



Vaughan Greenspace Strategic Plan

Phase 2 What We Heard Report
July 2024

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About the Project

Project Background

The City of Vaughan is preparing a Greenspace Strategic Plan (GSP) that will set out a vision for the future of Vaughan's parks and greenspaces, guiding the expansion, development, and operations of Vaughan's parks system as the city grows.

Phase two of engagement, which took place in May and June of 2024, provided an opportunity for Council, key stakeholders, and members of the public to review initial direction for the GSP and provide their feedback on how to measure, acquire, fund and plan for parks and greenspaces in Vaughan.





PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Purpose of Engagement

The aim of the Greenspace Strategic Plan (GSP) engagement is to develop a shared vision for the future of greenspace within the City of Vaughan by listening and learning about what matters and how greenspace is used. The inputs and insights generated through engagement with members of the public and key stakeholders will be essential in the development of the GSP to ensure the principles, policies and recommendations reflect the lives of Vaughan's residents.

Engagement Principles

All engagement aimed to be:

- **Inclusive:** By creating a welcoming space for conversation that respects the diverse lived experiences of all participants.
- **Accessible:** By making it easy to participate and access information, by considering diverse abilities, learning styles, and amount of time required.
- **Meaningful:** By providing opportunities for participants to share ideas and concerns openly and authentically.
- **Transparent:** By providing clear information about the process, how decisions are made, and reporting back on what we heard.
- **Adaptive:** By being flexible to respond and adapt to the changing needs of participants over the course of the project.

Overall Engagement Goals

The engagement process for the GSP provides opportunities for participants to provide meaningful, appropriate, and actionable input that will be used to develop the plan.

The goal of public engagement on the project is to:

- Ensure broad awareness of the project.
- Make all relevant information about the process readily available to key stakeholders.
- Gather meaningful input from a wide range of interests, areas, and partnerships.
- Authentically incorporate input into the creation of the GSP.
- Ensure all engagement reporting is clear, concise, transparent, and reflects both qualitative and quantitative information.

Measures of Success

Engagement will be considered successful when:

- Project awareness has increased and participants feel well-informed about the process.
- The public and key stakeholders had a range of diverse opportunities to contribute.
- Council, key stakeholders, and the community are active participants throughout the process.
- The project team is able to demonstrate how public input has been considered to inform the development of the strategies and recommendations in the plan.
- The satisfaction response increases in the citizen satisfaction survey.

Timeline

Phase 1 (Fall 2023)

Where We Are and Where We Need to Go

Phase 1 engaged Vaughan residents and key stakeholders to raise awareness about the GSP, assess how greenspaces are currently used and valued, and identify satisfaction levels, challenges, and opportunities.

Phase 2 (Spring 2024)

How We Are Going to Get There

Phase 2 identified residents' and key stakeholders' preferences and priorities for greenspace location, function and amenities within Vaughan's growing and changing environment. The results of this phase of engagement will inform the development of a framework for guiding greenspace acquisition and enhancement.

Phase 3 (Fall 2024)

Confirming the Plan

Phase 3 will share and validate elements of the draft GSP with residents and key stakeholders. This phase will gather feedback from Vaughan residents on proposed greenspace policies, guidelines and strategies and identify potential gaps or changes in the plan to ensure alignment with community needs and preferences.







Phase 4 (Winter 2025)

Celebrating the Plan






The final phase of the project will conclude the engagement process, share and celebrate the approved GSP with Vaughan residents and key stakeholders.

How We Engaged

The section below describes the engagement, communications, and outreach tactics leveraged for Phase 2 of the GSP.

Format	Description	By the Numbers
 Online Survey	<p>An online survey asked community members to share their preferences and priorities for parks and greenspaces.</p> <p>An abbreviated version of the survey was used at a “Concert in the Park” event on June 12, 2024 and was completed in-person with attendees.</p>	<p>389 survey responses (359 online surveys, 30 abbreviated surveys)</p>
 Open Houses	<p>Two open house events invited members of the public to provide feedback on emerging directions for the GSP and share their interests and priorities for future greenspace expansion.</p>	<p>22 attendees</p>
 Park Forum	<p>An online Park Forum was held on May 30, 2024 that brought together three park professionals for a public discussion on park advocacy, research, design and management and explored park trends across North America.</p>	<p>34 attendees</p>
 Stakeholder Advisory Group Meetings	<p>Three Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) meetings were held. The SAG was formed at the end of Phase 1 and is composed of volunteer community members, representatives of local organizations and special interest groups.</p>	<p>18 community members and 2 key stakeholders were selected to participate</p> <p>3 meetings in Phase 2</p>
 Youth Engagement	<p>The City invited high school students to participate in a workbook and poster activity.</p>	<p>8 schools engaged</p> <p>160 completed workbooks</p> <p>126 park posters</p>
 Concert in the Park	<p>An information booth to promote and engage on the project was held at the June 12, 2024 Concert in the Park (Vaughan Metropolitan Centre). An abbreviated version of the online survey was used to gather feedback from attendees.</p>	<p>30 abbreviated surveys completed</p>

Communications & Outreach Tactics

Format	Description	By the Numbers
 Project Webpage	The online hub for all project information and engagement opportunities (vaughan.ca/GreenspacePlan)	
 Project Updates	The City of Vaughan provided updates about the GSP and opportunities for the public to get involved and share feedback through various e-newsletters.	1 PSA, 1 Vaughan News email (~24,000 subscribers), 2 Vaughan engagement eNewsletters (~2,500 subscribers), 4 Council packages
 Promotional Signage	Digital and mobile signs were displayed across Vaughan to raise awareness about the project and its engagement opportunities.	6 mobile signs, 3 cube pod signs
 Social Media Campaign	Social media posts were used to raise awareness about the project on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.	24 social media posts
 Storymap	A “storymap,” created on the ArcGIS StoryMap platform, was created to communicate information about the GSP and to act as a hub for information about the project throughout the remaining phases.	

Who We Engaged

The City values the voice of Vaughan's diverse community and is committed to engaging residents and key stakeholders in decisions that interest or impact them. The following groups were invited to provide feedback in Phase 2 of GSP engagement, sharing their perspectives on greenspace typologies, supply, acquisition, and partnerships.

General Public

Vaughan residents were invited to participate in engagement opportunities throughout Phase 2. These opportunities were structured to provide multiple avenues for participation that met residents' diverse interests and abilities, learning styles, and availability to participate.



High School Students

High school students were invited to participate in a workbook activity to help shape the future of Vaughan's greenspaces. A workbook activity and poster design activity was developed in Phase 1 to gather opinions from students which were returned to the project team in Phase 2.



Indigenous Partners

Recognizing the importance of reconciliation and Indigenous engagement, the Vaughan GSP sought to share project information with Indigenous partners. Further engagement and consultation will be held with Indigenous partners in the following stages of the project.



Key stakeholders and Community Groups

Throughout the project, the City of Vaughan has engaged a wide range of key stakeholders and community groups to ensure diverse voices are represented. These efforts include reaching out to equity-deserving groups, youth, seniors and other stakeholders to provide opportunities for participation and input. By informing and involving these groups, the City aims to foster inclusive and equitable planning outcomes that reflect the needs and aspirations of the entire community.

Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG)

A Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) was established at the end of Phase 1 of the project to provide a platform for residents and key stakeholders to stay informed, review project materials, and offer feedback to the Project Team throughout the process. Community representatives on the SAG were selected through a civic lottery, which ensured the group reflected the demographics of Vaughan, considering factors such as age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, and spoken language. This random selection process helped create a diverse group that mirrors the community's makeup.

The SAG's role is to:

- Offer advice to the project team, drawing on members' unique perspectives, insights, and experiences to shape the Greenspace Strategic Plan.
- Review all materials provided by the project team and submit comments.
- Participate in discussions on broader strategic issues, such as challenges, opportunities, and possible solutions, rather than focusing on specific parks or activities.



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WHAT WE HEARD

Key Takeaways

Throughout Phase 2 public engagement the following themes emerged:

Greenspaces for all: Participants wish to see Vaughan's parks and greenspaces serve as spaces for all residents. This includes placing considerations for youth, older adults, people with disabilities and more at the forefront of greenspace planning and design. In addition, participants mention changing trends and preferences for park use, suggesting that parks should be flexible, adaptable and multi-functional to maximize different types of use year round.

Emphasize the “green” in greenspace: Throughout engagement, participants emphasize the significance of Vaughan's natural spaces. While some identify concepts like tree canopy cover, gardens, and greenery as important, others specify the role that natural spaces provide in supporting well-being, providing wildlife habitat features, and mitigating against the impacts of climate change.

Keep it local: Participants identified which park amenities are important to have closest to home and which are acceptable to travel a short distance to access, with amenities like playgrounds and passive spaces identified as important to be within walking distance. Furthermore, open house participants indicated that, especially in more urban or densely populated areas of the City, it's important to have local access to spaces like dog parks, social spaces and tree canopy. Participants recognize space constraints, suggesting that smaller, local parks and greenspaces in these settings are preferable to having to drive to access larger spaces.

Health benefits are key: Participants, especially youth, emphasized the role that parks and greenspaces play in their physical and mental health, as well as social connection with peers, friends, and family. The multitude of health benefits of greenspaces are well-recognized by Vaughan residents, who wish to see this theme highlighted more prominently in the vision statement for the Greenspace Strategic Plan.

Online Survey Findings

The online public survey asked participants to reflect on a series of questions across the following topic areas:

- GSP vision statement and goals
- Preferences for amenities closer to home (such as outdoor recreation areas and gathering areas)
- Access to greenspaces near employment areas
- Suitability for amenities (e.g., sports courts, trails, gathering spaces, etc.) in high-density or low-density areas

The responses to these survey questions will help to inform greenspace typologies, acquisition criteria and targets.

Who We Heard From

359 responses were collected on the online survey and 30 responses to an abbreviated version of the survey were collected at the June 12, 2024 Concert in the Park event.

Participants were invited to complete a series of optional demographics questions. The responses to these questions support the City in understanding how different user groups experience Vaughan’s greenspaces and to ensure that all user groups feel like they belong and can participate in activities that are meaningful to them.

