



HOW DO  
YOU WANT TO  
PARTICIPATE?

LET US  
KNOW!

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

## Summary of Community Engagement

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# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Town of Okotoks has always worked diligently to communicate with and involve our citizens. Over the past decade, care has been taken to recognize the growing demand for open and two-way communication, particularly as it pertains to listening to citizens, gathering feedback and the expanding influence of technology in accessing information.

As our population grows and changes, the Town has decided to develop a formalized Public Participation Strategy and Toolkit to guide future interaction with a wide range of stakeholders and the public about policies, projects, programs, and services.

The public participation project will **establish clear processes and guidelines to improve and increase public participation in municipal decision-making and service delivery**, and will ensure Council and staff are continually receiving input from a variety of sources.

## ABOUT THE PROCESS

In this same spirit of responsiveness, the Town is undertaking a comprehensive public engagement process to gather input on the creation of this strategy and ask people how they want to participate, receive information, and get involved in their community. By involving citizens in the project, we will be able to create strategies and tools that will best meet the public's needs and preferences for engaging with the municipality.

From May through December 2017, the Town is inviting residents, businesses, community groups, and other stakeholders to participate in a variety of activities to share their ideas.



## ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH

Throughout June and July of 2017, the City invited the entire community to get involved in the creation of the Public Participation Strategy. The goal was to raise awareness about the project, communicate the roles of local government and the roles that citizens can play in civic decision-making, and gather input to guide the development of the Strategy and Toolkit.

To help raise awareness of the project and opportunities to be involved, engagement activities were promoted extensively and in advance to reach as many people as possible:

- News release
- Project website
- Social media
- Advertisements in the Town pages
- LED signs throughout the community
- In-person outreach at the Children's festival and street parade
- Story in the Town utility bill sent to 8,500 addresses

Over 170 people were engaged through:

- **A public survey:** available online and in hard copy from June 10 to July 7, 2017. A total of 120 responses were received in total.
- **Pop up booths at community events:** Town staff hosted a booth at the Operations Grand Opening and the Mural Mosaic unveiling on June 10<sup>th</sup>. Approximately 50 to 60 people stopped to share their ideas.

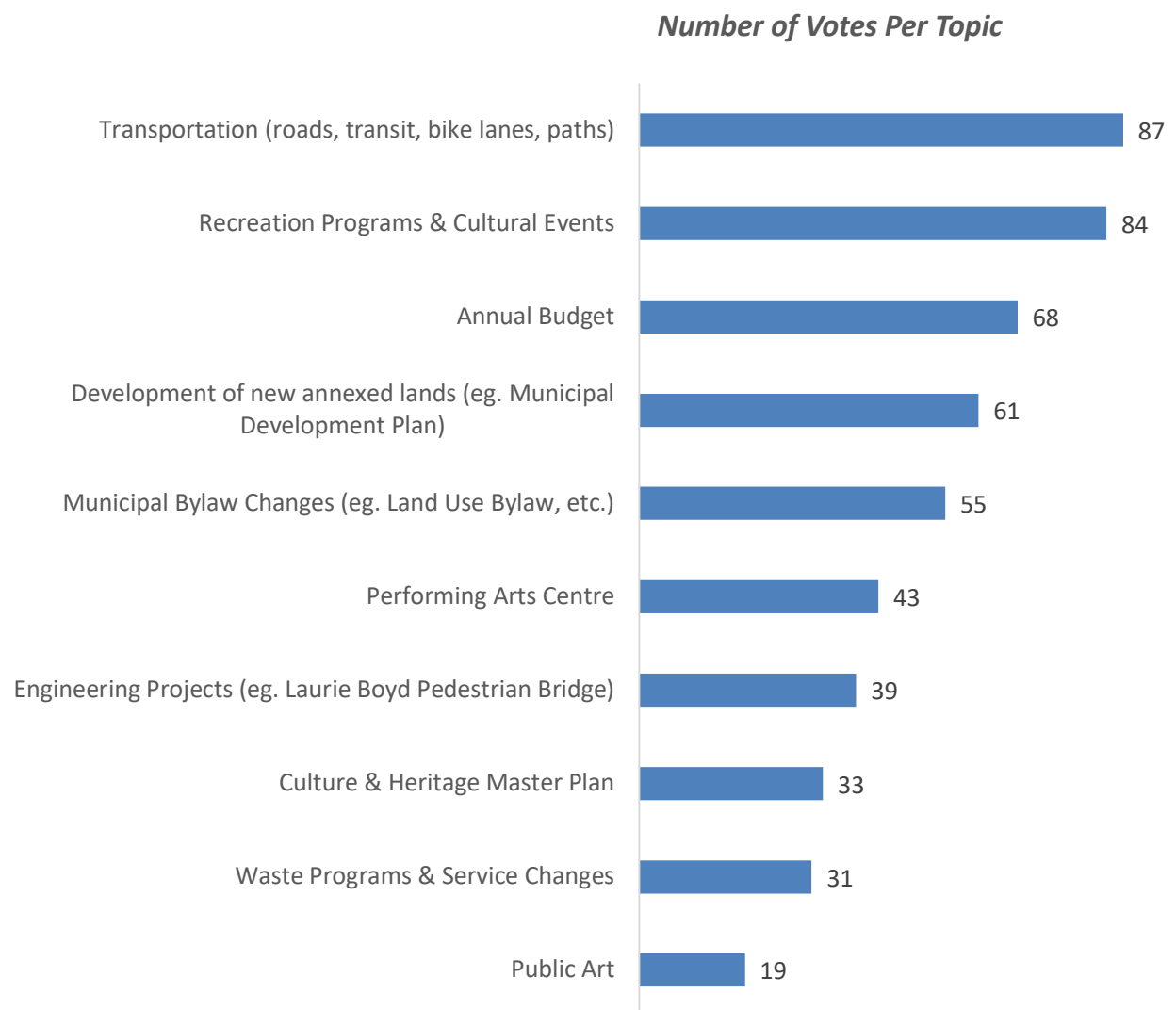
This report provides a summary of what we heard through these activities.

