

**2022**

# **Engagement Feedback Survey**



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# Executive summary

In January 2021, Vaughan Council approved the City of Vaughan's Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy – formally committing to involving residents, businesses and stakeholders in crucial conversations to shape the city and offering a framework based on international standards, best practices and methodology.

The following year, the City launched an engagement feedback survey to continuously monitor and evaluate the success of the policy and City's engagement practices. This report summarizes the feedback collected throughout 2022 by individuals who participated in a City engagement activity. The survey revealed what the City is doing well and suggestions for improvement.

## What we heard we're doing well:

- offering welcoming and accessible opportunities for the public to have a say on City projects that interest or impact them
- ensuring the public receives relevant background information, so they can provide informed feedback
- providing multiple avenues for feedback and input, including virtual and in-person options
- respecting the public's time and effort when choosing engagement methods and soliciting their perspectives





## Where we could do better:

- providing engagement feedback summary reports after an engagement process closes, offering a transparent record of what was said/heard
- following up consistently with engagement participants to inform them of any decisions made and demonstrate how their feedback was considered
- communicating, clearly and transparently, which aspects of a project the public can and can't influence
- involving the public earlier in City projects when fewer decisions have been made
- leveraging local ratepayer associations and community organizations to solicit their local knowledge and perspectives, and to inform their members of engagement opportunities
- continuing to grow awareness of the City's public engagement program and further communicate opportunities to get involved through advertising, social media, mailed letters, emails, newsletters and more

The City is committed to acting on this feedback. Continuous improvement is essential, and the City aims to engage the Vaughan community in positive, meaningful and welcoming ways.

# About this report

**This report provides a summary of the feedback, ideas and preferences for engagement collected via the engagement feedback survey in 2022.**

In 2022, the City launched a year-long survey to collect feedback on its engagement practices from Vaughan residents, businesses and stakeholders. The survey aimed to identify community needs and input on fostering a positive, inclusive and meaningful engagement experience.

The survey was hosted on the City's engagement platform, [Have Your Say, Vaughan](#), throughout the year and closed on Dec. 18, 2022. Promotion of the survey was targeted to those who participated in a City engagement activity, such as a survey, public meeting, focus group, online forum or interactive mapping exercise. The survey also contained a short set of questions for respondents who indicated they had not participated in a City conversation.

In total, 100 people completed the survey. Survey respondents provided valuable feedback on the City's engagement practices – highlighting areas where the City is doing well, as well as areas for improvement. Overall, respondents said the City's engagement activities are welcoming, accessible and informative. Respondents also provided suggestions for improvement including providing greater clarity regarding what the public can and can't influence, consistently following-up after an engagement process closes to share what was heard and explaining how community input informed decision-making.



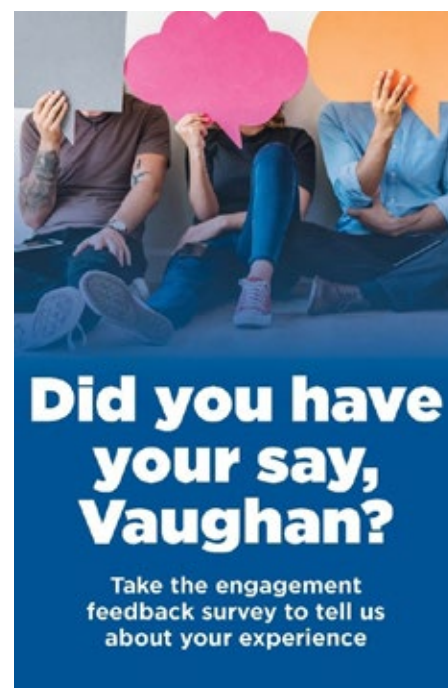




# How we reached the community

The City applied a wide variety of communications tactics to encourage participation in the Engagement Feedback Survey throughout 2022, including:

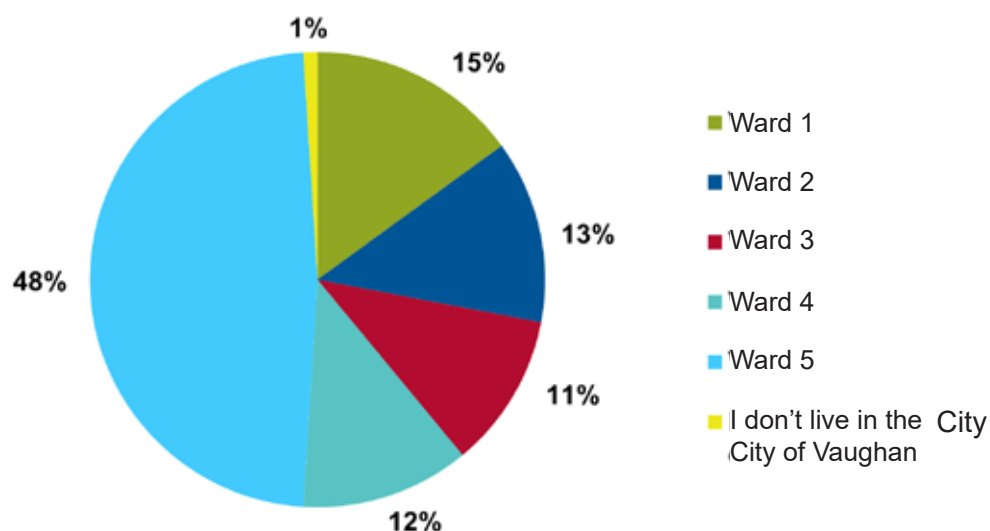
- public service announcements.
- paid and organic social media posts.
- paid digital advertising.
- mobile signs at high-traffic locations within each of Vaughan's five wards.
- promotions across the City's digital signage network.
- articles in the Vaughan News and the Vaughan Engagement eNewsletters.
- articles in Councillor eNewsletters.
- posting the survey link to the City's engagement webpage, [vaughan.ca/HaveYourSay](https://vaughan.ca/HaveYourSay).
- posting the survey link on each page of the City's online engagement platform, [Have Your Say, Vaughan](https://HaveYourSay.Vaughan).
- directly sharing the link with individuals who participated in a City engagement activity.



