

POWELL RIVER

**BENCHLANDS**

# **ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY**

July 12, 2023

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 1. PROCESS CONTEXT & SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 OUTREACH METHODS & MEDIA COVERAGE	2
1.3 SUMMARY OF PARTICIPATION	2
1.4 SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	4
1.5 SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS	4

## 2. KEY THEMES & KEY DIRECTIONS

2.1 SUMMARY OF 'WHAT WE HEARD'	5
2.2 BALANCING INPUT	7
2.3 NEXT STEPS	7

## APPENDIX I SUMMARY OF RAW DATA

A. ONLINE & PAPER SURVEY	9
B. OPEN HOUSE	19
C. WEBINAR	32
D. WEBSITE COMMENT FORM/LETTER	33

# 1. PROCESS CONTEXT & SUMMARY

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Couverdon Real Estate engaged the Powell River community as a part of their early exploration of neighbourhood development opportunities on the “Benchlands.” The engagement process aimed to: inform community participants about Couverdon’s overall approach to neighbourhood planning; and, gather community input on several key themes, including: Neighbourhood Design; Housing; Parks, Trails, and Open Space; and Mobility.

Multiple engagement methods were deployed, including an open house, online and paper surveys, and a webinar with an in-depth question-and-answer session.

Feedback from this engagement will inform next steps for further public engagement, development of the draft masterplan and formal application to the City of Powell River. Concurrent to public consultation, the project team is engaging with City of Powell River staff and Tla’amin Nation to incorporate their input as the process proceeds.

This summary provides an overview of the feedback received from Phase 2 engagement.

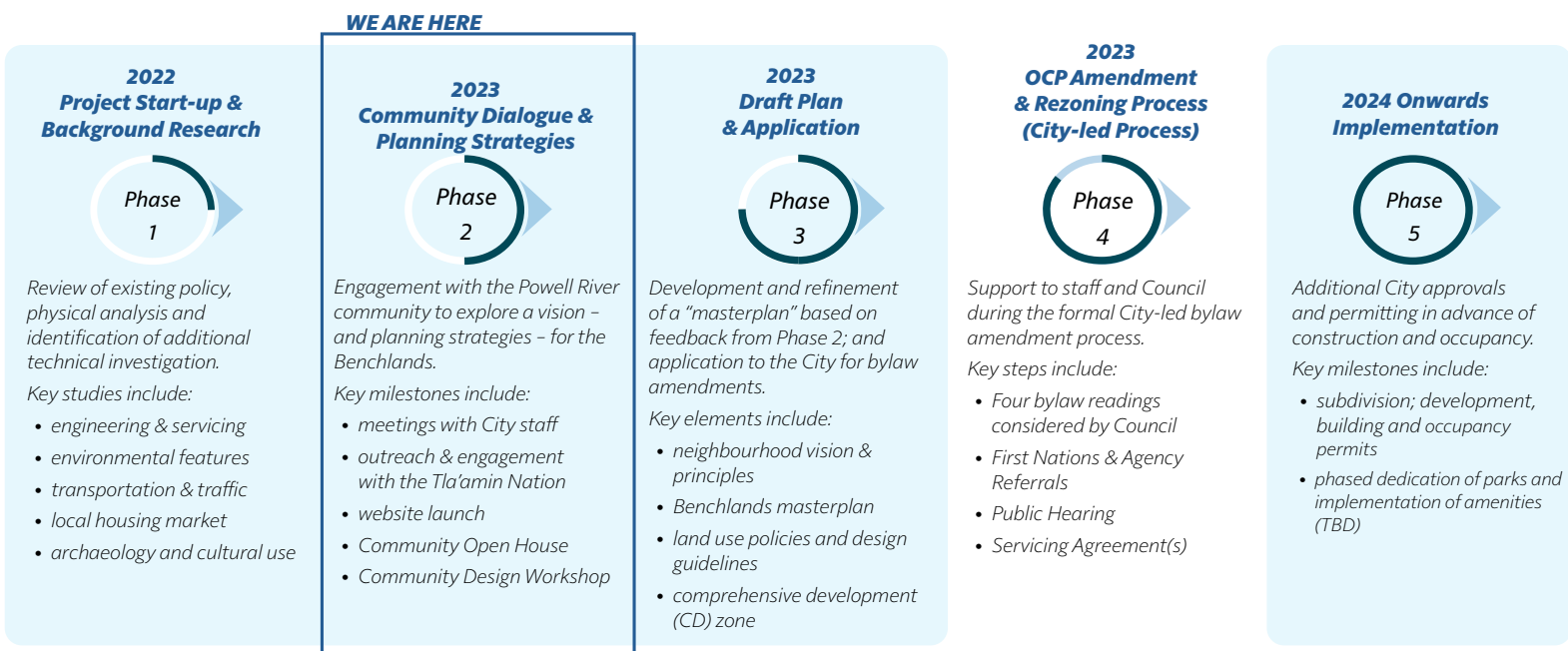


Figure 1. Detailed timeline of the project’s five phases.\*

\*The process timeline illustrates the five phases of the project from project start up to implementation. Implementation will take place in multiple phases with buildout likely measured over decades. We are currently in phase 2 which places an emphasis on community engagement.

## 1.2 OUTREACH METHODS & MEDIA COVERAGE

The outreach methods utilized for the engagement included word of mouth, web-based promotions on Powell River Peak, [the Benchlands website](#), as well as print ads in Powell River Peak and qathet Living magazine.

Emails were sent out inviting 34 community groups to participate in the engagement process (local schools, faith groups, NGOs, Ratepayers Associations etc.) Additionally, 1834 postcards were sent to surrounding neighbourhoods to ensure a wide reach within the community. The map to the right shows the extent of where the postcards were distributed by Canada Post.

The Powell River Peak wrote an [article](#) on the project on April 11 and CBC radio interviewed a Couverdon staff member and the Powell River Mayor on April 18.

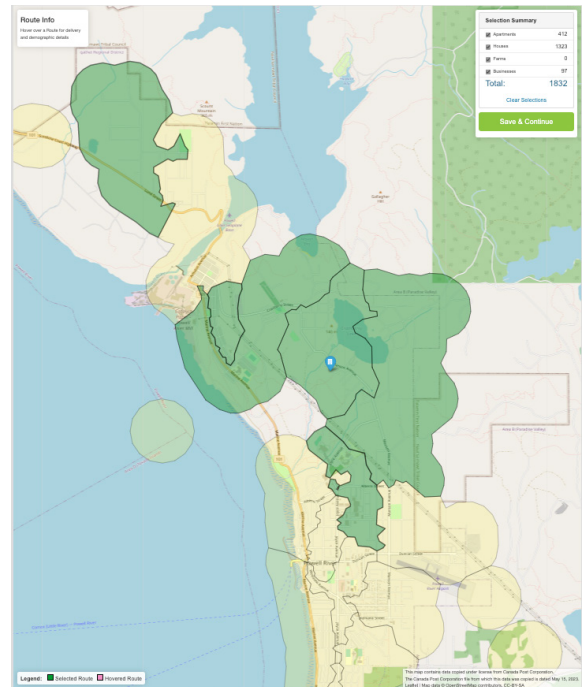


Figure 2. Distribution of postcards via Canada Post - delivered to areas in green.

## 1.3 SUMMARY OF PARTICIPATION

The engagement process involved an in-person open house, survey (online and paper), a webinar, as well as a comment form on the project website. The open house on April 25, 2023 was well-attended, with 140 participants who provided feedback on the information boards via sticky dots, sticky notes, and a participant survey.



