

Town of Whitecourt

What We Heard Report

Advisory Committee Meeting #2, Open House #2 and Citizen Survey #2

MDP, LUB and North Flats ASP





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Introduction

The Town of Whitecourt is currently in the process of updating the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB), and are creating the new North Flats Area Structure Plan (ASP). This What We Heard Report reflects the feedback received from the project's second round of engagement.

The preliminary round of engagement was held between November 2022 and January 2023. The goal of this round of engagement was to collect feedback on emerging themes, issues, and opportunities. The outcomes of this round of engagement were reflected in first drafts of the MDP and LUB documents.

The second round of engagement was designed to collect feedback on the proposed changes to the MDP and LUB documents. Feedback from the community was used to ensure that the changes made in the first drafts were in line with the goals of the community.

This phase of engagement included the following events:

- Advisory Committee Meeting #2 – June 21, 2023
- Open House #2 – June 28, 2023
- Citizen Survey #2 – July 18 to August 11, 2023

Project Timeline

The Advisory Committee Meeting #2, Open House #2, and Citizen Survey #2 were conducted as part of Phase 4 of the project. This phase of the project was designed to give the project team feedback on the MDP and LUB, concurrent to writing the second drafts of each document.

Further engagement will be undertaken for 'Phase 5 – ASP Preparation' and 'Phase 6 – Finalization and Approval'.



Event Details

Advisory Committee Meeting #2

The MDP, LUB and North Flats ASP Project Team met with the Advisory Committee for the second time on June 21, 2023. The meeting consisted of a presentation of proposed changes and draft policies paired with small group and collective discussions.

The following topics were discussed in the meeting:

Municipal Development Plan	Land Use Bylaw
• Draft Land Use Concept	• Use Class Consolidation
• Draft Vision	• Permitted and Discretionary Use Changes
• Draft Guiding Principles	• Development Regulations
• Draft Continuing Goals	• Key Regulation changes
• Mapping – Key Changes	
• Key Policy Changes	

Open House #2

The second project Open House was held on June 28, 2023. This Open House provided the opportunity for the public to provide feedback on topics identified by Town Staff and the Project team as well as key draft changes to the LUB and MDP documents.

The following topics were presented in the Open House:

Municipal Development Plan	Land Use Bylaw
• Draft Land Use Concept	• Secondary Suites
• Draft Vision	• Accessory Buildings
• Draft Guiding Principles	• C-7 Commercial District
• Draft Continuing Goals	• Daycare, Family Care and Assisted Living Facilities
• Highlights of Key Policy Changes	• Grading and Landscaping
• Mapping	• Urban Hens and Urban Beekeeping



Event Details

Citizen Survey #2

The second citizen survey was conducted between July 18 and August 11, 2023. The purpose of this survey was to reach a broad sample of Whitecourt residents to inform the Project Team on key topics and proposed changes to the LUB and MDP documents. The survey received 215 responses.

The following topics were included in the survey:

- Draft Vision
- Housing
 - Secondary Suites
 - Garage Suites
 - Garden Suites
 - Tiny Homes
- Retail Stores along the Highway and Downtown
- Drainage and Grading
- Animals (Urban Beekeeping and Urban Hens)

Advisory Committee Meeting #2 – Feedback

Detailed feedback from the Advisory Committee Meeting is captured in the table below. Feedback was collected during group discussions on chart paper, on reference maps and in the reference packages provided to participants.

