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JUNE 2015

PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE

SHAPING OUR FUTURE

STRATHCONA
COUNTY

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INTRODUCTION

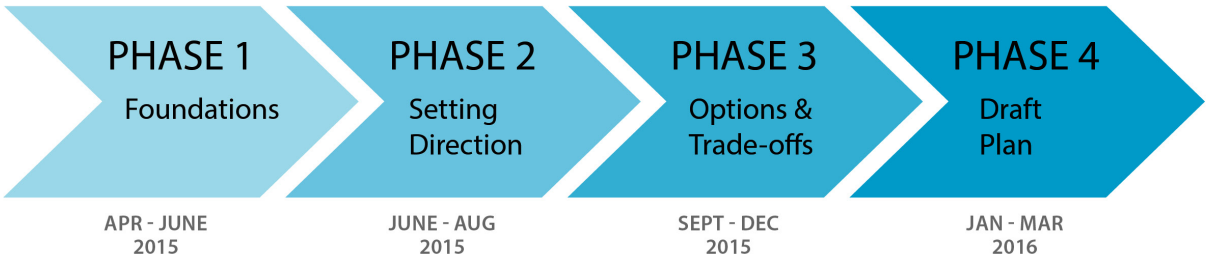
Strathcona County is updating its Municipal Development Plan (MDP) which is the County's plan for the future. It sets out a clear vision for how Strathcona will grow and develop over the next 20 years or more, and guides decisions on key issues like conservation of the natural environment and investment in infrastructure and services.

Since the MDP was last updated in 2007, the County has added over 10,000 new residents. This growth means we need to ensure that development of urban and rural communities is sustainable and maintains a high quality of life for current and future residents. The updated MDP will also reflect recent studies, as well as key trends and best practices.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Over a 10 month period, we are asking residents, business owners, and community stakeholder groups to share what they value most about Strathcona County and to weigh in on how the County can build on our strengths while planning for the future.

This report summarizes what we did, what we asked, and what we heard in Phase 1.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

We engaged participants on their core values as well as a range of topics including; agriculture, industry, environment, affordable housing, nature based and agri-tourism, sustainability, and urban design. Key priorities for participants included transit, walkability, urban and rural balance, protection of natural areas and agricultural lands, parks/trails and recreation (especially for youth), and affordable housing as well as greater accessibility, services and housing for seniors.

Participants emphasized the need for more local shops and green spaces throughout rural neighbourhoods and more shops, offices, parks, pathways and walkable amenities in Sherwood Park. Providing a mix of housing types without sprawling into farmlands or natural spaces was a critical theme and participants stressed the need to avoid over-development and preserve the rural areas and lifestyles that residents love.

MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE
SHAPING OUR FUTURE

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

SUMMARY

In May of 2015, the County officially launched the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) Update project. The launch began with the release of the project webpage and online engagement hub including a whiteboard video, community mapping exercise and questionnaire along with other key communications. This was followed by an interactive Public Launch Event on May 7 at Millennium Place in Sherwood Park as well as a number of "stakeholder coffee chats" with key representatives from local organizations and interest groups.

The purpose of engagement initiatives in Phase 1 is to raise awareness about the project and opportunities to get involved, provide background information, and gather feedback from a wide range of people.

The input we received will help us as part of our development of the updated MDP.

PROMOTION

To raise awareness about the project and launch event, the County promoted the event via:

- Poster and information display at Millennium Place
- Postcards, newsletters and backgrounders at key locations throughout the County (Planning and Development Services, Millennium Place, Community Centre, Kinsmen Leisure Centre, Library, Broadmoor Arena, Ardrossan Recreation Complex, Heartland Hall Contact Office, Broadmoor Golf Course, Wilderness Centre, South Contact Office)
- County digital displays at key locations throughout the County (Planning and Development Services, Millennium Place, Community Centre, Kinsmen Leisure Centre, Festival Place, Library, Broadmoor Arena, Ardrossan Recreation Complex, Family and Community Services, Wye Transit Centre, Bethel Transit Centre)
- Whiteboard video clips on County digital displays
- Newspaper ads in Sherwood Park News on April 24 and May 1
- Newspaper article in Sherwood Park News
- Press release issued April 30
- County newsletter and Economic Development & Tourism newsletter
- Event information and backgrounders distributed to rural areas via the Bookmobile
- Social Media including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
- Emails to stakeholders

PUBLIC LAUNCH EVENT

To kick-off the project, the team hosted a public drop-in event in the Gibson Room at Millennium Place on May 7 between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. Approximately 80 people attended.