389 survey responses collected between May 6 and June 14, 2024

Figure 1
Respondent Age

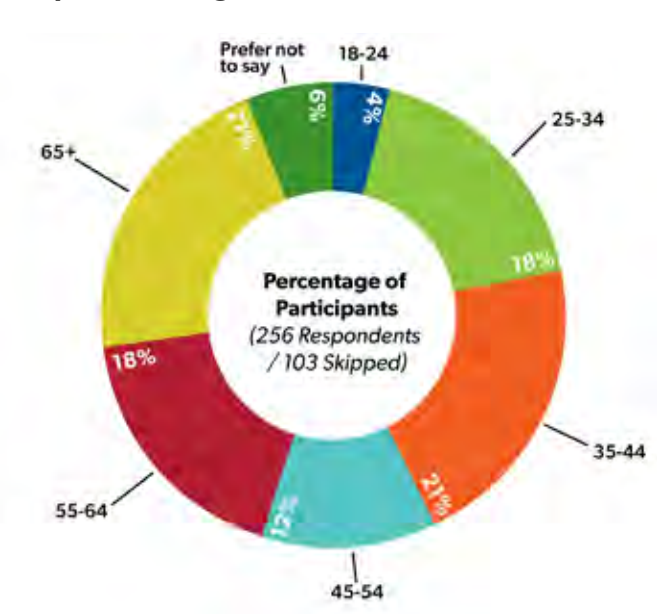


Figure 2
Respondent Gender

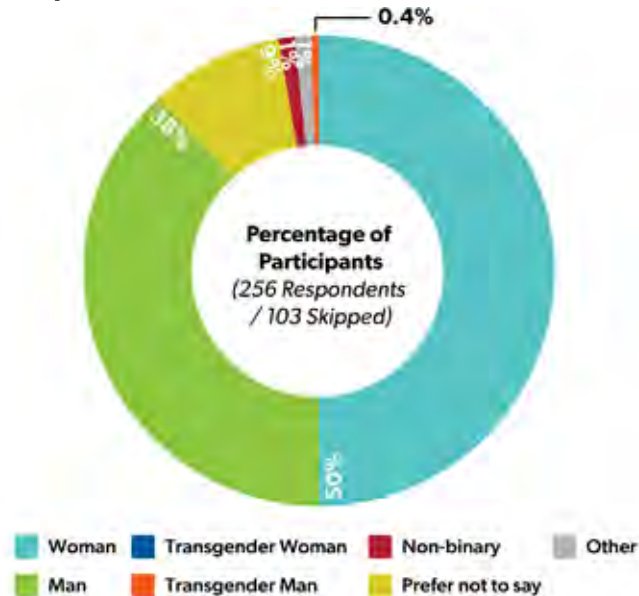
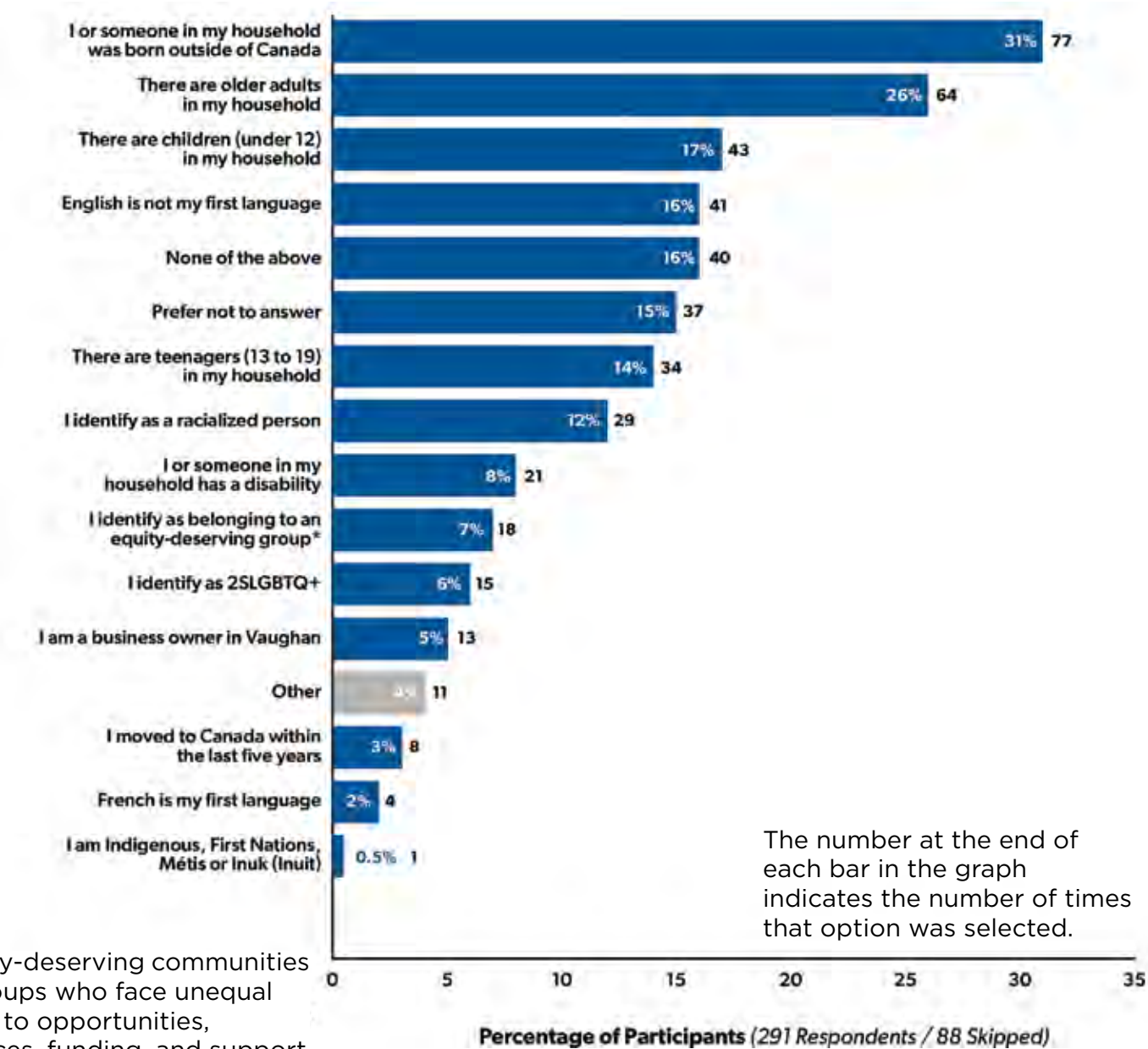


Figure 3

Respondent Identities

Participants were invited to report on demographic details about themselves and their households by selecting from the options below. This information allows the City of Vaughan to understand which demographic groups were engaged through the online survey and to ensure that outreach and communications tactics are effective in reaching and capturing feedback from equity-deserving community members.

The question was multiple choice, allowing participants to select more than one option.



*(equity-deserving communities are groups who face unequal access to opportunities, resources, funding, and support or who experience systemic discrimination and oppression)

Emerging Greenspace Vision and Goals

In Phase 1 of the project, through consultation with City of Vaughan staff, key stakeholders and members of the public, a draft vision statement and eight emerging goals were generated. Phase 2 of engagement presented this vision and set of goals to members of the public for validation and refinement.

Emerging Vision Statement

“Our greenspaces are an essential asset to the city that supports our economic prosperity, the celebration of culture, and the physical and mental health and well-being of our residents. We are responsible for our greenspace system to provide ecological habitats, support climate resilience and function as green infrastructure.”

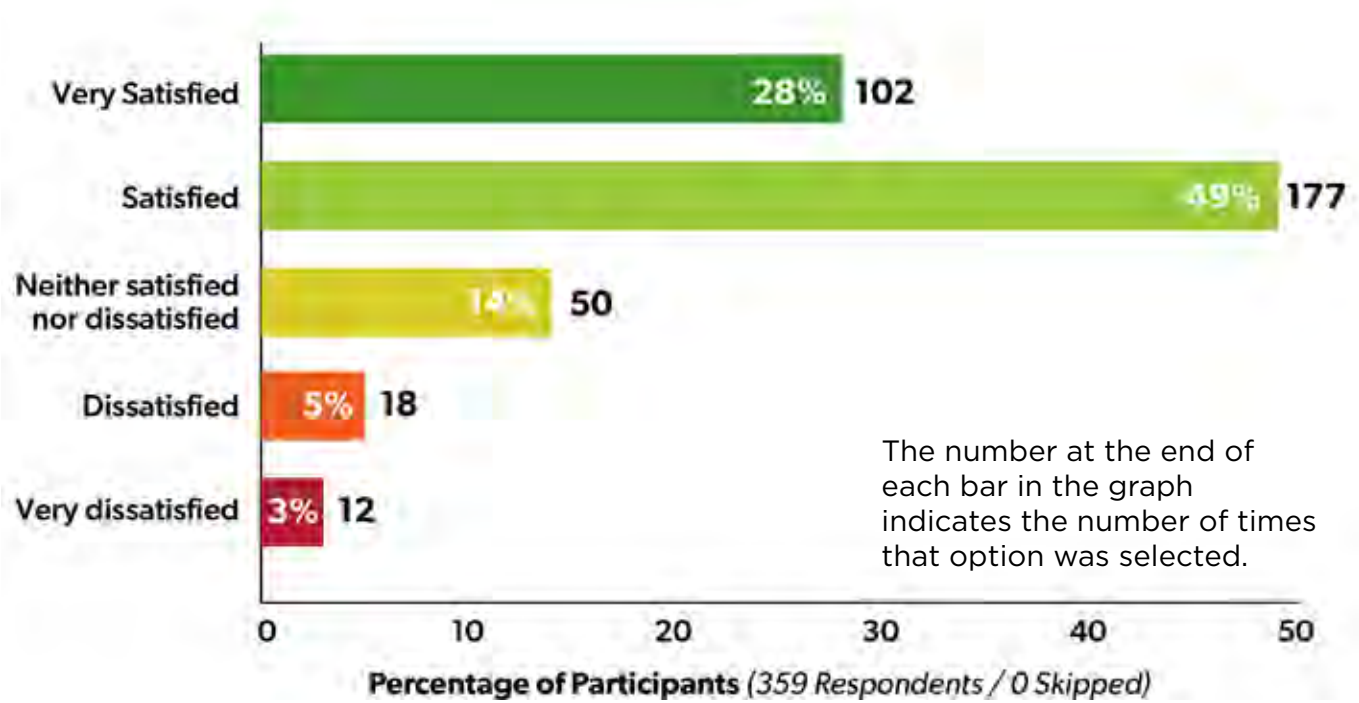
Through the online survey, participants were given the opportunity to review and refine the vision statement to ensure that it aligns with their preferences and aspirations for Vaughan’s greenspaces.



Satisfaction with Vision Statement

When asked how satisfied they are with the vision statement, 49% of participants indicated they were satisfied and 28% indicated they were very satisfied. 14% of participants reported they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and a combined 8% of participants indicated they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Figure 4
How satisfied are you with the proposed vision statement?