Topic	Feedback
Municipal Development Plan	
Draft Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing • Livability for all stages of life • The forestry, oil and gas industries • Community connection through social engagement, entertainment, volunteerism, events etc. • Greater focus on social wellbeing, quality of life • Support for non-profits and volunteer groups • Whitecourt as a family-oriented community • Amenities for young adults • Affordability • Paper and pulp
Draft Guiding Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize community • Include environmental goals (green energy) • Environmental policies should be more targeted (target specific industries) • Align with the Town's Economic Development Strategy
Continuing Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further highlight the goal to promote growth and attract development • Set a goal to ensure appropriate industrial and residential servicing capacity • Emphasize Downtown vitalization as a key goal
Affordable Housing Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Town has done well to date for housing mix • Does the distribution of high income, low income, and medium income households match the kinds of units available? • How can we work with supporting organizations and non-profits?
Land Use Bylaw	
Urban Hens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of attracting predators into Town • The number of hens will be an important consideration • Option to run as a pilot project • Inspections will be required for animal care standards
Urban Beekeeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestion to create a community beekeeping area
Grading Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost vs. Benefit – opinion that the benefits outweigh the cost • Needs proper enforcement • There are many existing issues
Secondary Suites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking requirements can be a barrier • Site coverage can be restrictive • Aesthetic standards

Open House #2 – Feedback

Participants were asked to provide their input on the open house panels using sticky notes, and on the comment sheets provided. The feedback received during the Open House is captured in the table below.

Topic	Feedback
Municipal Development Plan	
Downtown Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entertainment amenities are wanted (such as a bowling alley) Investment in public realm improvements in Downtown should be prioritized Review façade improvement and grant policies Suggestion that there may be opportunities for tax incentives to rent buildings Downtown
Affordable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could the old Travel Lodge be a shelter?
Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development Constraints: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the insurance implications of 1/100 year vs. 1/200-year flood levels? Suggestion to show historic resources Land Use Concept <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opinion that there is too much residential land Suggestion that there is need for more industrial land beyond what is currently shown
Land Use Bylaw	
Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C-1 Core Commercial – Downtown: suggestion to allow townhomes to make the district more walkable C-7 Hilltop Commercial – Have not seen much change downtown as a result of highway commercial development. Opinion that the C-7 district is doing well and attracting traffic.
Landscaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggestion that grass should be done at the construction phase and be the contractor's responsibility Perspective that there is a current lack of proper landscaping
Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration is needed for buildings with small separation distances.
Urban Hens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opposition to urban hens Concern for odour and noise
Shipping Containers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Split feedback between support and opposition for shipping containers being allowed within the Town Some support was noted for residential shipping containers
Daycare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opinion that the 150m separation distance may be required to control traffic around daycares. Feedback that parking is an existing issue.
Secondary Suites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern for potential parking issues related to secondary suites.

Citizen Survey #2 – Feedback

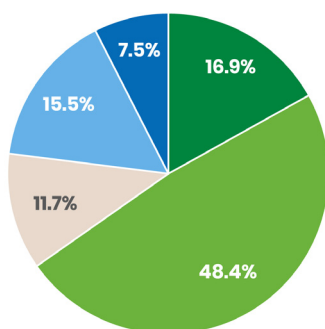
The following results were collected in the second citizen survey. The data collected in this survey act to provide insight into citizen preferences and will inform key decisions for the draft Land Use Bylaw and Municipal Development Plan documents. The spelling and grammar of selected quotes have been edited for clarification purposes only.

Question 1: Vision Statement

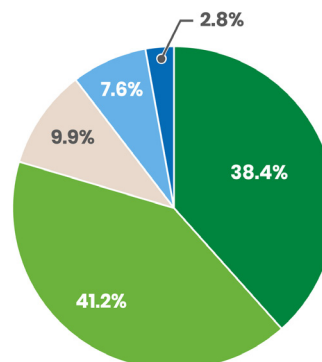
“Whitecourt is an active and inclusive community which promotes investment, creates a vibrant business environment, provides affordable housing options, and maintains environmental integrity. The Town promotes opportunities for tourism and economic development while continually striving to improve the quality of life for residents. Our community celebrates our history while looking toward the future.” Please select the answer that best matches your opinion.

