



A United Vision:
**GUELPH'S
COMMUNITY PLAN**



Every voice matters

Results from a year of listening



Community engagement analysis summary





Our year of listening



A United Vision:
**GUELPH'S
COMMUNITY PLAN**
MAKE YOUR MARK.



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Introduction

The City of Guelph and a wide range of community partners are building a Community Plan that will shape what Guelph will look like over the next 10 to 20 years. It will consider the community's economic, cultural, educational, environmental, social and health hopes and dreams. The plan will lay the foundation for a strong, welcoming and prosperous future for Guelph—one where everyone has a sense of belonging, can access essential services and earn a good living. Once built, the plan will help inform the strategic work of community partners including local government. The Community Plan will give everyone in Guelph a way to monitor our progress, share what we learn and adjust when necessary.

What is a Community Plan?

Many communities have long-term plans in place to help guide and support the creation and implementation of municipal and local stakeholder strategies and master plans. These types of long-range plans are often called community plans.

Guelph's Community Plan will be a public document that will provide a shared vision and roadmap for the future. It will be:

Comprehensive – The plan will address all aspects of community development, including economic, cultural, educational, environmental, social and health issues.

Long-range – The plan will identify community-wide priorities and issues over a 10+ year time horizon.

Related to the entire city – The plan will not be bound by jurisdiction or levels of responsibility. It will identify

the issues that reflect the needs and priorities of the diversity of residents and neighbourhoods, businesses and institutions that make up the whole community of Guelph.

It is also important that the Community Plan be “made-in-Guelph” and have that feel to it. It is not a generic document. The personality of the city must shine through. That is why engaging the community in conceiving the elements of the plan is so important.

The Community plan is not designed to be a static document, but something that grows and evolves as the community does. It is designed to be a platform to continue to convene stakeholders to keep on top of the City's future and our shared efforts to make progress on important things.

Engaging the Community

As part of the community planning process, the City embarked on a year-long citizen engagement and listening process. Between January 2018 and February 2019, community members were invited to provide input at a variety of events and in diverse ways—surveys, focus groups, casual discussions, targeted workshops and on social media. This broad-based, mixed-methods approach was intentional, to ensure that as many people as possible from different demographic groups and sectors were given an opportunity to provide input to the Community Plan. This report synthesizes the findings from that year of listening.

How we've partnered with the community and staff to co-create this Plan

The project methodology was divided into the following key phases:

- Project planning and research (October 2017 – February 2018): defining the governance, intended outcomes, principles and guiding partners.
- Year of listening (January 2018 – January 2019): Community outreach and engagement through various approaches.
- Building and validating the plan (January 2019 – April 2019): Reviewing the data and drafting core elements, working with stakeholders to refine and validate.
- Council endorsement (May 2019) – The plan is presented to Council for their endorsement to become the foundation of the new City Strategic Plan.
- Putting the plan into action (May onwards) – Working with Council to develop the new City Strategic Plan (formally known as Council Shared Agenda), communicating the plan to stakeholders and staff, working to onboard the components and supporting others to use it in their work planning. Setting up the metric collection and reporting systems that dovetail to the City's Annual Report to the Community.

Project Governance

The project governance was designed to promote an inclusive and effective engagement process. A round table approach was used to support staff and community leaders to take a hands-on, testing orientation in a workshop setting where members were actively shaping and testing the project plan, engagement and research tools.

Members are also actively championing the process among their networks and helping to make sure the Community Plan team is on the right track. Key components of the governance model are:

- City Council will be engaged to validate and contribute to the Community Plan at key points in the process. They are responsible for endorsing the plan and using it as a basis for the City's Strategic Plan.
- The Executive Team is directing the project team and providing strategic oversight.
- The Community Round Table is comprised of community leaders across sectors. They are responsible for providing guidance and advice to ensure the engagement is inclusive and aligned to the Plan's stated principles.
- The Staff Round Table focused on ensuring comprehensive internal staff engagement and that existing City plans and strategies are well reflected in the Community Plan. Each service area had representation at the table. This table also provided input to ensure the plan would support their work.

Governance Structure



Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Community and stakeholder engagement are a vital part of strategic planning. It leads to improved outcomes for all stakeholders and a greater sense of community ownership and support of the plan. This engagement can lead to increased adoption, advocacy and action towards community priorities.

When municipalities seek out the aspirations, ideas, issues and concerns of residents, there is a greater likelihood that the final product will be able to meet community needs. Public involvement brings to light more information (scientific, technical, historical, etc.) and leads to better decisions and satisfaction with the outcomes.

The City believes that a united vision is essential for establishing a strong future, and that everyone should have a voice in shaping the Community Plan. As a result, the process for providing community engagement to this project has been extensive.

Between January 2018 and February 2019, community members and visitors were actively invited to provide input at a variety of community events and meetings, using a diverse set of methods. This broad-based, mixed-methods approach was intentional to ensure that as many people as possible from different demographic groups and sectors were given an opportunity to provide input to the Community Plan.

Overall, the engagement strategy yielded excellent results. More than 100 community events and meetings were attended, and more than 6,200 engagements were achieved. In addition to the numbers, the relationships that were strengthened and created through the engagement work will support future city projects and initiatives.

Engagement Highlights



Key Engagement Questions

The principal questions that have guided the engagement strategy and design are as follows:

1. What do we want Guelph to be?
2. What matters most to you?
3. What's in the way? What are the barriers?
4. Where are the opportunities? What are our strengths?

The answers to these questions were collected in a variety of creative and fun formats. Participants were invited to create postcards, newspaper headlines, fill in questionnaires and engage in group conversation.

Ways to Get Involved

The City sought broad engagement from residents, visitors, the business community, community organizations and associations, academic institutions, not-for-profit organizations, advisory committees and faith groups. Community members and staff were invited to provide input in four different ways:

- In person
- Online
- Telephone survey
- On your own

In-Person Engagement

The in-person engagement took various forms to make sure the broad population of Guelph, as well as more targeted stakeholder and special interest groups, had an opportunity to participate. It was important to the team to attend events and meetings where people were already gathering. This approach helped gain trust and make it easier for people to participate. It also led to a considerable number of requests for staff to attend different opportunities, which has been a foundation for good relationship-building that will continue beyond the life of this particular project.

The broad engagement activities centred around large and small events (e.g. Movies in the Square, Ribfest), City amenities (such as libraries and recreation centres), public spaces (e.g. Stone Road Mall, Guelph Community Health Centre, The Drop In Centre), partner meetings and gatherings (e.g. The Poverty Task Force, Guelph Downtown Business Association, Muslim Society of Guelph).