**140**

**OPEN HOUSE PARTICIPANTS**



**76**

**SURVEY REPOSSES**



**8**

**COMMENTS/EMAILS FROM THE WEBSITE**

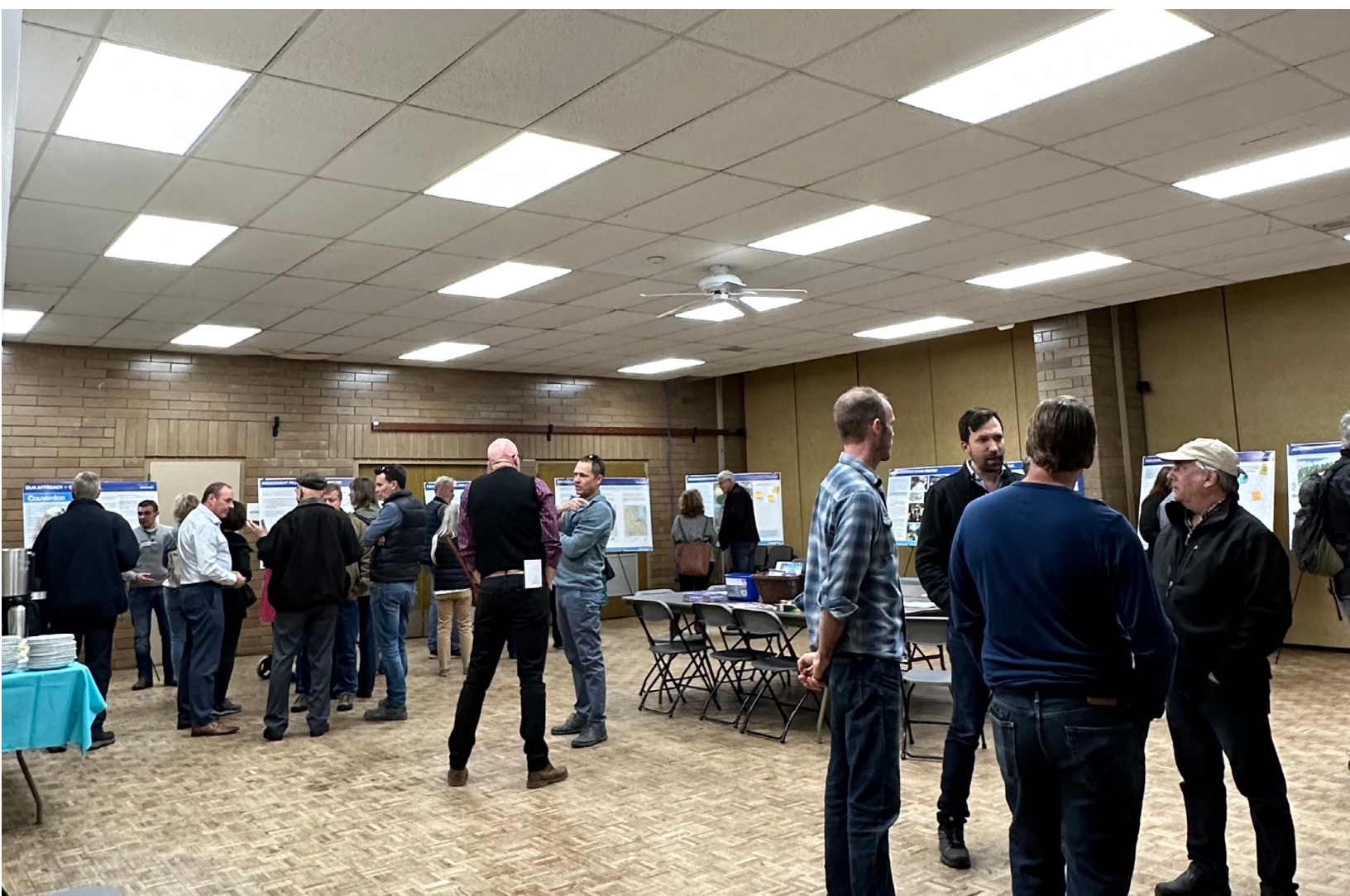


**4**

**WEBINAR PARTICPANTS**

The online survey was available on the Powell River Benchlands website from April 25 - May 10, 2023. Participants were able to access it from QR codes displayed around the open house. It was available to open house attendees, webinar participants, as well as those who did not have a chance to attend the open house. Pairing with the online survey was a digital version of the open house boards on the website for people to take a look at in detail. The webinar was held on May 3rd in the evening on Zoom. We welcomed four participants to a presentation detailing the strategies and overall approach, followed by an in-depth question and answer session.







## 1.4 SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Feedback was collected on a range of ideas (e.g. “strategies” and “approaches”) presented to the community. The graph below illustrates the summary of the level of support, at a glance.

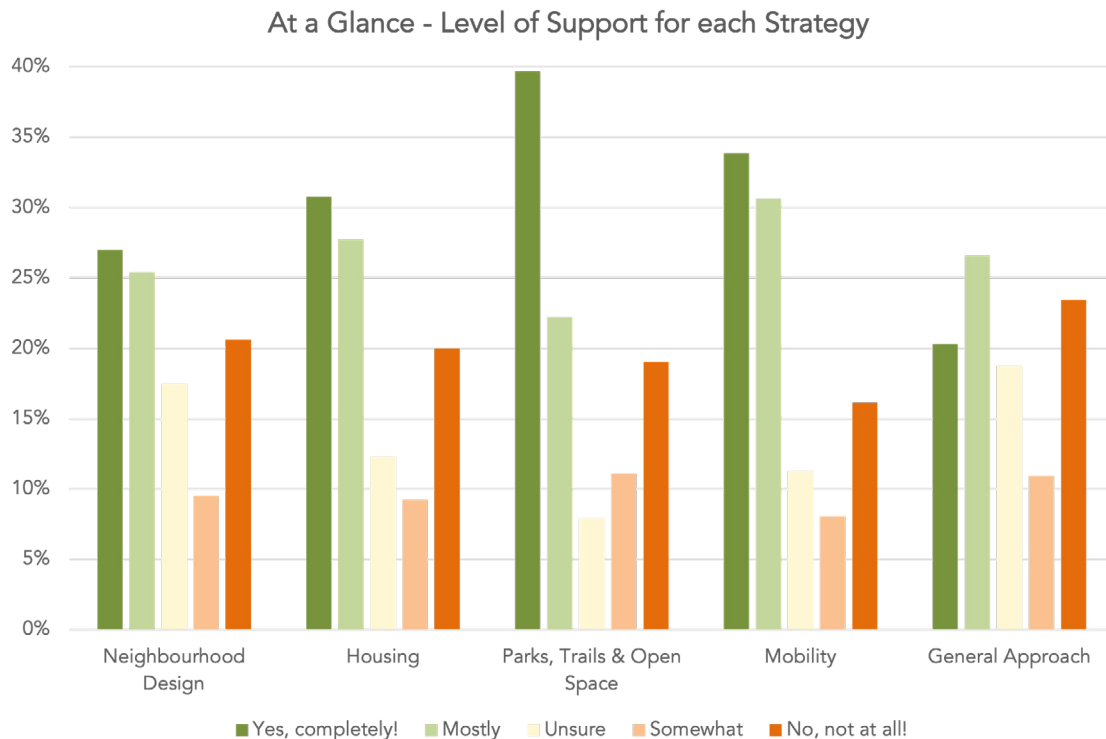


Figure 3. At a glance, level of support for each strategy.

## 1.5 KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK

Qualitative feedback was provided by participants – through all modes of engagement – for both the strategies as well as the engagement process. Consolidated key takeaways are included here below to inform the planning process ahead:

- Build on the **strong sense of community** in Powell River. We heard that Powell River is increasingly becoming a popular destination for young families as it provides access to recreation, outdoor pursuits, music and culture.
- Include **diverse housing options** to accommodate different lifestyles and household types.
- Include a mix of **residential and small-scale commercial spaces** to promote walkability and social connection.
- **Enhance green space and trail connectivity** to promote an active lifestyle and social well-being.
- Focus on **environmental protection and climate change mitigation efforts** on the site.
- Consider impacts to neighbours and **manage vehicular traffic effectively**.
- **Continue to engage** community members in a transparent process in subsequent planning phases.

## 2. KEY THEMES & KEY DIRECTIONS

### 2.1 SUMMARY OF “WHAT WE HEARD”

The feedback collected during this phase of engagement illustrates strong general support for the planning approach taken to date, and emphasizes the need for new housing in Powell River while considering social and environmental sustainability. Participants highlighted key areas of importance, including environmental protection, affordability, diversity of housing types, community connectivity, sustainability, and transparent decision-making. They expressed their desire to preserve the green space and trail networks within the new neighbourhood. Most participants expressed support for the format of engagement process, recognizing it as an opportunity to contribute insights and stay informed about project progress.

Community participation has been valuable in collecting perspectives that will inform and shape the neighbourhood planning and design process in accordance with the community's needs and priorities. The following section provides a summary of key themes we heard through the engagement process.

#### Neighbourhood Design

- Build on the strong sense of community in Powell River and seek to foster a socially cohesive community through neighbourhood design
- Powell River is a popular destination for young families and the new neighbourhood could provide family-friendly housing and play areas
- Plan for diversity in ages within the new neighbourhood to be a source of energy and vitality, contributing to a vibrant and inclusive community
- Integrate the new housing development into existing neighbourhoods and amenities
- Consider a balance between the natural environment and the housing objectives of the neighbourhood
- Consider well-rounded mix of residential and small-scale commercial spaces including child care centres, small retail shops, artists' studios, and live-work units
- Foster a vibrant and inclusive neighbourhood where residents can live, work, and play within close proximity
- Include recreation and open space such as a golf course, sports fields, ball diamonds or similar recreational facilities

#### Local Economic Development

- Consider the creation of new commercial spaces that would lead to increased employment opportunities within the community
- Support and promote local businesses through the creation of housing options for the workforce

## Housing

- Prioritize affordable, inclusive, and sustainable houses for people of all ages that cater to various demographics and foster affordability and accessibility for residents
- Include more options for seniors, low-income individuals, and singles in Powell River while accommodating new families
- Include pet-friendly housing options
- Consider fourplexes and six-plexes, townhomes and some condos as part of a denser housing mix
- Consider house design that supports social cohesion
- Consider sustainable house design, which promote energy efficiency and reduce environmental impact

## Parks, Trails and Open Space

### Environmental Protection and Climate Change

- Preserve natural habitats and wildlife corridors
- Explore innovative alternative energy sources such as solar or geothermal power
- Protect and expand the existing green and open spaces
- Recognize the importance of protecting riparian areas, to protect fish habitat
- Protect trees and the Coastal Douglas Fir ecosystem
- Install bear-safe garbage cans