Strongly Agree
 Somewhat Agree
 Neither Agree nor Disagree
 Somewhat Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

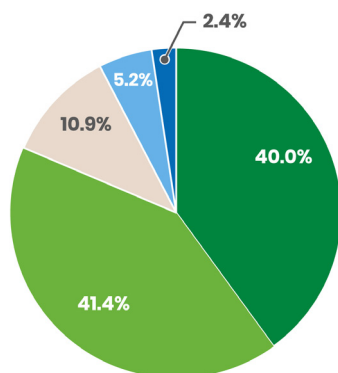
a. This statement aligns with my vision of Whitecourt.



b. This statement reflects my ideal Whitecourt.



c. The topics outlined in this vision are important to me.





Citizen Survey #2 – Feedback

Question 1 (Continued):

d. Please list any goals or objectives you feel are missing from the Vision Statement.

The comments below highlight the key topics identified in the text comments for this question. 46 text comments were collected.

“Encourage bigger businesses to come to Whitecourt. Focus more on our tourism and all the outdoor activities Whitecourt has to offer.”

“I feel that Whitecourt does not always provide the most affordable housing options. While that isn’t at total fault of the Town and there are other factors that effect this (inflation, carbon tax, federal taxations rates, etc.), Affordable housing seems to be a struggle within our community.”

“Wonderful vision, though it certainly doesn’t reflect the current state of the community.”

“It would be great to see a more vibrant downtown core. With full businesses and face lifts on multiple buildings the downtown core could be a wonderful place for families and tourists”

“This vision is very business and economic focused. I like that inclusion and environmental responsibility are mentioned. What about arts and culture?”

“I’m not sure what the Town of Whitecourt is doing to provide affordable housing options. The town may have a vibrant business environment, but the downtown area still needs improvement to attract and keep businesses downtown, especially main street. I do believe commercial and residential can be mixed i.e.: a small convenience store (no gas station) within walking distance of residential.”

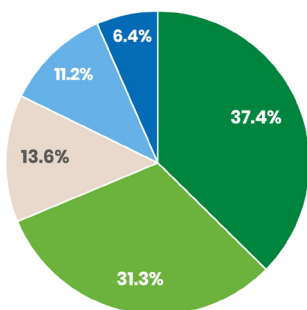
Citizen Survey #2 – Feedback

Question 2: Housing

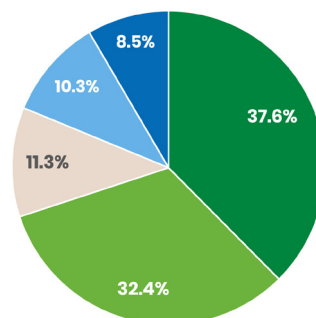
Affordable housing was identified as one of the key public priorities for Whitecourt. While we already have policies that allow many different forms and types of housing, we'd like your feedback on whether secondary suites should be expanded to include garage suites (on top of a garage) or garden suites (standalone units typically placed in the backyard). Currently, secondary suites are allowed in all single detached dwellings. Please select the answer that best matches your opinion.

■ **Strongly Agree**
■ **Somewhat Agree**
■ **Neither Agree nor Disagree**
■ **Somewhat Disagree**
■ **Strongly Disagree**

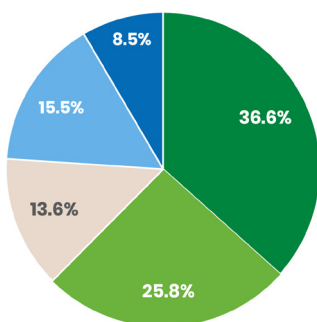
a. Whitecourt should allow secondary suites in all residential neighbourhoods.



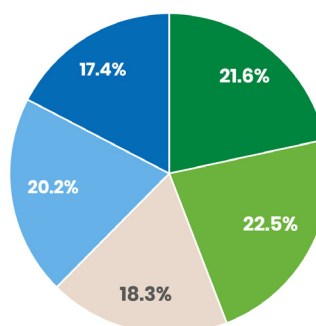
b. Whitecourt should allow garage suites.