At this interactive event, participants used an "event passport" to guide them through seven activity stations. We asked participants to share their ideas about the best future for the County as well as key issues, opportunities and priorities related to topics such as agriculture, industry, environment, affordable housing, nature based and agri-tourism, sustainability, and urban design The activity stations included:

1. **Introduction & Context:** information about the MDP update and opportunity for participants to share general "hopes" and "fears" about the future of the County
2. **Vision & Values:** a "vision tree" where participants identified their vision for the future of the County and an exercise called "walk in my shoes" to learn about how the MDP can address the needs of different people.
3. **Nature-Based & Agri-Tourism:** information on economic opportunities related to sustainable tourism; participants voted on a list of initial ideas for tourism and added their own ideas.
4. **Community Mapping:** participants reviewed information on environmental management, agriculture and industry and explored large maps of the County and identified areas to protect and areas that they felt need more housing, shops, parks and other amenities.
5. **Housing:** information on rural residential and affordable housing in the County; participants were asked to be "Mayor for a day" and decide how they would allocate resources among different types of housing.
6. **Sustainable Development & Urban Design:** participants ranked a list of initial ideas for making the County more sustainable and added their own new ideas.
7. **Engagement Process:** information on the process and opportunities to get involved; participants used the "graffiti wall" to tell us what they thought about the event and how they want to be notified and involved in the future.

An "additional comments" form was also provided to capture more general feedback. These comments have been summarized in the most relevant sections.

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT HUB

The engagement process also includes an online component to provide additional information about the project and to gather input from those who were unable to attend the in-person event.

The online hub at http://strathcona.engagingplans.org/ includes:

- **Project Information & Process:** information about the MDP update project, the process and ways to get involved.
- **Background Information:** 8 background papers on key discussion topics and links to other key municipal documents and resources.
- **Whiteboard Video:** a 3-minute illustrated video that summarizes what the MDP is, why the County is undertaking an update, what the process is, and why we want and need feedback from the community.
- **Community Mapping:** an online map of the community where participants can identify places that are important to them and places they think could be improved. Participants can add photos and vote/comment on photos that others have shared.
- **Questionnaire:** participants are asked about their vision for the future of the County – what they would like the community to be like by 2035. The questionnaire also asks participants how they would like to be notified about the project and provides a space for general comments.

The online questionnaire was available from May 5 to May 22. The community mapping activity is still available on the online hub for residents to continue to share their ideas and identify areas of the County that are important to them.

STAKEHOLDER COFFEE CHATS

Numerous stakeholder meetings we held in May. Representatives from local organizations and interest groups and the County will continue to meet throughout the month of June. The purpose of these meetings is to: raise awareness about the project, explain what the MDP is, why it matters, and how to get involved. Stakeholders learn about the project and share some of their initial thoughts as well as advise on the best ways to notify and engage their networks.

Stakeholder coffee chats are available to any interested groups or organizations throughout June. Contact MDPupdate@strathcona.ca if your group would like to attend a meeting to be briefed on the project.

WHAT WE HEARD: SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

The following section provides an overview of community input from the in-person public launch event as well as the online community mapping activity and questionnaire.

VISION AND VALUES

We asked participants to tell us about their **hopes** for the future of the County as well as their long-term **vision** – what they would like the County to be like 20 years from now…