### Trails, Pathways and Open Space

- Maintain trails for recreational activities such as walking, hiking, other outdoor activities, and the enjoyment of nature

- Consider the inclusion of community assets such as existing trails, and cycling routes which are currently used by mountain bikers, hikers, dog walkers, and nature lovers of all ages
- Include dog parks for pet owners to exercise and socialize their dogs
- Consider the importance of sustainable and locally sourced food and include initiatives that support local farming and promote access to fresh, healthy produce

## Mobility

- Consider wide sidewalks or walking corridors to enhance pedestrian accessibility
- Include effective traffic management strategies to ensure smooth circulation of vehicles and minimize congestion

## Active Transportation

- Promote walking as a means of transportation to a commercial or service hub
- Connect mobility networks around and through the site via streets and multi-use paths
- Connect with existing transit networks that connect the recreational complex with the Brooks school
- Consider safe, shared paths for pedestrians and cyclists

## Servicing and Phasing

- Consider essential community infrastructure to meet the demands of a growing population

## Process - Transparency and Accountability

- Ensure that the implementation of the design reflects the needs and aspirations of the community as a whole
- Continue with open and inclusive processes to help ensure that the design aligns with the community's vision and values

## 2.2 BALANCING INPUT

The “engagement weave” diagram (below) illustrates how the feedback from the engagement process will be woven together with technical studies, best practice research, engagement with Tla’amin Nation, and insights from Council and City staff, to create a plan for the Benchlands development.

Information and ideas from all of these streams interact, leading to shared learning and insight, and the emergence of new ideas throughout the process, from start-up to implementation. We recognize that no single “thread” – input, comment, or activity – determines the outcome, however in terms of land use (i.e. rezoning) decisions, the City Powell River Council is the decision-making authority.



Figure 4. “Weave” diagram illustrating engagement process bringing together multiple perspectives and insights.

## 2.3 NEXT STEPS

Feedback from community members, the City of Powell River staff and Tla’amin Nation and inputs from the technical studies (transportation, environment, archaeology, engineering, housing market, etc.) will inform updates to the key directions (strategies) and the development of a draft concept plan. Our intent is to host another in person event in the fall with community members to receive feedback on the draft concept plan design. At this event we will report back on a summary of what we heard and how this informed the updated key directions (strategies) and the draft concept plan. This information will also be available via the website for those unable to attend in person.

We are grateful for the efforts made by community members to participate in the engagement process to date and appreciate the opportunity to better understand community perspectives which will help shape the future of the Benchlands. Please stay tuned for upcoming dates for public input.

## APPENDIX | SUMMARY OF RAW DATA

## A. ONLINE & PAPER SURVEY

Paper surveys were provided to participants at the open house and available online from April 25 - May 10 via the Powell River Benchlands website. QR codes displayed at the open house helped attendees easily access the online survey if preferred to the hardcopy format. Opportunities were also communicated via a project mailing list and via social media (Instagram) managed by Couverdon. A digital version of the open house information boards was also available via the project website for people review information in detail.

We received 38 completed paper surveys at the open house and 38 online surveys.

The following sections provide a summary of respondents' support to each strategy and general comments on the themes of: Neighbourhood Design, Housing, Parks, Trails & Open Space, Mobility, and Phasing & Implementation. The numbers in brackets refer to the number of comments received on each theme.

### DEMOGRAPHICS/GENERAL INFO

The majority of survey respondents were from the City of Powell River, with one participant residing outside the city limits, in qathet. The graph below illustrates the neighbourhood participants reside in.

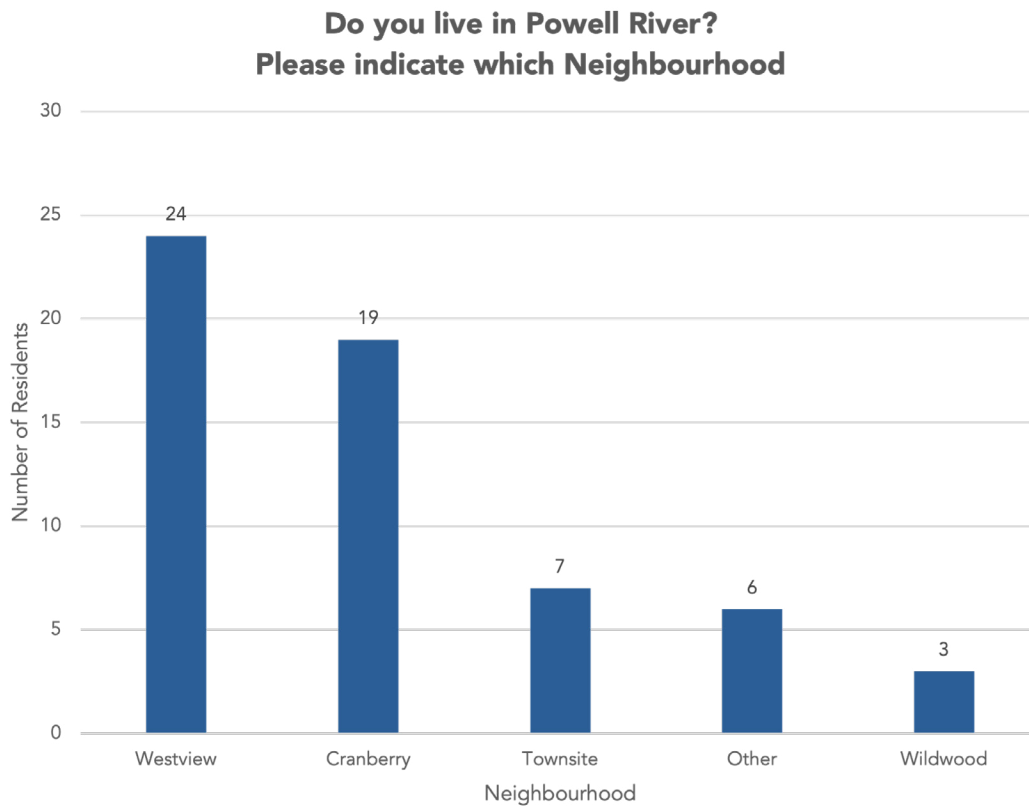


Figure 5. Distribution of the neighbourhoods people reside in from survey respondents.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD DESIGN STRATEGY

**Overall, 52% of respondents completely or mostly support the proposed approach to neighbourhood design on the Benchlands.** Thirty-one percent of respondents somewhat or do not support the approach, and 17% are unsure. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of the level of support and section following outlines the key themes that respondents expressed.

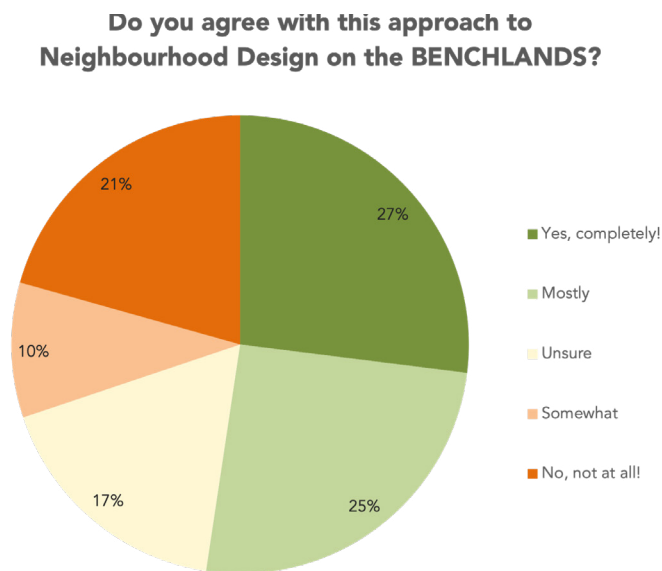


Figure 6. Level of support for the Neighbourhood Design Strategy.

## Environmental Protection and Climate Change (25)

The respondents voiced their concerns regarding the potential impacts of the proposed development on the environmental and natural features of the site such as riparian areas and wildlife corridors. Throughout the survey comments, an emphasis was placed on preserving the trees and wildlife habitats. They mentioned exploring innovative alternative energy sources such as solar or geothermal power. In addition, the community recognized the significance of incorporating parking areas equipped with charging stations for electric vehicles as an important step towards tackling carbon emissions and addressing climate change. A strong consensus to protect and expand the existing green and open spaces emerged as a fundamental principle guiding the design of the neighbourhood.

Some respondents indicated an inclination towards leaving the site as is without significant alterations or development.

## Connectivity (15)

The engagement process highlighted the importance of connectivity in promoting social cohesion and reducing reliance on vehicles. Respondents expressed a desire for well-planned and accessible transportation networks that promotes ease of movement, connectivity, and integration with the surrounding areas. This includes considerations for community assets such as existing trails, and cycling routes which are currently used by mountain bikers, hikers, dog walkers, and nature lovers of all ages.

Respondents also expressed interest in the provision for multi-use trails that accommodate a range of activities, promoting an active and connected lifestyle.



