

WHAT WE HEARD

Blue Willow Square Park Enhancement

ENGAGEMENT REPORT



Fall 2023



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PROJECT OVERVIEW

About this report

This report summarizes what the City of Vaughan heard through community engagement on park enhancement options for Blue Willow Square located at 99 Blue Willow Dr.

In March and April of 2023, the City hosted an in-person public Open House and an online survey to collect feedback on how residents currently use Blue Willow Square and their preferred park enhancement options.

Several options for park enhancement were proposed for community prioritization and feedback (Figure 1), including:

- a shade structure.
- a pollinator garden and naturalized planting.
- central area upgrades (i.e. seating areas, sculptures, landscape planting).
- playground enhancement.
- an outdoor fitness area.

Additionally, the option to activate the open green space with new features such as a yoga deck, table tennis and open lawn space was also proposed.

In total, the City heard from 102 people, 69 of whom completed the online survey and 32 who attended the public Open House.

Most participants expressed their support and excitement for park enhancement options in Blue Willow Square. However, some questioned whether enhancements were needed and if the funding could be better spent elsewhere, citing the square's proximity to other parks with similar amenities. Participants strongly preferred the playground enhancement option, citing many benefits, including keeping kids both active and engaged and helping to build community. The shade structure was ranked second, with many noting a current lack of shade and seating in the square. Residents felt the addition of a shade structure and/or shaded seating would allow Blue Willow Square to become a gathering area for the community. Participants also expressed positive support reallocating a portion of the greenspace, using a portion of this space to include new features and amenities such as an area for lounging and relaxing or games tables.



Why Blue Willow Square?

Sometimes, when a new development – like a condominium – is built, the developer is required to contribute community benefit funding. This contribution – **Section 37 funding** – can be used to fund local enhancements to public services and community infrastructure, including parks.

The City previously secured funding through the development application located at 7777 Weston Rd., which has been used to enhance park spaces serving the local community. Blue Willow Square was selected to utilize approximately \$200,000 of these Section 37 benefits to enhance the park.



Figure 1: Conceptual aerial image of Blue Willow Square park enhancement options

HOW WE ENGAGED

IN-PERSON PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

On March 21, 2023, residents were invited to attend an in-person public Open House to review information about Blue Willow Square, engage with staff, participate in an activity table and explore the following:

- existing park conditions.
- nearby parks and amenities in the community.
- five potential park enhancement options.
- activation of the open greenspace or keeping it as is.
- an exercise to rank the enhancement options based on preference.

When residents arrived at the Open House, they were encouraged to review the information provided on panels and utilize sticky notes and markers to write comments (Figure 2). They were also encouraged to make suggestions and share their likes and dislikes about each park enhancement option presented.

The primary focus of the Open House was to engage with residents to learn about which park enhancements they desire and why. The information panels were grouped into several stations that participants could review at their own pace, with City staff members present at each station to engage with attendees and answer questions. The last station invited attendees to vote on their top three enhancement options (Figure 3). Participants were provided with a set of numbered dots (labelled one, two and three) and were asked to place them on the photos of the park enhancement options they prefer. Residents were also provided with an opportunity to share their feedback on reallocating a portion of the existing open greenspace to new activities such as table tennis, a gathering circle or yoga deck.

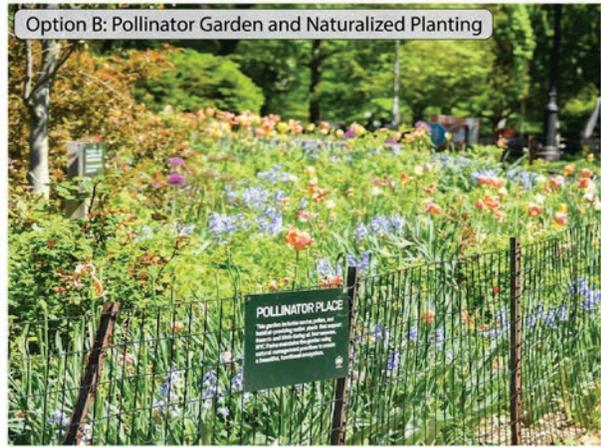


Figure 2: Blue Willow Square Open House venue

BLUE WILLOW SQUARE - WARD 3

Rank Your Top Three Options!

Place a sticker on your most preferred options



vaughan.ca/BlueWillow



Figure 3: Park enhancement options panel

Additionally, staff prepared an activity table for residents of all ages (Figures 4 and 5) where kids and adults painted rocks. These rocks will be placed in Blue Willow Square as an art installation and community-building initiative. As they painted, participants further discussed the park enhancement options and their preferences. Staff are currently investigating a suitable location within Blue Willow Square to place the painted rocks once the park enhancements are complete.



Figure 4: Rock art activity



Figure 5: Rock art activity station

ONLINE SURVEY

Following the public Open House, the City launched an online survey from **March 22 to April 5, 2023**. The survey was hosted on the City's online engagement platform, Have Your Say, Vaughan, to collect additional community feedback. The information and questions presented mirrored the information panels and interactive activities at the Open House. Similar to the Open House, survey participants were asked to provide information on the demographics of their community and feedback on how they currently use the park and the potential park enhancement options.





HOW WE REACHED THE COMMUNITY

Promotion of the Open House and survey was multi-faceted and included a combination of far-reaching and targeted communications tactics.

Blue Willow Square - Mailing Area

1:7,500



Legend

- Mailing Area - 300m
- Blue Willow Square
- Property Boundary



THIS MAP IS FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY.

Note: This map is dated and has not been field verified by Parks Planning. This map shall be used as a reference document only and should be verified using City of Vaughan Official Plans, Subdivision Agreements, etc. All errors and omissions with regards to this map shall be reported directly to Parks Planning.



Figure 6: Map of residents who received a project notice

PROJECT NOTICE

A project notice with information about the project, Open House and online survey was mailed to 902 homes within 300 metres of Blue Willow Square. Additionally, this information was sent to the Pine Valley Village Community Association.



Figure 7: Project notice sent to residents within 300 metres of Blue Willow Square

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Two public service announcements were released to promote the project. The first was issued on March 7 to local, GTA, national and cultural media outlets, and those who subscribe to Vaughan News, the City's eNewsletter, to promote the Open House. The second public service announcement was released on March 22 to promote the online survey. The public service announcements were issued to more than 42,500 subscribers.



Figure 8: Public service announcement sent to residents

SOCIAL MEDIA

From March 7 to April 4, 2023, the City shared 20 posts across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn to promote the Open House and online survey, and encourage the community to learn more by visiting the project website.



Figure 9: Social media graphic

COMMUNITY SIGNAGE

The City installed temporary signage around Blue Willow Square from March 7 to March 21, 2023, to inform those living in the community about the Open House. Three roadside signs were placed in high-traffic areas within the community:

- southeast corner Ansley Grove Road and Blue Willow Drive
- southeast corner of Blue Willow Drive and Pottery Place
- northeast corner of Chancellor Drive and Belview Avenue



Figure 10: Roadside sign located in the community



Figure 11: Graphic used to promote the Open House on community centre televisions

WEBSITE

Residents could visit the Blue Willow Square Park Enhancement website at vaughan.ca/BlueWillow for more information throughout the engagement process. This report will be posted to the project website, and additional updates will follow on the timeline of design, construction and implementation.