Comments on the Emerging Vision Statement

Participants were asked to provide feedback on the emerging vision statement and to share what they felt was missing from the statement, if anything. Participants offered suggestions for themes to include in the vision or highlighted existing themes that resonated with them, including:

Nature: Participants expressed a desire to see the vision statement speak to the importance of protecting and preserving greenspaces, providing habitat for wildlife, biodiversity and the role of greenspaces in mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Health and well-being: Participants appreciated that the vision statement identified the importance of greenspaces for promoting physical and mental health. Many of these comments emphasized that health and well-being should be highlighted earlier in the statement, before the theme of economic prosperity.

Community, belonging and inclusion: Participants spoke about the value of greenspaces in building community, a sense of belonging, and the importance of ensuring greenspaces are inclusive and accessible to all residents.

Emphasis: A number of comments specifically drew attention to the emphasis placed on “economic prosperity” in the first sentence of the vision and expressed a desire for other themes to be more prominently featured.



“There should be mention of **protecting existing and possible expansion** of green space as our population grows.”



“**Physical and mental health and well-being** of our residents should be earlier on in the definition.

Economic prosperity, although important, is not what I think of when I think of greenspace.”



“It could be better if the focus is more on the **environment, our physical and mental health and well-being**, instead on economic prosperity.”

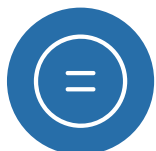
Emerging Greenspace Goals

Eight emerging goals for the GSP were shared with participants. These draft goals were designed to provide the City with direction and focus in achieving the vision for the GSP.



Greenspace Expansion

Open space and parkland continues to be secured to adequately meet the needs of a growing population while maintaining and protecting natural systems.



Equitable Access

Greenspaces are distributed based on equitable access to identified community needs.



Diverse Greenspace Experiences

A diversity of greenspace types, amenities and recreational opportunities are provided to meet the needs of a diverse community.



Celebrate Culture

Parks and greenspaces play a larger role in celebrating the past, present and future cultural landscape in Vaughan.



Increased Tree Canopy

Greenspaces contribute to achieving the City's tree canopy goals.



Adaptable Spaces

The function of parks and the amenities respond to the changing needs of the community while protecting and improving natural features and systems.



Climate Resilience

The City's greenspaces help contribute to our climate resilience goals.



Sustainable Funding

The acquisition, development, maintenance and lifecycle management is funded to meet the needs of residents.

Participants were asked to what extent they believed each goal would support the City in achieving its vision for the GSP and indicate their level of agreement for each.

Most of the emerging goals received support from 72% to 83% of participants, except for the *Celebrate Culture* goal, which only 55% of participants agreed or strongly agreed would help the City achieve the GSP vision.

In open-ended comments, participants highlighted the issues most important to them, most of which are captured in the emerging greenspace goals, except for park maintenance and cleanliness — emphasizing the importance of cleanliness, garbage collection and allocating funds and resources to maintain parks as a source of civic pride for Vaughan residents.

Emerging greenspace goals with the highest support:

1. Increased Tree Canopy: **83%**
2. Greenspace Expansion: **82%**
3. Climate Resilience: **79%**

Participants 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that these goals will support the City of Vaughan in achieving the vision for the GSP.

To what extent do you believe the goals will support the City in achieving the vision for the Greenspace Strategic Plan?



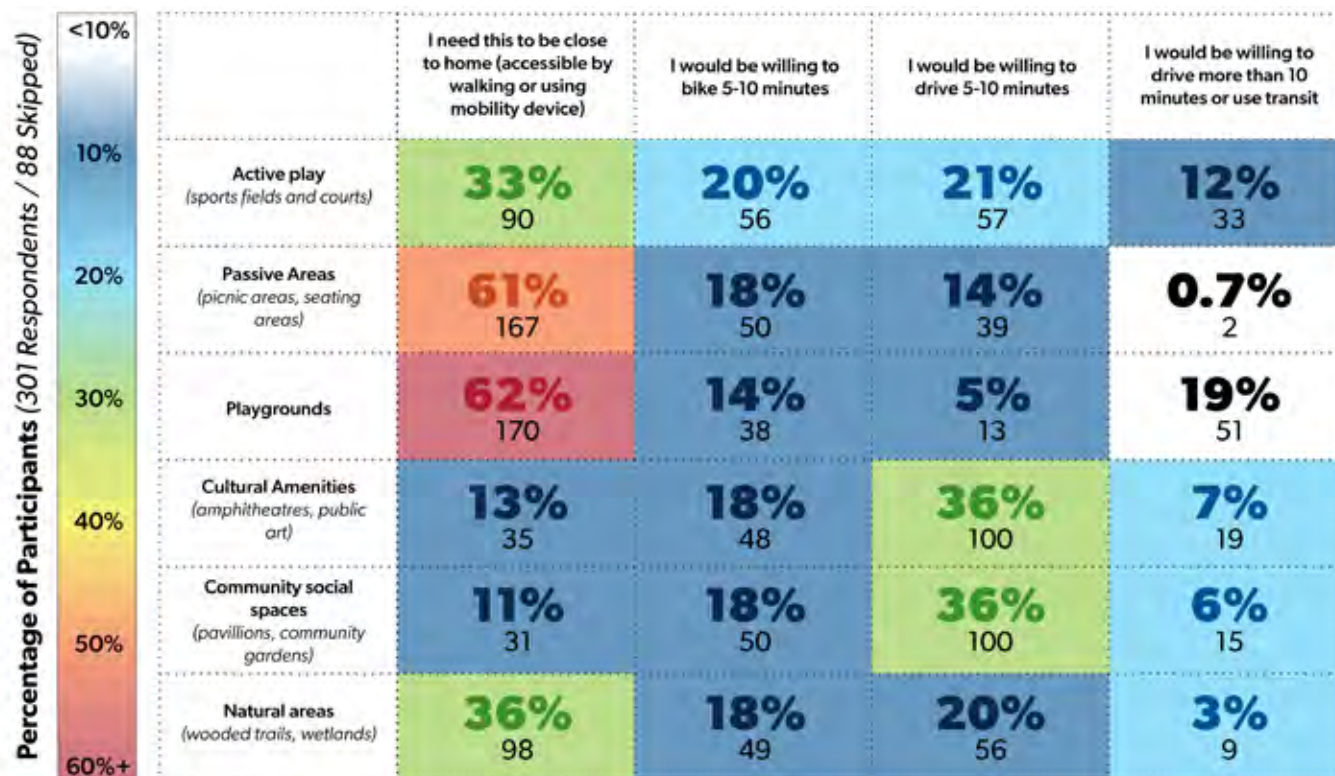
Preferences for Distance to Greenspace Amenities

Participants were asked how far they would be willing to travel from home to access a variety of different greenspace amenities. This question enables the project team to understand which amenities residents prefer to have close to home and accessible near residential areas, and which amenities residents would be willing to travel farther distances to access. This information can help inform decision making about where to locate new greenspace amenities and provision levels for different areas of the city whether by walking or via mobility devices (close to home), by bike (5-10 minutes cycling), short car ride (5-10 minutes driving), longer car ride (more than 10-minutes driving) or no preference.

Figure 6

For each of the six categories, please indicate whether the amenity should be provided close to home (accessible by walking or using a mobility device) or if you would consider cycling, driving or using transit to access it.

Select the most acceptable option for each category.



Cycling to greenspace amenities

Traveling by bike (5-10 minutes) was least preferred out of all the proposed modes of travel to access greenspaces; however, support was relatively evenly split between the various amenities with each amenity receiving around 15-20% support. Although low, the even distribution of support across the board suggests at least a willingness among some participants to choose cycling to access greenspaces, with potential room for growth. The open-ended comments support this sentiment with several participants requesting that the City invest in cycling infrastructure to improve access to parks.

Short drives to greenspace amenities

For greenspaces that participants would be willing to drive 5-10 minutes to access, cultural amenities such as farmers markets and community gardens, and community social spaces such as event pavilions and picnic areas were most preferred. Similarly, these amenities were most frequently identified as those that participants would be willing to drive more than 10 minutes or use public transit to access. This result suggests that there are some greenspace amenities that may be considered “destination amenities” which are important to people (i.e., they are willing to travel longer distances to access), yet do not necessarily need to be located close to home in every neighbourhood.

Accessing natural areas

Natural forested areas are another amenity that participants indicated they would be willing to drive more than 10 minutes or take transit to access. Natural areas also scored relatively high as an amenity that participants said they need to have close to home. This suggests that while natural areas that serve as destinations (e.g., North Maple Regional Park) are essential places for connection to nature and outdoor recreation, residents are simultaneously looking for more frequent opportunities to connect to nature closer to home. In open ended responses, many participants expressed their appreciation for Vaughan’s natural areas and that they wish to see these spaces protected from future urban development.



Ranking the Importance of Greenspaces Amenities

To support the results of the previous question, participants who selected “I need this amenity to be close to home” for any of the six amenity categories were then asked to rank the amenities by importance to have closest to home. This question was asked to encourage participants to prioritize amenities, rather than indicate that all amenities should be near home.

The results of this ranking support the finding that playgrounds and passive areas (e.g., picnic areas, seating areas) are the amenities that participants feel are most important to have close to home, followed by active play (e.g., sports fields and courts) and natural areas (e.g., wooded trails, wetlands).



Additional Insights on Greenspace Amenities

Participants were invited to provide additional information regarding their preferences for greenspace amenities and their distance from home. Many shared their favourite activities to do in greenspaces and the impact that greenspaces have in their daily lives.

In addition to sharing what they appreciate about their local greenspaces, many of the comments provide insight into the concerns and priorities of participants and include suggestions for ways to improve and enhance greenspaces in Vaughan, such as:

Maintenance: Participants emphasized the importance of maintenance, upkeep and cleanliness of greenspaces, citing the need for more garbage bins and improved trash collection.

Comfort: Participants offered suggestions for improving the comfort of greenspaces by increasing the number of benches and places to sit, enhancing shade through tree plantings and shelters, as well as increasing access to water fountains and public washrooms.

All ages: Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring greenspaces are accessible to residents of all ages by providing activities for youth and ensuring physical accessibility for older adults.

Paths and trails: Participants highlighted the need for improved connectivity from residential areas into greenspaces by enhancing multi-use paths and trails to increase park usage.

Amenities: Participants suggested new or enhanced amenities and activities they wished to see in their local parks. Several participants suggested more and/or larger farmer's markets to acknowledge the City's rich agricultural heritage. In addition, dog off-leash areas were requested, as well as winter amenities to support activities such as skating, tobogganing, and cross-country skiing.



"I just love Elder Mills. It is nice to walk around and see the birds and we have even spotted a beaver. It takes you to a relaxing state of mind. Please don't ever develop this area."