In addition to these broader engagement activities, five



sector-specific conversations were held. These engagement activities were hosted jointly by community partners and covered: economy and business; arts and culture; environment; health, social and education sectors.

There were also considerable internal staff engagement efforts that included an internal staff round table, attendance at staff events such as the annual staff BBQ, department meetings and service area town halls.

Online Engagement

A variety of online tools and techniques were used to reach out to, listen to and involve residents in the Community Plan. These digital engagement platforms allowed the City to talk to people who may not attend public events or meetings.

The initial online platforms used for this project were Mindmixer and Facebook. On July 10, 2018, the City launched a new digital engagement platform, Engagement HQ, which can be found at haveyoursay.guelph.ca. This platform became the primary site for online engagement on the Community Plan.

Leger Methodology

To complement the in-person and digital community engagement tactics, Leger was contracted by the City to undertake a statistically representative telephone survey. The survey of 600 Guelph residents was completed between January 3 and January 21, 2019. For this survey Leger used their in-house call centre, comprised of 80

CATI telephone stations and 250 bilingual interviewers, to collect responses.

- Residents were contacted by cellphone or landline
- The survey took approximately 12 minutes per respondent

Due to limited responses in select wards, the sample was weighted to provide a representative sample of Guelph. The margin of error for this survey was +/-4.0 per cent, 19 times out of 20 (at the 95 per cent confidence level).

The survey questions presented a mix of open and closed questions and were designed to explore the following areas:

- What residents love about Guelph
- What they want Guelph to be known for
- What is most important to focus on
- Which values should be considered when making decisions

Do-It-Yourself Activities

The project team also created a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Conversation Guidebook, which was full of ideas for activities that community members could use to start a conversation with family, friends, co-workers and neighbours. There was also a playful game called “Cards for Community” that was available to the public to use.

Analysis Approach

The engagement analysis was done in two parts, with an interim report produced in October 2018. This report summarized the engagement completed up to that date.

To facilitate the analysis of a large volume of engagement data in different types and formats (narrative and images), a decision was made to use Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). CAQDAS are computer databases that allow researchers and policy makers to manage, organize and store non-numerical and unstructured data. In order to identify trends, insights, patterns and relationships within the information, the data is categorized into themes (coded). The selected CAQDAS for this project is Dedoose – an economical, web-based application used to analyze qualitative and mixed methods research.

With the guidance of City staff and the project consultant, two summer interns reviewed all of the material in-depth and systemically assigned “codes” to indicate the presence of interesting and meaningful pieces of content. In academic disciplines, this is referred to as “content analysis.”

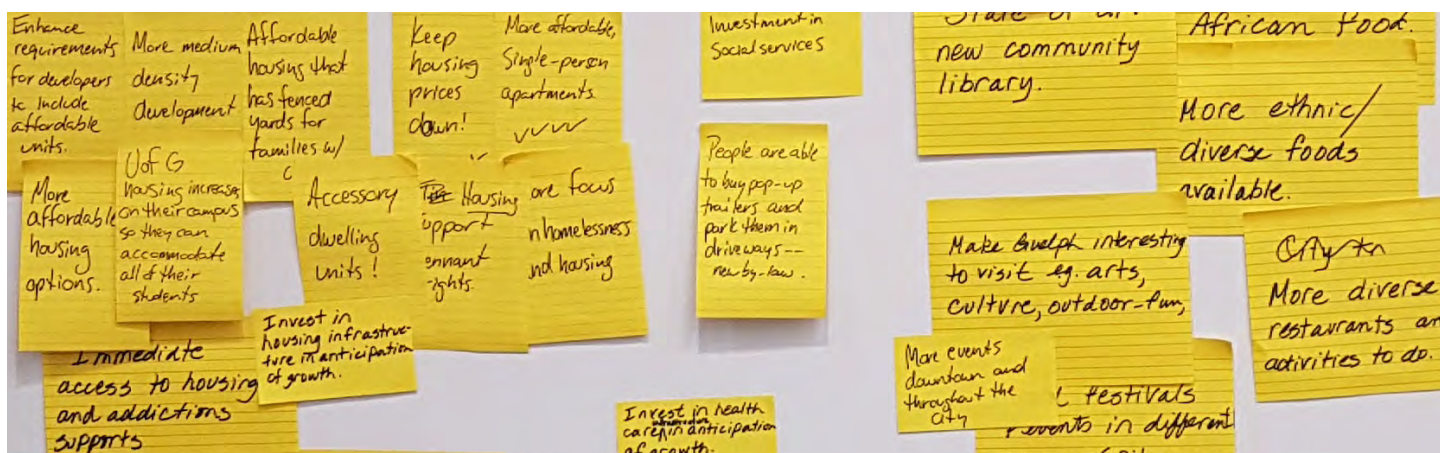
Not every data point was loaded into Dedoose, such as transcripts from certain community meetings. After October 2018, as the nature of the data grew richer (i.e. a table conversation vs a single headline) a different approach to the analysis was carried out that did not include using Dedoose; however, the content was analyzed using a similar theming process.

In addition to the interim engagement findings report, five sector conversation summaries, a Leger survey summary report and this final engagement findings summary have been created.

Overview of Engagement Findings

Before exploring the content of the findings in multiple ways, it is worth highlighting three notable features of the data:

1. The issues and themes are **highly consistent** across the various data sources, wards and demographic groups. This consistency is striking, especially given the diversity of the people and opportunities for input. A remarkably unified vision of Guelph priorities emerges. There were obvious clusters in the feedback (e.g. input gathered in libraries mentioned the need for libraries; input gathered at the drop-in centre highlighted the need for detox services and affordable housing) but those areas of concentration were generally evened out across multiple data sources.
2. The feedback is overwhelmingly **positive and constructive**. It reflects a high level of community pride and confidence in the city’s future. People are and want to be proud to live here.
3. There is a strong degree of **alignment between residents’ vision for Guelph and its perceived current strengths**. This is another encouraging finding, as it affirms that Guelph is well-positioned to achieve whatever vision it casts.



Understanding the Recurring Issues

The data will initially be presented based on frequency of mention. Recurring issues are depicted in the table on page 14. They are summarized here, with further detail provided in the thematic and visionary summaries in the following sections.

The first category contains residents' clearest priorities. There were three issues that emerged as priorities multiple times within virtually every point of consultation contact: affordable housing, parks and green spaces, and reliable transit.

Affordable housing includes housing rental and ownership as well as addressing homelessness. There is a need to assist those who are hard to house, those requiring rent geared to income, and those who can afford [reasonable] market prices. A range of housing types is needed.

The rising price of housing and the shortage of affordable and accessible options are growing concerns not only to residents living on low income, but also to businesses looking to recruit workers, seniors wishing to downsize and/or age in place, and middle-income families wishing to relocate. Many participants in the local labour force cannot afford to purchase homes in Guelph, and existing homeowners are questioning whether they could afford to purchase their own house in today's market.