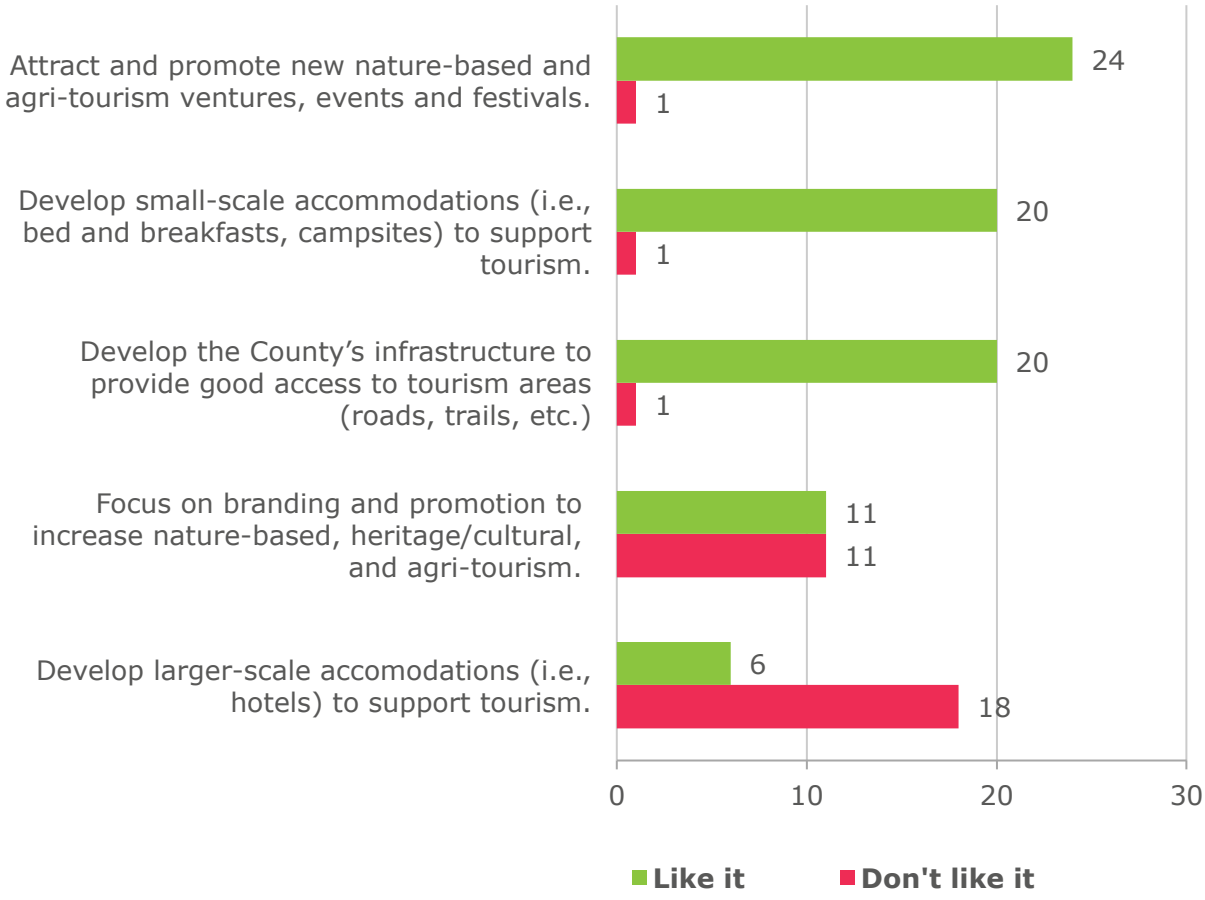
Participants described a safe and welcoming community that is supportive and comfortable for all, with special efforts to support seniors and create age-friendly spaces, housing and services. A mix of housing types and transportation options, including affordable housing and transit, will allow people of all incomes and abilities to live in the community and provide a balance of urban and rural lifestyles. Development will occur to meet the needs of growth, but will respect and protect the community's farmlands, wildlife, green spaces, and heritage assets and allow a thoughtful mix of residential, industrial, and agriculture to support local jobs without "over-developing." More parks, natural spaces, recreation amenities (especially for youth), trails and walkable spaces will help support a healthy community, serving County residents and visitors of all ages and abilities and promoting social interactions and connections.

We also asked participants to tell us about their **fears** for the future of the County. Feedback included loss of farmland and open spaces, too much growth/over-development, loss of rural lifestyles, more strip malls, increased traffic, trash/pollution/damage to the environment, increased bureaucracy, and a lack of affordability.

NATURE-BASED & AGRI-TOURISM

We asked participants to vote on a number of initial ideas for tourism and tell us why they did or didn't like each idea for Strathcona County.

Overall participants showed strong support for attracting and promoting new nature-based and agri-tourism opportunities, developing small-scale accommodations (bed & breakfasts, campsites), and developing infrastructure to provide access to tourism areas. Support for branding/promotion was mixed while support for larger-scale accommodations (like hotels) was lower.



Participants noted that new opportunities and infrastructure (including better signage/way-finding, trails, cycling connections, and accessibility for seniors) would help to encourage families and visitors to explore and enjoy the County. Several participants stressed the need for more pedestrian trails to access natural areas, rather than roads or trails for motorized recreational vehicles.

Comments suggested that smaller-scale accommodations like campsites would provide more affordable options to enjoy the countryside. A few participants also suggested that the County's natural assets speak for themselves and expensive branding campaigns aren't necessary.

