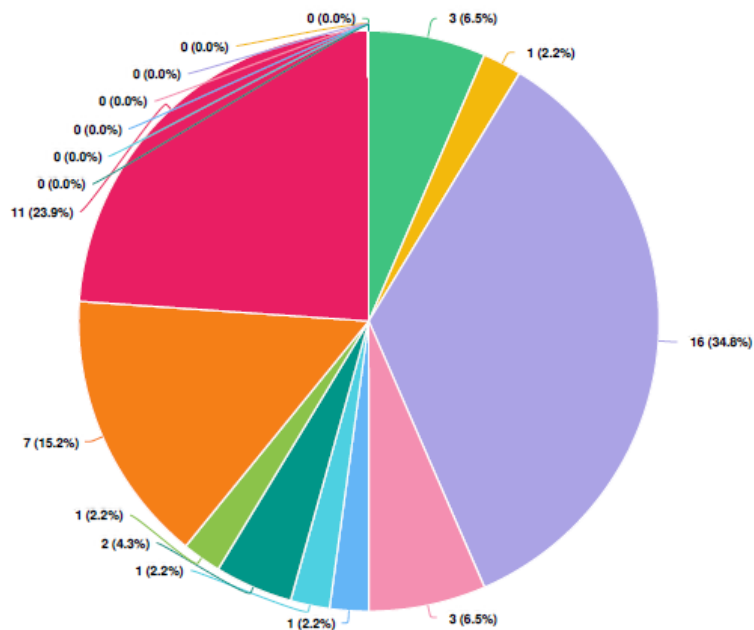


11. Do the housing options surrounding the college satisfy your needs?



12. Which neighbourhood in Fort McMurray* do you live in?

* One hundred percent of respondents reported that they live in Fort McMurray.



Question options

Wood Buffalo Waterways Saline Creek Prairie Creek Parsons Creek Ptarmigan Court
 Dickinsfield Timberlea Thickwood Stone Creek Longboat Landing Gregoire
 Grayling Terrace Eagle Ridge Downtown Beacon Hill Abasand

Overall sentiment from Keyano College consultation

Many of the participating students and staff feel the college area is not being utilized in a way that allows them to be fully immersed in the Keyano College area. Essential services, nonessential services, open space and parks were a topic of conversation on both days. Themes include a desire for more retail and consumer options, affordable indoor and outdoor recreational options, and entertainment venues, though public transportation became a through-thread across the board.

It is important to note that conversations throughout this engagement involved topics that aren't managed within the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan. In these situations, staff notified participants of what the plan does and doesn't include. Staff continued to gather all feedback and shared it to the appropriate departments afterwards to ensure concerns and/or questions weren't left without response. One example of this is elements of public transportation, which was mentioned by most participants during in-person engagement.

RMWB Council and Council Appointed Committee consultation

RMWB Council and Council Appointed Committees were invited to participate in presentations scheduled in March 2023. These sessions aimed at educating participants about the draft's current state, inviting participants to ask questions and include any additional feedback. In total, 63 people from RMWB Council and eight Council Appointed Committees joined one of nine sessions.

Topics during workshops included support and incentives for existing, new, and potential downtown business owners, creating a better sense of place and belonging for all residents of Wood Buffalo, and the importance of having an action plan to see progress on its short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Many individuals addressed concerns relating to safety, law enforcement, and aligning with other Municipal projects such as flood mitigation and wayfinding.



PHASE 2: VALIDATION ENGAGEMENT (April 2023)

Engagement on downtown revitalization began in 2019, and again in 2020 to gather more detailed responses from participants. Based on the feedback received during both engagement phases, along with 2023 engagement with Keyano College, a draft plan was created.

The validation stage of engagement provides residents, Indigenous partners, and key stakeholders with an opportunity to review the draft plan to confirm that it reflects the needs of the community. Because COVID-19 protocols in 2020 restricted in-person events, it was especially important to increase these tactics, while offering online and oral engagement opportunities as well.

Did you know?