The cost of housing emerged in the online survey as the number one challenge for businesses in Guelph. One participant in the economic sector forum noted, "**15 businesses come to mind that have relocated to KW in the past two years because of real estate costs.**" An online participant asserted, "**Not everyone can afford a single detached house... nor should they. Having higher density buildings is a good thing, it attracts younger (25-30 year-olds) and older demographics to Guelph (baby boomers/retirees), and extends the home ownership option to more people.**"


People noted not only the need for greater housing supply and variety, but also for the infrastructure to support population growth, including transportation services and adequate wrap-around resources for those needing supportive housing. They also suggested requiring developers to include accessible options and



affordable units (and renewable energy) in all new housing builds. The affirmation of this issue as a high priority for Guelph stood out across every major source of engagement data, including the sectoral conversations, through online surveys, at community gatherings and on Facebook.

Residents also affirmed the need to protect, expand and animate **parks and green spaces**, which was distinct feedback from other elements of environmental leadership mentioned elsewhere in the findings. The desire for green spaces emerged from diverse respondents, from school-age children and clients at The Drop In Centre to online participants, library users and folks at the Muslim Society. One participant wrote, "**More green space, and not just sports/soccer fields. Give us nice places to sit and read under shade. Take a picnic. Get outdoors. Socialize with each other. More Riverside Park greenspaces scattered throughout the city so more people can enjoy them.**"

This love for green space is closely linked to how people spend their leisure time (i.e. walking, biking, hiking, walking dogs) and to what kind of city they want in terms of aesthetics (i.e. green and natural). An online respondent had this advice: "**I do appreciate the parkland planning that I see around me, but it is time to move on and integrate parkland planning with neighbourhood development.**"



The desire for a **reliable and complete transit system** is focused primarily on buses to all parts of the city. Other elements of transportation and infrastructure, such as regional connectivity or bicycle infrastructure, were mentioned elsewhere. Here, the emphasis was on internal city public transit.

There is a strong need to connect the four corners of the city, as they are perceived to be currently siloed. As one resident said, **“anyone without a vehicle in the south end is trapped.”** Several others noted that the current bus system does not adequately serve the new industrial areas of the city with sufficient frequency. People want better frequency, coverage and affordability. As one social services leader noted, transit planning should be **“inclusive and needs-based.”** There is also interest in investing in a fleet of electric buses.

If the city is seeking a small number of clear priorities worthy of focus based on the priorities of residents, these would be the three to choose.

The second category contains issues repeated both within each data source and across four or more data sources:

Bicycle infrastructure refers to a desire for safe, clean and well-connected paths and lanes throughout the city. People also want the accompanying infrastructure such as bike storage/lock-up facilities, incentives, and public/driver education campaigns required to support widespread cycling in the city. As one online respondent explained, **“As traffic gets more heavy, it is more risky for cyclists to be out on the roads, both for commuting and recreation. It would be great to have designated “cycling areas” where people in cars know that if you’re entering that area, that they need to be more mindful of the cyclists, as well as continue to implement the active transportation initiatives. I’d love to see Guelph work with surrounding counties to develop a long-term commitment to maintaining at least one 50 to 75k loop or stretch of road with wide, well-paved bike lanes where two riders wide can comfortably ride recreationally through the county roads. It would be great for our community members, but it might also attract cycling tourism and possibly attract bicycle-friendly businesses along the route.”**

Caring includes references to neighbourliness and friendliness. People enjoy running into people they know in Guelph and they are proud of the city being one in

which people authentically care about one another. Newcomers reported that Guelph is, for example, **“full of warm, nice people that make this feel like home even though I have no family here.”** One respondent said, **“People make eye contact with each other and say hello on the street. I hope that does not change.”** People see this warmth as a distinguishing feature of Guelph.

Environmental leadership refers to a real and aspirational differentiating identity for Guelph. Guelph is known as a “green city” and people want it to maintain its identity as a front runner in this field. They want Guelph to be recognized as a hub for environmental innovation at scale.

Food security is something Guelph residents want confidence in, for everyone who lives here. Affordable year-round access to healthy food is important to Guelph, often with an emphasis on local products. One example is this comment from an online participant: **“I want a Guelph that ensures the well-being of ALL its citizens. Economic stability for all, including housing that individuals can realistically afford, and healthy food security is crucial to achieve this, as well as safe streets, reliable transportation and a vital arts community.”**

Inclusion includes the notions of acceptance and belonging. Residents want a city where everyone is welcome and can live free of stigma or exclusion. One participant in the economic sectoral forum noted that **“Guelph needs to cultivate a sense of belonging”** and linked that to affordability as well. Another online respondent expressed it this way: **“We also can’t let NIMBY protectionism take over Guelph. We need to be open and welcoming to newcomers and help them fit into the community. We have problems with racial and economic segregation here in Guelph, and that’s uncomfortable to admit. This kind of attitude and division in the city isn’t healthy, and will only be exacerbated with population growth if we do nothing to tackle it.”**

Libraries were mentioned as being worthy of maintenance and expansion in the city. People are keen to see the new downtown library branch built. Recreation centres were also mentioned as important community spaces, but less often.

Low height with no sprawl reveals the mixed feedback received about intensification and Guelph’s growth trajectory. People generally want to avoid suburban sprawl, while also avoiding cluttering the view of the sky