# WHAT WE HEARD

## KEY TOPICS

We asked participants what topics mattered most to them. Transportation, and recreation and culture programs/events were the top choices followed by the Town's annual budget.

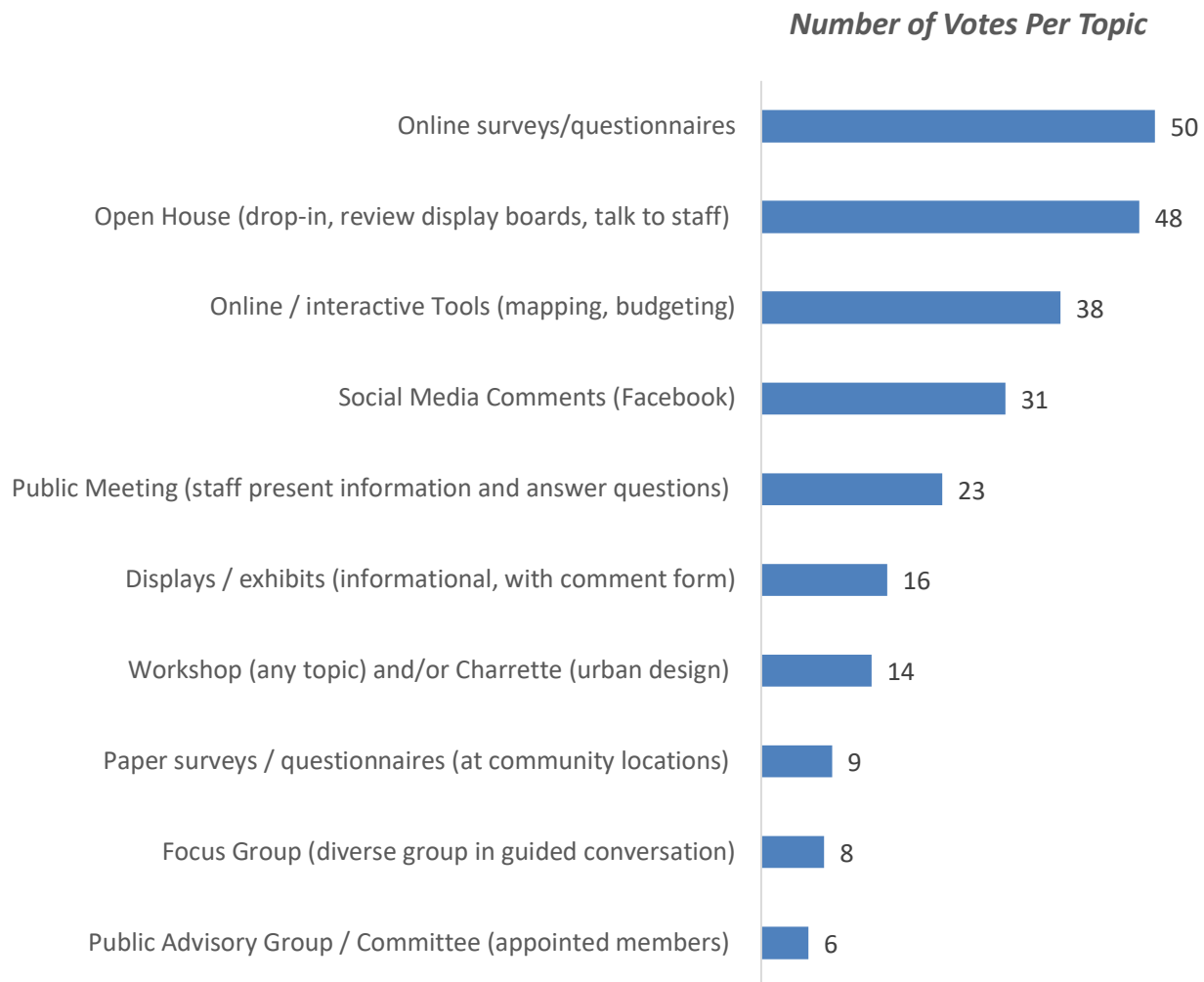
**Which of these topics would inspire you to take part? Choose your top 3.**