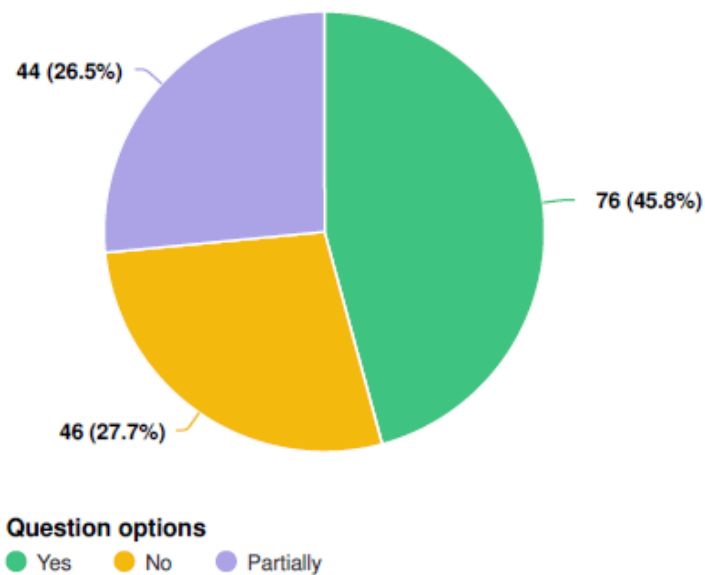
The draft Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan document was downloaded 490 times during engagement.

To assist in socializing the Downtown ARP, educational materials were developed to increase public understanding of the foundational categories of the plan. A one-page explainer was shared online, and at all in-person events. Large poster boards were designed to tell the story of the draft plan and were utilized at the open house and in-person business luncheon. A detailed presentation was used for each one-on-one sessions, personalized to the group in attendance for a better understanding of the plan's impact on the work stakeholders do within the region. A validation survey was created and included descriptions of each foundational ARP category prior to asking for feedback to ensure the participant had the adequate information necessary to meaningfully engage.

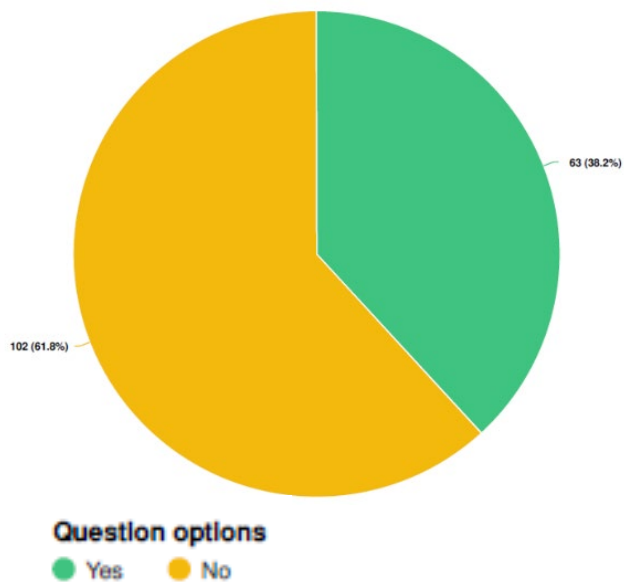
Public validation survey responses

This survey was created to support all participants who wanted to learn more about the plan's structure and share their feedback on the draft. The questions were developed based on the draft plan's five foundational categories with an open text option after the multiple-choice selection to allow residents to explain further. This survey was open for public response April 3 – 30, 2023. Where applicable, the overall sentiment of comments captured are explored within each question and response chart shown below.

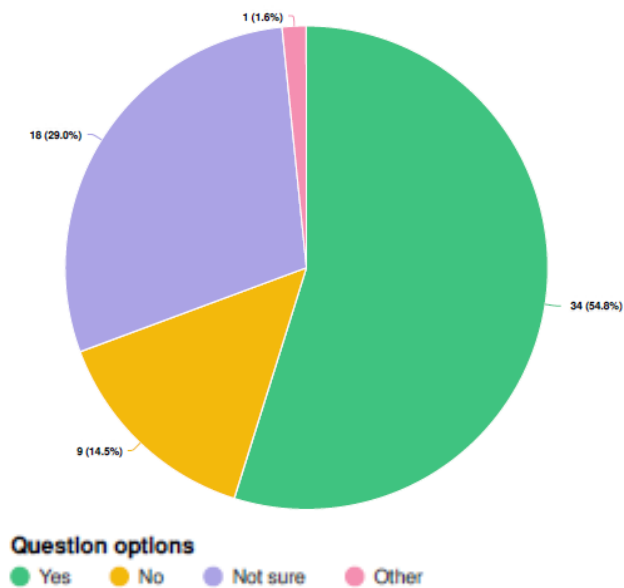
1. Have you read the draft Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan?