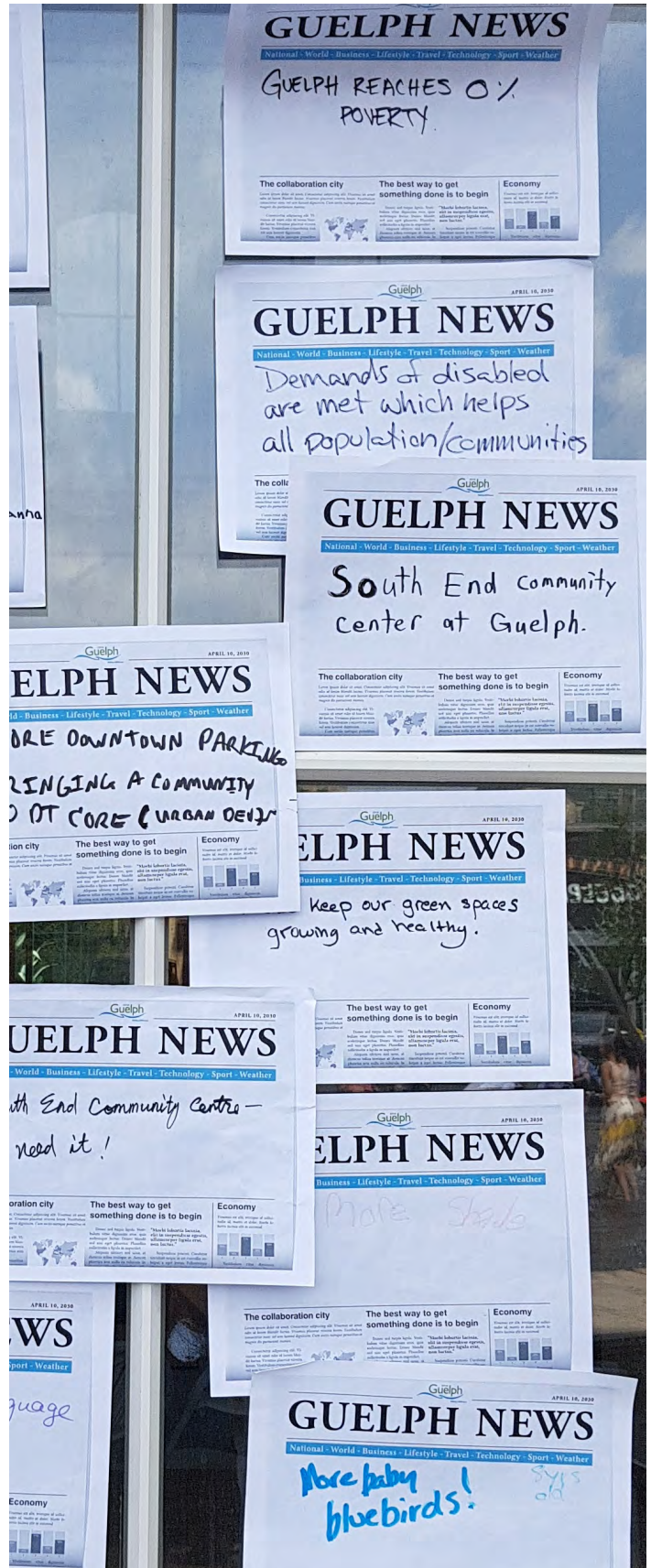
with tall buildings. They want Church of our Lady to continue to dominate the Guelph skyline without having to compete with skyscrapers. As one participant explained, **“In my opinion, we should be building up, not out, with a conscious effort to try and keep the skyline focused on the church, as is Guelph’s signature.”** Another participant expressed it this way: **“I don’t think population necessarily implies high rises, there are many much more sane options within reasonable height limits. High rises look good to the bank, but are a societal disaster. I would propose mixed use, instead of half dead malls and sprawling box stores, build *intentional* communities, where quality of life trumps the bank. Now, admittedly, this involves talking to different developers and architects than do Markham, Mississauga or Toronto lakefront, but if folks want to live in such conditions, hey, they can move over there and commute to us by train!”**


Mental health supports include a wide range of accessible health supports. Specific repeated mention was made of becoming a trauma-informed community, addressing substance use particularly in the downtown core, and focusing on preventing and mitigating the effects of adverse childhood experiences.

Regional connectivity was specifically mentioned within the broader category of transportation. People want Guelph to get further ahead of the curve on this need. It reflects a desire for people to be able to drive and take public transit (particularly light rail) more easily to Kitchener, Waterloo, Hamilton and Toronto. This would offer more options both for living and working in Guelph and in the surrounding communities. Two-way, all-day GO service was seen as the biggest current opportunity for Guelph. There was a slight tension within this issue, however, as several people mentioned not wanting Guelph to become a “commuter town.” In those cases, the feedback was linked to maintaining a vibrant downtown.

Safety includes both the level and consistency of enforcement of bylaws, such as parking or public alcohol consumption, as well as people’s desire to lower their perceived risk or vulnerability to crime or harassment.

A second hospital was specifically highlighted as a need across diverse populations, within the context of reducing wait times but also a desire to be able to stay local for care. Hospital improvements were mentioned specifically, rather than “improved health care.” There was





some support for becoming Canada's healthiest city, but less so in the 600-person survey.

Trails are linked to residents' desire for a bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly city that connects people to nature and to the other places they want to go. This desire refers to trail connectivity within the city, between cities, and between trails and transit.

Trees were noted as very important, including maintaining a tree canopy and protecting mature trees, particularly on school grounds. Pollinator protection was also frequently mentioned, within comments related both to trees and green spaces. One respondent explained her perspective this way: **"wildlife is rapidly losing habitat and bird species are disappearing. Green spaces are being gobbled up by intensification and tree canopy is being lost. Trees that are planted frequently die due to lack of care and maintenance. Trees are vitally important to our health and to city cooling. We have done so well on water conservation but ignorance about the importance of ecosystem protection saddens and frightens me, especially as the climate warms."**

A vibrant downtown is highly valued, for its retail and cultural opportunities. As one online respondent said, **"Guelph is doing a fantastic job at cultivating the downtown core, I love going down there to shop, to eat, and to socialize."** Another said, **"It's an involved community. There are a lot of people that love this city and want to see it continue to be the great place it is. It has a downtown core that is thriving."** Guelph values independent retailers. The vibe of downtown is seen as especially valuable. A lively downtown core is indicative of a healthy, thriving and active city.

Walkability is a feature of city life that is important to the people of Guelph, not only downtown or on trails, but also in newer neighbourhoods. One respondent suggested promoting the "100-foot diet" through walkable community gardens.

The third category of feedback also contains repeated themes appearing across multiple but fewer data sources:

Accessibility refers primarily to eliminating barriers to full community participation for those with various disabilities, but also more broadly infers removing constraints to engagement. Most often this category included improving physical accessibility and affordability.

Accessible parking was specifically noted as a need. One respondent expressed her opinion this way, **"For those with disabilities or for the older population, getting around is very important for our quality of life. More money should be spent making sidewalks and the crossing of intersections accessible."**

Affordable child care includes child care that is accessible and of high quality. It also incorporates a call for higher wages for early childhood educators.