## **Wildlife Corridors (14)**

Preserving the existing riparian ecosystem and safeguarding wildlife habitats emerged as a topic of importance among respondents, who expressed their support in the strategy as it recognizes the importance of protecting riparian areas, to protect fish habitat. Protecting the riparian areas was seen as essential for fostering ecological connectivity and preserving biodiversity.

## **Housing (13)**

Respondents commented on the importance of offering diverse housing options that cater to a wide range of lifestyles and household types. While detached homes have traditionally been prevalent in the City of Powell River, the community voiced a desire for additional choice. Preserving Powell Rivers' rural charm with sensitive density to meet the housing needs of Powell River was deemed important. Furthermore, respondents expressed a need for diverse housing types that cater to various demographics and foster affordability and accessibility for residents. There were considerations for both rental and ownership housing options.

## **A Mix of Uses (10)**

Respondents expressed a desire for a well-rounded mix of residential and small-scale commercial spaces. Many respondents encouraged the establishment of various small-scale commercial uses such as child care centres, small retail shops, artists' studios, and live-work units. This mix is seen as crucial for creating a vibrant and dynamic community.

## **Sense of Community (7)**

Building a strong sense of community was a recurring theme throughout the survey responses. Respondents acknowledged that the City of Powell River is increasingly becoming a popular destination for young families and seeks to foster a social cohesive community. The diversity in ages within the community is seen as a source of energy and vitality, contributing to a vibrant and inclusive social fabric.

While most respondents demonstrated support for the proposed vision of Benchlands, few acknowledged that certain aspects of the plan may be viewed as ambitious or idealistic, highlighting the complexity of balancing different interests and preferences within the community. Respondents acknowledged that compromises may need to be made to accommodate diverse perspectives.

## **Recreation Facilities (5)**

Providing accessible and diverse recreational facilities garnered strong support from the community. Respondents expressed the desire for golf courses, sports fields, ball diamonds or similar recreational facilities that can be enjoyed by residents as they promote leisure, well-being, and an enhanced quality of life.

## **Process | Transparency and Accountability (5)**

Most respondents supported the engagement process while some expressed a desire for continued transparency and accountability in the planning and engagement process. They wanted to ensure that the implementation of the design reflects the needs and aspirations of the community as a whole. Open and inclusive decision-making processes were highlighted as important for ensuring that the design aligns with the community's vision and values.

## Enhanced Community Infrastructure (4)

Respondents emphasized the need to improve essential community infrastructure to meet the demands of a growing population. Respondents feel that this growing population are in need for local government and authorities to enhance facilities such as hospitals and recreational centres to provide adequate services and create a stronger community environment.

## HOUSING STRATEGY

Respondents expressed their preferences and concerns regarding housing options and affordability. **Overall, 59% of respondents completely or mostly support the proposed approach to housing on the Benchlands.** 29% of respondents somewhat or do not support the approach, and 12% are unsure. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of the level of support and following are themes that emerged from the survey.

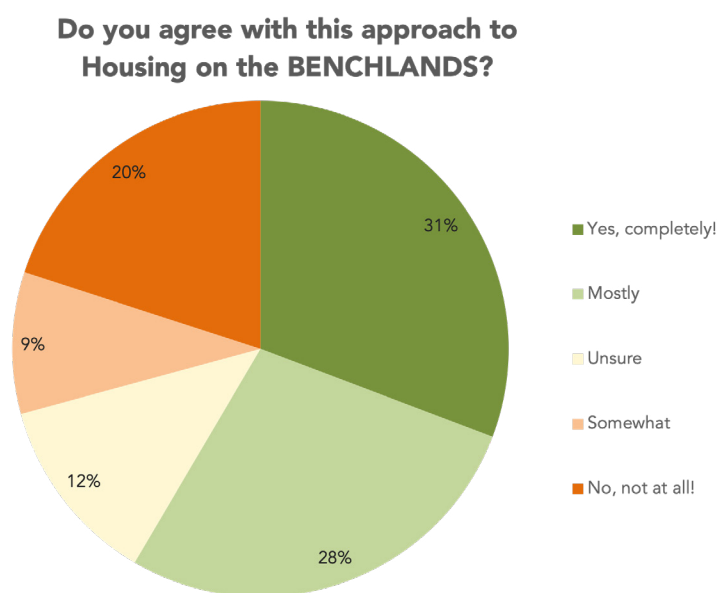


Figure 7. Level of support for the Housing Strategy.

## Affordable Housing (29)

There was widespread support for the development of affordable housing options in the community. The need for affordable, inclusive, and sustainable houses for people of all ages was emphasized. Respondents also called for increased housing opportunities for non-profit organizations and individuals with disabilities. Affordability of housing was identified, given the construction costs and the median household income in Powell River. They believe that there is a strong need to address the housing affordability challenges faced by various segments of the community.

## Housing Gaps (22)

Addressing housing gaps was a key topic of importance highlighted during the engagement process. The community expressed the need for more options for seniors, low-income individuals, and singles in Powell River while accommodating new families. There was a recognition of the need to provide housing that accommodates pet owners, indicating a desire for pet-friendly housing options. Providing a range of housing options to meet the diverse needs of different demographics was seen as important.

## **Attached Housing (9)**

Respondents showed a preference for townhomes and some condos as part of a denser housing mix. There was a recognized need for more density in housing options to help with affordability. Attached housing provides a mix of housing types and contributes to a more vibrant and integrated neighbourhood. Fourplexes and six-plexes were suggested as potential solutions to increase housing availability. Respondents identified the current lack of housing diversity as an area of improvement and strongly supported the proposed development which embraces a collaborative and supportive living environment. There was a call for more co-operative housing options.

Some community members expressed a preference for housing diversity, including a mix of housing types and tenures. However, there were others who were not in favour of multi-family housing options.

## **Environmental Protection (4)**

While most of the respondents favour the proposed development, a few respondents expressed a desire to preserve the current state of the Benchlands.

## **Sustainability (4)**

Respondents were supportive and highlighted the importance of incorporating sustainable practices in the building process. They want the development to consider sustainable sourcing of materials and explore the use of green energy where feasible.

## **Low Density Housing (2)**

Some respondents expressed a preference for detached housing, and did not like the idea of condos, apartments. Respondents suggest a desire to maintain a certain aesthetic or atmosphere in the community.

## PARK, TRAILS & OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

Respondents expressed their preferences related to environmental protection, connectivity, safety, open space, recreation, and agriculture. **Overall, 62% of respondents completely or mostly support the proposed approach to parks, trails, and open space on the Benchlands.** 30% of respondents somewhat or do not support the approach, and 8% are unsure. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of the level of support and following are themes that emerged from the survey.

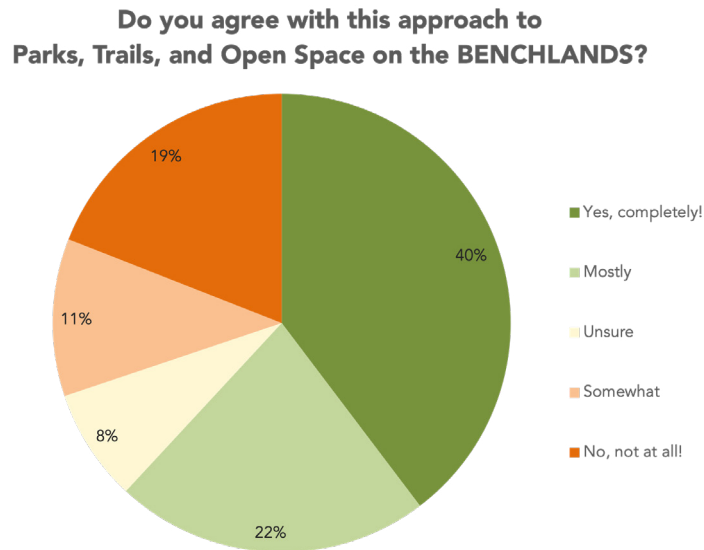


Figure 8. Level of support for the Parks, Trails, and Open Space Strategy.

### Environmental Protection (40)

Protecting the environment and preserving natural spaces were significant priorities for the respondents. There were concerns about the potential loss of natural areas and animal habitat. Respondents emphasized the importance of preserving older trees, especially for the eagles.. Ultimately, there is a desire to safeguard the riparian area and ensure that any development plans consider the environmental impact.

### Connectivity (17)

Respondents expressed a desire for enhanced connectivity, to integrate the site into surrounded neighbourhoods. Desire to upgrade the Pole Line trail (BC Hydro Right of Way on the southern boundary of the site) as a greenway, seamlessly integrating natural open spaces with residential areas emerged as a vital element for fostering a sense of belonging. Participants emphasized the importance of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and the provision of dedicated bike lanes to separate fast vehicles from bikers. The community values the creation of a well-connected network of trails and pathways that promote walkability, cycling, and accessibility. Moreover, participants emphasized the importance of establishing connections not only within the Benchlands but also with the surrounding neighbourhoods.

### Wildlife Corridors (5)

Respondents expressed the need to maintain wildlife corridors within the Benchlands as it aims to protect the habitats of various wildlife species and promote biodiversity. The community recognized the significance of maintaining and enhancing the natural ecosystem.