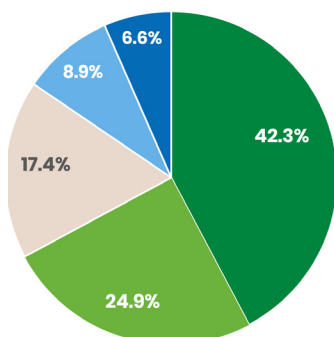
c. Whitecourt should allow garden suites.



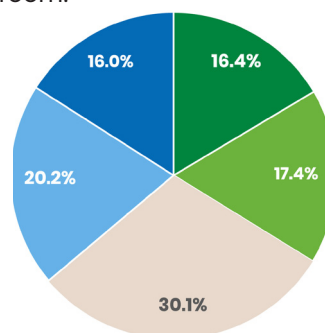
d. Secondary suites should be allowed in duplexes.



e. Secondary suites should be required to have one (1) dedicated off-street parking stall.



f. Secondary suites should be required to have one dedicated off-street parking stall per bedroom.



Citizen Survey #2 – Feedback

Question 2 (Continued):

g. Other ideas or comments? Let us know.

The comments below highlight the key topics identified in the text comments for this question. 38 text comments were collected.

"Make the housing we have affordable and build affordable housing so people can have their own place not in others basements or in someone back yard. Make pet friendly homes which have no size limit on animals."

"More single floor independent dwellings needed at affordable rents. I am thinking of things like the row of bungalow suites available on Anderson Close. These are great for seniors and those with disabilities of all kinds."

"Some streets, having little to no driveway parking, are already too congested to add more suites unless it is made mandatory to add off street parking. Therefore I think that is a very necessary piece to add at least one extra parking area."

"With all of the cul-de-sacs in Whitecourt and the restrictions for parking on garbage days there is a definite shortage of on-street parking."

"Not all homes have the option of off street parking & those people should not be excluded from making extra income. I would be more concerned about rentals that have 5-6 renters and 5-6 vehicles with no parking. That I have seen, along with frustration to other home owners in the area."

"Intergenerational housing is becoming more popular in Canada with expanded immigration, coupled with rising housing costs. It's important to support the family unit through secondary suites, though it should not be a situation to allow rental property owners an additional avenue to exploit for income."

"The street parking is already a concern and without committed parking space it will flood further. Certain streets are already dangerous for kids to play and cross due to high impact parking."

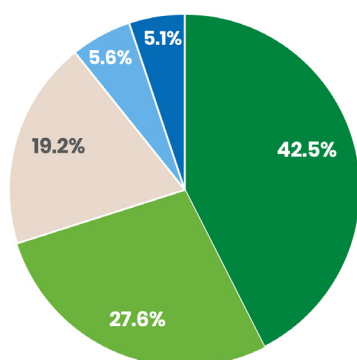
Citizen Survey #2 – Feedback

Question 3: Tiny Homes

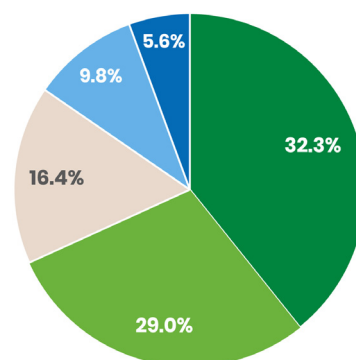
The Project Team is also reviewing whether the Town should allow tiny homes that are constructed on site. Currently these types of homes can be considered in manufactured home parks, but they cannot be built on site and must be able to be transported on wheels. Tiny homes typically have floor areas under 47m² (500ft²). They are required to have a permanent foundation and meet all the requirements of the building code. Please select the answer that best matches your opinion.

■ **Strongly Agree**
■ **Somewhat Agree**
■ **Neither Agree nor Disagree**
■ **Somewhat Disagree**
■ **Strongly Disagree**

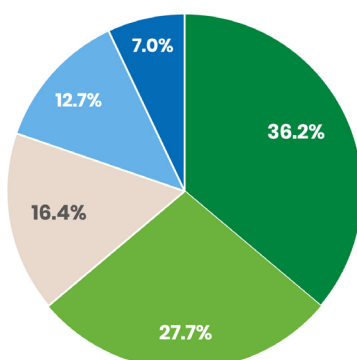
- a. Tiny homes that are built on site should be considered in manufactured home parks.