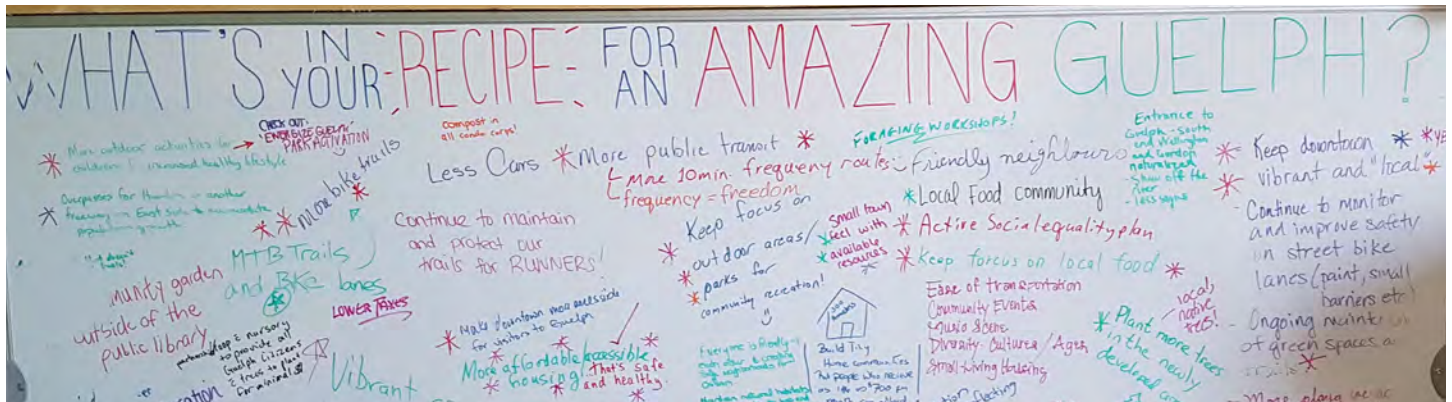
Arts are an important element of what creates Guelph's creative vibe. People mentioned festivals and music, as well as the importance of the aesthetics of the city. They also mentioned appreciating living in a place where creativity of all kinds can flourish. At the arts and culture sectoral conversation, the call for an arts strategy and artistic nodes throughout the city was clear, as was the need to make arts a core deliverable rather than an afterthought. It is one of the reasons people choose Guelph.

Dog parks and/or leash-free zones emerged as a specific need in Guelph, especially ones that are fully fenced with parking nearby. Dog lovers and those with a fear or dislike of other people's dogs both mentioned the need for this infrastructure to be built in the city.

East end development refers to the need for more services east of the downtown core, specifically a grocery store near Watson Road. As one resident explained, **"Where I live, in the East End, it's a food desert (for reasonably priced groceries). It takes me 25 minutes by bus, or 45 minutes on foot to reach a grocery store I can reasonably afford. For someone who already doesn't own a car because of the cost, I definitely cannot be shopping at the higher end stores in my area."** Other respondents spoke of having no reasons to draw them to the east side of the city, and no easy routes to get there.

Fiscal responsibility is a general approach to the provision of public services that was often mentioned, although rarely with any further detailed comments. Residents want their tax dollars handled prudently and transparently. Opinions about what that means varied, including calls both to raise and lower taxes.

Green, sustainable development refers not to "sustainable development" in a more general sense, but instead to aligning infrastructure with growth in the city. When growth happens, residents want expectations



placed on developers to “go green.” There is a perception that the current regulations are too lenient on developers overall and specifically on environmentally-friendly requirements. Below are examples of comments on this topic:

“Growth should not negatively affect our natural heritage systems.”

“Integrate natural green spaces (swales, meadows, forests etc.) into all new developments.”

“I see evidence of sustainable housing development in my neighbourhood and hope that choosing developers (developments) includes sustainability as a core requirement.”

“The current bylaw around parkland/greenspace per development is not nearly strong enough. As well developers are granted too many exceptions from bylaws.”

These latter comments were echoed in the feedback related to safety and the need for consistent enforcement as well.

High community engagement reflects both a current strength and an aspiration. It includes individual volunteer involvement and concern, as well as numerous examples of effective collaboration across the community.

Less drugs/loitering downtown is perceived to be needed. This concern was raised both by retailers and by people who reported feeling “vulnerable” or “uncomfortable” walking downtown streets. One online participant expressed her concern this way, “**Real solutions to address Guelph’s population battling drug and alcohol addictions. These people need support and a place to go.**”

Living wage jobs are the primary way in which economic development was described in the engagement feedback. People want reliable, flexible employment that pays them enough to live decently in Guelph. This was often expressed as “good jobs” or “decent work.”

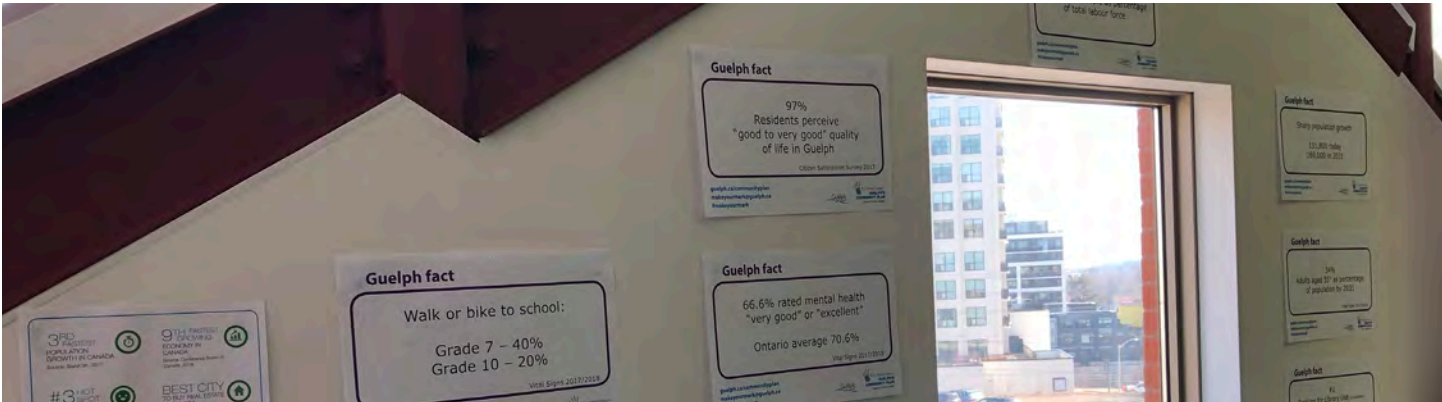
Opportunities for community connections refers primarily to a desire for social events, adult programming and community “bumping” opportunities that allow people to run into other people they know. It was often linked to Guelph being a friendly, caring city. It also included calls for “more fun places” in Guelph, from children and adults alike.

Parking/traffic congestion problems were noted, particularly parking scarcity downtown and near transit hubs and slow traffic on Highway 7, the Gordon Street corridor and routes to the 401. The need for traffic calming was noted, including by school age children.

Seniors’ services included an emphasis on ensuring geographic dispersion of services throughout the city and greater cultural diversity in those services.

Water for people is about protecting groundwater sources from scarcity, contamination and corporate control. Particular mention was made of Nestle and the work of Wellington Water Watchers. The environment and water were noted as very or somewhat important in the telephone survey by 27 per cent of respondents, more than double any other issue. This category includes protection of watersheds and rivers as well.