## Recreation (3)

Providing natural play areas and opportunities for fishing in creeks were mentioned as desirable features for recreation. The community expressed a desire to create engaging recreational spaces for children.

## Safety (3)

Safety was a key topic of importance raised during the engagement process. Community members advocated for the installation of bear-safe garbage cans and the creation of safe, shared paths for pedestrians and cyclists.

## Agriculture (1)

One respondent emphasized providing more information about agriculture-related opportunities.

## MOBILITY STRATEGY

Several respondents made comments regarding active transportation, public transport, climate change, underground parking, traffic management, and trails and pathways. **Overall, 65% of respondents completely or mostly support the proposed approach to mobility on the Benchlands.** 24% of respondents somewhat or do not support the approach, and 11% are unsure. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of the level of support and following are themes that emerged from the survey.

## Active Transportation (19)

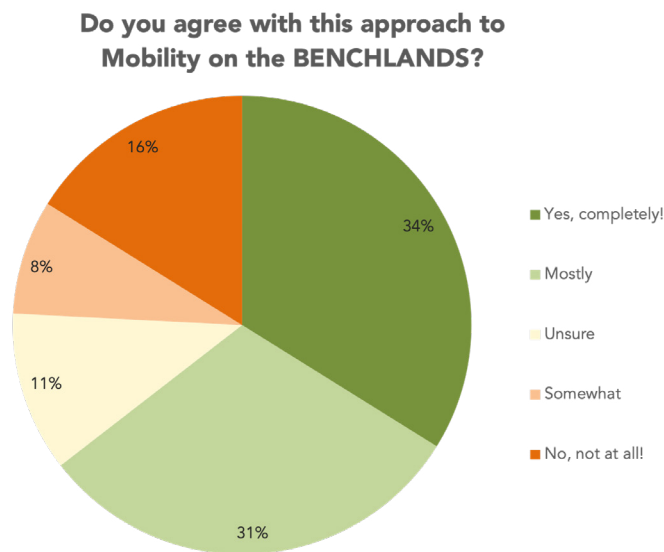


Figure 9. Level of support for the Mobility Strategy.

Respondents expressed the need for improved infrastructure for active transportation. This included the development of bike trails and lanes, particularly alongside the Millennium Trail, as well as the provision of good walking options. Respondents also emphasized the importance of larger sidewalks or walking corridors to enhance pedestrian accessibility. They encouraged a healthy and active lifestyle while reducing reliance on cars. By prioritizing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, the community aims to create a more sustainable and environmentally friendly neighbourhood. Wheelchair accessible transportation options were identified as an important requirement.

Respondents advocated for comprehensive public transport systems to reduce traffic congestion, emissions, and reliance on private vehicles. For example, there was a suggestion to establish bus routes that connect the recreational complex with the Brooks school, ensuring convenient transportation for residents.

One point raised was the inclusion of a car-sharing service to promote shared mobility and reduce the number of private vehicles on the road, supporting sustainable transportation practices.

### **Trails and Pathways (13)**

Preserving the natural forest trails emerged as an important preference. Respondents stressed the importance of connectivity, including a desire to retain the existing trails, emphasizing their value for recreational activities and the enjoyment of nature. One example is having hard-surfaced paths suitable for roller blades, skateboards, and strollers. Participants promoted inclusivity and also emphasized on ensuring that the trails cater to the diverse needs and preferences of residents.

### **Accessibility and Walking (5)**

Respondents emphasized the importance of promoting walking as a means of transportation to a commercial or service hub. Enhancing accessibility for pedestrians was highlighted as a consideration to ensure convenience and inclusivity for all community members.

### **Traffic Management and Parking (5)**

Managing traffic effectively and accommodating the expected increase in population were concerns raised. The community desires effective traffic management strategies to ensure smooth circulation of vehicles and minimize congestion and potential issues in the area.

Suggestions included installing stop lights and creating parking lots at existing facilities. Utilizing the existing hydro right-of-way (ROW) as a means of accessing the area and alleviating traffic on Manson and Cranberry Streets was proposed. Additionally, there was a suggestion for the development of a connector between Cranberry and Westview to improve traffic flow and management of traffic flow on the south edge of the Benchlands.

With regards to parking, the idea of central underground parking with small shuttle cars to individual homes was put forth as a potential solution. It was also noted that there are currently ample off-street and on-street parking spaces available in the area.

### **Infrastructure and Implementation (4)**

Respondents highlighted the need to consider existing infrastructure in Powell River and its improvements to support the development. This included emphasis on evaluating and addressing any necessary upgrades or modifications to accommodate increased population, transportation needs, and connectivity.

### **Climate Change (2)**

Respondents expressed support for environmentally friendly transportation options. Specifically, there was a consensus on promoting the use of electric vehicles (e-vehicles) and installing e-charging stations to facilitate their adoption.

## PHASING & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

While there was not a specific question on phasing and implementation, several key points were raised by participants through other questions regarding open space, accessibility and walking, a transparent approach, local economic development, and infrastructure and servicing.

### Infrastructure and Servicing (3)

Few respondents offered suggestions highlighting the potential consequences of the development on water-related matters, particularly considering the increasing occurrence of hotter summers. Respondents emphasized on the importance of considering infrastructure costs and expressed a preference for better utilization of existing city land, such as infill projects, as opposed to the concept of expansive paved streets that could lead to water runoff issues.

### Local Economic Development (3)

Respondents emphasized the need to open up opportunities for local businesses. They advocated for the creation of new business spaces that would lead to increased employment opportunities within the community. The respondents expressed a desire to support and promote local economic growth.

## OVERALL

**Overall, 47% of participants support the ideas and planning approach presented.** Twenty-three percent don't support it at all and 11% somewhat support it. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of the level of support and following are themes that emerged from the survey.

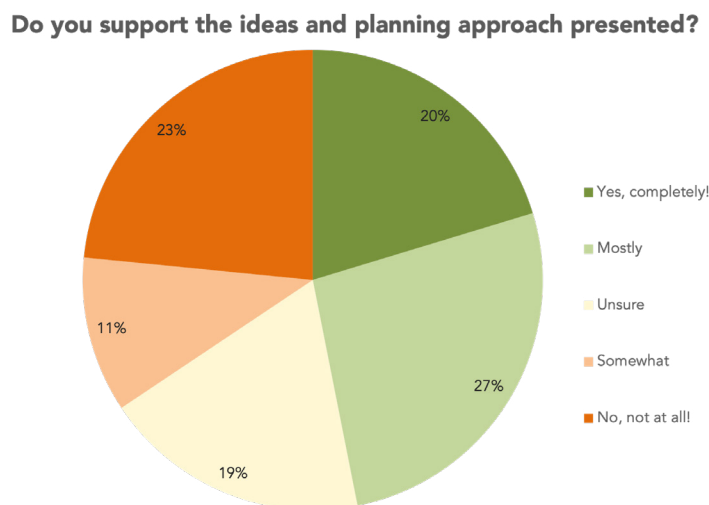


Figure 10. Level of support for the Overall Approach.

### Further Engagement (22)

There was a strong desire among community members to stay informed and engaged in the ongoing process. They expressed the need for continued updates and information regarding project developments.

Respondents generally appreciated the engagement process thus far. They felt that their voices were being heard and valued, indicating satisfaction with the level of involvement and communication throughout the planning stages. There were suggestions to conduct targeted engagement, such as with youth and Tla'amin Nation.

## **Environmental Protection (17)**

The respondents expressed support for the ideals of environmental protection, including the preservation of natural habitats and wildlife. There was a desire to ensure that any development on the Benchlands supports environmental values and promotes sustainability.

Some participants expressed the viewpoint that no development is needed on the Benchlands. They advocated for preserving the area in its current state, and reflected a desire to maintain the natural beauty and ecological value of the land.

## **Transparency and Accountability (14)**

The respondents emphasized on the importance of transparency in the planning and implementation of the project. They wanted to ensure that the decision-making process is well thought out, reflects the needs of the community, and is accountable to the shared goals and values expressed during the engagement process.

The respondents expressed a strong appreciation for Powell River and indicated a desire for open and inclusive decision-making, where community members are actively involved and informed throughout the development process.

## **Community Infrastructure (7)**

There was a specific interest in ensuring the availability of community infrastructure, particularly health and medical services. The respondents recognized the need for accessible healthcare facilities to support the well-being of residents in the Benchlands area.



## B. OPEN HOUSE

The open house was held on April 25, 2023 from 4-8pm at the Powell River Recreation Complex, 140 people attended. The drop in style format allowed for the project team to have direct interaction with community members.

Project team members included staff from: Couverdon Real Estate; AMC Project Management; MODUS Planning, Design and Engagement; Mainstream Biological Consulting; and Highland Engineering.

Large format poster boards provided information – in words, graphics, maps and illustrations – about the project process, policy context and planning strategies, including: neighbourhood context, neighbourhood design, housing, parks, trails, and open space, mobility, servicing and phasing.

### MODE OF OUTREACH

Most of the participants heard about the open house through print ads. Word of mouth and web-based\* methods were comparable in reaching participants, and radio ads were the least.

Moving forward Couverdon has partnered with Zinc Communication Strategies, a team of seasoned communicators, ex-journalists, PR-pros, passionate public engagement specialists, and digital content creators for helping with communication with public.