BIG IDEAS FOR TOURISM

We also asked participants to tell us their "big ideas" for tourism and ways to make our economy even stronger. Ideas included:

- **More trails, parks and access to natural areas:** continue to develop the recreational trail system (including bike trails), add more parks, and provide better access and recreation around lakes, rivers, and parks ***(7 comments)***
- **More camping:** better access, areas for trailers and tents, not too far from town ***(5 comments)***
- **Better signage/way-finding:** for all tourist destinations (i.e., library, museum) as well as educational signs to learn about the County's natural areas ***(3 comments)***
- **More events, festivals and restaurants:** including more food events and venues, outdoor markets and music events ***(3 comments)***
- **Why do we need more tourism?** Over rated, you can't have your cake and eat it too ***(3 comments)***
- **Focus on joint marketing:** partner with existing organizations ***(1 comment)***
- **We need a "world's largest" –** a unique draw for tourists ***(1 comment)***
- **Luxury resorts:** need a formal nature-based tourism policy framework to allow bare land condo/commercial development in multiple phases ***(1 comment)***
- **Equestrian facilities:** need to have the ability to transfer commercial density to agricultural lands for horse stalls ***(1 comment)***

COMMUNITY MAPPING

We asked participants to look at two large-scale maps – one of the urban service area (Sherwood Park) and one of the rural service area (the rest of the County) – and identify places they love/areas to protect as well as areas that need more homes, shops, offices, industry and parks/open spaces.

IMPORTANT AREAS TO PROTECT

Participants identified many of the County's natural areas including the Beaver Hills Moraine area, North Cooking Lake, Hastings Lake, Elk Island National Park, Astotin Natural Area, Strathcona Science Provincial Park and important wildlife corridors such as Pointe-aux-Pins Creek (in Ardrossan).

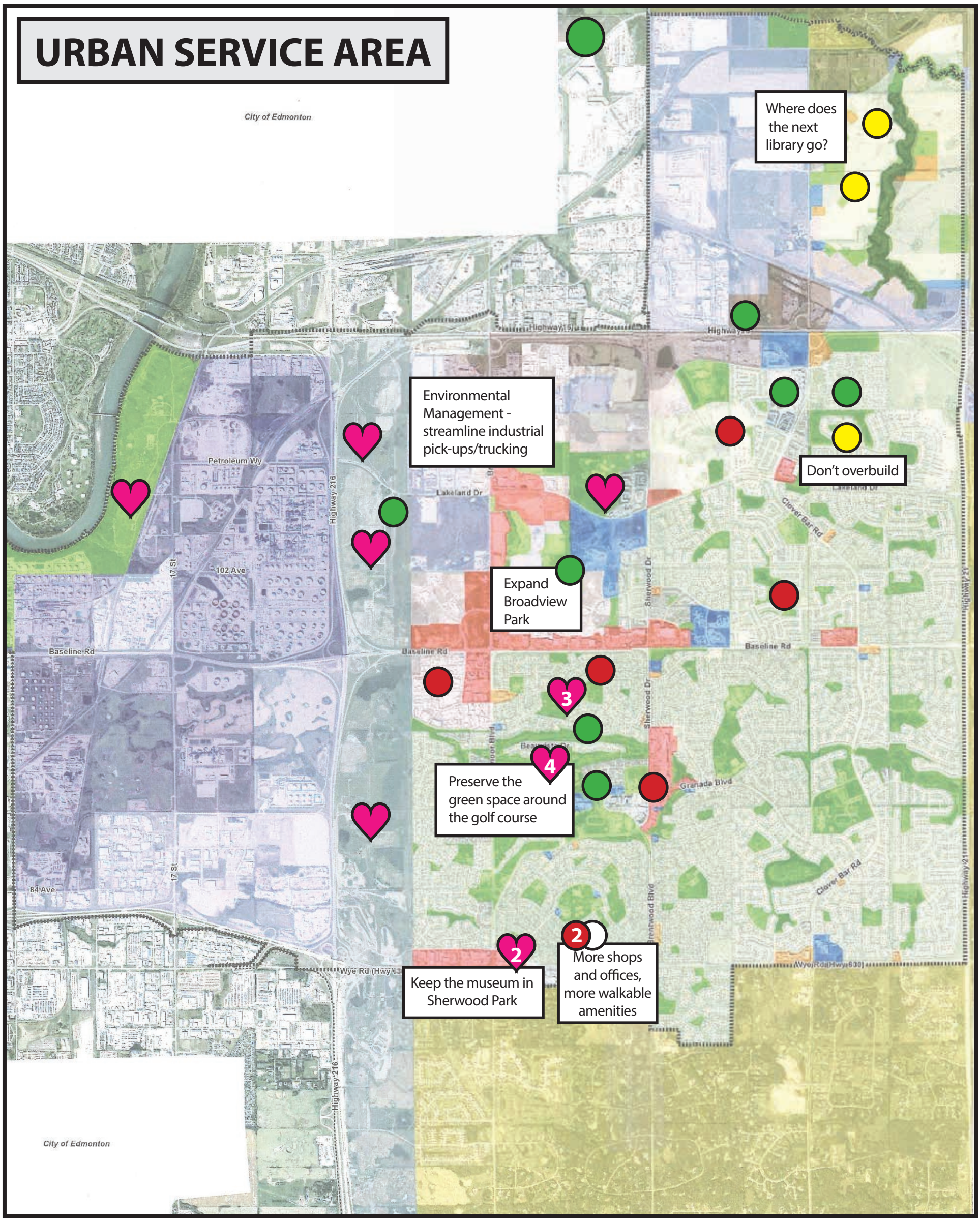
Other important areas included agricultural lands in Bremner and numerous places throughout Sherwood Park including schools (Clover Bar Junior High and Mills Haven Elementary), the Druids Rugby Football Club fields, Centennial Park, and Millennium Place.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Participants identified the need for more **parks and green spaces** surrounding industrial areas and throughout urban and rural neighbourhoods including more bike paths, walkways and greenways (interconnected parks) as alternatives to roadways in Sherwood Park. Participants also noted a need for more local **shops/retail** distributed throughout urban and rural neighbourhoods to make them more walkable. More **retail, offices and industry** were also suggested for Sherwood Park.