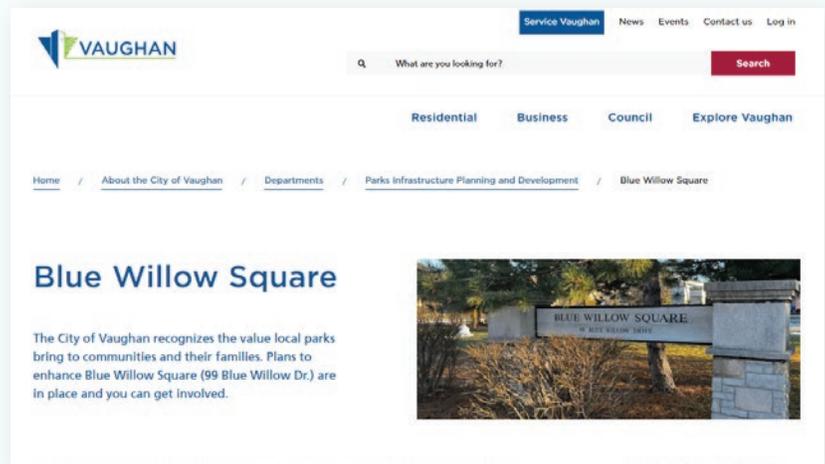


Figure 12: Blue Willow Square Enhancement project webpage



WHO WE HEARD FROM

In total, the City heard from 102 people, with 32 attending the Open House and 69 completing the online survey.

The survey included several questions to help the City better understand who participated, including their age, who lives in their household, where they live and how they heard about the project. This data was not collected from those who attended the Open House.

Age of survey respondents

Feedback was collected from respondents representing a wide age range. Most (35 percent) were 35 to 44 years old, followed by 55 to 64 years old (21 per cent), 25 to 34 (18 per cent) and 45 to 54 (12 per cent). Few respondents were over 65 years old (seven per cent) or between 18 and 24 (four per cent).

What is your age?

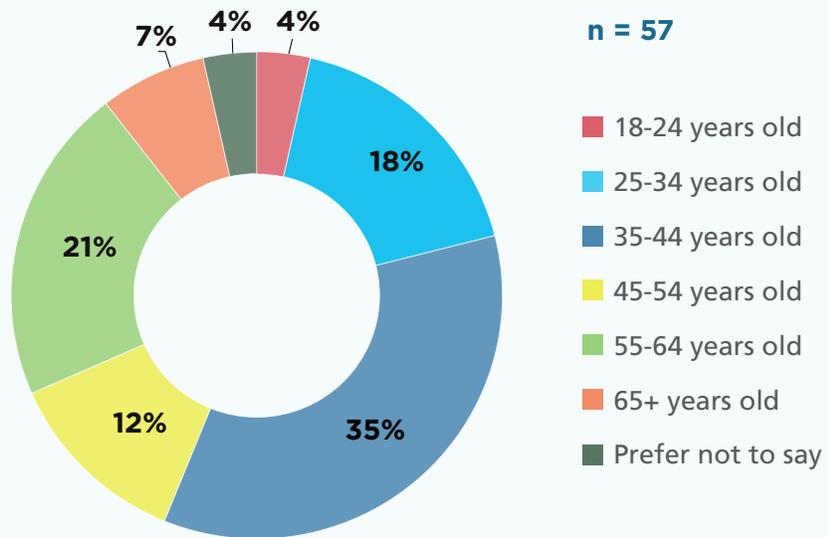


Figure 13: Survey responses to “What is your age?”

Household composition

Those who took the survey represented a mixture of household types, including single- and two-parent families with kids, multi-generational families and adult/older adult households with no children. The majority (76 per cent) of households included one or two adults. Over half (57 per cent) of the survey respondents indicated they live in households with one to two children up to 12 years of age, while 38 per cent included one or two teens (13 to 19 years old) or young adults (20 to 29 years old). Almost half (47 per cent) included at least one or two older adults or seniors.

Including yourself, how many people within each age group live in your household?

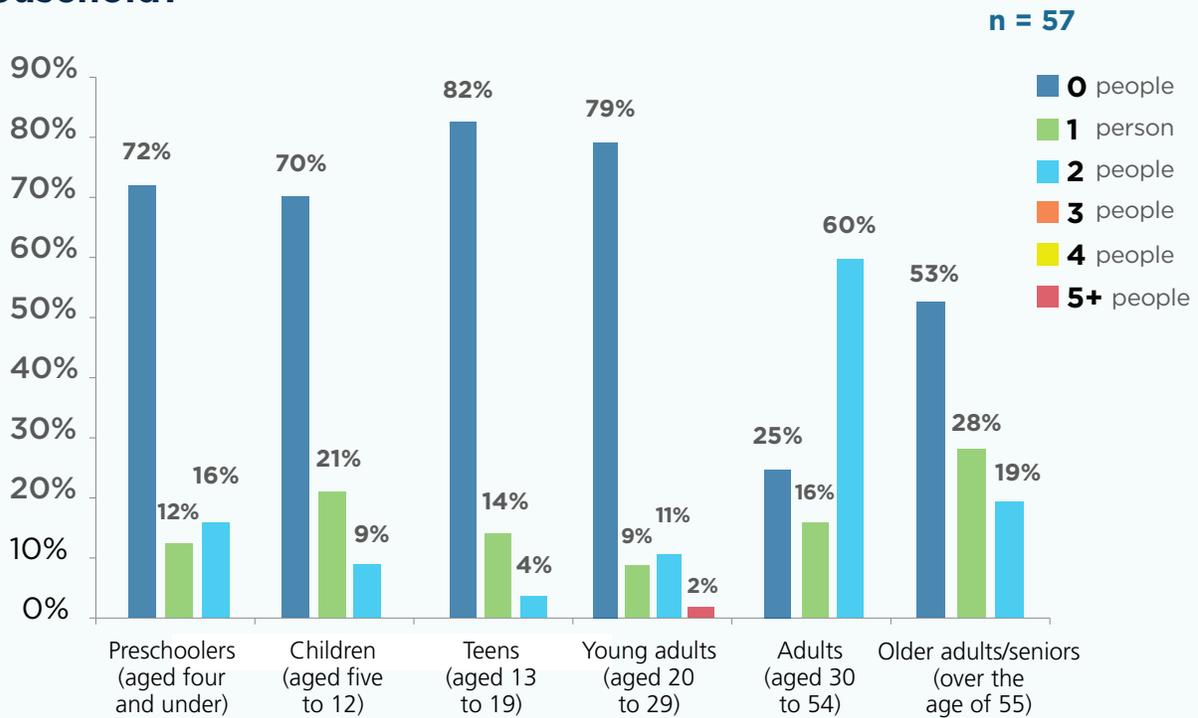


Figure 14: Survey responses to “Including yourself, how many people within each age group live in your household?”