*\*A note that the Benchlands team did not use Facebook as a means of advertising, but through the engagement process, have learned that Facebook is one of the main communication tools in the Powell River community.*

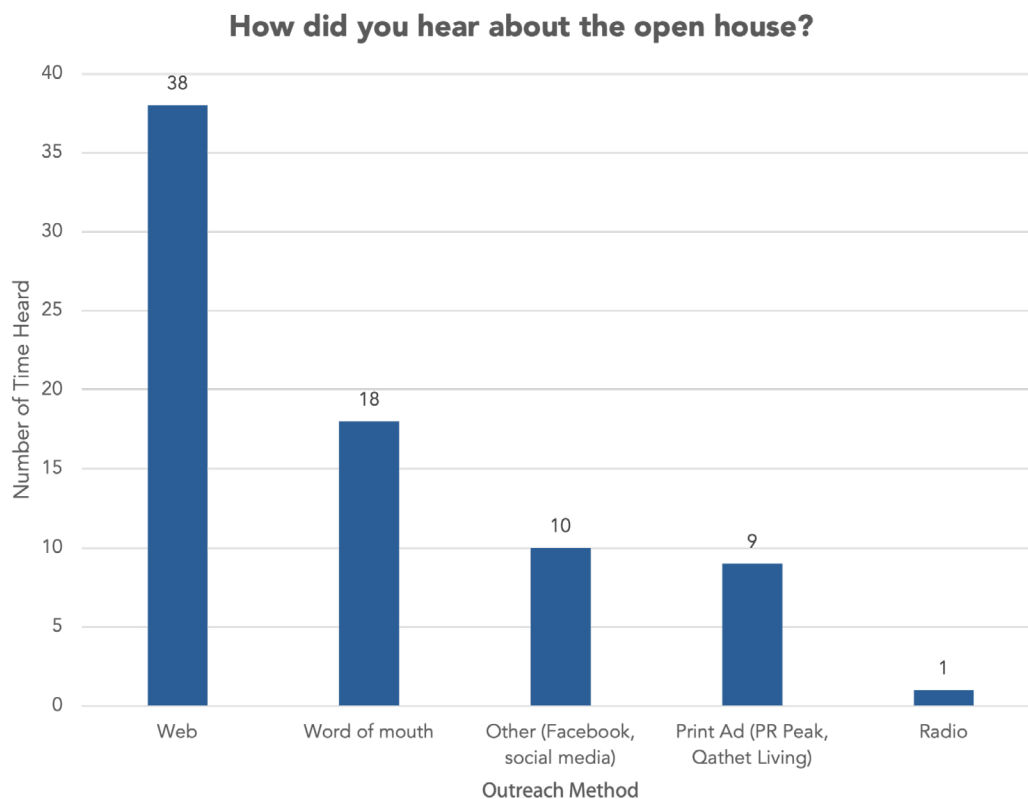


Figure 11. Distribution of how participants heard about the Open House.

# NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTEXT BOARD

Responses to this board were somewhat divergent from the intended objective: to better understand and identify adjacent neighbourhood services and amenities (for context and planning of complementary uses). Comments emphasized references to wildlife corridors, and green spaces, with far fewer input regarding neighbourhood amenities and local businesses. The following details provide a summary of these comments:

Figure 12. Neighbourhood Context board from the Public Open House.

## Wildlife Corridors (17)

Participants expressed a strong desire to protect various wildlife species, including bears, cougars, herons, and others. Preserving their natural habitats and ensuring the connectivity of wildlife corridors were key priorities. Participants also emphasized the importance of protecting trees and the Coastal Douglas Fir ecosystem, highlighting the community's commitment to preserving local biodiversity.

## **Green Space (7)**

The preservation and creation of green spaces were considered crucial aspects of any housing development. Natural spaces associated with Cranberry Lake, a local natural feature, are especially important. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of having green spaces throughout neighbourhoods, providing residents with access to nature, recreational opportunities, and a sense of tranquillity.

## **Environmental Protection (5)**

The respondents expressed support for the ideals of environmental protection, including the preservation of natural habitats and wildlife. There was a desire to ensure that any development on the Benchlands supports environmental values and promotes sustainability.

## **Amenities (3)**

The need for amenities that enhance the community's quality of life was an important topic of discussion. Dog parks were specifically mentioned, indicating the community's interest in providing spaces for pet owners to exercise and socialize their dogs. The importance of well-maintained trails for walking, hiking, and other outdoor activities was also highlighted as a way to encourage an active lifestyle. These amenities contribute to the overall well-being and enjoyment of residents.

## **Local Businesses (1)**

Participants emphasized on the importance of local businesses for the community to thrive together. Supporting and promoting local businesses like Magpie's Diner reflects the community's recognition of the importance of a thriving local economy and the unique contributions that small businesses bring to the community's character and identity.



# NEIGHBOURHOOD DESIGN STRATEGY BOARD

The open house yielded valuable insights regarding participants' aspirations for a diverse, walkable, and sustainable neighbourhood that fosters a strong sense of community. The following points provide a detailed summary of these discussions:

## NEIGHBOURHOOD DESIGN STRATEGY

*Planning and design for the Benchlands aims to create a neighbourhood where residents can connect with each other, are physically active and can enjoy a range of activities, all within close proximity to home.*

*Great neighbourhoods typically include: a 'sense of place' defined by local landscape, gathering spaces for social connection, places to play and be active, ease of mobility, a variety of housing options, and convenient, small-scale commercial services (e.g. corner store/cafe).*

**There is an opportunity at the BENCHLANDS to design a neighbourhood for all ages with a focus on quality of life, livability and social cohesion.**

**POWELL RIVER BENCHLANDS**

Walkability  
Mixed Residential/Commercial  
Civic art

**What do you think makes a great neighbourhood?**

**YOUR IDEAS**

- More diverse / mixed use
- Forest Green Space
- Good Health (not too big hospitals)
- Green spaces / Parks / Trails
- Walkability (not relying on personal vehicles)
- Trail enhanced
- Mixed Use
- Green live/work/public spaces
- Health services - hospital
- Wildlife protection / green corridors
- Sense of community
- Child care facility
- Transit - ferry
- Artist studios
- Community gardens / Pickleball Courts
- INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT
- Public green space for people to gather well-being?
- Neighbourhood near services is smart
- Walkable - higher density closer to services

Also need green places for people to go - those with limited mobility, close to housing.

**A PLACE FOR ALL AGES**

In order to build a welcoming community, it is essential to approach neighbourhood design that supports social connections for a mix of ages, incomes and abilities.

Strategies include diverse housing types, tenures (i.e. rental) and designs that accommodate a range of residents' needs and promote social interaction. Simple design elements – such as front doors and porches, street trees and sidewalks – promote comfort, safety, mobility and sociability across all life stages (e.g. baby strollers, mobility scooters, etc.).

**FRIENDLY TO OUR FAMILIES**

Housing, parks and open space design can also bring greater livability to **families with young children**. Housing diversity can support overall affordability; and specific design considerations of open space (e.g. yards and parks) and local neighbourhood amenities which provide opportunities for parents to socialize with neighbouring families is a key feature to community connection.

**BEYOND NEIGHBOURHOOD BOUNDARIES**

Surrounded by a range of complimentary neighbourhood uses and facilities (e.g. the Rec Complex and Cranberry commercial area), neighbourhood design will seek to connect and strengthen the existing 'fabric' of the Powell River community.

Figure 13. Neighbourhood Design Strategy board from the Public Open House.

## Diverse Mix of Uses (26)

Participants expressed the need for a wide range of services and amenities to meet residents' needs. This includes health services and hospitals, a neighbourhood plaza with small commercial areas, residences integrated with local businesses, parks, libraries, community gardens, sports fields, child care facilities, artist-friendly spaces, and a central village. These various uses contribute to a vibrant and inclusive community where residents can live, work, and play within close proximity.





# HOUSING STRATEGY BOARD

During the open house, participants expressed their inclination and concerns regarding affordability, housing diversity and sustainability. The following points provide a summary of these comments:

Figure 15. Housing Strategy board from the Public Open House.

## Housing for All (29)

Participants emphasized the importance of housing options that cater to different demographics. This included housing for young people, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. The community recognized the need for inclusive housing solutions that accommodate diverse needs and promote accessible and independent living. Additionally, there was an interest in supporting individuals on their journey to home ownership, providing opportunities for long-term stability and asset building.



## Affordability (12)

Some participants voiced their support for affordability. There was a demand for the provision of social housing for low-income individuals and families, as well as purpose-built rental units. The community recognized the need for affordable housing options to address the housing challenges faced by different segments of the population.

## Multi-Family Housing (12)

Participants expressed openness to multi-family housing options as a means to address housing demands and create a more compact and efficient use of space. This included the consideration of townhomes, apartments, multi-family dwellings, and supportive/transitional housing. Non-profit housing initiatives were also highlighted as a way to provide affordable and accessible housing options for those in need.