Suggestions for more **housing** included Cambrian Crossing and Summerwood in Sherwood Park, and select Country Residential areas in the rural service area.

URBAN SERVICE AREA



AREAS YOU LOVE / IMPORTANT AREAS TO PROTECT

Add more HOMES

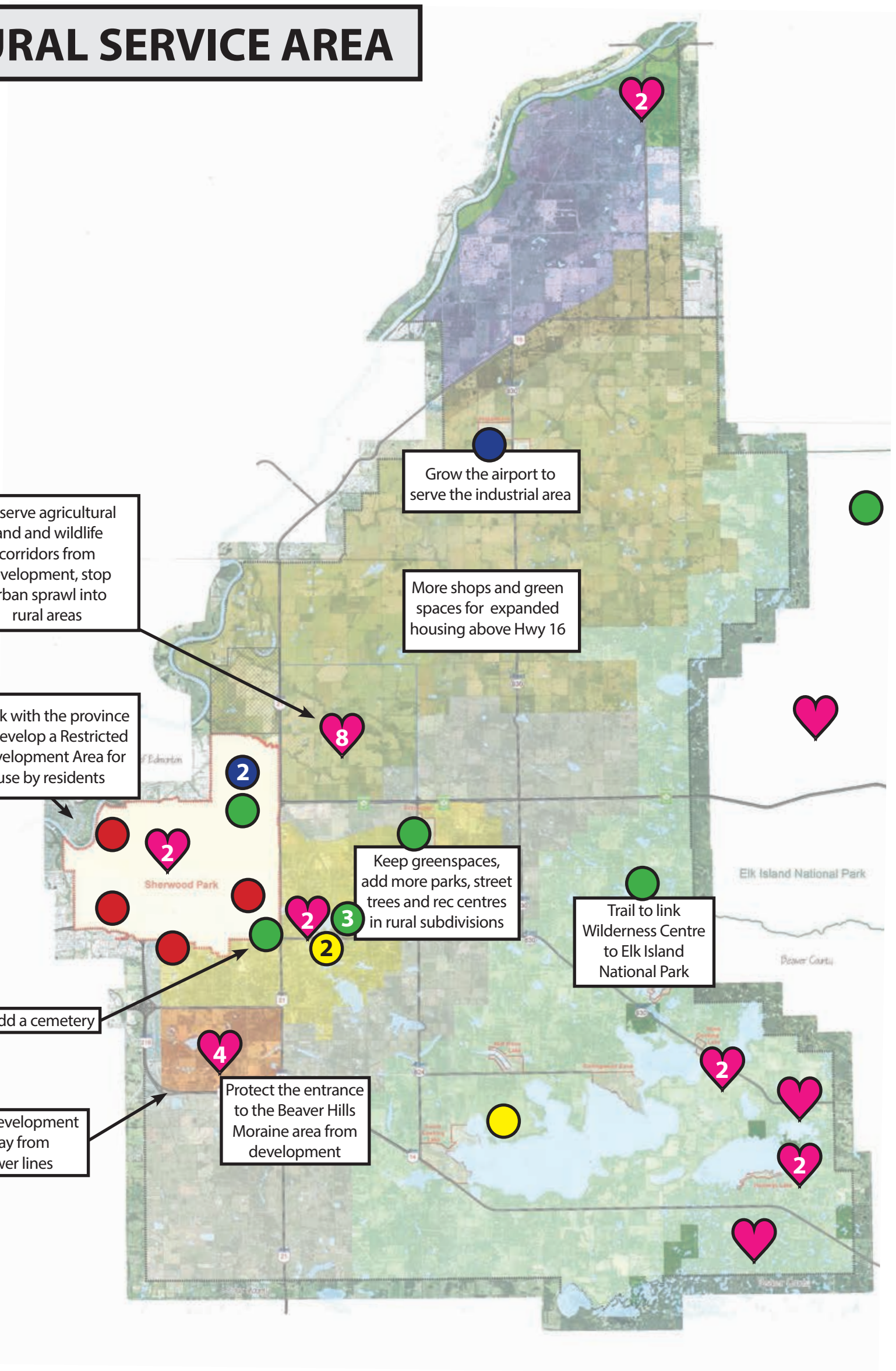
Add more SHOPS

Add more OFFICES

Add more INDUSTRY

Add more PARKS & OPEN SPACES

RURAL SERVICE AREA