Greenspaces Preferences Near Employment Areas

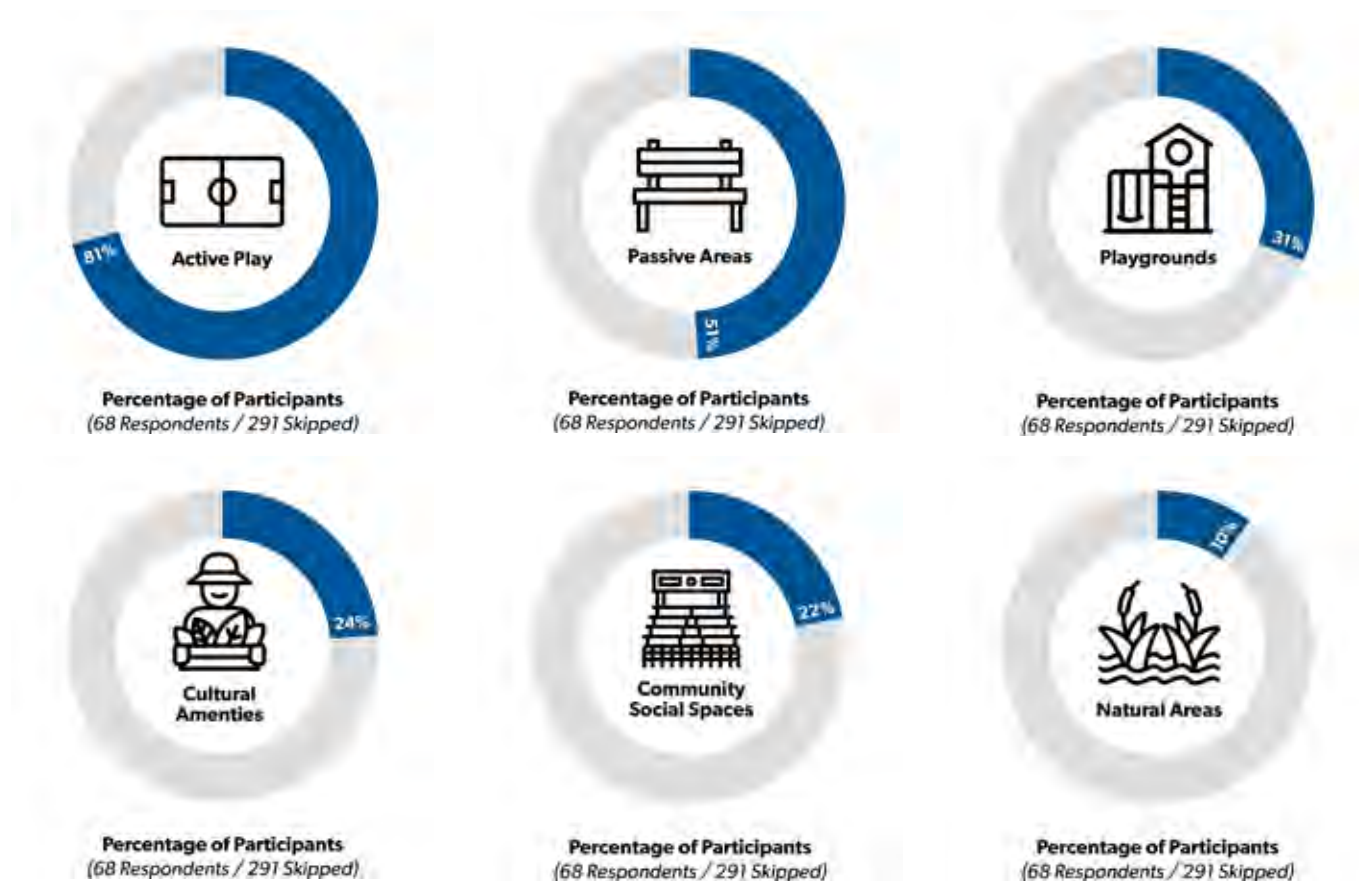
Participants employed in full-time or part-time work in the City of Vaughan were asked about their preferences for greenspace amenities near their workplaces.

Greenspace Amenities Preferred Near Employment Areas

When asked which of the following features and amenities are most important to have near their place of work, passive areas (for sitting, birdwatching, etc.) were identified as most preferred with 81% of participants selecting this option, followed by natural areas such as forests and meadows at 51% and cultural amenities such as farmers' markets and community gardens at 31%. Fewer responses were received for community social spaces (24%), active play areas (22%), and playgrounds (10%).

Figure 7

Which of the following are most important to have access to near your place of work?
Select your three most preferred options.



Greenspace Use Patterns and Preferences

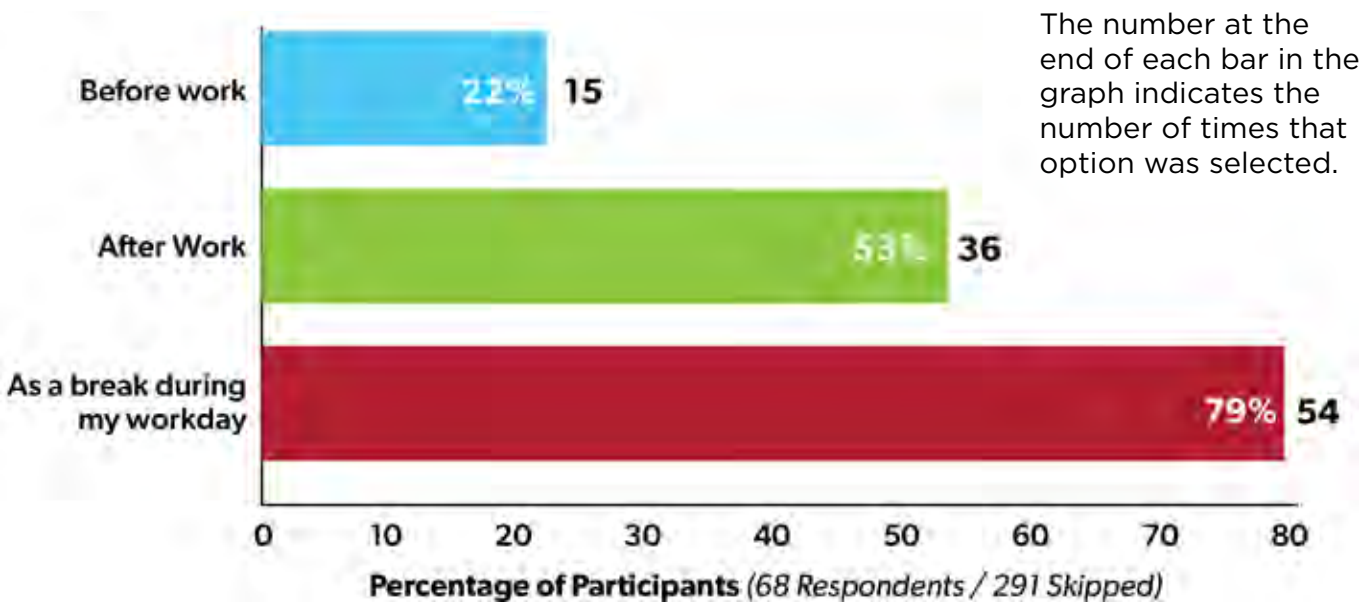
When asked how they would use parks or greenspaces near their places of work, the majority of participants (79%) indicated they would visit a greenspace as a break in their workday. 53% of participants indicated they would visit a greenspace after work, while only 22% said they would visit before work.

One respondent highlighted the therapeutic benefit of greenspaces for employees, noting that, **“work can be stressful and a nice walk in nature is refreshing and helps with mental and physical health.”**

Figure 8

If there were parks or greenspaces near your place of work, how would you use them? Select all that apply.

Temporal Considerations

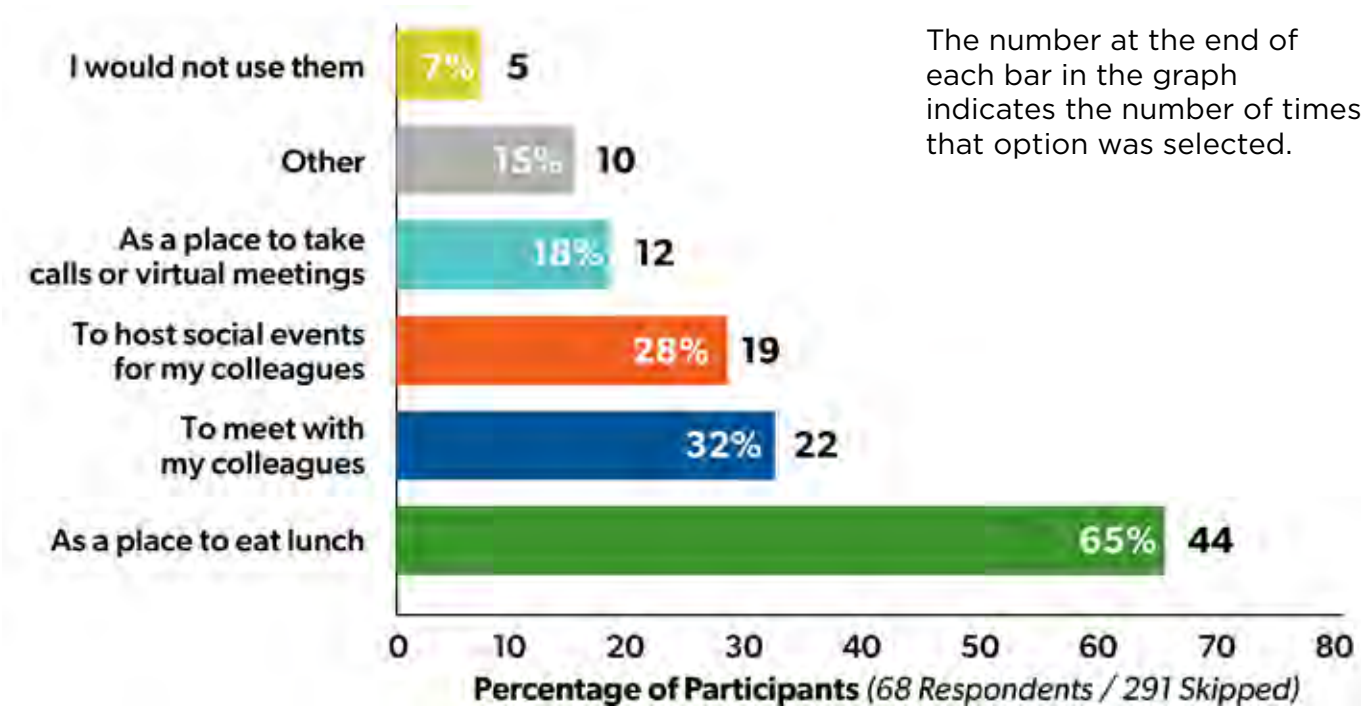


In terms of the activities that participants envision themselves doing in greenspaces near work, eating lunch (65%) was most frequently selected, followed by social activities such as meeting with colleagues (32%) or hosting social events for colleagues (28%). Nearly 18% of participants expressed interest in using parks and greenspaces as an alternative venue for work, taking calls and virtual meetings.