# Who completed the survey

Everyone in Vaughan should have a voice in City decision-making. Vaughan is home to many different communities, and the feedback collected through public engagement must represent the diversity of those who choose to live, work and play here. For this reason, a series of demographic questions were included in the survey to understand who provided feedback and which voices may be underrepresented.

## Which ward do you live in?



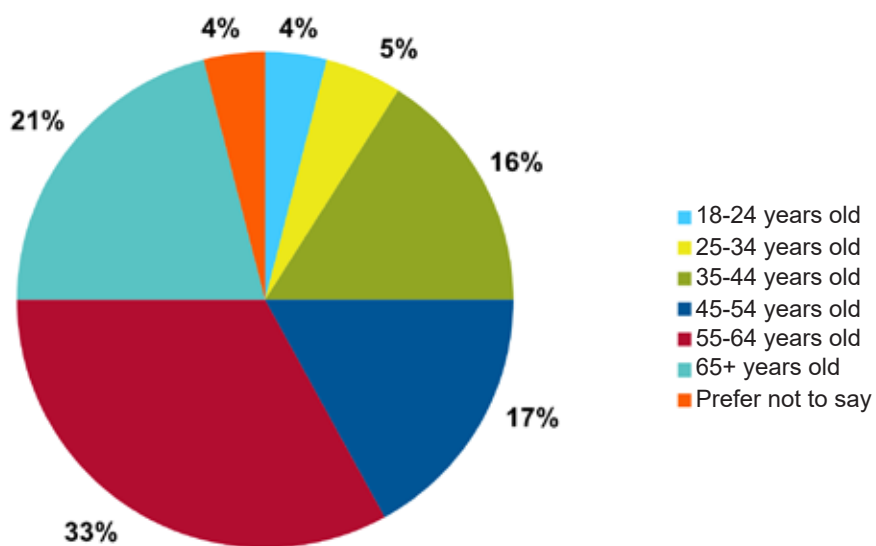
n = 100 responses

The letter 'n' refers to the sample size.