- b. Tiny homes that are built on site should be considered in other areas of Whitecourt with manufactured homes.



- c. Tiny homes transported on wheels should be considered in areas of Whitecourt with manufactured homes.



- d. Other ideas or comments? Let us know.
 The comments below highlight the key topics identified in the text comments for this question. 18 comments were collected.

"Love this idea! Tiny homes are more affordable for many people."

"Tiny homes should be in Manufactured parks, or special zoning, not inter mixed with regular housing of any sort."

"Although I agree I like the idea of tiny homes, there should be a designated area where tiny homes are allowed like a specifically developed area with tiny home lots or something of that nature in an organized fashion."

"Their needs to be limits on where these can be placed, not stand alone just anywhere in town, for example"

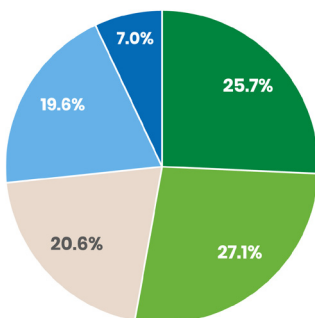
Citizen Survey #2 – Feedback

Question 4: Retail Stores along the Highway and Downtown

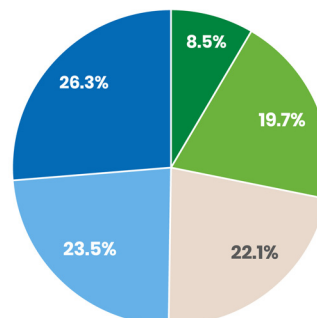
The 2015 Land Use Bylaw (Bylaw 1506) opened up additional retail opportunities along Highway 43 in recognition of the unique needs of Hilltop residents and the travelling public. While providing commercial opportunities in the Hilltop Area is important, the Project Team wants to ensure that added opportunity on the Hilltop does not take away from the vitality of downtown. Supporting a vibrant downtown was one of the core mandates that came out of our first phase of consultation. Please select the answer that best matches your opinion.

■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Somewhat Agree
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree
 ■ Somewhat Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree

a. The current uses along the highway are functioning well and should be kept the way they are.



b. Retail uses along the highway should be limited, similar to the regulations in place before 2015.

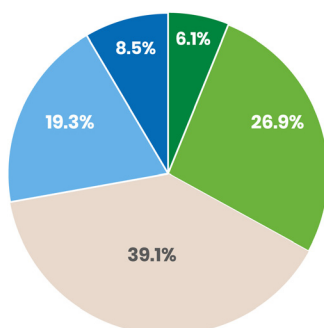


Question 5: Drainage and Grading

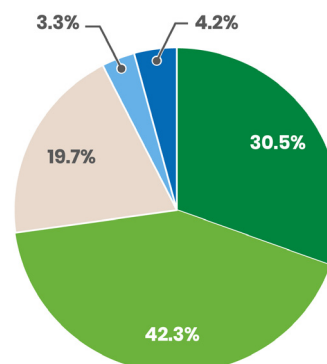
We've heard throughout the first phase of consultation that Whitecourt needs stronger processes to make sure that lot grades are completed to design at time of building construction. Currently the Town of Whitecourt requires a grade report from a Land Surveyor after a building is constructed. Town staff compare this report to the grade plan for the subdivision and send a letter to the current property owner to inform them whether or not the lot grades are within acceptable tolerances from the approved subdivision design. Additional processes or requirements to ensure grades meet design at time of building completion can add increased costs and time to a project, but incorrect drainage can cause many issues for property owners and cost many thousands of dollars to correct. Please select the answer that best matches your opinion.