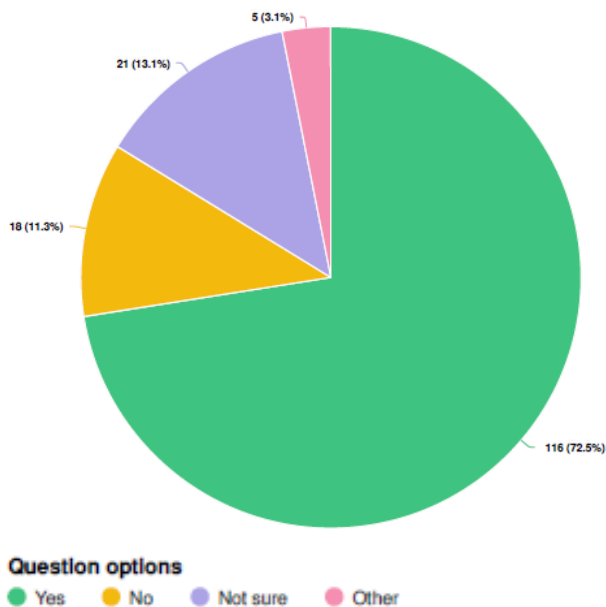
2. Did you participate in 2019 or 2020 engagements?



3. Thanks for participating in the initial engagement! Do you feel that we captured your feedback?

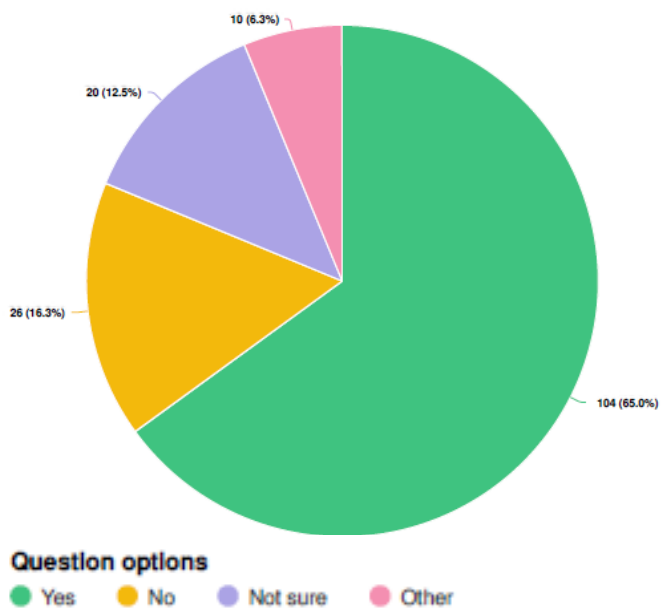


4. Do the themes in Land Use reflect what you see for downtown?



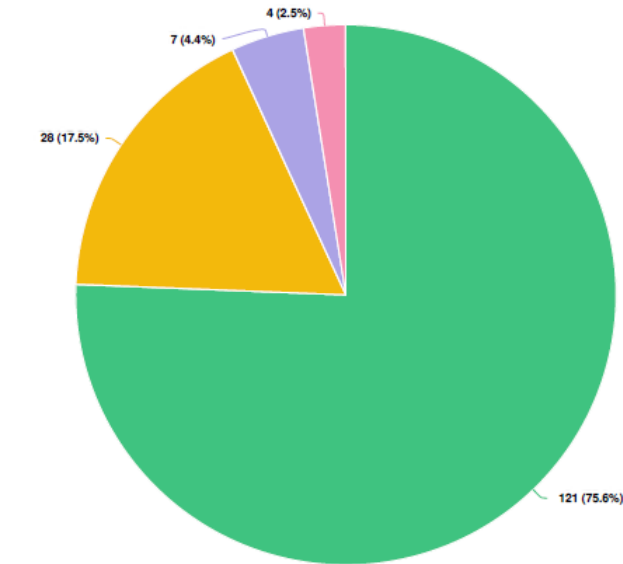
Comments regarding Land Use include a need to focus on a need to support developers with a better permitting system and filling vacant properties and storefronts. Some comments reveal that residents want to see development in other areas of Fort McMurray rather than downtown.