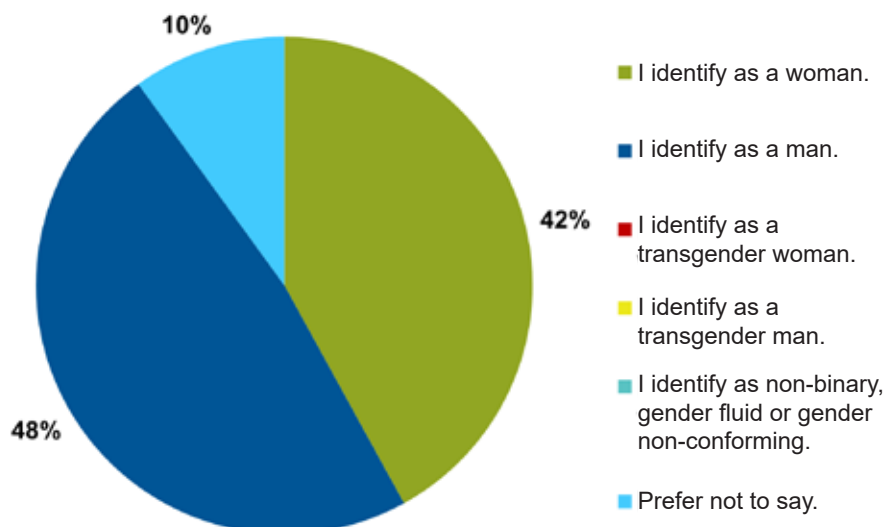




### What is your age?

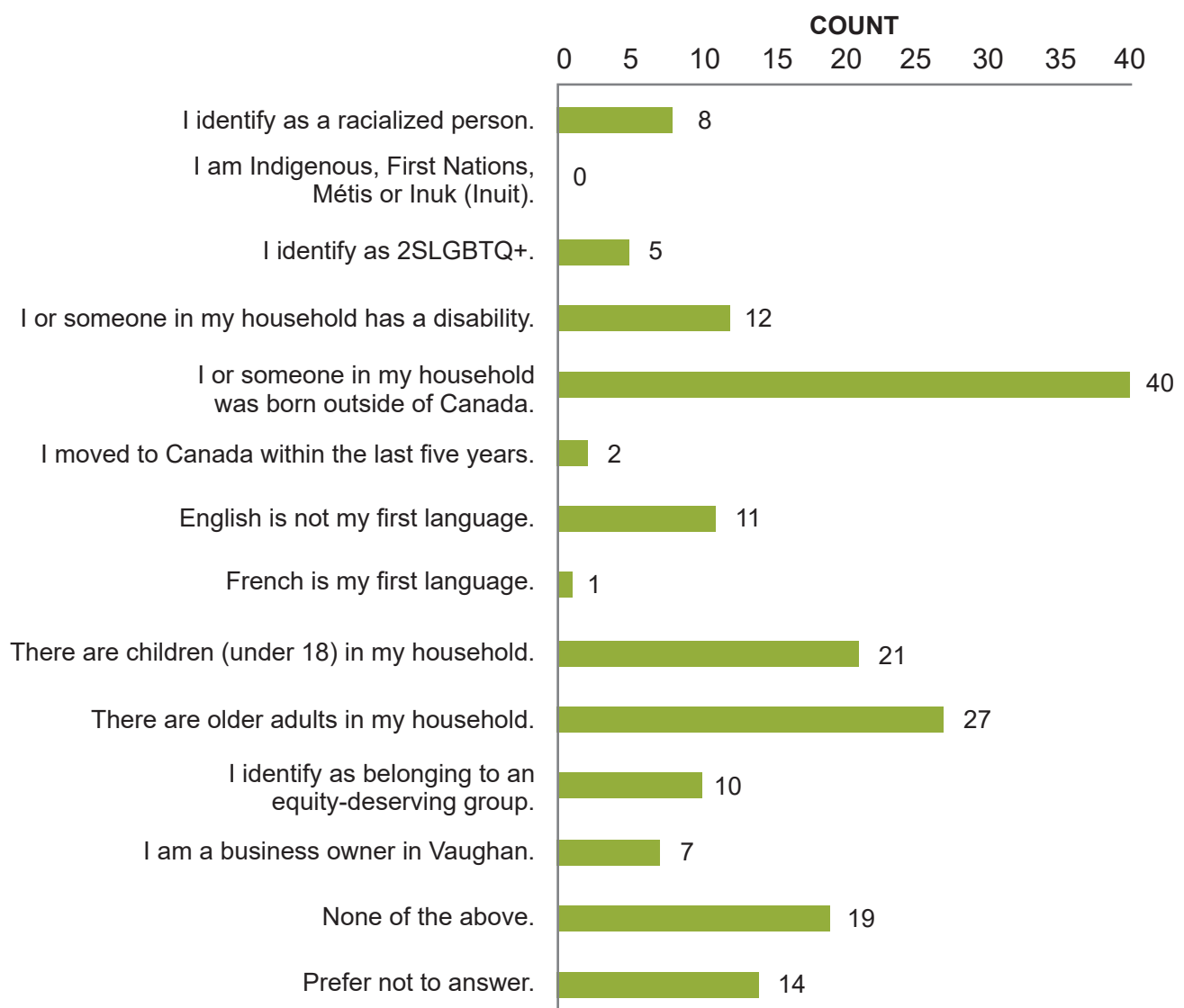


### How would you best describe your gender identity/expression?





Please select any of the following that apply to you.



n = 100 responses



# Survey results

## Which projects received feedback

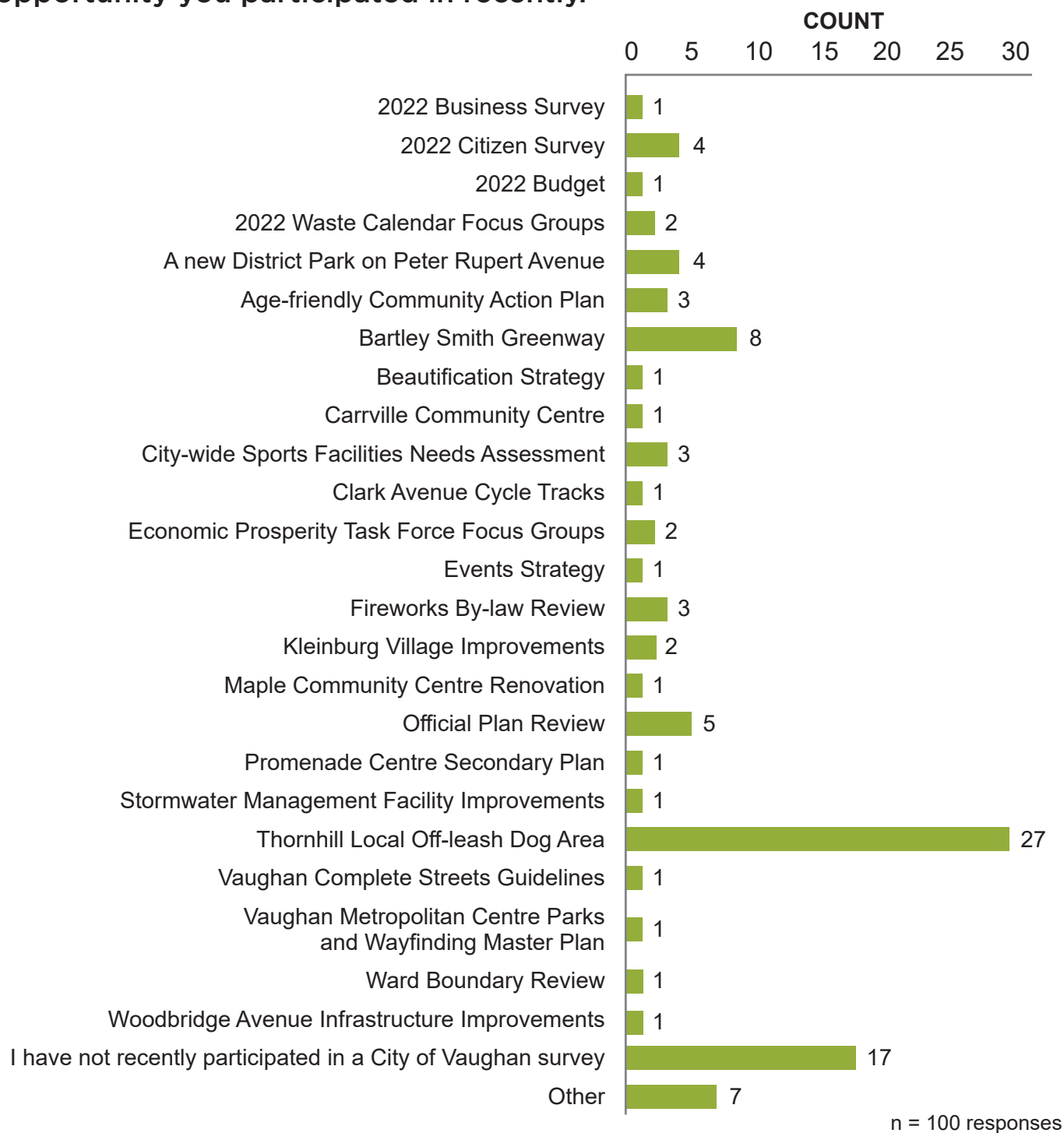
At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to select the City project they participated in and would like to provide feedback on. The list consisted of City projects that featured an engagement opportunity within the past 12 to 18 months – a total of 37 projects. Respondents also had the option to select “other” if the project they participated in was not listed or they could choose “I have not recently participated in a City engagement opportunity.”