Awareness and outreach

The survey results showed that most participants heard about the project through the mailed project notice, roadside signs, social media and City eNewsletters. This information helps inform staff on how to best reach residents in Vaughan with future engagement opportunities.

How did you hear about this project?

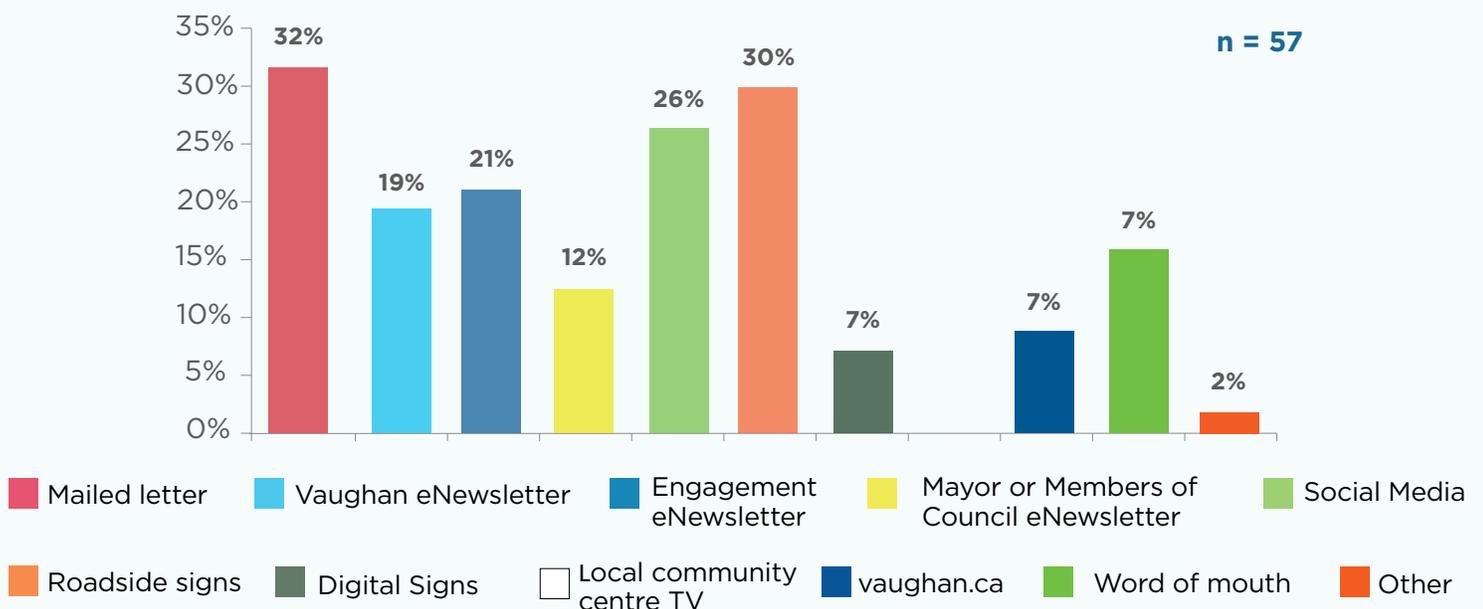


Figure 15: Survey responses to “How did you hear about this project?”

WHAT WE HEARD

Existing conditions and site context

Blue Willow Square currently consists of a large open greenspace, small play structure, a central gathering area with a fountain, benches and trellises, modest plantings, and a small pollinator garden within the open greenspace. The park is bordered by Blue Willow Drive to the north, Pottery Place to the east, Foxchase Avenue to the south and Minton Drive to the west. There is one crosswalk at the northeast corner, and the park can be accessed via six entrances.



Online survey respondents were asked how they currently use and enjoy Blue Willow Square. The most popular park uses reported were relaxation and active living. Almost half (48 per cent) of participants currently use Blue Willow Square for relaxation (strolling, sitting, etc.), and another half (48 per cent) use it for walking, running or exercise. Other uses included walking around or through the square to reach another destination (39 per cent), active play (e.g. enjoying the playground or field sports) (33 per cent) and social gathering (13 per cent). Nineteen percent of participants indicated they had not used Blue Willow Square at all.

How do you currently use the space at Blue Willow Square?

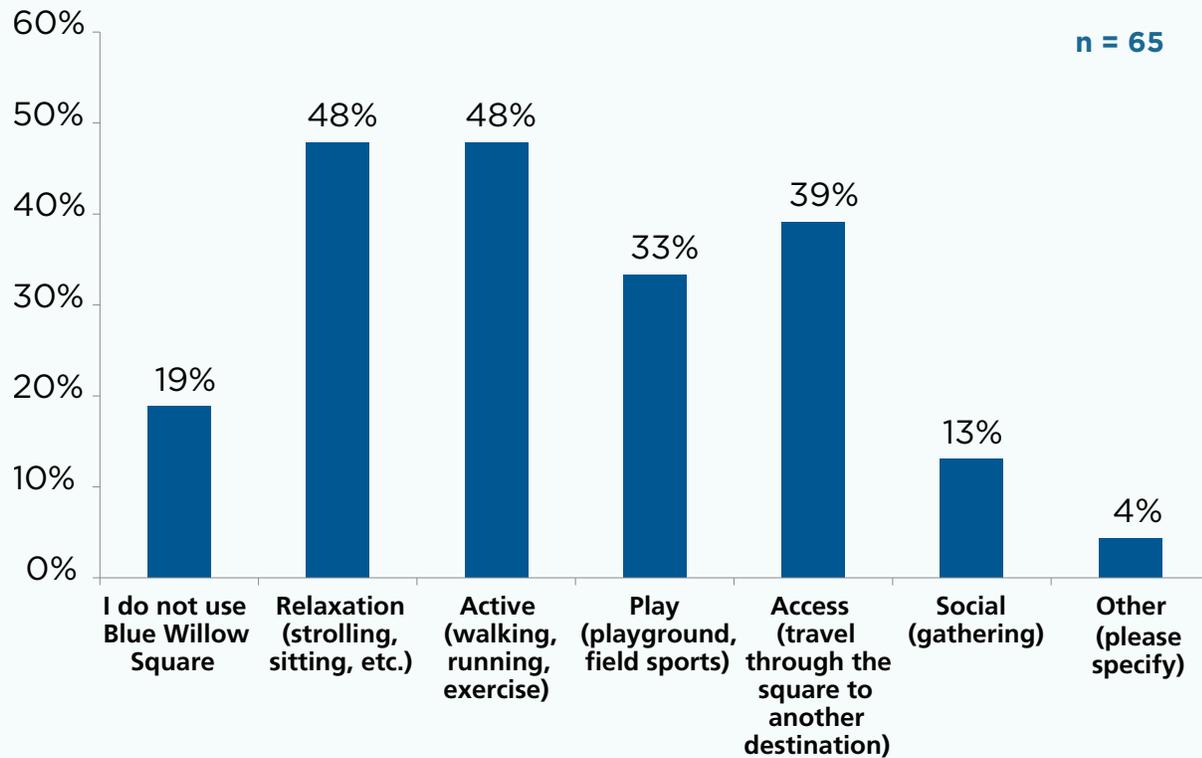


Figure 17: Survey responses to “How do you currently use the space at Blue Willow Square?”