Wildlife includes protecting habitats and wetlands. It was mentioned as “wildlife protection” more than getting rid of the nuisance of Canada geese, which was also noted although less frequently.



Summary of Recurring Issues

Most frequently mentioned issues	Issues repeated within and across 4+ data sources	Issues repeated within and across 2 or 3 data sources
Affordable housing	Bicycle infrastructure	Accessibility
Parks and green spaces	Caring	Affordable child care
Reliable transit	Environmental leadership	Arts
	Food security	Dog parks
	Inclusion	East end development
	Libraries	Fiscal responsibility
	Low height with no sprawl	Green, sustainable development
	Mental health supports	High community engagement
	Regional connectivity	Less drugs/loitering downtown
	Safety	Living wage jobs
	Second hospital	Opportunities for community connections
	Trails	Parking/traffic congestion problems
	Trees	Seniors' services
	Vibrant downtown	Water for people
	Walkability	Wildlife



Compelling Themes

Organizing the above data another way yields six compelling themes that could contribute to a vision and action plan for the city. Each is described here, with the components from the feedback that fit within that theme.



1. “Guelph has character”—Personality

The personality and vibe of “Guelphiness” is important to protect and promote. Participants talked about wanting to avoid “soulless” development or “becoming devoid of character” or being a “generic” city. Guelph has a definite and distinctive spirit to it that must not be lost.

This assertion has cultural and aesthetic elements as well as economic ones. For example, respondents want new developments to be complete, walkable, interesting neighbourhoods while still maintaining a vibrant downtown driven by independent retailers. One participant expressed it this way: **“We need to figure out a way to ensure that the new neighbourhoods in Guelph reflect the character of our city. What makes the new neighbourhoods in the city (on all four quadrants of the compass) a unique part of Guelph? Could they as easily be part of Milton or some other large southwestern Ontario town?”**

Creativity and innovation are also seen as critical components of the city people want to maintain and build. They love the market and the festivals. They want a city that is passionate and engaged.

This theme includes comments about:

- A vibrant downtown
- Child-friendliness
- Creativity
- Beauty
- “No more ugly plazas”
- Even new developments to have “soul”



“Art is core to the success of a vibrant and growing community as well as an economic driver.”

2. “You belong in Guelph”—Caring connections

This theme is about promoting caring relationships and building a strong social fabric. It captures the idea of maintaining the positive dimensions of a small town feel while providing the amenities of a bigger city. It also has an active connotation, reflecting that people in Guelph live with intention, get involved and choose to make a difference.

Residents reported growing up in town, leaving for work/school, and then returning as an adult to raise a family. Others come to Guelph for post-secondary education, fall in love with the community, and decide to make it their permanent home. Why do people decide to stay here? Because it’s a friendly, vibrant and inclusive place. People know each other. They stop to chat when passing each other on the street, when walking their dogs at the park or picking up groceries at the farmers’ market or local store. Neighbours are caring, supportive and helpful. People are engaged in community life.

Comments made aligned to this theme affirm strengthening Guelph’s:

- Friendly, welcoming people
- Strong sense of belonging
- High level community engagement and collaboration
- Development that promotes neighbourhood integrity
- Sufficient level of excellent local services, especially hospitals, libraries, child care
- Community hubs

“It has the culture of a large city but the friendly community of a small city.”

“There is a kindness in the city of Guelph that you do not experience anywhere else in other cities.”

“Embedded, effortless collaboration between the City and community service organizations.”



3. “No one is left behind in Guelph”— Social inclusion

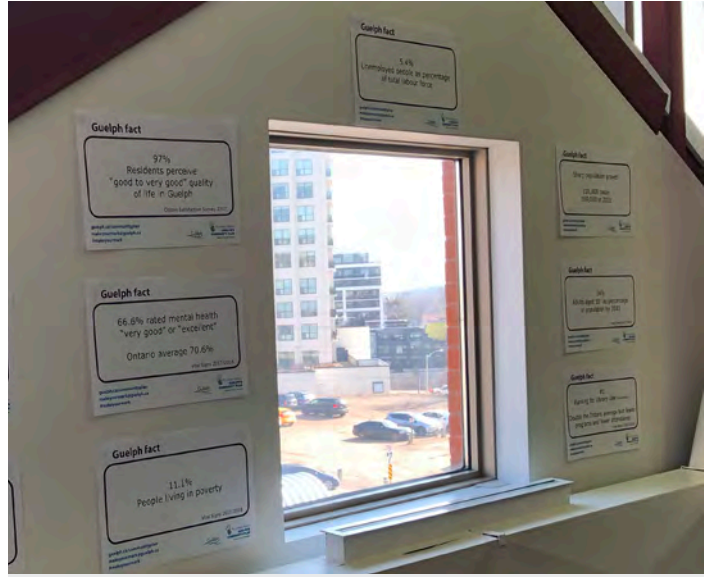
Across all engagement platforms, residents affirmed their desire for Guelph to be a place where people’s basic needs are affordably met and the most vulnerable are well looked after.

This theme includes memorable targets or aspirations for Guelph, such as:

- No homelessness
- No poverty
- No food insecurity

It also underscores a desire for:

- Affordable housing; rental and ownership
- Attention to mental health challenges, addictions and trauma
- Widespread accessibility



“If you give someone a home,
you give them a future.”



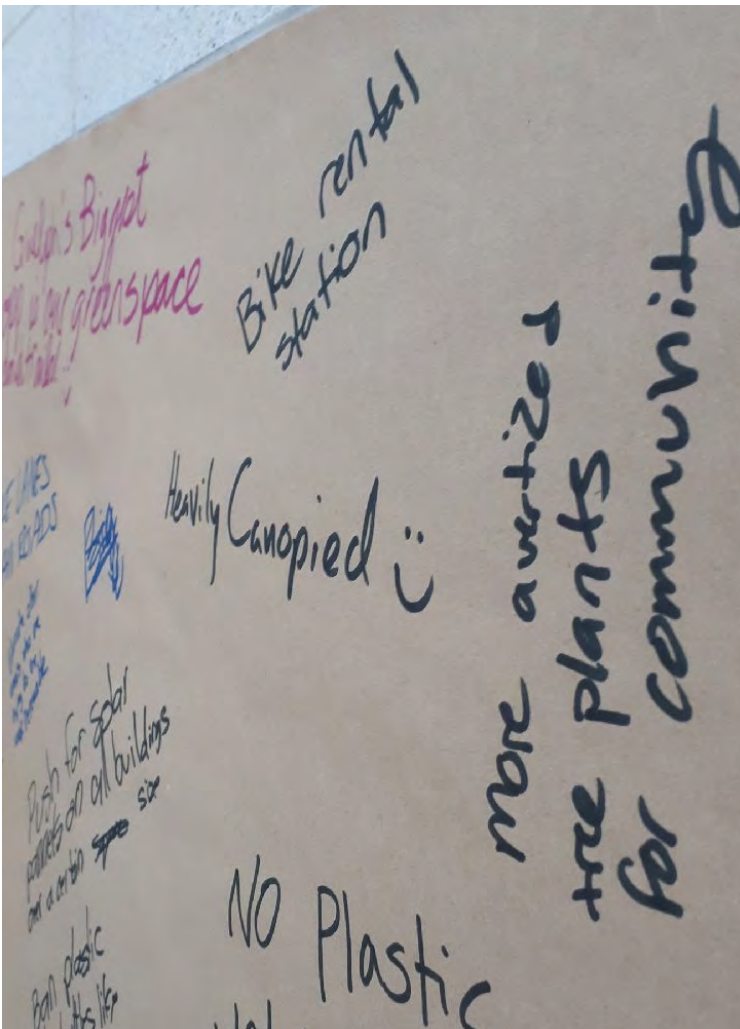
4. "It's easy to get to and around Guelph"— Transportation