## FORMATS

Next, we asked participants how they preferred to participate. Online surveys and open houses were the most popular choices, followed by online/interactive tools.

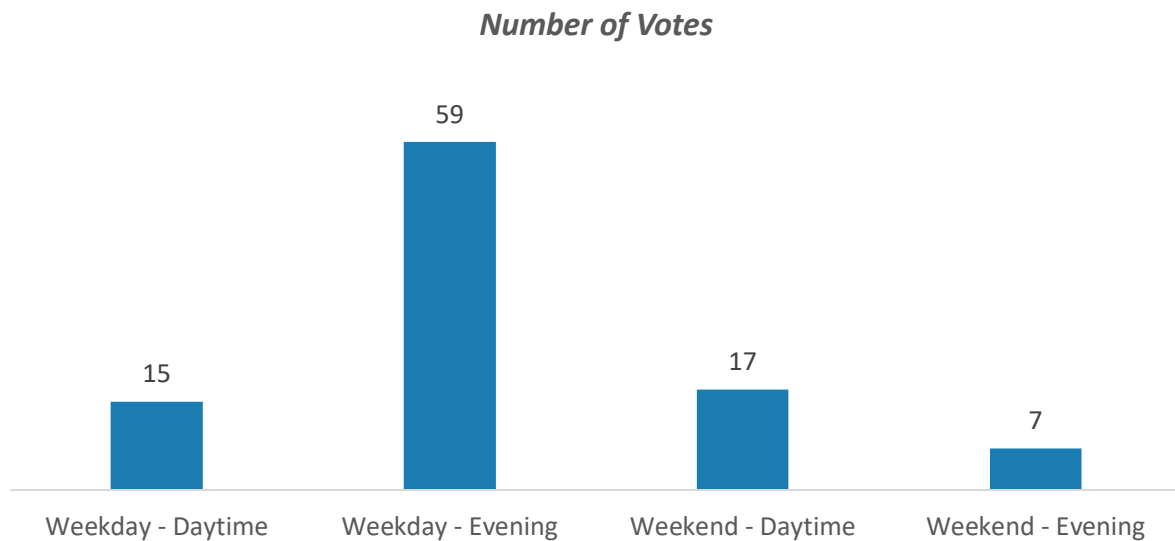
**Which of these formats would encourage you to take part? Choose your top 3.**



## TIMING

The next question asked participants about timing – when they preferred to participate. Weekday evenings were by far the most popular time.