Survey respondents provided feedback on 24 of the 37 listed projects. These projects covered various topics (e.g. off-leash dog areas, community centre renovations, parks, trails and ward boundaries) and represented the work of several departments across the City. It’s worth noting that a significant number of participants (27 per cent) took the feedback survey after participating in the Thornhill Local Off-Leash Dog Area project. This is likely due to the large number of people who engaged in that project (more than 1,000).

## Reasons for not participating

Those who indicated they had not recently participated in a City engagement opportunity were asked why and what the City could do or change to encourage their participation. Nearly all respondents (16 respondents or 94 per cent) stated they were unaware of opportunities to participate. A few respondents also indicated they don’t feel their participation will meaningfully influence City decisions (three respondents), they do not feel comfortable participating virtually (one) or they are not comfortable engaging in English (one). When asked what the City could do to encourage more participation, the top suggestion was better notification and more outreach (e.g. more advertising, roadside signage, radio ads, emails).

## Tell us which City of Vaughan project/engagement opportunity you participated in recently.



Projects which featured an engagement opportunity within the past 12 to 18 months but were not selected by respondents of this survey included the 2022-2026 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan, Block 27 Environmental Assessment, Concord GO Centre, Fire Station 7-12, Integrated Urban Water Plan, Kirby Road Widening, Maple Heritage Conservation District Plan Update, Municipal Energy Plan, Napier Street Traffic Study, Old Maple Infrastructure Improvements, Teston Road Environmental Assessment, Traffic and Speed Management Study and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan.

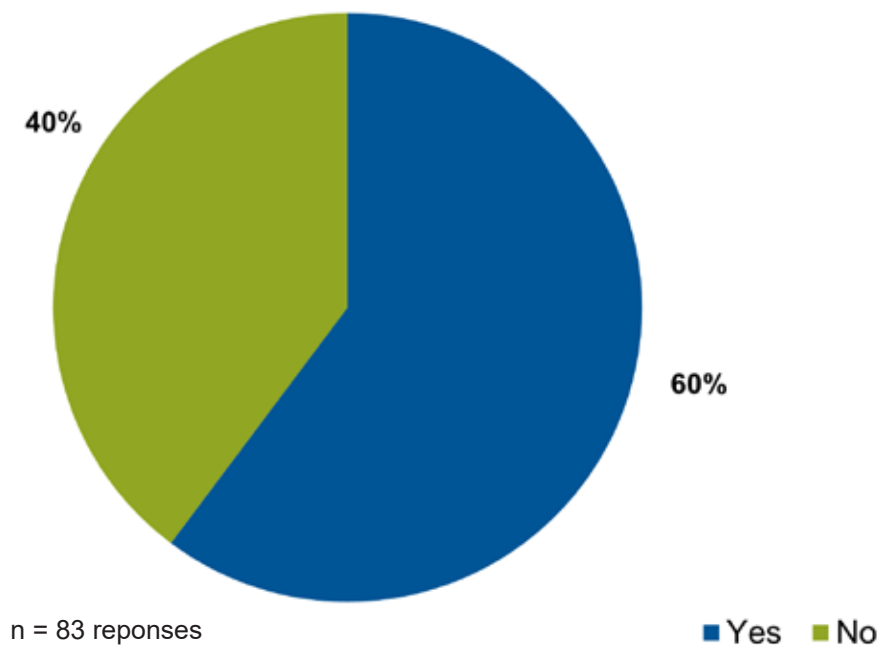




## Previous participation in City projects

For those who had participated in a City project, the survey asked them to indicate whether it was their first time. The majority of survey respondents (60 per cent) had not previously participated in a City engagement and the remainder (40 per cent) had.

**Is this the first time you've participated in an engagement opportunity to inform a City project or initiative?**



*Received notification by mail and live in the area – so it was relevant to me.*

*I would like to become more engaged in community activities in general including this engagement opportunity.*

*Wanted to add my voice to the Official Plan of the city I have called my home for the last 42 years.*

## Reasons for participating

Whether or not it was their first time participating in a City-led engagement activity, respondents were asked to explain why they chose to get involved. Several common themes emerged in the responses provided:

- personal interest in the topic of the engagement opportunity (e.g. greenspace, development and intensification, off-leash dog areas)
- potential to be impacted – positively or negatively – by the project's outcome
- a desire to be heard by City staff and have their perspective considered in City decision-making
- concern about the project and potential project outcomes
- a sense of civic duty or responsibility as an advocate for their community
- they felt canvassed or “asked to” by the City (via a letter, email, roadside sign, etc.)

*I wanted to express my concerns and idea about intensification in my neighbourhood.*

*It's important for me to know that the right decisions are being made and to help ensure that.*





## How respondents heard about engagement opportunities

The City promotes all engagement opportunities through comprehensive communications plans, which include a variety of broad and targeted tactics, such as mailed letters to residents, roadside signage, social media, community centre TV screens and more. To understand which channels successfully reached community members, survey respondents were asked how they heard about the engagement activity they chose to participate in.