Residents want Guelph to be a place that is easy to navigate. This primarily involves ensuring that the transit system within the city provides frequent, thorough and reliable coverage. Walkable neighbourhoods and bicycle infrastructure are also key. Ease of navigation also means building better regional connectivity so that travel time to Kitchener/Waterloo and Toronto is reduced.

There are people who would be willing to live in Guelph and commute elsewhere to work but limited regional transit connections prevent them from doing so. More broadly, this theme captures a desire to keep Guelph's infrastructure aligned with its growth. It also reveals a tension in the engagement feedback between wanting to move away from car culture while also addressing issues of traffic congestion, limited parking and potholes.

Specific examples and features within this theme include calls for:

- Reliable internal transit system throughout the city, including servicing industrial areas well
- Affordable transit, including family passes
- Regional connectivity
- Adequate parking
- An excellent cycling system
- Less traffic congestion
- Walkability
- Fixed potholes
- Keeping infrastructure aligned with growth
- Moving away from dependence on personal vehicles



"Transit-oriented development instead of development-oriented transit."

"Every household can cross the city, get to school and buy groceries without needing a personal vehicle by 2031."

"I picture Guelph having less cars on the road by having more buses, better-designed routes that run at all hours, more bicycle lanes, and no big-rig transport trucks driving on small streets downtown. Guelph needs modern, clean, convenient transportation that caters to all citizens, especially those who work in the west and north ends, and not just the students. We need cars off the roads, more safe and logical bike lanes, the Hanlon needs to have overpasses and the downtown core needs big-rigs off the streets."



5. “Guelph is an environmental leader”— Green development

People see Guelph as an environmental leader. They are proud of that identity and want the city to continue to position itself that way. For example, 28 per cent of respondents to the 600-person telephone survey indicated that Guelph’s environmental consciousness sets the city apart and is something people want to be known for. Environment and water were noted as doubly important compared to any other issue in the survey, most notably in order to meet the needs of future generations.

Environmental leadership has sectoral activity components (e.g. waste reduction; renewable energy; tree canopy; source water protection) while bringing with it additional behavioural expectations such as insisting developers adopt sustainable practices and building features. It also carries an important identity

component for Guelph, as people want to live in a place known for being at the forefront of environmental innovation. Numerous suggestions on how to become the “greenest” and “most sustainable city in Ontario” were provided including: biopower generation, solar panel micro grids, permaculture, vehicle charging stations, and bans on plastic bags, straws and water bottles.

Components of this theme include:

- Parks and green spaces
- Trails
- Renewable energy
- Water for people
- Green, sustainable development
- Waste reduction
- Environmental innovation

“In 10 years, my Guelph will be a diverse, caring, green global leader in how a community should look like. A world example of what people have the power of doing, and how change is possible with thought and passion for the right change.”



6. “Guelph works”—Economic opportunities

From a governance point of view, residents are looking for responsive, forward-thinking and collaborative local government that makes it easy to do business locally. They want leaders who set a clear direction and work collaboratively at a decent pace to get things done. They want true leadership that looks beyond the four-year electoral cycle. They also want to be listened to. As one respondent noted, **“It is important that staff make sure all voices are heard, that they put aside personal-professional opinion, and bring forward all options—even ones they don’t agree with or are from the community.”**

Economically, they want to be able to find talent that can be paid a living wage doing decent work. People want access to a range of quality jobs, from part-time to full-time, and from manufacturing positions to employment opportunities that require highly specialized skills. There is concern about the ability to hire employees across all types of jobs in Guelph with such low unemployment. Based on the online survey results, 38 per cent of respondents feel positive about Guelph’s business outlook versus 7.6 per cent who have a negative economic outlook. There is also a strong desire for better connectivity within the business community, based on feedback from the economic sector forum.

There is a strong element of collaboration evident in Guelph that residents want to maintain. The city’s vibrant non-profit, faith and social enterprise ecosystem was

repeatedly affirmed. As one representative of the social sector commented, **“action here is easy.”** 10C was highlighted as a terrific example of community collaborative leadership. As one online participant explained, **“Strong citizen consultation, an active arts community, groups like Yorkland Green Hub, GCAT, the folks at St. Ignatius, the DBA, 10C, many I’ve missed, and hundreds (thousands) of individuals who are actively involved in facets of Guelph’s development make me cautiously optimistic for its future.”**

The bigger goal behind these aspirations is for both current and future generations to be able to live affordably and well in Guelph. Residents want local employment opportunities in the future so their children can remain in Guelph when they grow up, and students want to find work that will allow them to stay here following their studies.

Aspirations within this theme include ensuring:

- People can stay local, including for health care
- It is easy to do business in Guelph
- Young people can find work
- Employers can find and keep talent
- Guelph expects green, sustainable development
- Decent work that pays a living wage
- Progressive, forward-thinking government



“Smart people in the right places to make the right decisions.”

“My personal agenda is to see a world where the lines between private, public and non-profit sectors are blurred. A viable economic plan will see all of those sectors working together toward prosperity, capital gain and social outcomes.”

Elements of a Vision

Beyond specific requests or features, residents want a **balanced approach** to city building (90 per cent of respondents saw all the issues highlighted in the telephone survey as somewhat or very important). As one respondent said, **“In 10 years, my Guelph will still have a proper balance between prudent development, innovation hub, efficient transit and quality of life for families—steady well-planned growth and socially responsible.”** This concept of balance is perhaps best captured in the term “livability”. “Resident well-being” was identified in the telephone survey as the most important consideration when making decisions in Guelph. Strong support was expressed for mixed use planning and “complete neighbourhoods”.