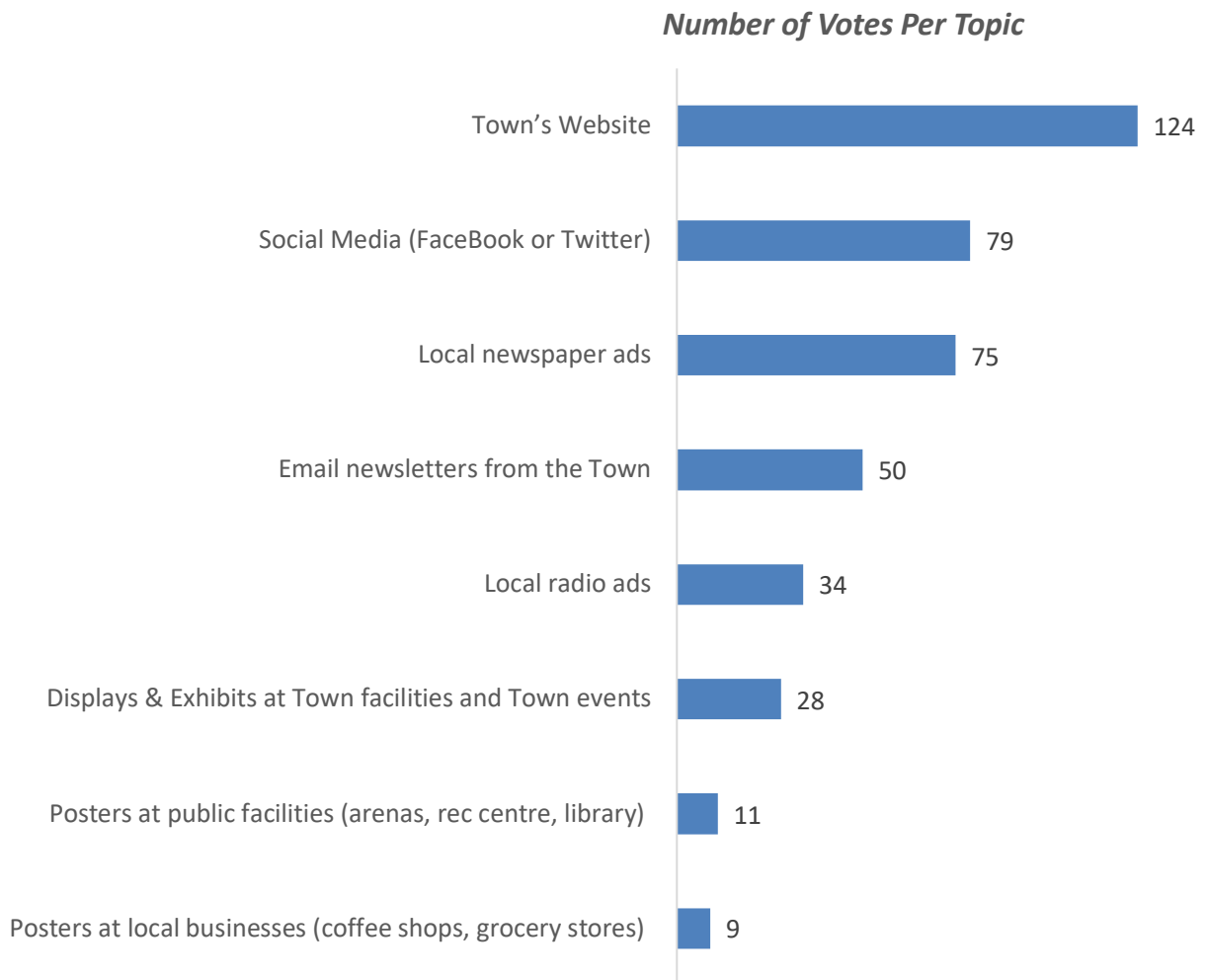
**Which of these times do you prefer to participate? Select your top choice and tell us why.**



Most participants noted that they work during the day and preferred to do other things on weekends so weekday evenings were the most convenient. Others noted daytimes were easier because they had children at home. A number of people also commented that they preferred to participate online at their leisure or when engagement opportunities were offered at busy facilities or events they were already attending.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Next, participants were asked where they liked to get information about civic issues. The Town's website was the most popular followed by social media and local newspaper ads.





## YOUR BIG IDEAS

Lastly, we asked participants if they had any additional ideas they'd like to share.

### How else can we improve public participation in Okotoks?

A total of 68 submissions were received. The following provides a summary of key ideas. As some submissions included more than one comment, the total number of comments below may exceed the total number of submissions.