To help City staff understand what should remain unchanged, the survey also asked participants to provide feedback on what they like about the existing conditions in Blue Willow Square. Respondents had positive to mixed sentiments towards the existing features of Blue Willow Square. The open greenspace, pathway connections, fountain and seating/benches are considered much-liked features. Whereas the existing playground, current sightlines/visibility and lack of amenities could be improved. Through open-ended responses, participants shared the following feedback key challenges and opportunities for improvement:

- The existing playground is too small, lacks excitement and variety, and there are more desired playgrounds in other parks.
- The quality of seating (e.g. location, orientation, sun and weather protection) could be improved for gathering and relaxation.
- Existing features need an update, and a greater quantity of amenities is desired, including improving the playground and adding a splashpad.
- The playground surfacing should be updated to a rubberized surface for better safety, aesthetics and cleanliness.
- There is need for increased lighting and visibility from various viewpoints (i.e. on pathways or from adjacent streets).
- The fountain should be repaired and maintained or removed. Without the fountain, some felt the paved area could be better utilized for informal exercise, shade or gathering.
- Overall park cleanliness could be improved, as irresponsible dog owners do not clean up after their pets.
- The open greenspace is a positive feature that should be kept as is.
- The existing pollinator garden is much appreciated, but located in an area of the open greenspace that conflicts with free play such as tag, tobogganing and field sports.

What do you like about Blue Willow Square today?

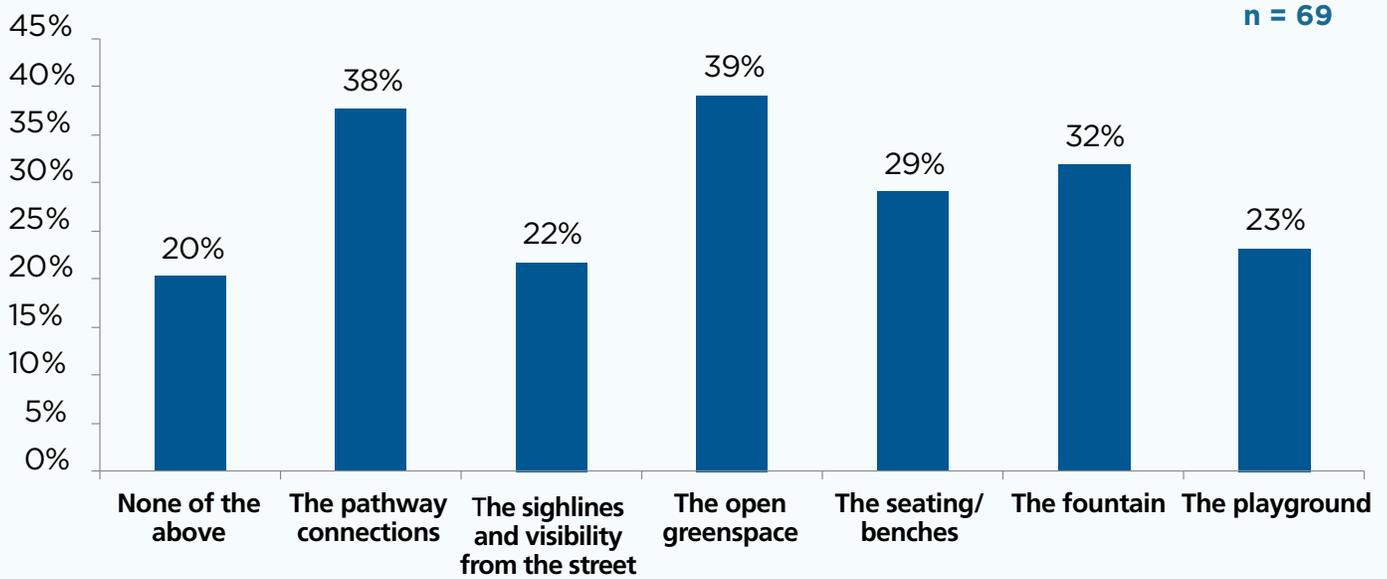


Figure 18: Survey responses to “What do you like about Blue Willow Square today?”

In addition to reporting on how they currently use and enjoy Blue Willow Square, survey respondents were asked how they travel to the park. The vast majority (86 per cent) of park users reported walking to Blue Willow Square, followed by cycling (25 per cent) and driving (18 per cent). Others reported using skateboards, scooters or rollerblades (five per cent) or electric scooters/bicycles (four per cent). These results indicate the majority of survey respondents live within walking distance of the park.

How do you currently travel to Blue Willow Square?