Figure 9

If there were parks or greenspaces near your place of work, how would you use them? Select all that apply.

Functional Considerations

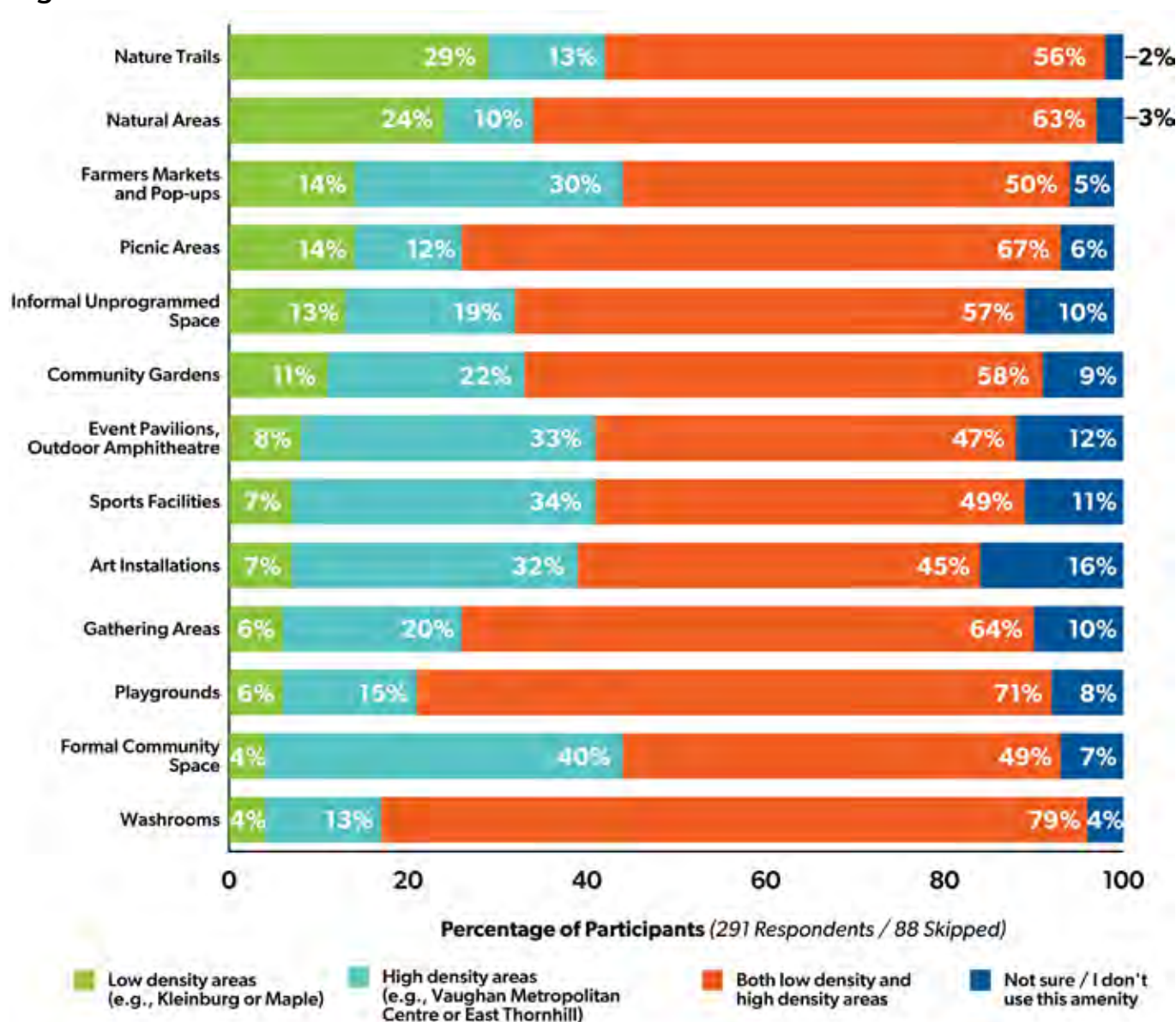


Relationship Between Greenspace Amenities and Density

Participants were asked which greenspace amenities are most suitable for low-density areas (e.g., Kleinberg or Maple) versus high-density areas (e.g., Vaughan Metropolitan Centre or East Thornhill), or both low-density and high-density areas.

In general, participants indicated that each of the amenities provided in the list are suitable for both high-density and low-density areas, rather than suitable for only one.

Figure 10



Washrooms received the most responses for “both,” with 79% of participants indicating that washrooms are suitable for both low-density and high-density areas. Playgrounds, picnic areas and gathering areas received a high number of responses for “both,” (71%, 67% and 64%, respectively), underscoring participants’ desire to see these amenities accessible in every part of the city, regardless of density.

On the other hand, art installations received the fewest responses for “both,” with only 45% of participants selecting this option. This may indicate that amenities like art installations (as well as event pavilions, outdoor amphitheatres, etc.) should be planned or designed for the context or location more than amenities like washrooms or playgrounds, which should be provided city-wide.

Support for access to amenities for all residents in Vaughan was a prominent theme in the open-ended comments that accompanied this question. Half of the comments included language indicating a desire for amenities to be available “across the city”, in “both low-density and high-density spaces,” and accessible for “every person.”



Natural areas received more responses indicating that they are an amenity suitable for low-density areas compared to high-density areas. 29% of participants selected nature trails as more suitable for low-density areas, compared to 13% who felt they were more suitable for high-density areas. Natural areas received similar response rates with 24% selecting it as an amenity for low-density areas compared to 10% who selected it as a high-density amenity.



“My initial response was to click natural areas as a low-density area, but I changed my response, as I think that, while much smaller, there are fantastic opportunities for nature areas in high density areas as well.”

Formal community spaces (e.g., plazas and squares) were selected as the most suitable for high-density urban areas (40%). Sports facilities, event pavilions, and outdoor amphitheaters, art installations, and farmers’ markets received a larger number of responses indicating they are amenities that people wish to see in high-density areas (34%, 33%, 32% and 30%, respectively).



Park Forum

On May 30th, 2024, the City of Vaughan hosted a virtual Park Forum titled, **What's Trending? New park typologies, creative placemaking and equitable and accessible programming that bring people together in parks.**

The Park Forum brought together park professionals with expertise in greenspace advocacy, design, operations, and management. The conversation explored how emerging trends in greenspace typologies, placemaking, and programming can support municipalities' goals of improving community health, increasing access and inclusion, and ensuring livable and sustainable public spaces amid urban growth.

The Park Forum panelists were:

- **Adri Stark**, Research & Data Strategist at Park People
- **Désirée Liu**, Project Manager & Senior Operations Analyst at ETM Associates
- **Amanda O'Rourke**, Executive Director at 8 80 Cities.

The Park Forum invited each panelist to share a short presentation highlighting their work and insights from the field, followed by a facilitated discussion and audience questions. Throughout the event, participants expressed interest in understanding elements about trends in parks and greenspaces that are particularly relevant to growing municipalities like Vaughan, including partnerships and sponsorship opportunities, ensuring accessible spaces for seniors and people with disabilities, and considerations for maintenance and operations.



Open Houses

This section describes what we heard from Vaughan residents at the two open houses held during Phase 2 of engagement on the GSP. The feedback received through in-depth conversations with community members provided additional context and nuance to the quantitative results of the public survey.

At the open houses, participants were invited to walk through a series of stations with information panels, speak to a member of the project team, and add their feedback directly on to the panels using sticky notes. Additionally, a mapping activity was provided, where participants could examine three maps representing Vaughan's current greenspace system, gaps in greenspace access, and projected population growth, and place a "pin" on the map to share their feedback.



Emerging Greenspace Vision and Goals

Open house participants were invited to review the emerging vision and goals for the Greenspace Strategic Plan. They were then given the opportunity to “vote” on the goals that they connect most with and share feedback on anything that might be missing.

Results of Voting Activity for Emerging Greenspace Goals

Participants resonated most with the goals that prioritize and emphasize natural spaces, increased tree canopy and greenspace expansion. Additionally, participants wish to see adaptable, healthy and safe spaces as a priority for Vaughan.

When asked what’s missing from the vision and goals, participants continued to express their preference for green and natural spaces, but also noted the importance of wildlife habitats and corridors, canopy cover, and access to nature. Connectivity, for both humans (i.e., bike paths and trail systems) and wildlife are considered important to include in the vision for the project.



New Greenspace Experiences

Participants were asked to share feedback about the greenspace experiences they wish to have in a variety of park types in urban settings (small, medium, and large parks) and suburban settings (small, medium, and large parks).

The activity provided examples and descriptions of small, medium, and large parks in urban and suburban settings to guide discussions and feedback.

Urban Parks

Several participants mentioned uncertainty about what an “urban park” might look like or how it would function in Vaughan, as the City is still in the process of intensifying. While Vaughan is quickly urbanizing, there are few existing urban areas in the City that participants can use as a reference point.

Suburban Parks

Most participants seemed to easily identified with and provided feedback on small and medium suburban parks, which are more familiar in the Vaughan context.

For medium suburban parks, participants expressed a strong interest in sports and active recreation. Popular amenities included skateparks, basketball courts, cricket pitches, soccer fields, and outdoor pools, which were seen as important features for promoting community activity and engagement.

In small suburban parks, participants desired a broader range of activities, feeling that these spaces often cater predominantly to younger children with playgrounds as the primary feature. They suggested incorporating more diverse elements such as arts and culture spaces, outdoor fitness areas, chess and ping pong tables, and spaces for older children and adults to play, relax, and socialize.



Greenspace Targets, Criteria and Funding

Informational panels on greenspace targets, criteria and funding informed participants of the types of acquisition frameworks and funding mechanisms that can be leveraged through the Greenspace Strategic Plan.

A few participants shared their feedback, suggesting additional taxes or accessing existing tax revenue streams through various levels of government like the Federal Carbon Tax. In terms of criteria for greenspace investments (i.e., where and when to prioritize greenspace developments in certain neighbourhoods), a few participants indicated that the protection of natural areas should be a part of the criteria.