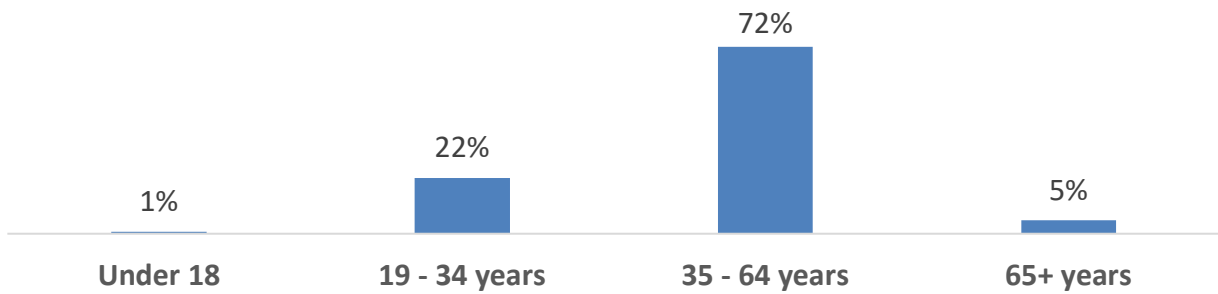
- **Website & online engagement (17 comments)**
  - More digital engagement, make it quick and easy for people to participate on their own time (feedback via social media or wikis, online meetings or live streams of open houses with Q&A, online surveys) (8 comments)
  - Improve Town website – make it easier to use and find information, post meeting minutes publicly (6 comments)
  - Sign up once and receive regular invitations to provide input (1 comment)
  - Town does a great job of website/social media – promote these tools more (1 comment)
  - Stop blocking people from social media accounts (1 comment)
- **In-person engagement (14 comments total)**
  - Go to where people are – engage at busy public facilities, events, and public places (grocery stores, library, parent groups) (4 comments)
  - More standing committees and advisory panels for ongoing input and co-design, ensure staff support and commitment (3 comments total)
  - Present to community groups and associations (1 comment)
  - Host a 'walkshop' – a moving conversation with Council (1 comment)
  - Open Doors days or events– allow behind the scenes look at civic operations and facilities (1 comment)
  - Bring City Hall out to the community (1 comment)
  - More open discussions (1 comment)
  - Town Hall meetings in evenings (1 comment)
  - Go door to door and talk to people (1 comment)
- **Communications and notifications (13 comments total)**
  - Provide more advance notice and promote upcoming events and opportunities more visibly (ie., road signs, posters, electronic boards, texting service) (4 comments)
  - Mail out information to all homes; include notices in utility bills (3 comments)
  - Use a broad range of channels to respect diverse needs of different people (social media, TV, radio, newsletters, newspaper, etc.) (3 comments)

- Provide a 311 phone line to help find information *(2 comments)*
- Provide more information on Town plans in newsletters *(1 comment)*
- **Listen to public feedback** - want to feel that the Town is actually listening and using public feedback to influence decisions ***(6 comments)***
- **Involve the public** – citizens have valuable input, make it worthwhile for the ‘silent majority’ to participate, not just those totally for or against a project, allow more input (ie., don’t limit to just 3 options) ***(5 comments)***
- **Provide incentives** – make it fun, provide free food, serve beer, offer prizes, host public speakers, discounts on property taxes/utilities ***(4 comments)***
- **Support creativity and bring people together *(3 comments total)***
  - Let citizens get creative – public art projects, competitions, etc. *(1 comment)*
  - Tell better stories – ie., Vancouver Greenest City conversations *(1 comment)*
  - Map our assets and share online to bring people together *(1 comment)*
- **Engage more young people/teenagers**; work with high school ‘work experience’ programs to engage students and have them engage others ***(3 comments)***
- **Don’t engage the public** – only ‘muddies’ informed decisions with people’s special interests ***(2 comments)***
- **Use a ward system** for more direct connection to Council ***(1 comment)***
- **Act quickly to implement decisions** after public input ***(1 comment)***
- **Share participation numbers publicly** so the public can see how many people contributed to a process ***(1 comment)***
- **Other comments** (unrelated to public participation)
  - More furniture choices in public facilities
  - Beautify landscaping on boulevards
  - Limit growth
  - Hold developers accountable
  - Stop wasting money on things we don’t need (like another hockey arena)
  - More green space along the riverside
  - More support and events for local arts and artists
  - More arts and cultural facilities

## WHO PARTICIPATED

A total of 120 people responded to the survey and approximately 50 to 60 people attended the in-person outreach events.

The majority of survey respondents were adults between the ages of 35 – 64. Participants at the in-person outreach events were not asked about their age.



## NEXT STEPS

**Your input matters.** We will use all the input from this first phase of engagement, along with best practice research and interviews with staff and other stakeholders, to develop the first draft of the Public Participation Strategy and Toolkit.

Once the Strategy and Toolkit are developed, the Town will use the Culture & Heritage Master Plan as a 'pilot project' to test them out and staff will receive training to ensure the new tools and policies are used consistently. Once the Strategy is drafted and piloted, we will bring it back to the public for your comments before finalizing and presenting to Council for Consideration in December.

Visit [www.okotoks.ca/publicparticipationstrategy](http://www.okotoks.ca/publicparticipationstrategy) for more information and stay tuned to provide your feedback on the draft Strategy in Fall of 2017.