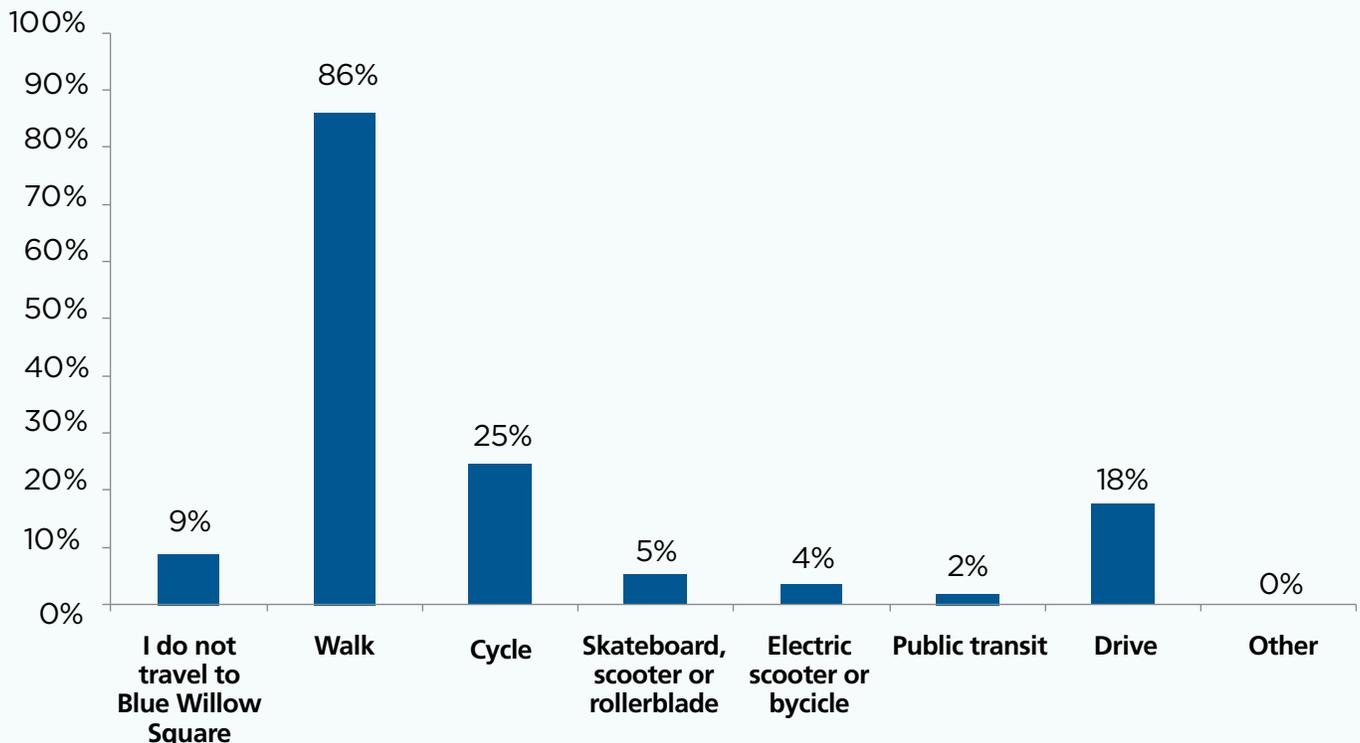


Figure 19: Survey responses to “How do you currently travel to Blue Willow Square?”

Park enhancement options

The primary purpose of the Open House and online survey was to collect the community's feedback on which of the five proposed park enhancement options would most benefit their neighbourhood. These options were chosen based on a review of amenities within nearby parks, feasibility given the size and geography of the site and the available budget.

The five enhancement options proposed were:

- **Option A:** Shade structure
- **Option B:** Pollinator garden and naturalized planting
- **Option C:** Central area upgrades
- **Option D:** Playground enhancement
- **Option E:** Outdoor fitness area

For each enhancement option, participants were provided a brief description and shown example photos that highlighted different aesthetics, features, designs and uses (Figures 20 to 24). Using this information, participants were invited to provide feedback on what they liked and disliked, concerns and suggestions. After reviewing and commenting on each option, participants were asked to rank each option from most to least preferred.



Option A: Shade structure

A shade structure was proposed to create an area for park patrons that would promote socialization and provide a safe area to rest and seek shade. The images demonstrated the many shapes, sizes, colours and materials available for a shade structure (Figure 20).

Summary of community feedback:

- **Weather protection:** Many participants desired a shade structure that offers protection against rain, sun, wind and snow. They liked the idea of utilizing the shade structure year-round. One resident noted that steel umbrellas, as shown in one of the sample images, are not preferred as they do not provide enough shade.
- **Requested features:** Many participants requested covered seating (underneath a structure or trees), picnic tables, solar lights and waste bins. Participants further explained this would promote a space for passive activities, such as picnics, talking and relaxing.
- **Shade structure size:** Participant feedback was split between those who preferred a single, large shade structure or multiple, small shade structures. It was noted by a few residents that multiple, structures would allow many groups of residents to utilize the area at the same time, whereas others noted that one large shade structure would be beneficial for larger groups.
- **Structure type:** Participants provided feedback on the types of shade structures they prefer using the sample photos provided. Participants referenced the enclosed gazebo, semi-transparent roof and metal roof options as the types of shade structures they would like to use.
- **Gathering:** Participants liked the idea of having a shade structure for gathering and socialization. However, some participants raised concerns that a shade structure might encourage people to socialize in the park at night, which may result in unwanted noise and vandalism.
- **Aesthetics:** Participants noted that the shade structure should serve as a strong focal point in the square, noting the importance of quality materials and having a themed look (traditional or modern) that is appropriate for the context of the park and surrounding neighbourhood.
- **Accessibility:** Some participants stressed the importance of accessible design, suggesting the shade structure be accessible via a ramp instead of stairs.



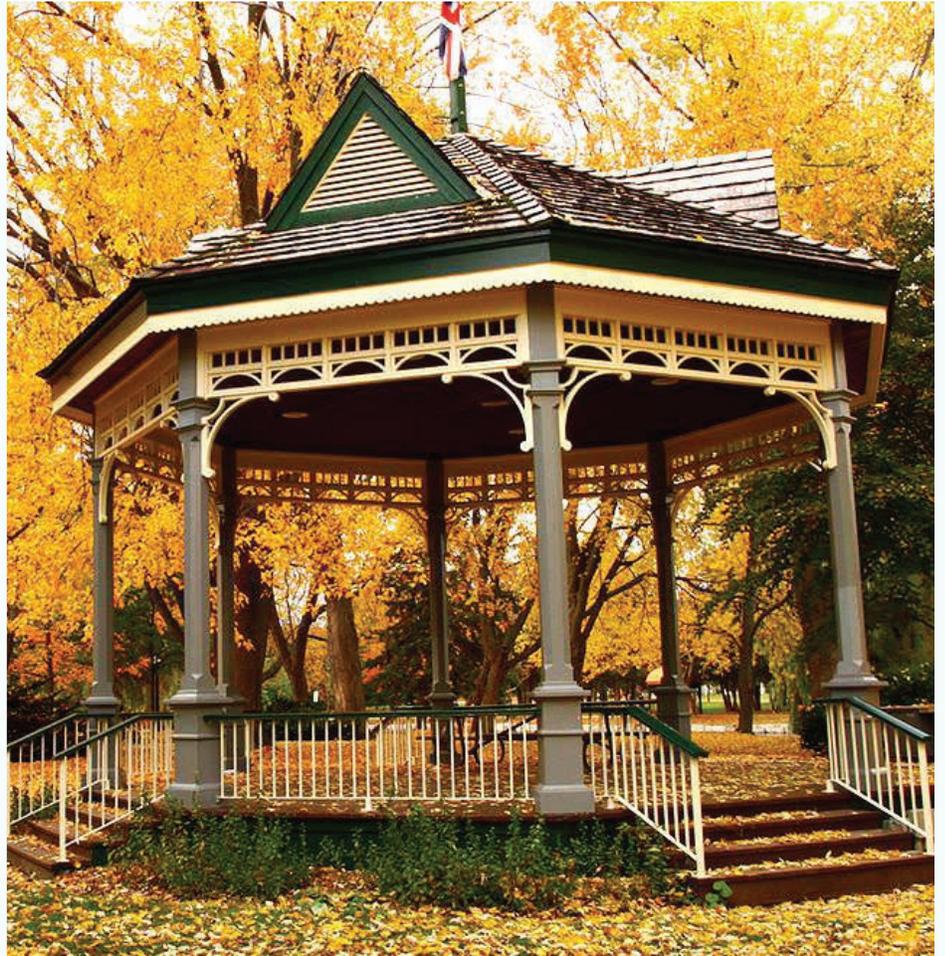


Figure 20: Shade structure precedent images

Option B: Pollinator garden and naturalized planting

A pollinator garden and naturalized plantings were proposed to benefit people, animals and insects living in the neighbourhood. The garden and plantings would provide food and shelter to birds, bees, butterflies and various other wildlife while also providing an aesthetically pleasing feature for park patrons.