## Sustainability (11)

Community members emphasized the importance of sustainability in housing design and development. The concept of passive houses, which promote energy efficiency and reduce environmental impact, was embraced by the community. The use of green energy options, such as solar power, was also highlighted as a way to promote sustainability. Ensuring access to fresh air and incorporating green spaces within housing developments were additional priorities to enhance the well-being of residents.

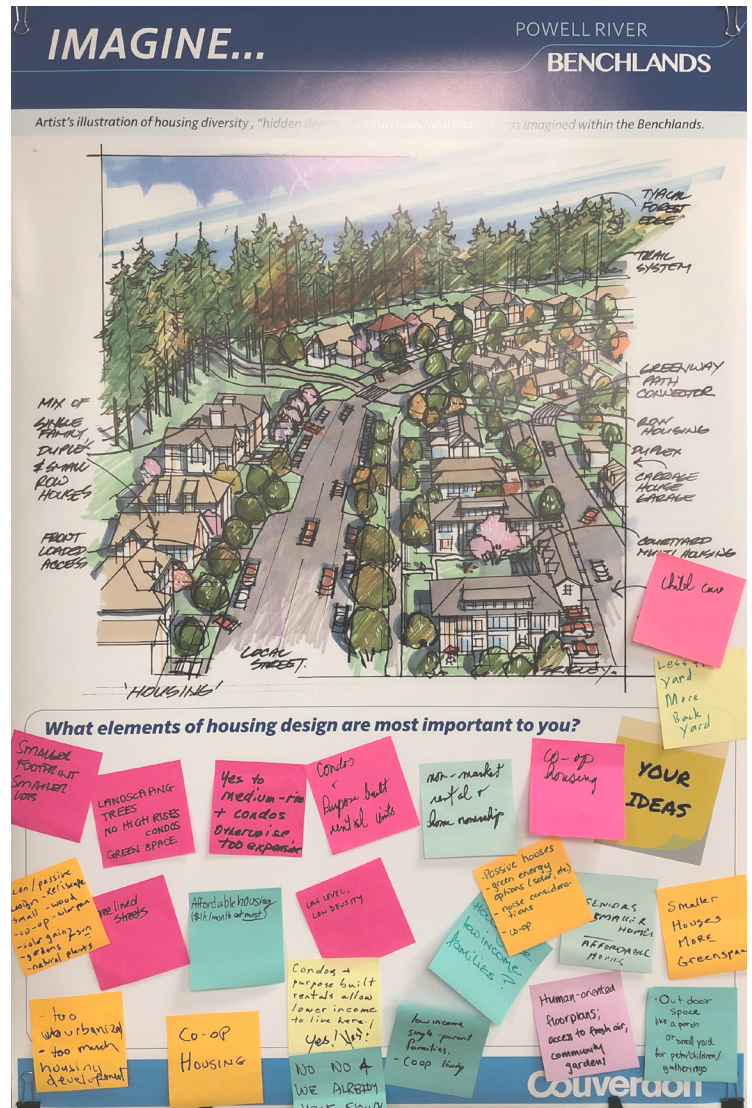


Figure 16. Artist's illustration of "hidden density" and architectural character as imagined within the Benchlands from the Public Open House.



# PARKS, TRAILS & OPEN SPACE STRATEGY BOARD

The open house comments highlighted the participants' strong commitment to environmental protection, connectivity, wildlife corridors, and sustainable infrastructure. The following points provide a summary of these comments:

POWELL RIVER  
BENCHLANDS

## PARKS, TRAILS & OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

*Parks, trails and open space at the Benchlands aims to connect, enhance and expand protected environmental features (e.g. riparian areas) and recreational opportunities (e.g. parks and trails network) within and beyond the site.*

**There is an opportunity at the BENCHLANDS to establish parks, trails and open spaces that preserve natural areas for future generations, promote an active lifestyle and create a vibrant and sustainable neighbourhood.**

**PROTECTION OF NATURAL FEATURES**  
Three creeks – Wys, McFall, and McGuffie – move through the Benchlands. Their riparian corridors and associated wetlands account for the majority of “environmentally sensitive areas” (ESAs) within the study area. Protected under Provincial Riparian Area Regulation, these features form the core of the open space strategy.

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SOCIAL CONNECTION**  
Beyond environmental protection, open space design at the Benchlands will emphasize physical and social connectivity within and beyond the neighbourhood.

Trail connections – within an interconnected network of the trails, greenways, and cycling routes – will support a livable, walkable and healthy community. The strategy seeks to enhance and expand trails for the community that loves to be connected with nature. A network of pathways will link residential streets with gathering areas...while extending to the community trails networks such as Pole Line Trail and beyond to provide safer cycling and walking space.

“Neighbourhood pocket parks” will serve as gathering spaces (e.g. seating/picnic areas) for residents and visitors to socialize together and create/maintain connections.

More centrally-located neighbourhood parks will host complimentary activities with the opportunity for features such as biking and hiking trails, pump track, dog park and/or community gardens.

**What trail connections are most important to you? What types of park do you want to see at the Benchlands?**

**YOUR IDEAS**

- Maintain wildlife corridors, forested trails.
- Prioritize forested / natural areas over open, more developed parks.
- Protect spaces for birds & insects.
- Connecting trails either side of Wys Cr.
- Protect future wildlife trees.
- Must keep trails and access to them.
- All the trails! I use them all.
- Please maintain trail access from Manson St (behind school) to connect to Millennium Trails.
- Pross that are in Benchlands will be affected by any wetland table alterations.
- GREEN BUFFER BETWEEN OLD NEIGHBOURHOOD AND NEW!
- Connection multi-use trails to existing network, separation from vehicle traffic.
- Preserve wild spaces. Planting will be critical.
- Leave permeable areas for storm H<sub>2</sub>O infiltration.
- PROTECT THE WILDLIFE SENSITIVE SPACE
- PROTECT FUTURE WILDLIFE TREES
- Roottop applies on businesses.

visit [powellriverbenchlands.com](http://powellriverbenchlands.com) for more information – share your ideas – and sign up for project updates

Figure 17. Parks, Trails, and Open Space Strategy board from the Public Open House.

## Environmental Protection (20)

Participants expressed a desire to protect forested natural areas over open, more developed parks. This reflects a preference for preserving and enhancing the existing green spaces that contain mature trees and contribute to the overall ecological health of the community. Additionally, there was a call for wider margins for trees along streets to maintain a green and visually appealing environment.



## Wildlife Corridors (11)

Participants emphasized the need to safeguard the habitats of various species and maintain biodiversity. Protecting wildlife corridors and preserving trees as part of the natural landscape were seen as a topic of importance for sustaining healthy ecosystems and supporting the coexistence of human and wildlife populations.

## Connectivity (8)

Protecting existing trails emerged as an important topic of discussion for the community. Preserving and enhancing these pathways ensures continued access to nature and promotes a healthy and active lifestyle. The community recognized the importance of maintaining connectivity and ensuring that residents can enjoy the existing trail networks without disruption.

## Servicing and Infrastructure (3)

Sustainable servicing and infrastructure were identified as important considerations during the engagement process. The community highlighted the importance of leaving permeable areas for stormwater infiltration, allowing for natural management of waterflows. This approach promotes water conservation, reduces runoff, and helps preserve the natural hydrological balance. Concerns were also raised about potential blow-downs if only narrow strips of trees are left standing, emphasizing the need for careful planning and evaluation of tree preservation strategies.

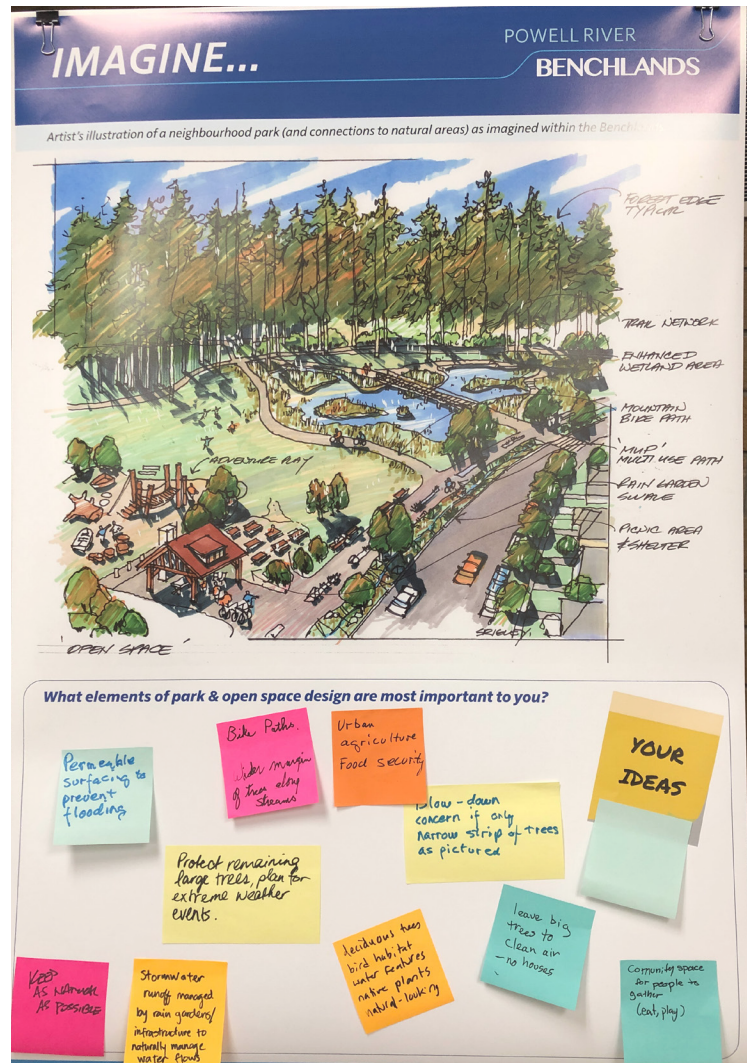


Figure 18. Artist's illustration of a neighbourhood (and connections to natural areas) as imagined within the Benchlands from the Public Open House.