AREAS YOU LOVE / IMPORTANT AREAS TO PROTECT

Add more HOMES

Add more SHOPS

Add more OFFICES

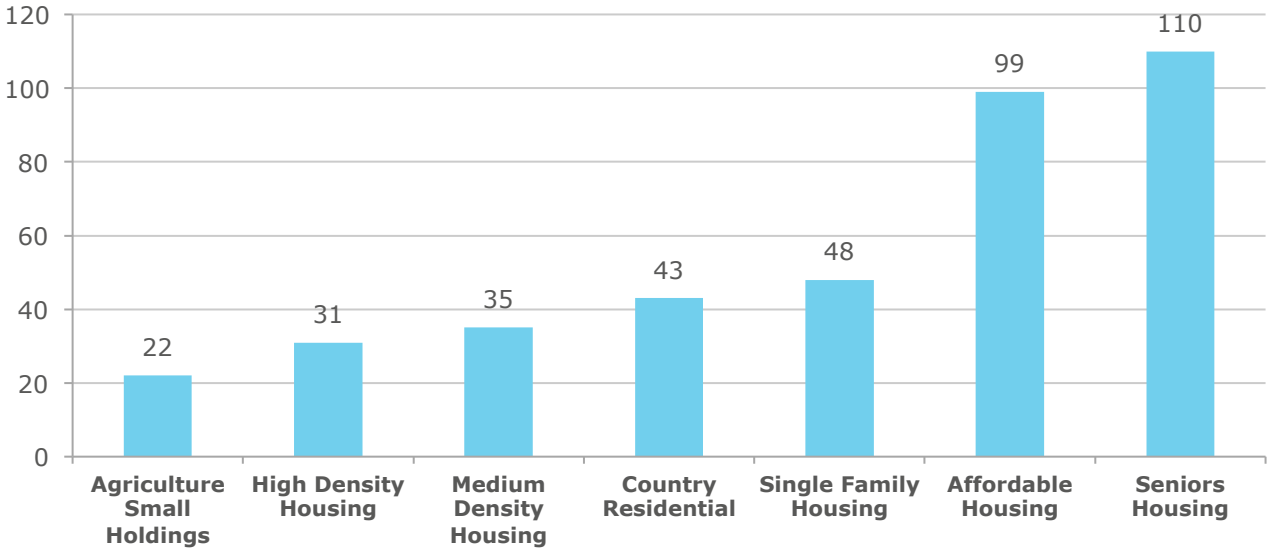
Add more INDUSTRY

Add more PARKS & OPEN SPACES

HOUSING

We asked participants to pretend they were "Mayor for a day" and decide how they would spend tax dollars on housing. Participants were given 10 tokens to allocate among 7 different types of housing.