Summary of community feedback:

- **Environmental benefits:** Many participants provided positive feedback on the environmental benefits this option provides, including attracting pollinator insects and other wildlife. However, some participants were concerned that attracting certain animals and insects – such as bees, mosquitos and rodents – may negatively impact park users (e.g. those with allergies).
- **Operations and maintenance:** Many participants were concerned with the potential cost, time and effort needed to maintain planted areas and preferred those resources be used elsewhere.
- **Educational opportunities:** Participants appreciated the educational opportunities associated with this option, including teaching park users about various plant and animal species. It was also recommended to add educational signage for park users.
- **Aesthetics:** Participants noted this option would be visually pleasing and create a more 'neighbourly' experience.
- **Design suggestions:** Participants suggested including a fence around the new planting to avoid damage from park users and their pets.
- **Community-building potential:** Participants pointed to the potential to involve the community in a planting program to help build a garden.
- **Planting location:** Participants commented on the potential location of the garden, noting a preference for plantings to be installed along the pathways.





Figure 21: Pollinator garden and naturalized planting precedent images

Option C: Central area upgrades

Upgrades to the central area, where the fountain currently exists, were proposed to revitalize the space and create an improved sense of place. These upgrades could include art pieces, sculptures or various seating options.

Summary of community feedback:

- **Design features:** Participants noted multiple design features that would improve user experience, such as shaded seating, gathering spots and chess tables. Also noted were features participants felt would not benefit park users, such as outdoor art or sculptures, new hardscape areas and seatwalls with planters.
- **Seating type:** Many participants noted their support for certain types of seating, as shown in Figure 22, such as the S-shaped bench and seating with back support. Participants also mentioned a preference for wood instead of steel, as well as grouped seating rather than isolated benches to better promote socialization and gathering.
- **Existing onsite fountain:** Feedback was split between those who appreciate the fountain as a central feature and would like to see it repaired and maintained, and those who would like to see it removed.
- **Aesthetics:** Participants indicated any proposed features should be visually appealing, modern looking, colourful and unique yet functional to help create a more vibrant community space.





Figure 22: Central area updates precedent images

Option D: Playground enhancement

An enhanced playground was proposed to offer new types of play to children of various age groups and complement the existing playground in the park. Playground enhancement would provide an inclusive experience through elements that promote active, passive, educational and co-operative play styles.

Summary of community feedback:

- **Accessibility requirements:** Participants recommended playground equipment that supports a variety of ages and abilities, with the potential for separate playgrounds for different age groups. Having a playground with accessible entry points and equipment for various levels of mobility was also recommended.
- **Design features and play surface:** Participants were excited about playground features such as nature play, unstructured free play, splash pads, climbing structures, slides, rock hop, spider web-like rope structures, dinosaur rocks and fossil discovery. Many participants indicated a strong preference for a rubberized play surface rather than sand or engineered wood fibre, as they felt rubber was cleaner, safer and better-looking.
- **Types of play:** Participants noted the playground should be thematic and include a sensory area with various types of play.
- **Social interaction:** Participants were enthusiastic about playground features which would enable kids to be active, foster a strong social connection and enhance community building.
- **Playground size:** Participants noted the current playground is too small and were supportive of a larger structure.





Figure 23: Playground enhancement precedent images

Option E: Outdoor fitness area

A stationary outdoor fitness area was proposed to provide a free and alternative form of exercise. Fitness equipment could include a chest press, pull-up bars, calisthenic bars and more.

Summary of community feedback:

- **Equipment placement:** Participants suggested placing the fitness equipment throughout the park rather than placing it in one centralized location to avoid large groups congregating and not sharing the equipment. Other participants felt existing hardscape spaces could be utilized (e.g. the central area next to the fountain), which would help maintain the open greenspace. Participants also noted that parents could use the equipment while their kids used the playground.
- **Equipment type:** Participants recommended fitness equipment such as callisthenic bars, a dip station, pull-up bars, rubber flooring and hills for walking.
- **Health and wellness:** Participants noted the need for outdoor fitness equipment to promote good health and encourage physical activity, while also benefiting from the equipment being free to use.
- **Safety:** Participants were concerned the fitness equipment would not be safe for children and suggest the equipment be accessible for all ages. Some participants were also concerned the equipment would become dirty and unusable.



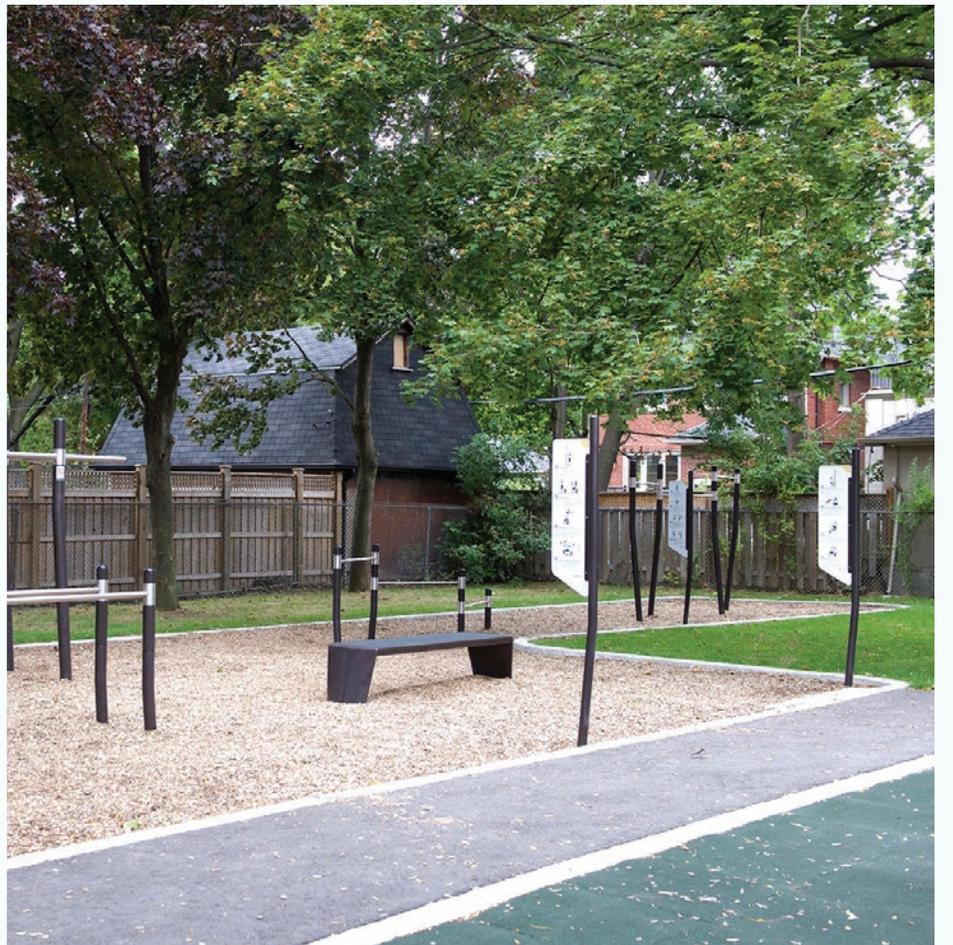


Figure 24: Outdoor fitness area precedent images

Preferred park enhancement option

After reviewing and commenting on each enhancement option, Open House and survey participants were asked to rank each option from most to least preferred. At the Open House, attendees were provided coloured and numbered stickers and asked to vote on their first, second and third choices (Figure 25). In the survey, respondents were asked to rank each option with the numbers one through five, where one represented most preferred and five was least preferred. Given this slight discrepancy in methodology, the findings below represent feedback from 85 respondents (online and in person) for the three top-ranked options and 60 respondents (online only) for the last two ranked options. The data has also been weighted, so the most preferred option has the highest score, and the least preferred has the lowest (Figure 26).