More than that, they are craving a **meaningful identity** for Guelph that goes beyond a brand. They describe wanting to pursue an aspiration or an accomplishment as a city.

The list below captures vision statements that reflect the engagement feedback in yet another way and could anchor inspiring and inspired community planning:

1. Small town feel with big city amenities
2. Create a future for our children
3. Make it possible to stay local
4. Affirm our environmental leadership
5. We take care of one another
6. Guelph is easy to get around

Some of these vision statements (1–3) cut across multiple themes while others (especially 4–6) align directly with the themes described above.

“Small town feel” has a mostly positive connotation, but it can also be seen as regressive and exclusive so should be treated with care. People want the friendliness of a small town without being insular. At the same time, they want the services of a bigger city, especially in terms of health and retail: 22 per cent of survey respondents love the amenities in Guelph, and 36 per cent love the size.

“Future for our children” includes both long-term environmental stewardship and medium-term job creation and culture building so that Guelph is a place where young people can find work and would choose to raise their families. Thriving youth is seen as a proxy or litmus test for community health. This vision also incorporates a strong

sense of **“whole community responsibility for the whole community.”** As another resident said, **“I want my children to say this was the best city to grow up in.”**

Staying local incorporates jobs, education and local services with an emphasis on health care. Residents want to be able to stay in town to work, shop and receive the care they need. As one online respondent explained, **“I would love an opportunity to work where I live. Unfortunately, there are very few jobs, many people travel to KW, Brampton, Oakville, Burlington, Hamilton, Toronto etc... I think Guelph has done a terrific job of attracting great businesses to the downtown core, making it a thriving and great place to do business, have dinner or hang out at City Hall ice skating or in the splash pad. I want this trend to continue, you are doing a great job, please keep going!!! The most important thing to me is to have a job in my own community, that way I don't have to be faced with the decision to leave this fantastic community.”**

The **leadership** element is key in terms of the **environment**. It is seen as an important differentiator for Guelph and part of the city's identity. People want Guelph to stay at the forefront in this field, and that desire is closely linked to “future for our children” above. Within the telephone survey, “environmental consciousness” was identified as the highest city priority for which people want to be known.

Taking care of one another affirms both active citizen engagement and taking collective responsibility for people's well-being, with no one left behind. For example, 41 per cent of telephone survey respondents love the sense of community in Guelph. According to one online respondent, **“We have to find a way to help people lift their heads from their specific work to take a wider view.”**

Being easy to get around includes regional and local connectivity. It carries a tension within it of moving away from car culture while making driving and parking easier too, including parking near transit hubs.

Many residents express wanting Guelph to be **known for something**, such as being the first in Canada at something. Other examples of these differentiators included:

- Environmental leadership
- Canada's kindest city
- Canada's most livable city

- The city with the least inequality in Canada
- Progressive/forward thinking development

As one respondent in the economic sectoral forum noted, **“We should become the best at fewer things.”**

They want the city to **go after something** that would shape its perception and identity.

Suggestions included:

- Bike to car ratio of 10:1
- 100 per cent renewable energy
- Zero poverty
- Zero homelessness
- Zero food insecurity

Tensions

The largest barrier to achieving the city building described through this engagement process is **finding the funding needed to match the needs cited**, particularly in the areas of housing, health care, operational dollars for community organizations and education. As one respondent noted, **“It takes a lot of commitment and trust to bring people together at a time when they are all fighting for funding, volunteers, attention in the public and government spheres.”** Other barriers have been previously mentioned, including a weak transit system internally and regionally, and a very low vacancy rate combined with a lack of affordable housing. Accountability is seen as another barrier, as living up to our aspirations and being transparent about how decisions are made can be difficult.

It is inevitable that input from such a wide cross-section of residents would yield tensions or contradictory aspirations. Overall, such conflicts were minimal in this data set, but a few contradictions did emerge, including:

- Mixed reviews about **intensification**, with a lack of clarity as to Guelph’s desired growth trajectory and pace. More specifically, respondents often mentioned wanting low-height development (“skies not skyscrapers”) without urban sprawl. Some saw growth as happening too slowly, others too quickly.
- A tension between **maintaining the old and embracing the new**. As one online respondent wrote, **“Maintain historic buildings when permitting new**



building projects. Guelph has more lovely old buildings than many cities but has let many go to make way for cookie cutter higher density housing. Once it’s gone, it’s lost forever and it is our history. I know, it’s a balance, but it seems to me that the old is not always valued as it should be.”

- A desired move away from **car culture** while also increasing parking and addressing traffic congestion.
- Simultaneous calls for both more and less **police presence** and enforcement.
- A need for **infrastructure** that aligns with development but that often lies outside of local control or local financial capacity (e.g. transit, parking, traffic congestion, affordable housing, two-way all-day GO trains).
- A lack of clarity about **how City decisions are made**.
- An overall sense of intentionality—people live in Guelph mostly by choice. They care about the city and are willing to get involved to make it even better. Yet at the same time, **23 per cent in the survey (the largest category) “don’t know” what would make the biggest difference in Guelph.**

Values

It is also worth noting that the comments reflect a mix of suggested features (e.g. green spaces), activities (e.g. improve bus frequency), and values (e.g. beauty) that Guelph residents desire to see in their city. In particular, values emerged as especially important.

Ultimately, values are made evident through behaviours and choices. There will likely be greater diversity of opinion when it comes to planning specifically what it means to uphold those values, as doing so can legitimately happen through pursuing a wide range of goals and actions.

For example, a value such as “responsible stewardship of resources” might be seen through construction of more bike lanes or parks or waste diversion facilities. Yet it could also arguably be seen through lowering taxes. Or even raising them. The same can be said for other widely-held values that emerged within this feedback, such as inclusion or efficiency or caring. There is likely more consensus at the level of values than actions, and conflict is heightened when these values themselves are found to be in tension with one another. Ongoing conversation about these choices and trade-offs will be needed as the implementation of community plans moves forward.

Conclusion

Some might say that it did not require a year of listening to affirm that Guelph residents care about being a livable city that promotes environmental protection. Yet “coming back to where you started is not the same thing as never leaving.”¹ This process has undoubtedly raised the level of thoughtful citizen engagement across sectors, wards and subpopulations in the city. It has generated detailed and compelling evidence to strengthen the case for particular paths forward that address the priorities noted. And its findings will underpin collaborative community plans that extend well beyond a single actor or a single term of City Council to achieve visions that are important to current and future generations in Guelph.



1 Terry Pratchett, A Hat Full of Sky, 2005.