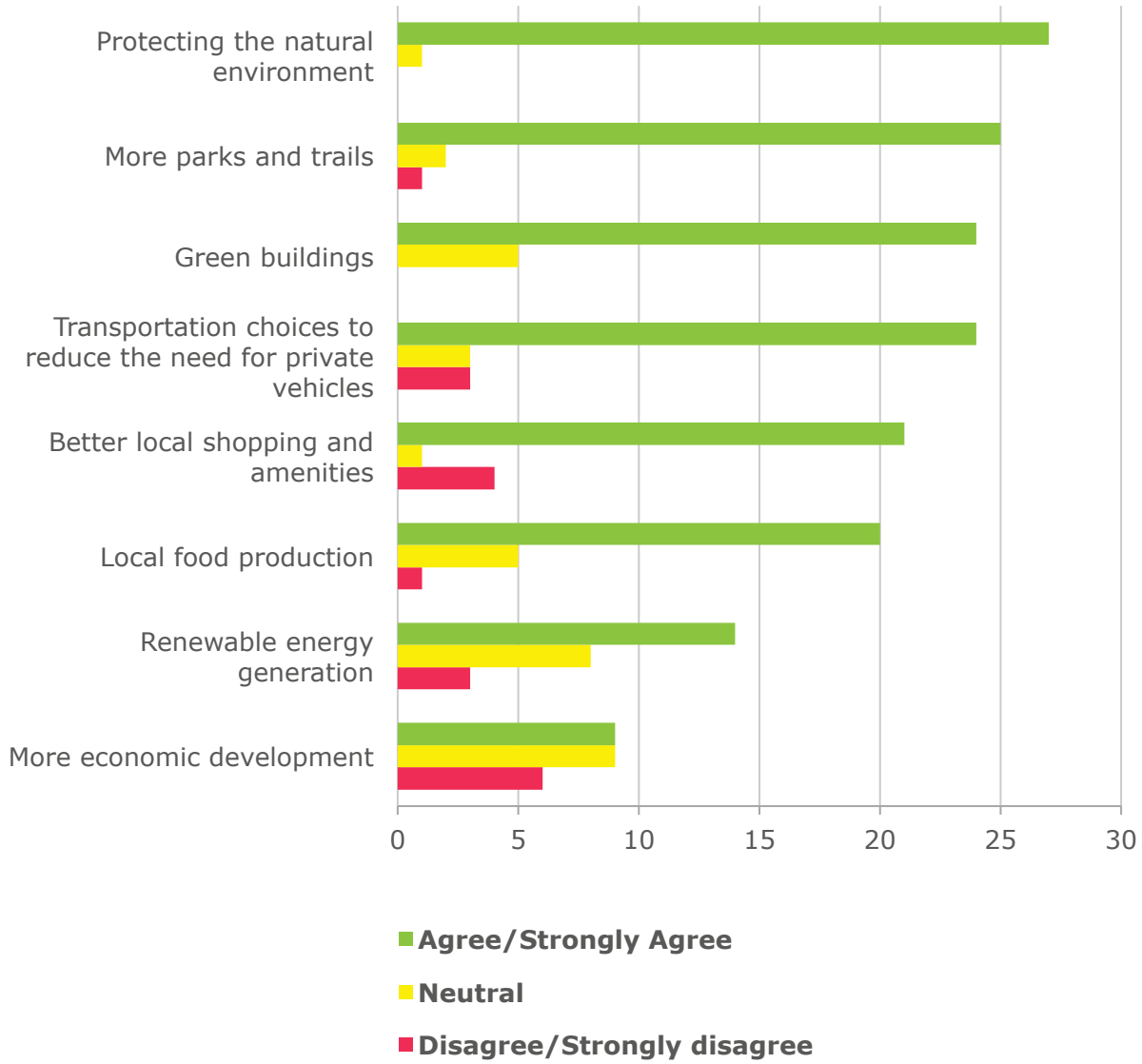
Participants stressed the need for more seniors housing and affordable housing as well as a mix of other housing types including single family, country residential, medium and high-density housing and agriculture small holdings.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & DESIGN

We asked participants to review a number of initial ideas for making Strathcona County more sustainable and tell us which ideas they agreed or disagreed with and why they felt the way they did.

Strong support was shown for protecting the natural environment, adding more parks/trails and green buildings, expanding transportation choices and local shops and amenities (to reduce the need for driving), and local food production. Support was also shown for renewable energy generation to a lesser extent while economic development received mixed support.