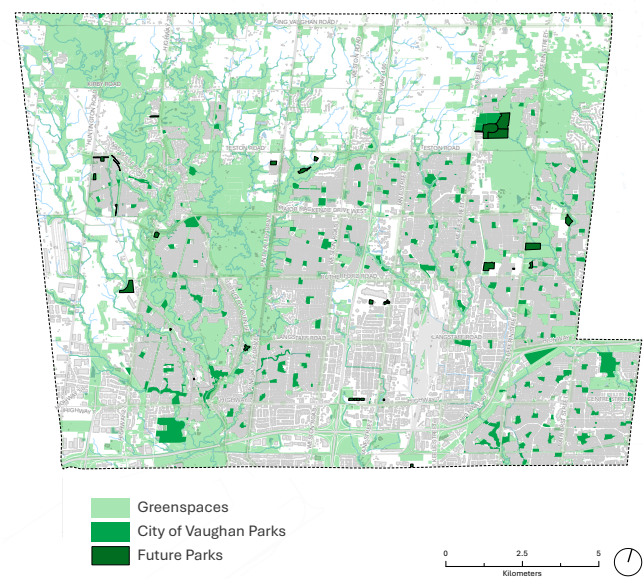


Mapping Activity

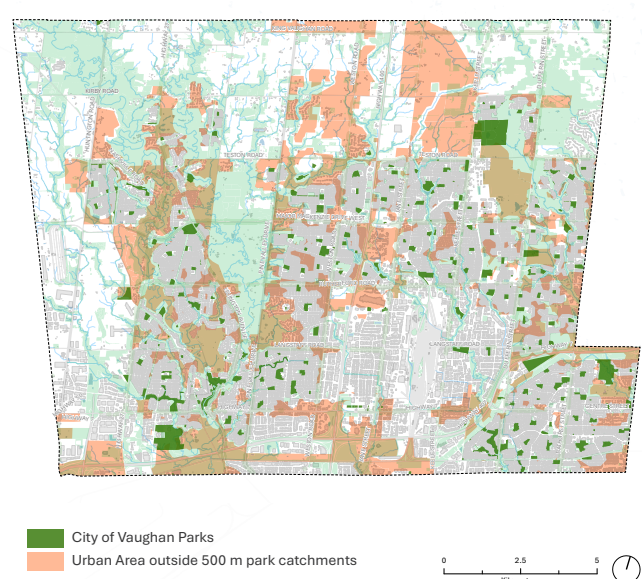
A set of three maps were developed for open house participants to review and provide location-specific feedback on their experience of greenspaces in Vaughan. Each map displayed a different framework for thinking about the city’s greenspaces and worksheets were provided for participants to share additional feedback.

Figure 11

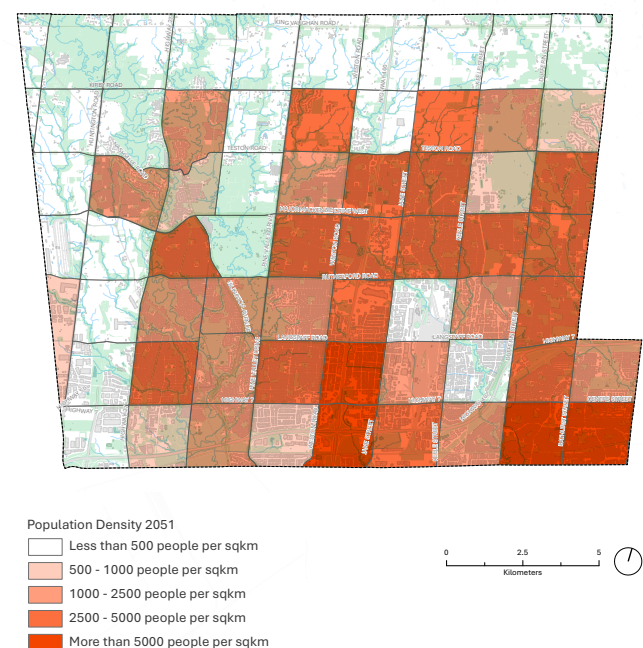
Parks and Greenspaces



Urban Area outside Park Catchments



Vaughan Population Density 2051



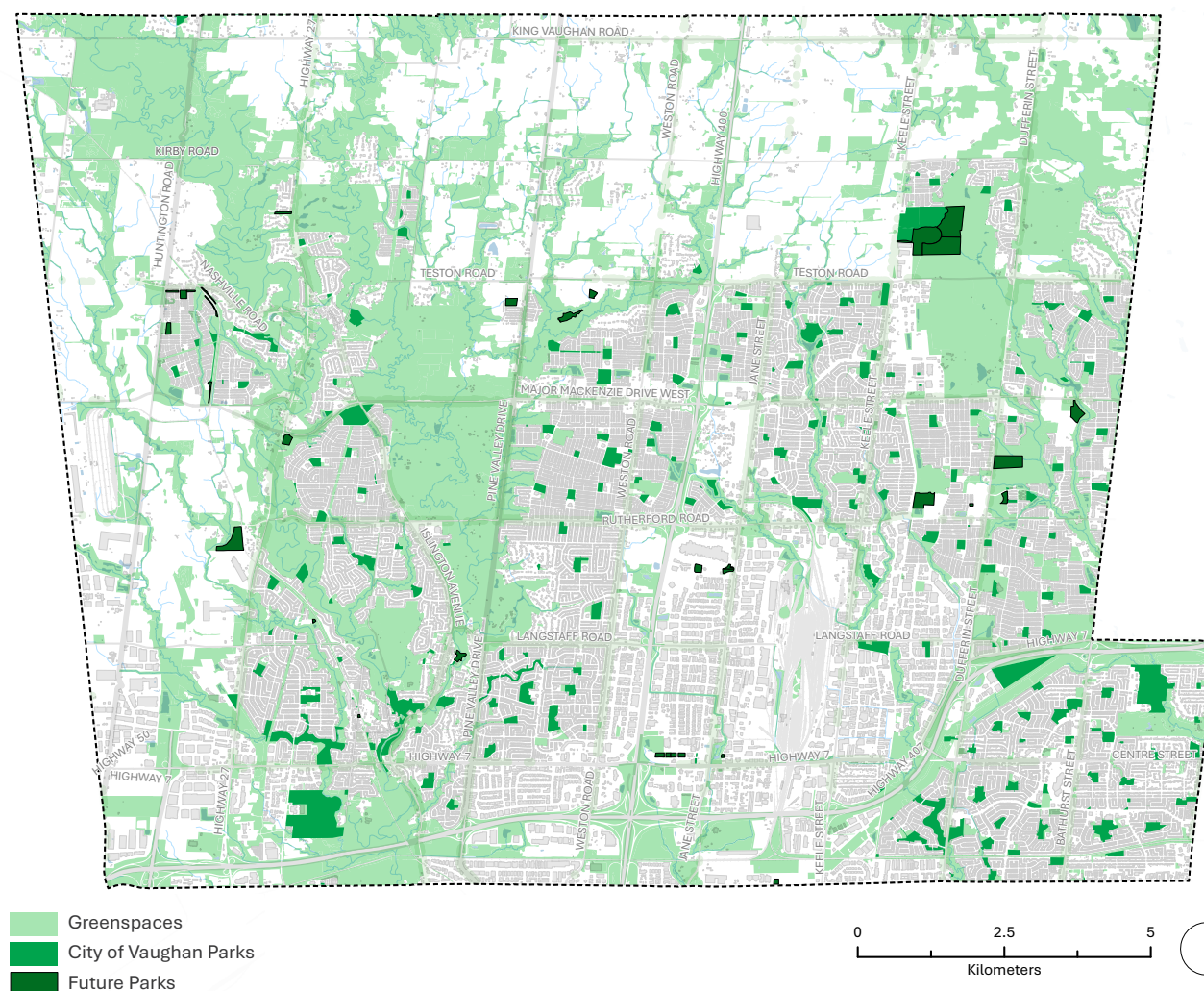
Map #1 Let's enhance what's working: This map shows the full extent of Vaughan's extensive greenspace network and identifies how much greenspace is currently available to residents.

Participants were asked to reflect on the following questions:

- What do you love about Vaughan's greenspaces?
- What makes Vaughan's greenspaces unique and exciting?
- What is the one thing you would do to improve greenspaces in Vaughan?

Participants highlighted some elements of Vaughan's greenspace system that are working well, such as access to nature, forests and woodlots with trail connections; however, the majority of comments indicated the elements they wish to see included more often. These requests include more natural areas (e.g., trees, shade, pollinator patches), improved maintenance and operations (e.g., more garbage bins, cleaning of park amenities), improved connectivity, and additional play and gathering spaces (e.g., skateparks, creative play structures, arts and culture spaces).

Figure 12
Parks and Greenspaces



Map #2 Let's fill in the gaps: This map shows the areas of the city where access to a park or greenspace is further than 500 metres walking distance and identifies where there are gaps in the current greenspace network.