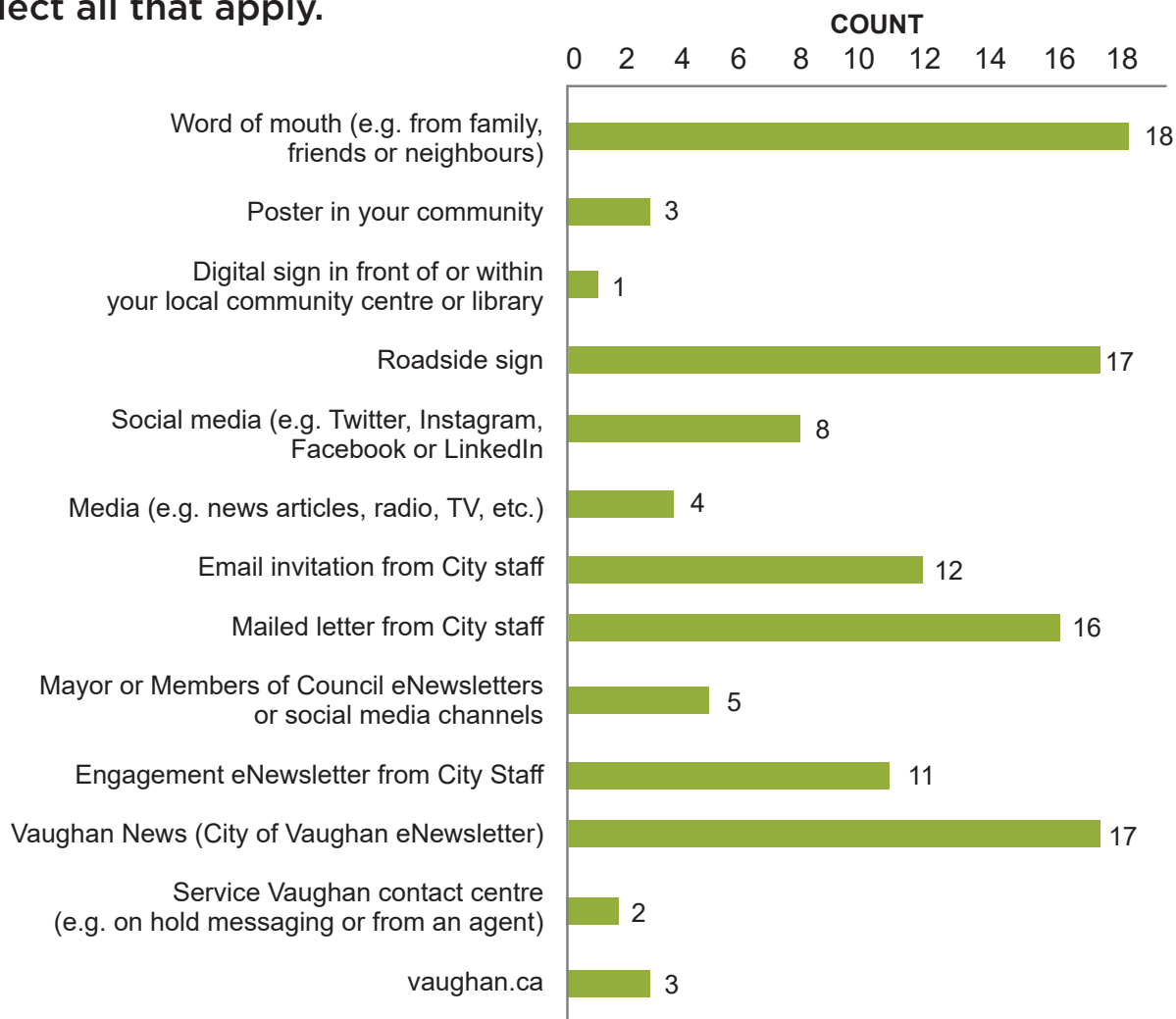
While all listed communications methods had some traction with survey respondents, some appeared to have greater visibility than others. The greatest number of respondents indicated they heard about the engagement opportunity through word of mouth (18 respondents or 22 per cent), followed by roadside signs (17 respondents or 20 per cent), the Vaughan News eNewsletter (17 respondents or 20 per cent) or a mailed letter from the City (16 respondents or 19 per cent). Additionally, several respondents were reached via an email invitation from City staff (12 respondents or 14 per cent), the Vaughan Engagement eNewsletter (11 respondents or 13 per cent) or social media (eight respondents or 10 per cent). The remaining communications tactics – posters in the community, digital signs, media (e.g. TV or radio), Mayor or Members of Council eNewsletters, Service Vaughan's on-hold messaging and the City's website – were mentioned less by respondents.





## How did you hear about the project/engagement opportunity you participated in?

Select all that apply.