5. Do the themes in Built Form reflect what you see for downtown?



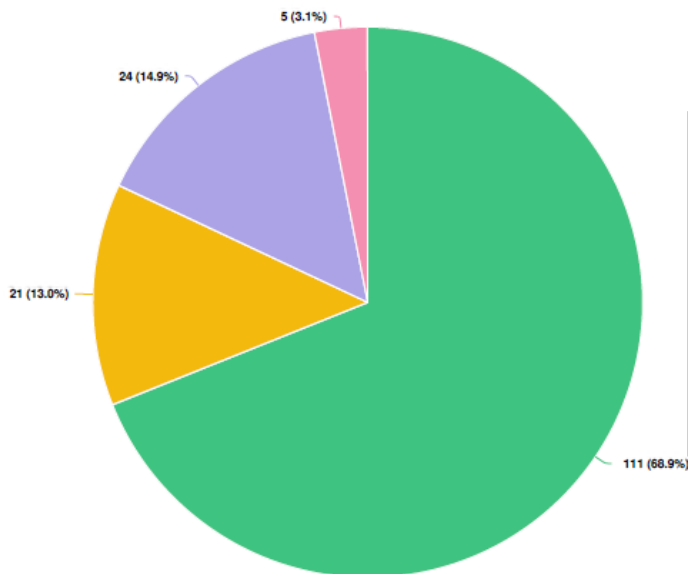
Comments regarding Built Form include the need to focus on maintenance and simple updates such as enhancing and completing sidewalks, and regular snow removal. Others share their desire for downtown to have more character or 'theme', using other destinations such as Banff or Jasper as an example. Participants also shared the need for action on this plan in order for visible change and excitement about the downtown to take place.