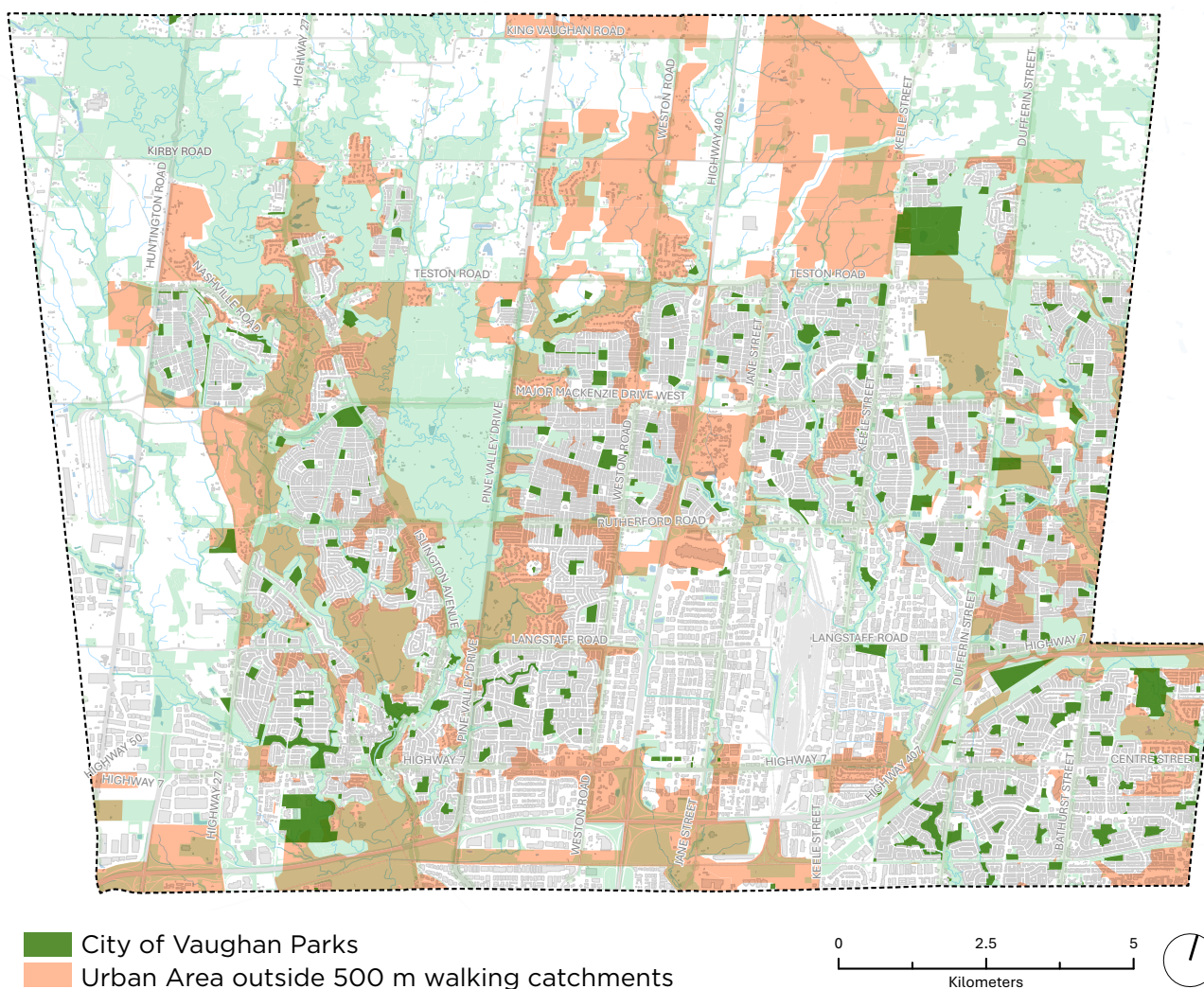
Participants were asked to reflect on the following questions:

- What parts of the city should be prioritized for new parks?
- Which park types are needed most and in which areas?
- How can we improve connectivity and equitable access to parks?

The majority of comments for this map emphasized the need for connections between parks, rather than enhancements to existing parks or the development of new parks. Participants' feedback included requests for active transportation networks, enhanced public transit, bike and pedestrian safe ways or bike lanes, and connections along natural corridors like ravines that support connectivity for both humans and wildlife. A few comments alluded to additional amenities that could support visitor experiences throughout Vaughan's greenspace network, such as Wi-Fi, group fitness, sports courts, skateparks, and more.

Figure 13

Urban Area outside Park Catchments



Map #3 Let's grow together: This map shows areas of the city where population growth is expected to take place in the next 25-30 years and identifies where there are projected future growth areas.

Participants were asked to reflect on the following questions:

- What changes or trends are you seeing in Vaughan that are influencing how parks are used?
- What greenspace features and amenities are best suited for areas of the city that are growing?
- What types of greenspaces are needed in Vaughan's more urban and dense neighbourhoods?

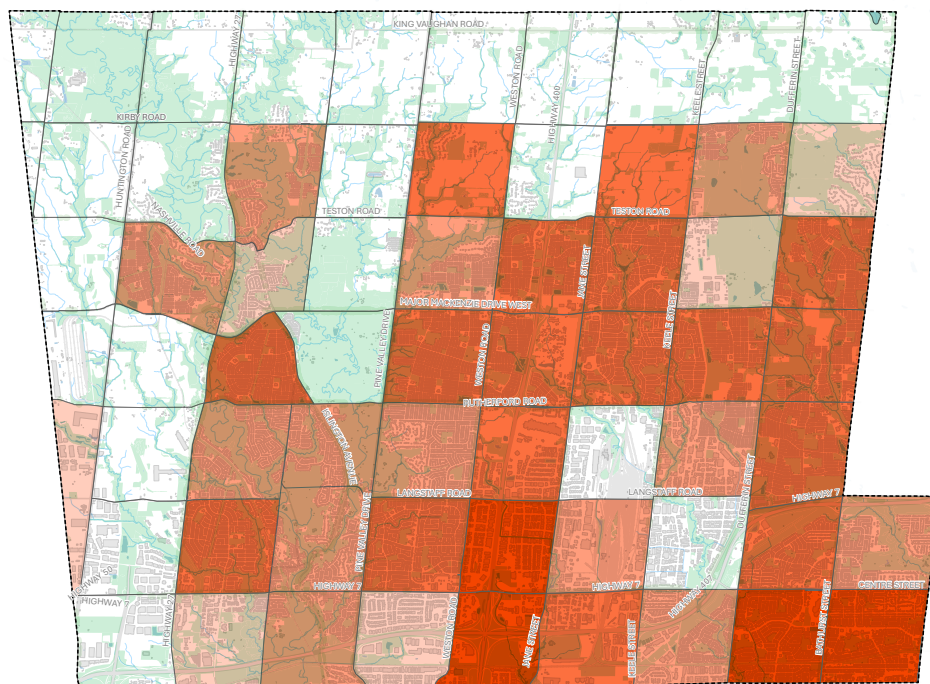
Similar to responses to the first map, participants emphasized the amenities and features they wish to see included in Vaughan's parks and greenspaces, such as sports courts and fields, natural areas, social and cultural spaces, and more.

Some comments identified greenspace trends that could be adopted in Vaughan more often, including: pickleball, dog parks, community spaces, community gardens and farmer's markets. One participant specified that these should not replace traditional amenities, but rather supplement the existing suite of features and facilities.

Parkettes and smaller park spaces were identified as elements to support the City and residents through growth. In addition, improved tree canopy and parks with amenities (e.g., dog parks, family-friendly spaces) are desired in intensification areas.

Figure 14

Vaughan Population Density 2051



Population Density 2051

- Less than 500 people per sqkm
- 500 - 1000 people per sqkm
- 1000 - 2500 people per sqkm
- 2500 - 5000 people per sqkm
- More than 5000 people per sqkm

0 2.5 5
Kilometers



“More greenspaces, even if those are smaller greenspaces. Also depends on demographics! Single young people vs. young families have different needs.”

“Need tree canopy in dense neighbourhoods + social gathering spaces that are naturalized.”

StoryMap

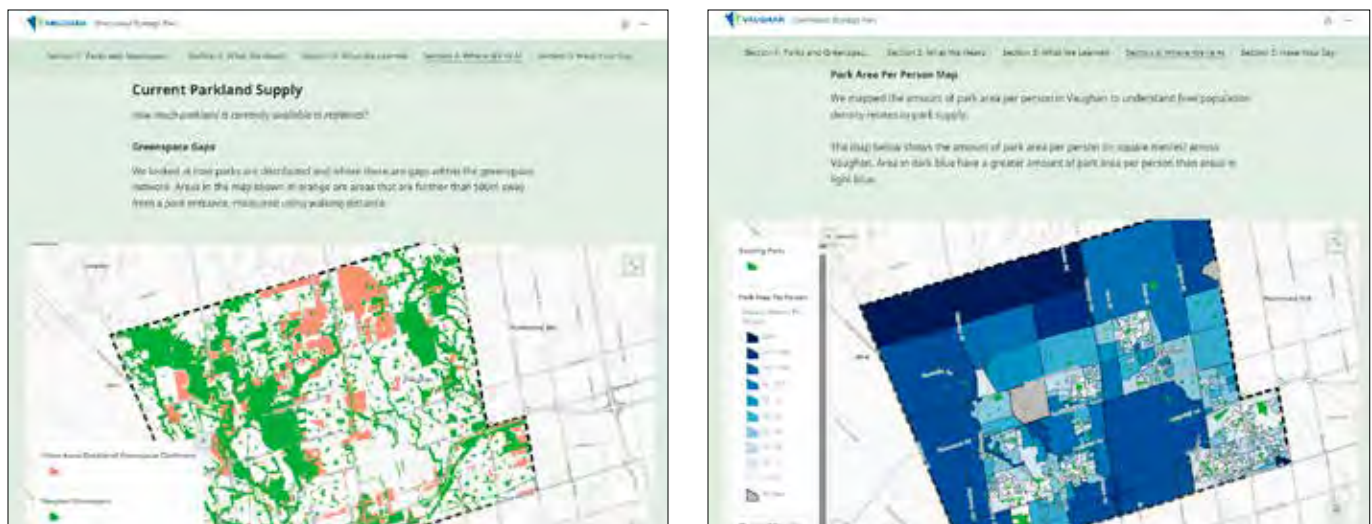
The StoryMap, developed in Phase 2, provides an interactive and comprehensive overview of the GSP, keeping Vaughan residents informed on project progress and engagement opportunities, with updates planned as the project moves into Phase 3.

It highlights critical aspects such as current and future gaps in the greenspace network, comprehensive research findings, and emerging policies and strategies for expanding and maintaining greenspace. The StoryMap includes a summary of what we heard during Phase 1 of the project, highlighting residents' preferences to see improved connectivity, expansion, amenities, natural features and maintenance considerations.

The StoryMap details strategic actions for the project moving forward, including how the project team will continue to assess greenspace needs, define park types to meet community needs, and make data-driven decisions about where to prioritize park development or revitalization projects.

While the intention of the StoryMap was to inform residents of project progress and engagement opportunities, the site directed participants to complete the survey and attend engagement events such as the Park Forum and Open Houses. Project team members received feedback during open houses that the StoryMap was a useful tool for learning about the Greenspace Strategic Plan.

Figure 15



Stakeholder Advisory Group Meetings

Recruitment for the Stakeholder Advisory Group was promoted through various communications and outreach channels. During Phase 2 of engagement, three Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) meetings were held on the following dates:

1. Thursday, March 7, 6-8pm
2. Tuesday, April 23, 6-8pm
3. Thursday, May 23, 6-8pm

Each meeting was held virtually and included a presentation, opportunities to ask questions to the project team, and breakout sessions to facilitate deeper discussion. See page 8 for more information about selection of the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

SAG Meeting #1

The first SAG meeting provided an opportunity for members to meet each other and the project team, as well as an introduction to the GSP project. SAG members were provided with information about:

- The purpose, objectives and timeline of the Greenspace Strategic Plan
- The role of community and interested party engagement on the project
- Measurement of gaps in the greenspace network (methodology and results)
- Existing and proposed park typologies

Participants provided their feedback on:

- Additional metrics for analysis of the greenspace network
- Additional park types or considerations for proposed park types

Participants recommended adding multi-use, cultural, and heritage elements to park categories, highlighting ecological spaces as essential to the overall system. They emphasized ecological preservation, park connectivity, and design features that reflected the local community. SAG members suggested using ecological metrics like ecosystem services and canopy cover, along with economic and connectivity measures, to create parks that support both environmental and community needs effectively.