n = 83 responses



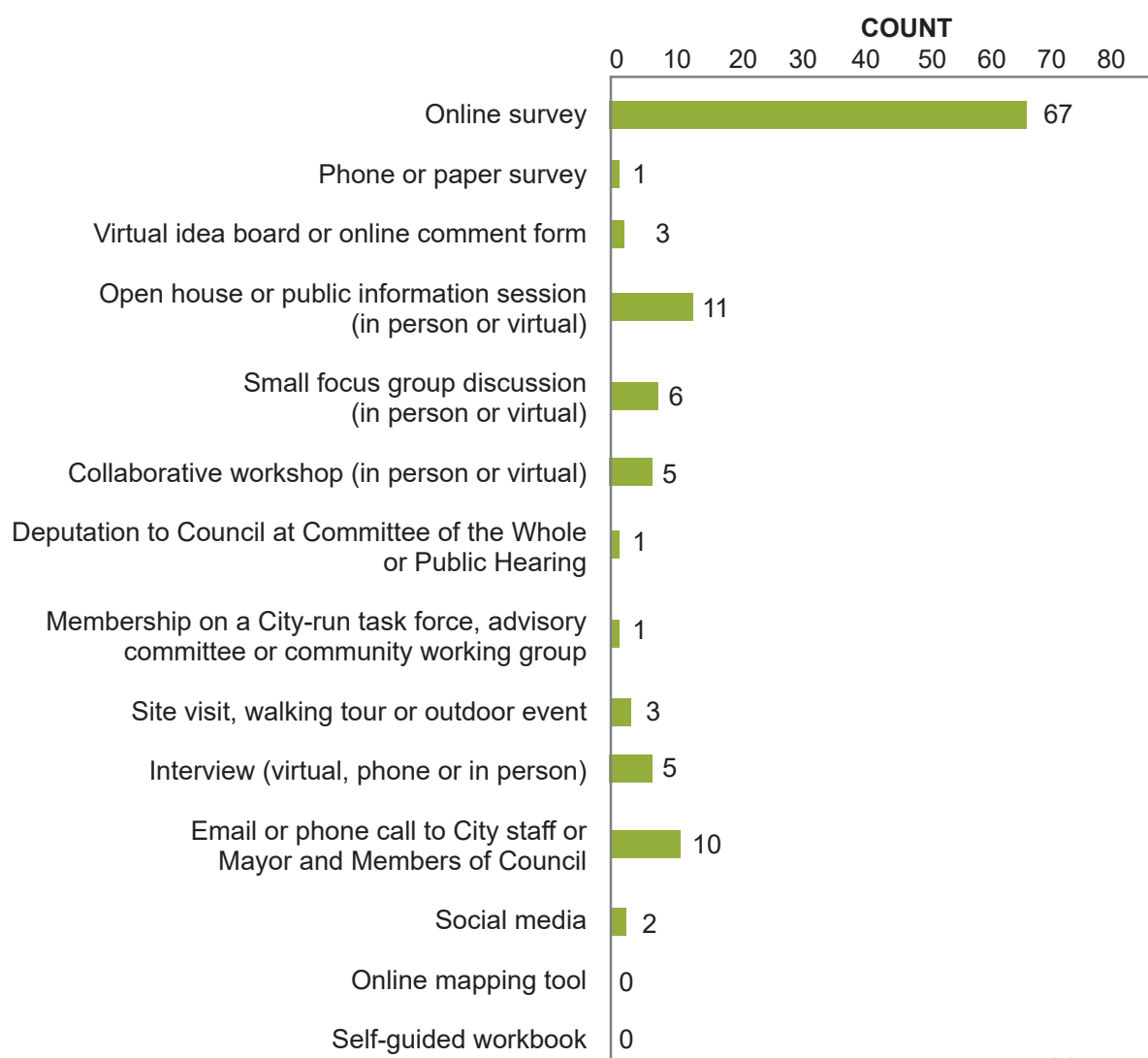
## How respondents were engaged

The City uses various engagement methods and tools to engage with the public – both virtual and in person – including public meetings, open houses, workshops, surveys, interactive maps, online idea boards, discussion forums and more. Tools and tactics are chosen based on who the City wishes to engage, the level of public influence on decision-making and the desired engagement outcomes.

Survey respondents were asked to identify which methods they used to provide feedback to the City. The majority of respondents (67 respondents or 81 per cent) participated in an online survey. This is, in part, because online surveys were the most common engagement method used in 2022. Online surveys are also a convenient way to provide feedback as they can be completed from anywhere at any time – and they generally take no longer than five to 10 minutes to complete. The next most commonly chosen methods were in-person or virtual open houses and public information sessions (11 respondents or 13 per cent) and emails or phone calls to City staff and Members of Council (10 respondents or 12 per cent). Only a handful of respondents participated in the remaining engagement methods offered by the City in 2022.



**Which method(s) did you use to provide feedback to the City about the project? Select all that apply.**



n = 83 responses





## How respondents described their engagement experience

The City strives to deliver engagement processes that are positive, meaningful and inclusive. The [City's Engagement Strategy](#) (PDF) contains guiding principles that govern how staff work with and serve the public, and ensure the integrity of Vaughan's community engagement practices. Key elements of these principles include:

- ensuring engagement processes are welcoming to everyone.
- ensuring the public has fair and equitable access to engagement opportunities and can influence City decision-making.
- promoting openness and transparency, including ensuring the public receives the information they need to provide informed feedback.
- promoting meaningful and relevant engagement by carefully considering and accurately portraying the public's role in decision-making.
- undertaking and encouraging actions that build trust and show respect for community knowledge, time and effort.

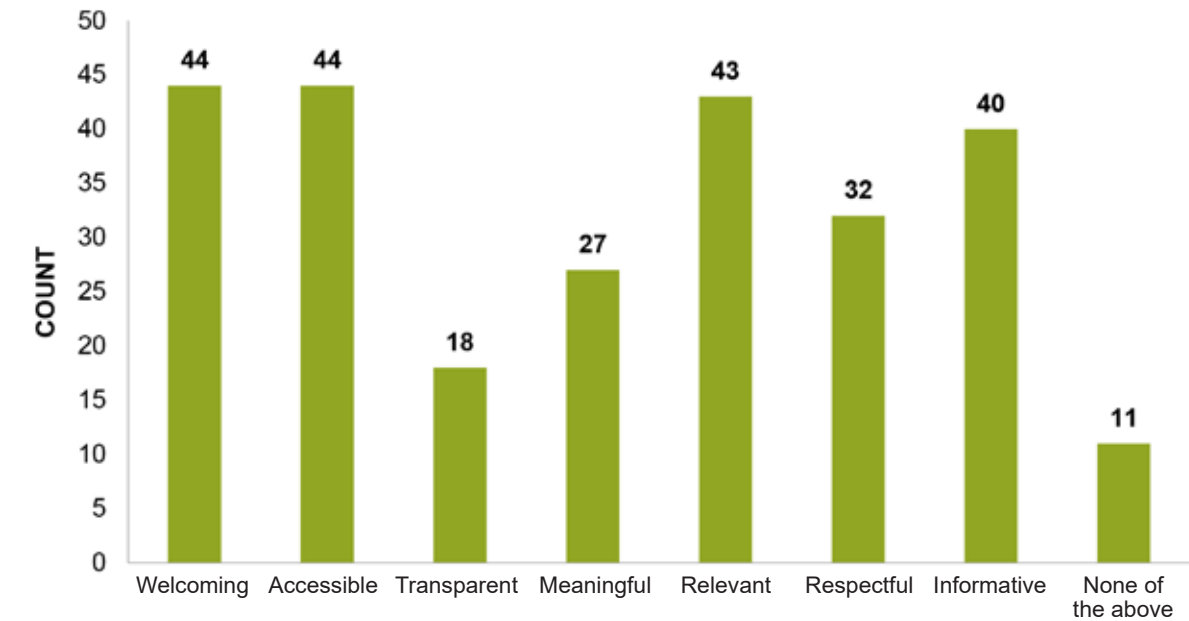
Survey respondents were asked to identify whether they felt the engagement activity they participated in was welcoming, accessible, transparent, meaningful, relevant, respectful and/or informative. The greatest number of respondents described the activity they participated in as welcoming (44 respondents or 53 per cent), accessible (44 respondents or 53 per cent), relevant (43 respondents or 52 per cent) or informative (40 respondents or 48 per cent). Fewer respondents described their engagement experience



as transparent, meaningful or respectful, and 11 respondents (or 13 per cent) selected “none of the above.”