6. Do the themes in Parks and Open Space reflect what you see for downtown?



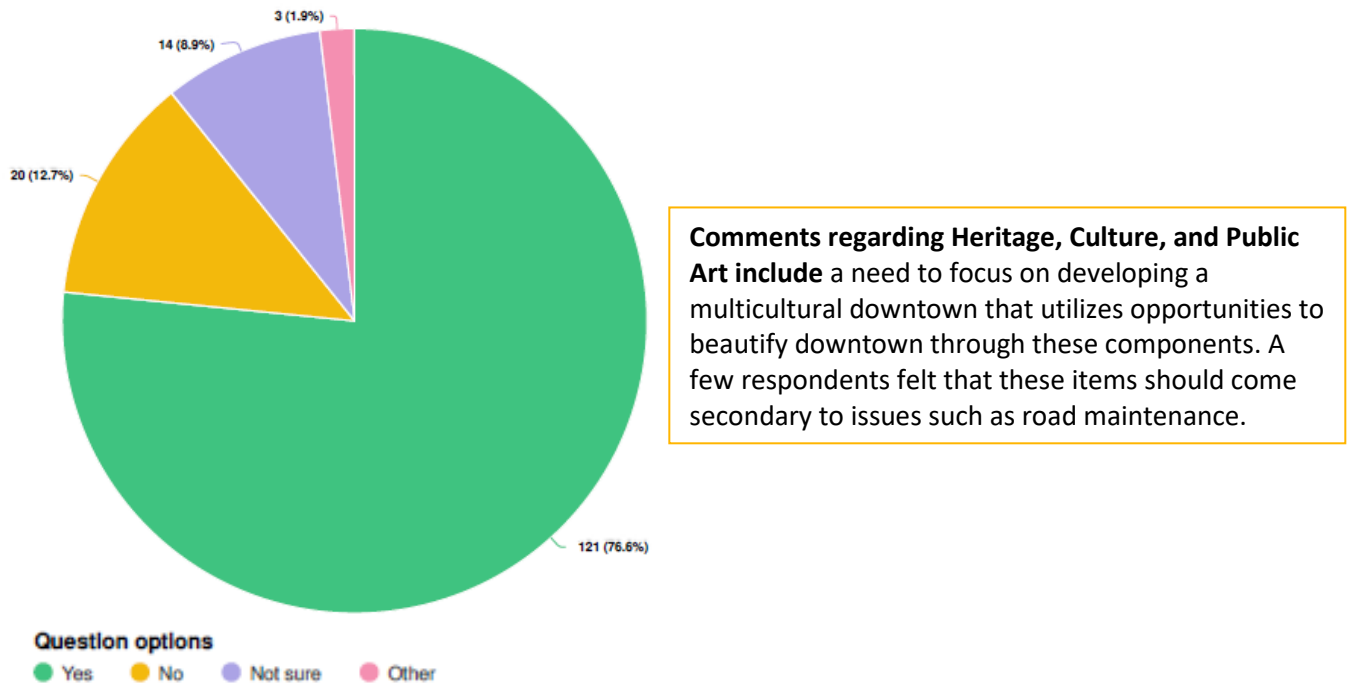
Comments regarding Parks and open Space include more efforts on regular maintenance, regard for accessibility and inclusivity to be top of mind in planning for these spaces, programming and promotion of programming at these spaces. Some concerns regarding downtown parks and spaces related to safety measures for residents to be more inclined to enjoy parks and space.

7. Do the themes in Transportation and Mobility reflect what you see for downtown?



Comments regarding Transportation and Mobility include themes such as parking, bike lanes and connected network systems and a need to continue developing with public transportation and private vehicle owners in mind. Participants want to ensure transportation options in downtown are accessible for everyone. It is important to residents that networks are considered into and out of downtown as well – not just within the downtown area.

8. Does the Heritage, Culture and Public Art category reflect what you see for downtown?



Overall sentiment from socialization and validation engagement

Whether speaking with key stakeholders or the general public, participants envision a future downtown Fort McMurray that focuses on safety, beautification, and supportive opportunities for existing and future business owners. This current sentiment reflects the views of previous survey participants as well.

Most categories received 65 – 75 percent of responses in support of the draft plan categories, though it is important to note that a small number of participants – both in-person and online – did not feel that the Municipality should focus efforts on downtown area redevelopment. Known reasons for not agreeing with the plan or its foundational categories often reflected concerns with flooding and developing other parts of Fort McMurray. Others felt the Municipality often creates plans that don't result in progressive action for the community.

Generally, participants are supportive of the five foundational categories within the draft plan. Many comments online focused on the need for beautification, while in-person conversations focused heavily on supporting existing and future businesses in the downtown core to achieve a downtown that looks and feels good to residents and visitors. Participating business owners and developers expressed their eagerness to be part of this plan in action, some of whom requested ongoing connection regarding the Downtown ARP.

Much of the feedback received during this campaign reinforced the importance of being fiscally responsible, aligning with other Municipal projects including flood mitigation, wayfinding, heritage management, and public transportation, and acting on the plan.

Promoting the ARP's accompanying Action Plan, which will drive the progress of this plan, will be an important part of educating residents on those steps, and how action items will be completed.

NEXT STEPS

The Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan is an important plan guiding future development in the downtown, and your involvement in this engagement isn't taken lightly.

Engagement findings and other determining factors will be reviewed and considered by Administration in developing the final version of the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan. Planning and Development will go before RMWB Council for a first reading in the coming months. Individuals are encouraged to register with Legislative Services to speak on behalf of this plan during the second reading (Public Hearing) and can do so by clicking [here](#).

Stay up to date on the progress of this plan by subscribing to rmwb.ca/ARP.

We encourage you to continue using your voice to make our region even better by learning about all current projects. Visit participate.rmwb.ca to stay connected!





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