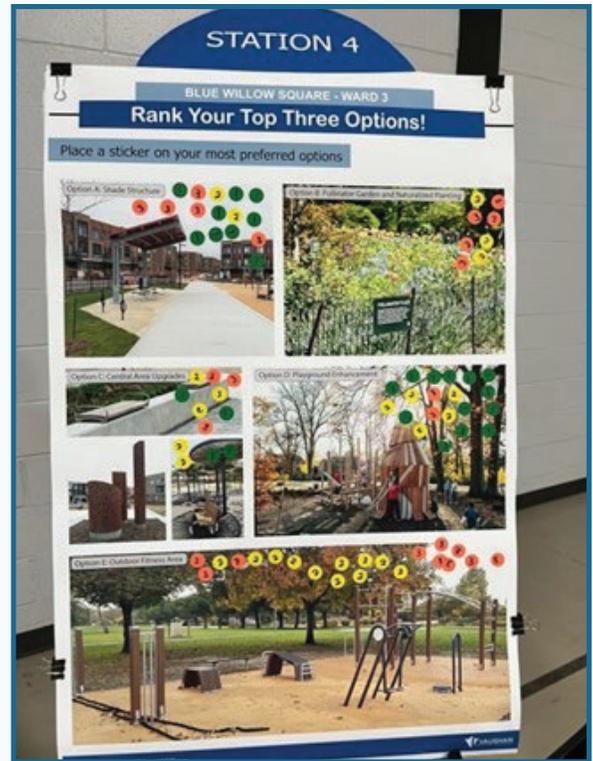


Figure 25: Park enhancement options panel with stickers ranking each option.

The playground enhancement option received the highest score (4.7), followed by the shade structure in second place (3.7). The remaining three options were closely ranked in the following order from third place to fifth: outdoor fitness area (2.9), central area upgrades (2.7) and pollinator garden and naturalized planting (2.4).



Which park enhancement options do you feel would most benefit your community?

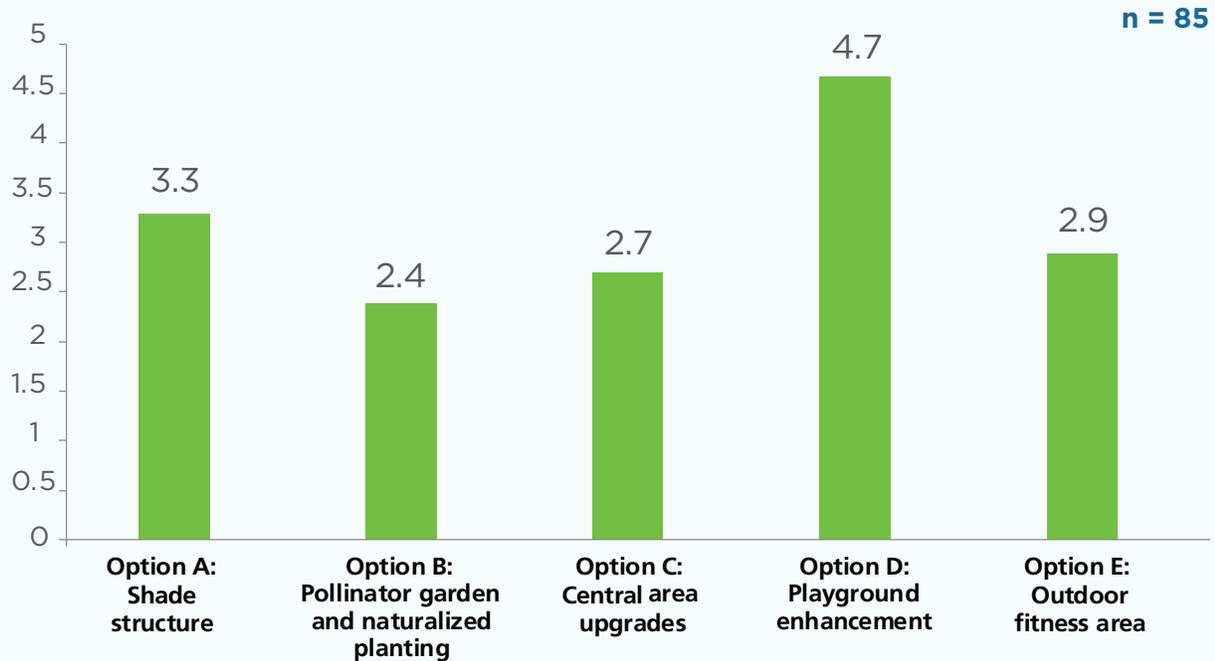


Figure 26: Weighted scores for each park enhancement option.

Open Greenspace

Currently, a large portion of Blue Willow Square is open greenspace that provides flexible space for various activities like tag, informal sports, gathering, exercise and picnics. Participants were asked whether they would like to activate a portion of this greenspace – with enhancements like a yoga deck, gathering circle, table tennis or chess table – or keep the greenspace as is.





Figure 27: Options for activating the greenspace

What would you prefer – keep the open greenspace as is or activate a portion of the greenspace with enhancements?

Most (70 per cent) of the respondents indicated they would like to activate a portion of the greenspace with park enhancements, while only 30 per cent wanted to keep it as is.