Those who participated in a City engagement for the first time were slightly more likely to describe their experience using the keywords provided. Sixty-four per cent described it as welcoming, 60 per cent chose accessible, 24 per cent felt it was transparent, 36 per cent said it was meaningful, 62 per cent felt it was relevant, 38 per cent chose respectful and 52 per cent said it was informative. Only six per cent selected “none of the above.”

**How would you describe the engagement opportunity you participated in? Select all that apply.**



n = 83 responses



Respondents were given space to explain their choices. Those who had a positive experience described receiving the information and context they needed and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to hear directly from City staff. They also reported satisfaction with the ability to express their opinions and felt they were heard. Those who had a less positive experience cited a lack of trust, explaining they felt the project's outcome was predetermined and decisions would be made based on political interests or staff biases versus public opinion. Others disagreed with the scope of the engagement and felt there wasn't enough room for public influence in decision-making.

### **Indicate the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

I was given the information needed to participate meaningfully.

I understand how my input will be used.

I felt listened to.

I had the opportunity to share all my thoughts, ideas and perspective.

I felt my input would be used to inform decision-making on the project.

I felt engaging in this project was a good use of my time.

I felt engaging in this project was a positive experience.

I would engage in future City projects.

I would recommend engaging in City projects to friends and family.



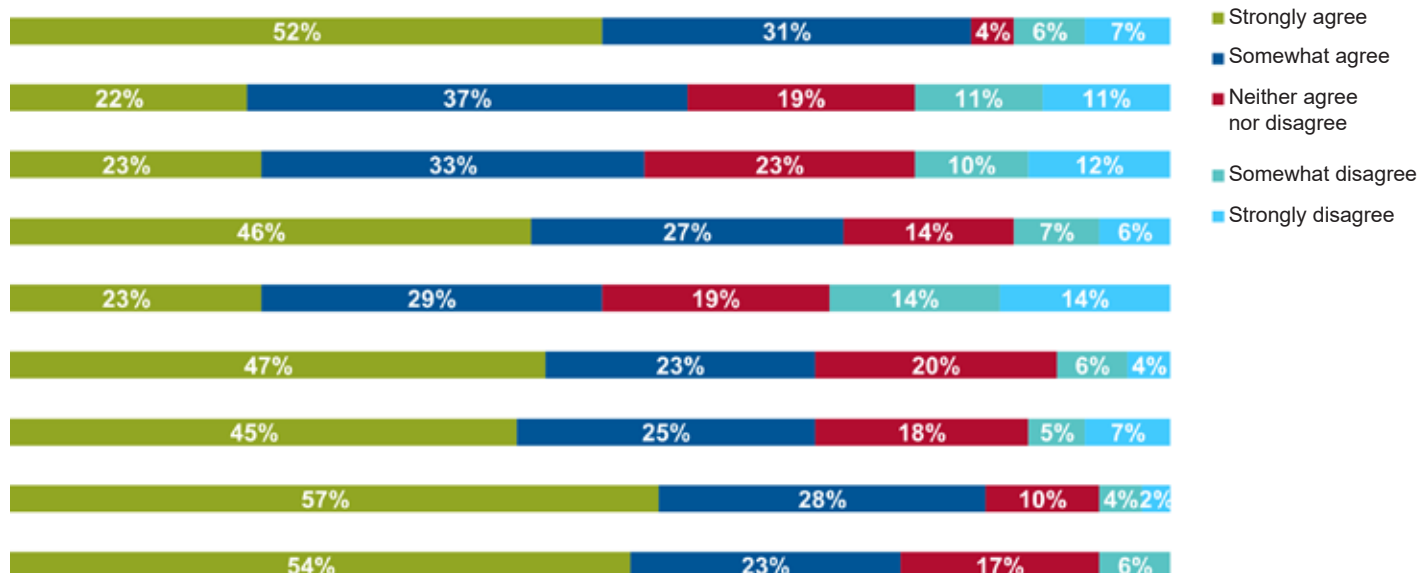
*"Felt as if I was heard and report followed."*

*"I wonder if my feedback will be considered or is everything already determined."*

*"Was able to get right to the source for background info and express my opinion."*

Next, respondents were presented with a series of statements potentially describing their engagement experience, and they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed. Each statement was positively framed, so agreement represents a positive engagement experience.

Overall, the City scored well, with at least 50 per cent of respondents strongly or somewhat agreeing with each statement. Of note, 83 per cent of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed they were given the information they needed to participate meaningfully,





85 per cent agreed they would engage in future City projects and 77 per cent would recommend engaging in City projects to their family and friends. A majority of respondents also agreed they had the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas and perspective (73 per cent), and 70 per cent agreed that participating was a positive experience and good use of their time.

The responses also point to opportunities for improvement. Only 59 per cent of respondents felt they understood how their input would be used, and fewer (52 per cent) felt their input would be used to inform decision-making.

Similar to the previous question, those who were providing feedback on their first City engagement experience were more likely to agree with each statement than those who had engaged on a City project more than once.

## Virtual versus in-person engagement

The global COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted how municipalities across Canada – and the world – connected with and consulted the public. Engagement professionals were required to pivot to using only virtual formats and tools. As a result, the toolkit for virtual engagement expanded rapidly, and now many more online engagement tools, platforms and applications are available.