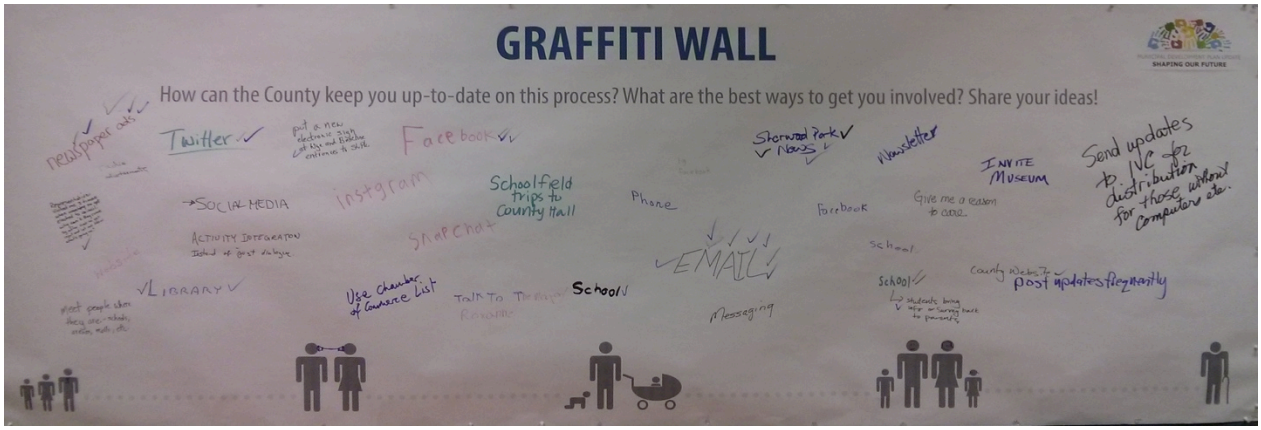


BIG IDEAS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

We also asked participants to tell us their "big ideas" for making Strathcona County more sustainable. Ideas included:

- **More/improved transit:** think about regional transit for the future, better urban and rural transit, more frequency (for shift workers), more service in rural areas (particularly for seniors and people with disabilities), subsidized transit to Edmonton for seniors, convenient 'after school' routes for high school students (e.g., mall, rec centres, library) ***(14 comments)***
- **More walkable amenities and local shops** ***(4 comments)***
- **Better accessibility:** push button doors and more ramps for seniors and people with disabilities ***(2 comments)***
- **More nature/access to nature** ***(2 comments)***
- **More diverse industry:** more diverse secondary industries (not necessarily heavy industry) ***(2 comments)***
- **Grow up, not out:** Sherwood Park should grow vertically, use infill and density in urban areas to become more sustainable and protect rural areas ***(2 comments)***
- **More character in new housing:** why are all new houses grey or beige? ***(2 comments)***
- **More bike paths**, especially near busy roads and popular locations ***(1 comment)***
- **Activity centres** for all ages (youth, seniors, etc.) to promote community health ***(1 comment)***
- **Stop subsidizing transit to University** ***(1 comment)***
- **Natural burial options** ***(1 comment)***
- **Stop cutting down trees,** start replanting ***(1 comment)***
- **Transparent growth management –** make the fiscal impact analysis for Bremner and Colchester Growth Management Studies detailed/thorough and available to the public ***(1 comment)***

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS



We asked participants about how they would like to be notified and involved in the project. Here are some of the ideas:

Notification:

- Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) (12 others agreed)
- Newspaper ads – Sherwood Park News (11 others agreed)
- Email (9 others agreed)
- County website – post updates frequently (5 others agreed)
- County newsletters/mail
- Radio ads
- Electronic sign at entrance to Sherwood Park
- Chamber of Commerce email list* *(privacy law implications)*
- Send updates to Information Volunteer Centre to distribute paper copies
- Have Council members stop by to let people know what's going on

Involvement:

- Get schools/students involved, school field trips to County Hall (7 others agreed)
- At the library (2 others agreed)
- Meet people where they are – schools, arenas, malls, etc.
- Invite the museum
- Talk to the Mayor
- Integrate activities instead of just dialogue

Additional comments:

- Appreciate this event
- Give people a reason to care (i.e., relate MDP content to people's interests and meaningfully engage them)
- No need to involve residents – just look at the past MDP, use common sense and stop wasting tax dollars on planning

NEXT STEPS

Over the next few months there will be many ways for County residents and stakeholder groups to have a say in the MDP. Each of the 4 phases of the project has an opportunity for the community to learn more, attend an event, and provide feedback.

The input we received during Phase 1 will help us as part of our development of the updated MDP.

PHASE 2 ENGAGEMENT

Join us in Phase 2 as we build off the community input to date and explore some early ideas for updating the Municipal Development Plan.

Please attend one of three interactive workshops (taking place June 22, 24, or 25) to learn about and discuss key topics for the MDP update. These small group discussion-based workshops are designed to help you and your neighbours hear from and learn from each other, as well as from planning staff and consultants. Share your ideas!

- **June 22** (5 – 8 p.m.) - Ardrossan Recreation Centre
- **June 24** (5 – 8 p.m.) - South Cooking Lake Community Hall
- **June 25** (5 – 8 p.m.) - Sherwood Park Community Centre Agora

Stay up to date on the project by signing up to our project mailing list at www.strathcona.ca/MDP. You can also visit this website to learn more about the MDP update, check out our whiteboard video, find out about upcoming engagement activities, and view input as it is gathered.