■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Somewhat Agree
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree
 ■ Somewhat Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree

a. I think that the current process for dealing with drainage and grading in Whitecourt is working.



b. I would support more rigorous procedures for confirming grades at the building stage.



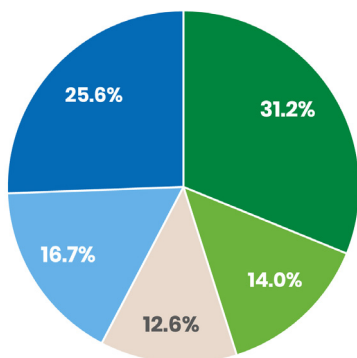
Citizen Survey #2 – Feedback

Question 6: Animals

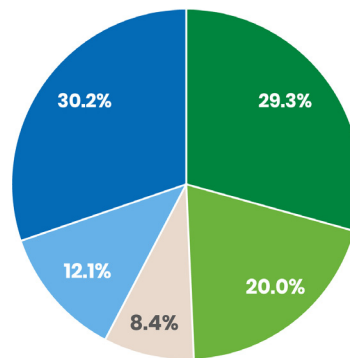
Interest has been shown in urban hens and urban bee keeping. These activities are a way to localize and diversify the food supply. On the downside, these uses also have the potential to be a significant nuisance. Hens can cause odours, spread diseases, and create waste management issues. Some people have life threatening allergies to bees. Bees and chickens attract predatory animals such as bears and cougars. Please select the answer that best matches your opinion.

■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Somewhat Agree
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree
 ■ Somewhat Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree

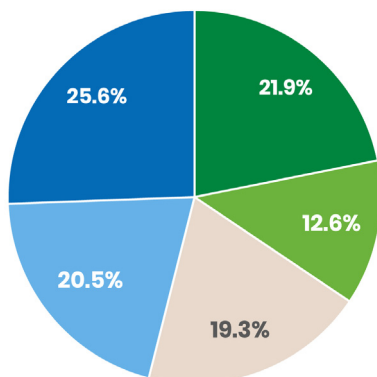
- a. Urban Hens are a nuisance in residential neighbourhoods.



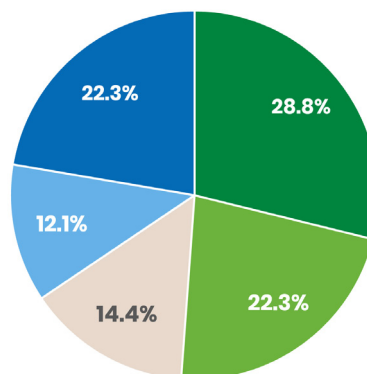
- b. I would be okay with urban chickens in my neighbourhood.



- c. Urban bee keeping is a nuisance in residential neighbourhoods.



- d. I would be ok with urban bee keeping in my neighbourhood.





Citizen Survey #2 – Feedback

Question 6 (Continued):

e. Other ideas or comments? Let us know.

The comments below highlight the key topics identified in the text comments for this question. 40 text comments were collected.

"Bees in town do not cause people any issues, they are not aggressive unless they are provoked. Bees are part of the natural world and are present without managed bee hives in town. People with life threatening allergies will stay away from areas with anything that may cause an allergic reaction."

"Keep it out of town...there is too many folks not learning enough about something before they go ahead and try it!! then everyone suffers!! people can't even watch their cats and dogs right now!!"

"Looking around many Whitecourt neighborhoods many people struggle to keep their yard clean and maintained and wouldn't put the effort into caring for livestock."

"I'm 100% for allowing urban hens and bees as long as owners are regulated to a set of governing rules so their property does not become a nuisance to neighbours. Like regular cleaning of coops, bees must be a certain distance from neighbouring properties, maybe consent from neighbours in case of allergies should be considered for bees. But chickens also eat pests such as ants, slugs, etc. their manure can be a wonderful addition to compost piles and they do more good than bad."

"I think in this situation, in more rural areas (acres, etc.) is where those sorts of activities should be kept."