With public health measures easing, municipalities like Vaughan have returned to connecting with residents, business owners and stakeholders in person – but that doesn't mean the City should stop using online

consultation methods. Throughout the pandemic, many shared that virtual forms of engagement were more convenient – allowing people to join public meetings from home, take surveys at a time that works best for them and fit engagement into their busy schedules. Therefore, the question of how the public wants to be engaged and when it's most appropriate to host consultation activities in person versus online is top of mind.

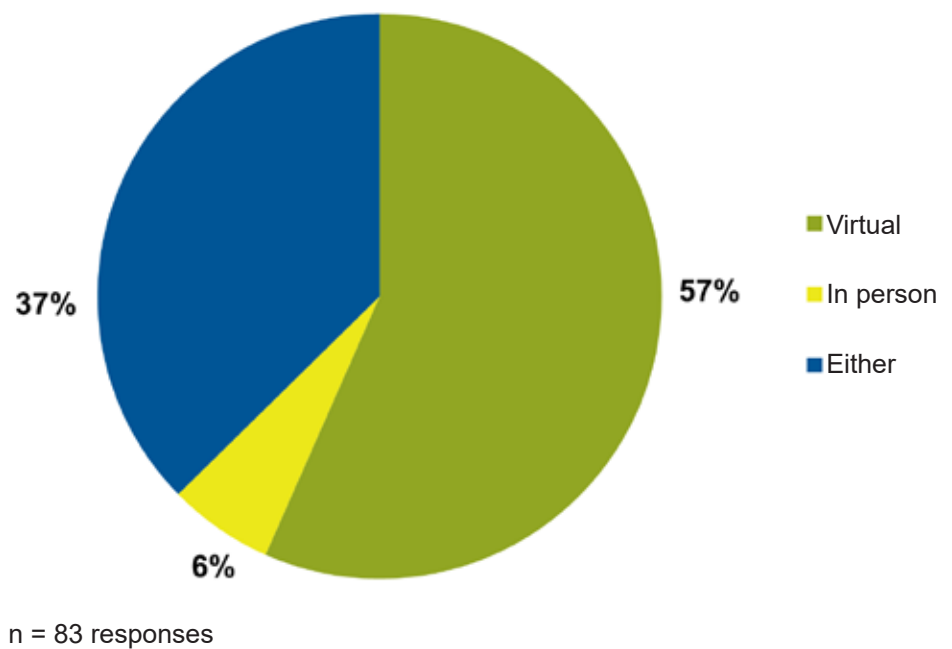
Survey respondents were asked whether they prefer to provide feedback through virtual activities, in person or either. The majority (47 respondents or 57 per cent) preferred virtual, while six per cent (five people) preferred providing feedback through in-person activities. The remaining 37 per cent (31 people) did not have a preference. When given space to explain their choice, respondents described virtual engagement as safer and more convenient. In addition, respondents felt virtual engagement opportunities save them time, are easier to fit into their schedule and are more accessible as they don't require travel, arrangement of childcare, etc. That said, others pointed out that it is still much easier to communicate and engage in two-way conversations when consultation activities are held in person.







Do you prefer to provide feedback on City projects through virtual activities or in-person activities?



*"Have a sincere and honest survey before any plan is initiated."*

*"Engage with other departments to reach more...libraries, schools, groups, etc. If engaging with seniors, develop a central core or hub so 'one-stop shopping' for information would make it easier to get information and provide input."*

*"Explain context and use of engagement exercises to avoid perception that this is just 'window dressing' or checkbox consultation."*

*"Demonstrate/ prove that our input is being used."*

## Suggestions for improvement

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked what the City should do to improve its engagement practices. The top two suggestions were more communications about engagement opportunities, and better follow-up with participants after an engagement has closed to share what was heard and demonstrate how the City acted on the public's input. Additional suggestions included:

- leveraging relationships with other City departments and community organizations to advertise engagement opportunities (e.g. libraries, schools).
- providing more background information in mailed letters and on project webpages.
- continuing to engage equity-deserving communities.
- ensuring those without access to the internet can still participate.
- more engagement of ratepayers associations.
- providing more time for comments and input.
- providing rewards for participation, like food or honoraria.
- offering multiple ways to get involved in a project.
- foregoing engagement when a decision has already been made (i.e. when there is no room for public influence).

*"Ratepayer groups are ready and willing to provide valuable input."*

*"Offer a small token of appreciation to increase the numbers."*





# Reflections on your feedback

Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in the survey and share their engagement experience.

The feedback and suggestions collected are necessary for the City to evaluate and continuously improve its engagement practices.

## What we heard we're doing well:

- offering welcoming and accessible opportunities for the public to have a say on City projects that interest or impact them
- ensuring the public receives relevant background information, so they can provide informed feedback
- providing multiple avenues for feedback and input, including virtual and in-person options
- respecting the public's time and effort when choosing engagement methods and soliciting their perspectives



## Where we could do better:

- providing engagement feedback summary reports after an engagement process closes and providing a transparent record of what was said/heard
- following up consistently with engagement participants to inform them of any decisions made and demonstrate how their feedback was considered
- communicating, clearly and transparently, which aspects of a project the public can and can't influence
- involving the public earlier in City projects when fewer decisions have been made
- leveraging local ratepayer associations and community organizations to solicit their local knowledge and perspectives, and to inform their members of engagement opportunities
- continuing to grow awareness of the City's public engagement program and further communicate opportunities to get involved through advertising, social media, mailed letters, emails, newsletters and more

The City greatly appreciates the feedback provided and is committed to acting on these areas for improvement. If you participate in a City engagement activity in 2023, please share your experience by completing the [2023 Engagement Feedback Survey](#).

To stay in the know about opportunities to have your say, sign up for the City's monthly [Engagement eNewsletter](#) or visit [vaughan.ca/HaveYourSay](https://vaughan.ca/HaveYourSay) for a list of current engagement opportunities.





## City of Vaughan

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