SAG Meeting #2

The second SAG meeting provided an update on project progress. The presentation to the SAG included information on:

- Key takeaways from SAG Meeting #1
- Opportunities for partnerships to support the greenspace network
- Placemaking opportunities and considerations in greenspaces
- Setting provision targets to provide equitable access to greenspaces across the City
- Engagement events taking place in Phase 2 of the project

Participants provided their feedback on:

- Partnership opportunities and preferences
- Placemaking approaches to make greenspaces memorable for residents of all ages
- Setting provision targets that reflect unique neighbourhoods and contexts throughout Vaughan

Participants described their preference to see partnerships used to enhance the City's service levels. Ideas for potential greenspace partners included schools, businesses, non-profit organizations and clubs. Partnership opportunities were centered around ecological stewardship, education and social events. One participant suggested that students and community organizations could be engaged as partners to support the management and maintenance of Vaughan's woodlots.

Placemaking was identified as an opportunity to promote community identity, park accessibility and trail connectivity. SAG members suggested that farmers' markets, sports tournaments and community gatherings could be leveraged to enhance placemaking opportunities. Additionally, events such as film festivals and arts events, in collaboration with partners, could be introduced to increase tourism in Vaughan. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining tree canopy and park character, in addition to introducing new elements into the greenspace system.

Participants suggested a few considerations for setting provision targets for greenspace acquisition or enhancement to ensure equitable access. These include incorporating different targets in urban and suburban areas, adaptive reuse or re-purposing of existing parks, parks that serve as wildlife corridors, support biodiversity and hydrological networks, and specific targets that include urban forestry, accessibility, park visitors, and connectivity.



SAG Meeting #3

The presentation for SAG Meeting #3 included:

- Key takeaways from SAG Meeting #2
- Emerging vision and goals for the GSP
- Emerging park types and classifications
- Decision-making criteria for new park locations

Participants provided their feedback on:

- Emerging park types and how to leverage both small and large parks to reach Vaughan's targets
- The criteria for decision-making that are most important to them
- Additional considerations for decision-making that account for urban and suburban areas in Vaughan

After reviewing the emerging vision for the Greenspace Strategic Plan, participants requested the addition of the terms “forward-thinking” or “prepared for the future” to convey that Vaughan is working proactively, rather than reactively to greenspace challenges. Additionally, participants suggested the mention of Vaughan's ecological assets and the transition from suburban to urban communities. For the emerging goals, participants suggested the inclusion of goals around connectivity, economic opportunities, and youth.

The discussion around emerging park types emphasized the importance of ecology (e.g., wildlife corridors, natural areas, green development standards) and safety through the inclusion of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. SAG members suggested designating ecologically sensitive areas, such as ravines, as natural spaces to protect their integrity and highlight historical and cultural significance within parks to enrich the visitor experience. They also suggested creating more, smaller parks instead of fewer, larger ones to improve equitable access for all residents. Additionally, participants mentioned the importance of highlighting the intended park function and purpose (e.g., for social connection, events) within park types.

The SAG provided additional considerations for decision-making on parkland acquisition, that included equity, such as criteria for youth and seniors, and people living with low incomes. Participants wish to see the preservation of and access to natural areas factored into decision-making, as well as cultural considerations to ensure newly acquired greenspaces contribute to a community's identity and vibrancy.



Student Engagement

To engage youth in the GSP, high school students were identified as a key demographic to gather feedback from, as older youth and teens are traditionally underrepresented in planning and engagement projects. Local high schools were contacted to gauge interest and eight schools participated in the activity.

Students provided valuable insights through a workbook activity, which focused on the importance of greenspace and explored barriers and opportunities from their perspective. The following sections summarize students' responses to the open-ended questions posed during the activity.

A design activity prompted youth to create a poster that would encourage youth of similar age group to visit their favourite park or greenspace. Students were encouraged to create a slogan and highlight key features that would attract other youth to visit the greenspace they selected. Although we couldn't include all posters, some are illustrated in this section.

Schools Engaged

- Emily Carr Secondary School
- Father Bressani Catholic High School
- St. Joan of Arc Catholic High School
- St. Jean de Brebeuf Catholic High School
- St. Elizabeth Catholic High School
- Woodbridge College
- Toronto District Christian High School
- Delano Academy



"I love being outside breathing fresh air, feeling the sun. It always makes me feel peaceful no matter what overwhelms me. It is an easy escape away from technology, school and general expectations. It's freeing even if it's temporary.

Parks and greenspace are important to me for these reasons, for the emotional benefits they never fail to provide. They never fail to clear me upon a sunny day, whether I'm riding my bike, reading on a bench or having a picnic with my friends."



Importance of Greenspace

Students described the importance of parks and greenspaces in their daily lives. Prompted by the question, “Why are parks and greenspaces important to you?,” responses often included the following themes:

Physical and mental health: Greenspaces are identified as playing a significant role in youth physical and mental health. In terms of physical health, students described how these spaces allow them to get out for a walk, bike ride or play sports and make connections between these activities and “getting exercise” or “staying healthy.” The mental health benefits were often described in relation to screen time and social media use in teens. Participants identified excessive screen time as problematic and contributing to stress, and described how parks and greenspaces encourage them to disconnect, relax and improve their mental health and well-being.

Social connection: Students described how greenspaces are places where they spend time with family or friends, whether through a walk in the park, picnic, barbecue, or other social gatherings. They emphasized that greenspaces play a significant role in building or maintaining their connection to family and friends, and often played a significant role in their childhood experiences or favourite memories.

Connection to nature: Participants alluded to the ways in which access to greenspace helps them to feel connected to nature, experience greenery, see wildlife, and more. These experiences were often connected to stress reduction and feelings of relaxation. In addition, several youth described the experience of living in urban or suburban areas, and that greenspaces offer a welcomed reprieve from these landscapes.

Play: While notions of play were embedded in many responses about physical health (e.g., playing sports for exercise) and social connection (e.g., hanging out with my friends in the park), several responses directly identified “play” and “fun” as part of the importance of parks and greenspaces. These responses were not always connected to park features or amenities and occasionally attributed to participants’ experiences of unstructured time in greenspaces.



“Parks and greenspaces are important to me because they make a good place to calm down and a chance to connect with nature and gives me a place to spend time with friends and family.”



“Living in a suburban area with not much trees or much colour can get suffocating sometimes. So having an outlet like a park close to my house, allows me space to breathe and clear my head.”



Barriers to Visiting Parks

When asked whether they had experienced barriers to visiting greenspaces, students' experiences varied, but generally spanned the following themes:

Access and navigation: Students described challenges accessing their local parks (e.g., due to distance from home), navigating within their local park, or accessing spaces like washrooms. A specific example was provided where a QR code was provided for access to a park map, but the participants did not have cellphone data and Wi-Fi was not available, so they were unable to access the map and navigate through the greenspace.

Safety: Participants' perceptions of safety are influenced by the presence of wildlife, crime, smoking/vaping, and loitering.

Maintenance: Many youth were concerned about the overall maintenance of greenspace, especially in relation to equipment, litter, and overall cleanliness. This was often described as other park visitors not respecting the space and leaving garbage behind, rather than park staff not maintaining the space.

Lack of Amenities: Youth described the ways in which greenspaces were not interesting to them, including not having amenities for older kids and teens, not having sports fields, being "boring" or them personally not having an interest in visiting greenspaces.

Feeling Unwelcome: Some participants described a specific social interaction or general scenario where they have been made to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in a greenspace. These included other children interfering with their enjoyment or an overall sense of not belonging within the space.



No Barriers: Youth often specified that they had not experienced barriers to accessing greenspace; however, they were able to show compassion and identify ways in which other people may experience barriers or be prevented from accessing greenspace.

Physical Accessibility: While only a few youth described an experience where physical accessibility was a barrier for them personally, several described experiences where an older adult (e.g., grandparent) had difficulty accessing a greenspace due to hills and unpaved pathways that disrupted their families' experience of the space.

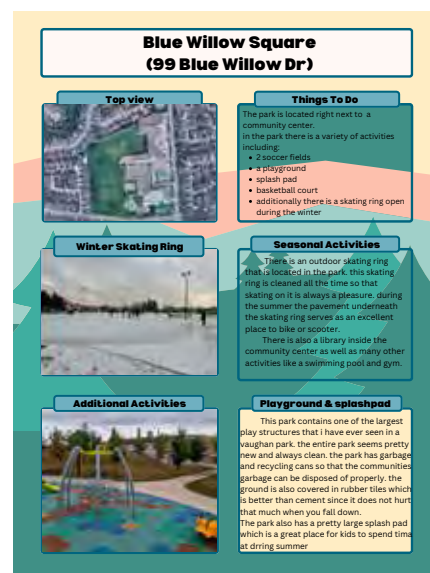
Additional Considerations for Greenspaces

Variety: Students would like to see an increased variety of facilities, amenities and activities in greenspaces, including various sports, skateboarding and ice skating, play areas and off-leash dog areas. A few requests were made for enhanced nature, such as more trees, gardens and natural habitats.

Access: Students would appreciate greenspace features that enable better access, such as additional bike and scooter parking spaces, and better access to greenspaces by public transit. In addition, some references were made to the locations of greenspaces, with preferences for them to be closer to home so youth can access them independently.

Wi-Fi: Access to Wi-Fi within greenspaces was described as a feature that would encourage youth to visit, as well as allowing them to access maps for navigation.

Comfort: Many students requested improved access to washrooms and water fountains that would enable them to stay in a greenspace longer and feel more comfortable while playing sports and other activities. Benches and picnic tables were additional considerations, both for youth and teens, but also for older adults.



Looking Ahead

Conclusion

The City of Vaughan's greenspace system is treasured by residents, with participants highlighting their existing access to nature as an asset. There are several areas of opportunity, suggested by participants across multiple engagement tactics, for the City to bolster the current greenspace network to ensure the system keeps pace with urban growth and aligns with the way current residents envision using their local parks and greenspaces.

Participants' suggestions for ensuring that greenspaces are welcoming to people of all backgrounds, continued emphasis on natural spaces, prioritization of health and well-being benefits, and improved access to amenities close to home will guide the development of the GSP.

Next Steps

In Phase 3, taking place Fall 2024, components of the draft plan will be shared and reviewed with key stakeholders and members of the public through a series of in-person and virtual engagement opportunities.

The final GSP will be refined based on this input from city staff/departments, community partners, key stakeholders and members of the public.