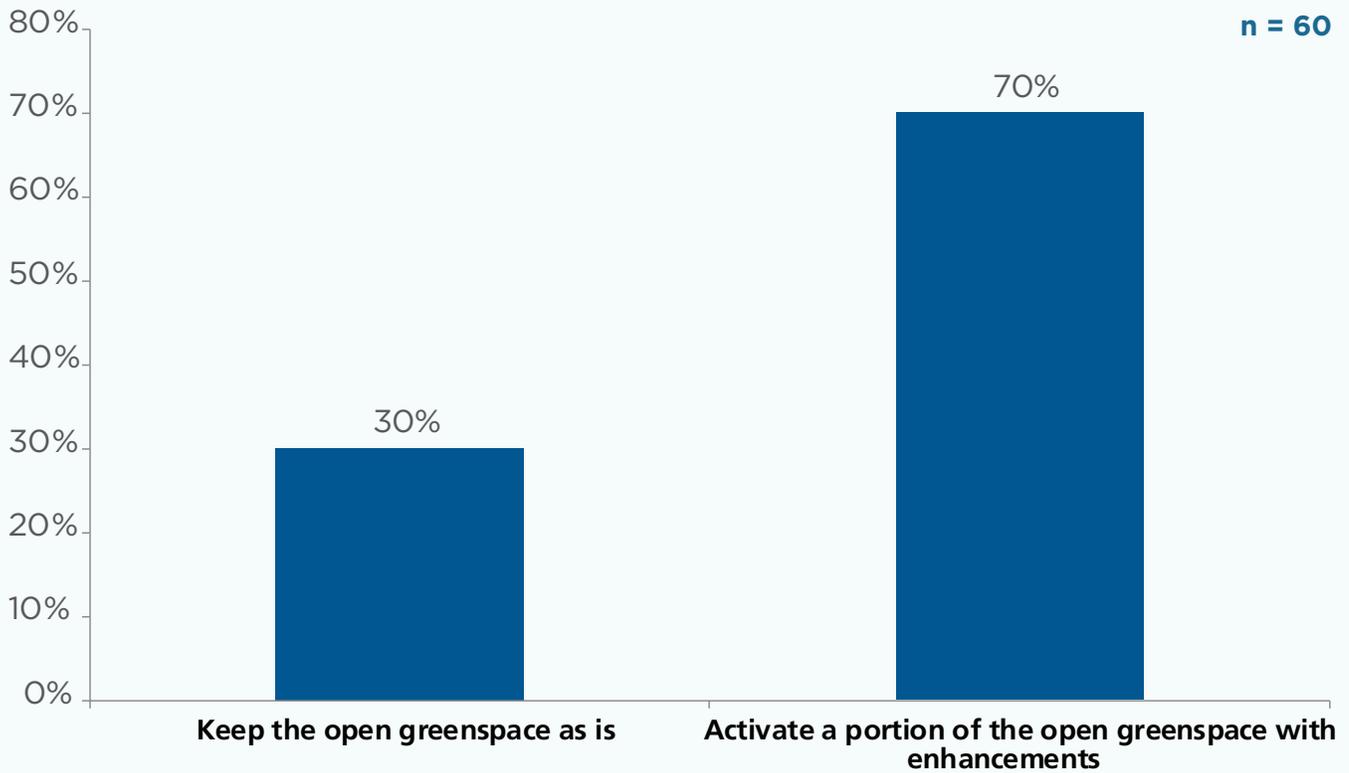


Figure 28: Survey responses to “Would you like to activate a portion of the open greenspace or leave it as is?”



If you would like to activate the open greenspace, what enhancements would you like to see there?

When asked how they would like to activate the greenspace, almost half (48 per cent) of respondents voted for amenities that support lounging and relaxation. This was followed by a tie between table tennis or a chess table (37 per cent each), a gathering circle (20 per cent) and yoga deck (17 per cent). Participants provided additional ideas as well, including a splash pad, soccer field, off-leash dog area, pickleball court, running track, disc golf, jumbo Connect-4 game and additional trees.

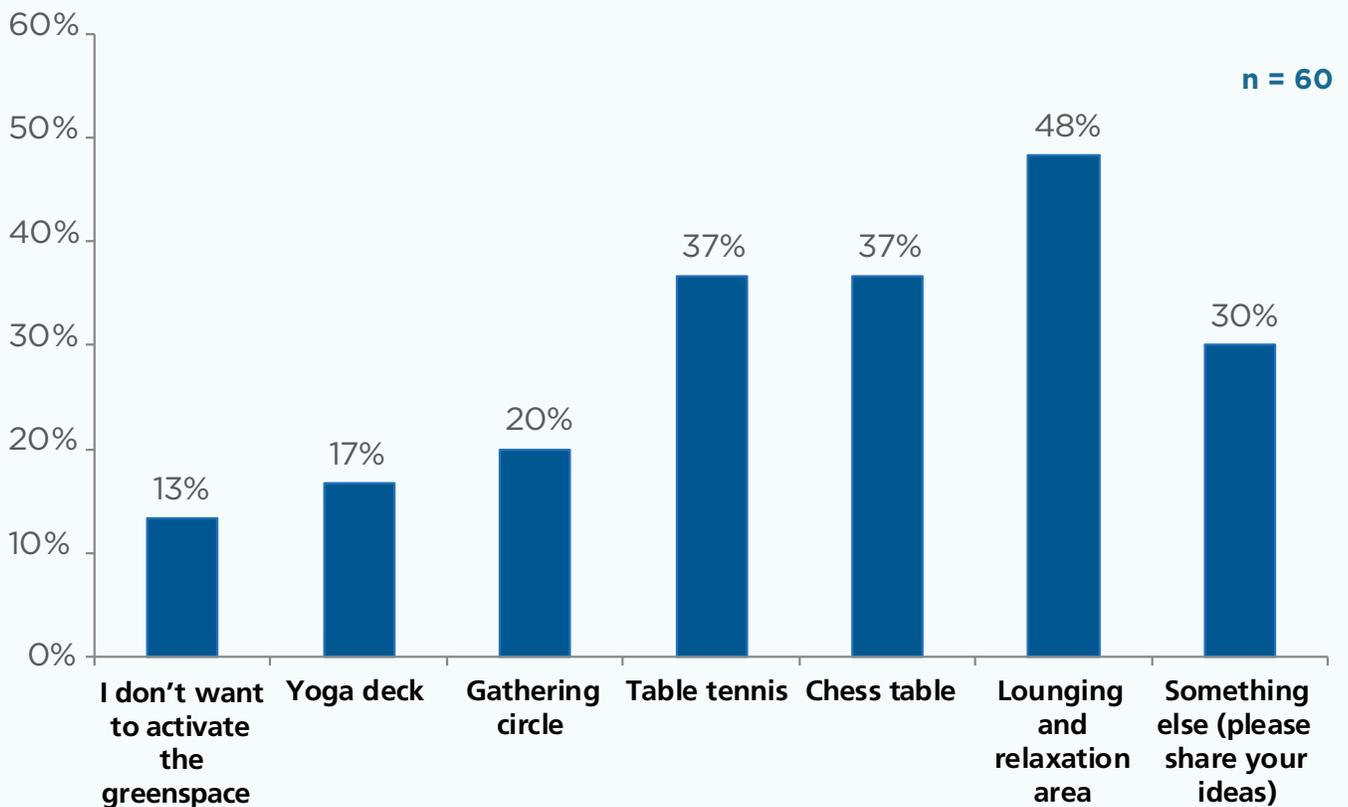


Figure 29: Survey responses to “If you would like to activate the open greenspace, what enhancements would you like to see there?”



NEXT STEPS

Thank you to all who provided thoughtful suggestions and feedback!

The Open House and survey demonstrated community support for the proposed playground enhancement option, with many expressing excitement for a larger space where kids of all ages can play and be active. The community also communicated a clear need for more areas to sit and gather in Blue Willow Square. This was expressed through support for a shade structure, as well as interest in activating a portion of the greenspace with areas for lounging and relaxation or games tables like chess and table tennis.

This feedback will be incorporated into the City's review and recommendations for which park enhancements can be implemented in Blue Willow Square, alongside considerations of feasibility, timing and available funding.

For future updates on this project, please visit vaughan.ca/BlueWillow.





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