## Traffic Management (8)

Participants identified the BC Hydro right of way as an option for the main access road, aiming to alleviate traffic congestion on Joyce Avenue and Marine Drive. Additionally, there was interest in developing a Powell River bypass to provide an alternative route and reduce traffic in key areas. Suggestions were made to divert traffic at the hospital intersection to improve flow and minimize congestion.

## Public Transportation (4)

Access to public transportation emerged as an important consideration. Participants expressed a need for increased bus service, ensuring that residents have convenient and reliable access to transportation options. Enhancing public transportation infrastructure aligns with the community's goal of promoting sustainable and efficient mobility for all residents.

## Car Share (2)

Comments highlighted support for car-sharing initiatives as an alternative to private car ownership. Specifically, Modo and Coast Car Co-Op were mentioned as examples of car-sharing services that could benefit the community. Car-sharing programs provide flexibility and affordability while reducing the overall number of cars on the road, contributing to improved traffic flow and reduced environmental impact.

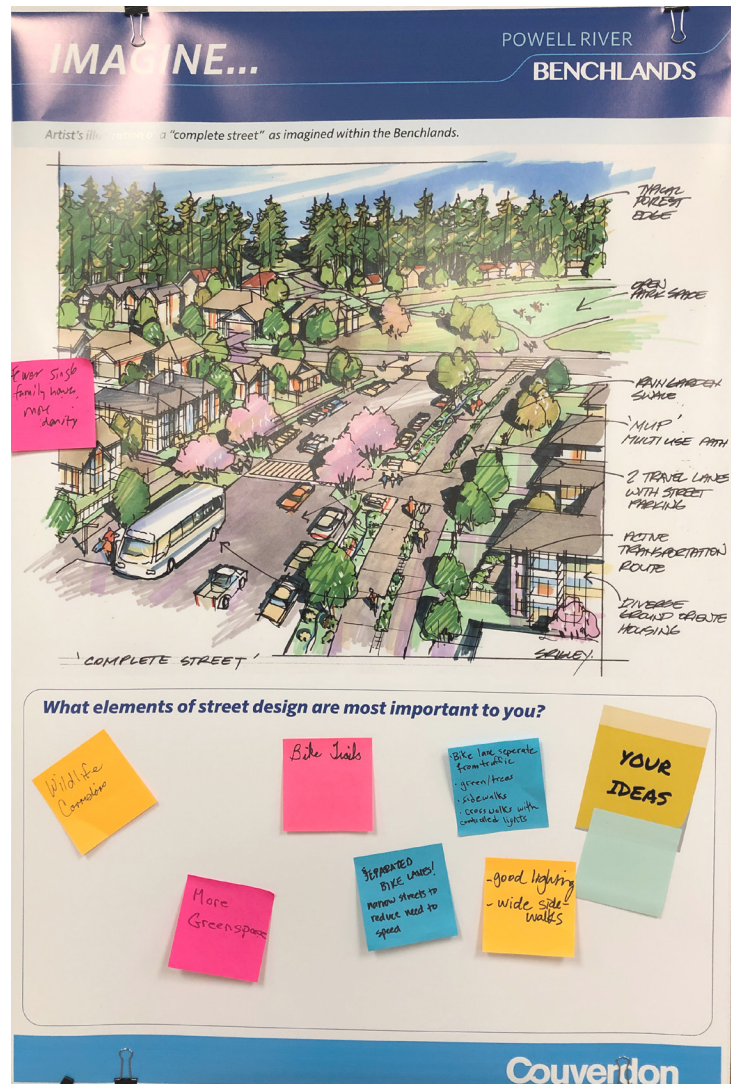


Figure 20. Artist's illustration of a "complete street" as imagined within the Benchlands from the Public Open House.



# SERVICING & PHASING STRATEGY BOARD

The engagement process highlighted interest in servicing and infrastructure improvements, as well as the importance of agriculture and local food security. The following points provide a summary of these comments:

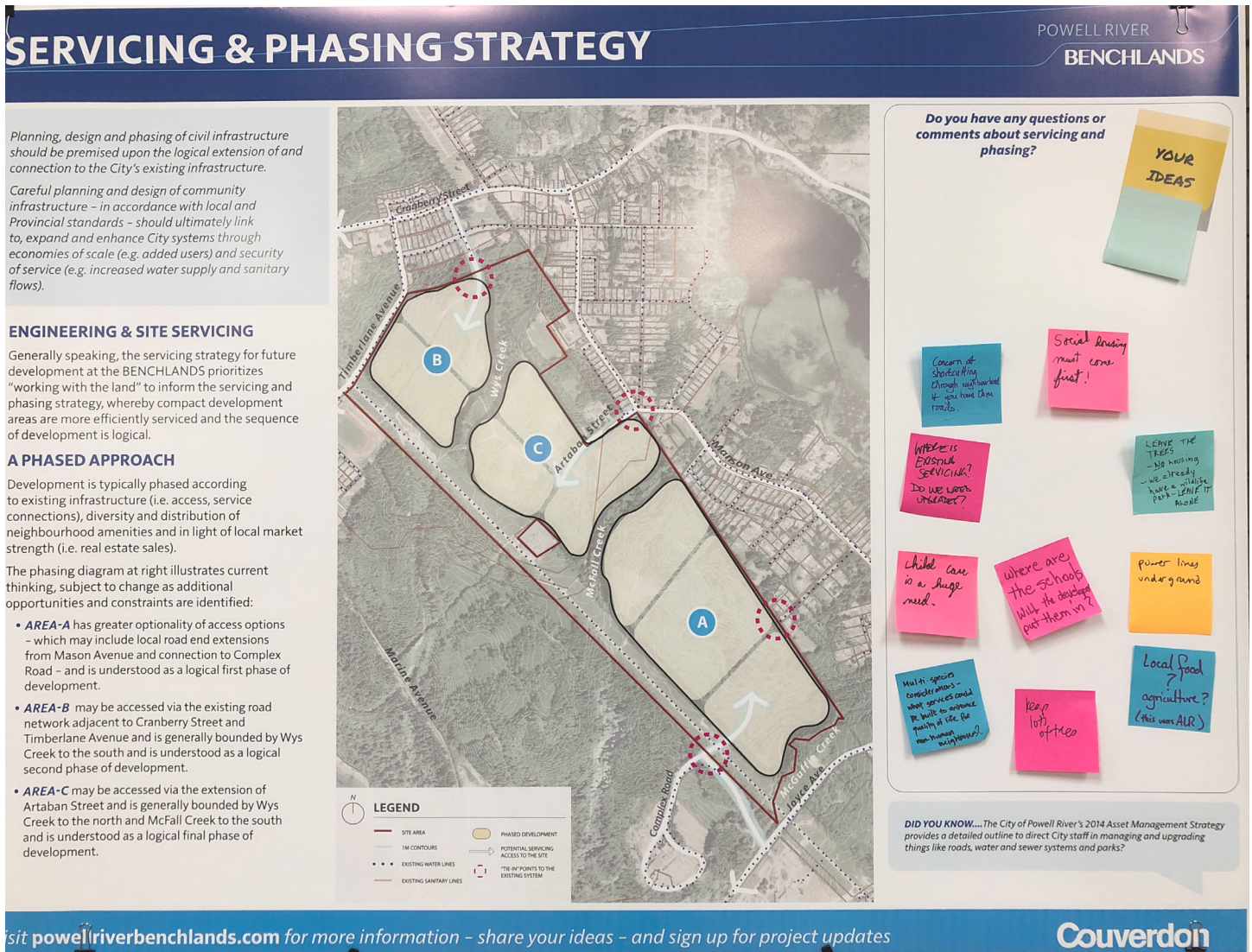


Figure 21. Servicing and Phasing Strategy board from the Public Open House.

## Agriculture (5)

Participants voiced an emphasis on agriculture and local food security. Recognizing the importance of sustainable and locally sourced food, community members called for initiatives that support local farming and promote access to fresh, healthy produce. Enhancing agricultural practices and creating opportunities for local farmers can contribute to food self-sufficiency, strengthen the local economy, and foster a sense of community resilience.

## Servicing and Infrastructure (5)

Participants expressed a desire for the implementation of underground power lines. This infrastructure improvement would help enhance the visual appeal of the area by removing overhead power lines and creating a more aesthetically pleasing environment. Underground power lines can also reduce the risk of power outages caused by severe weather conditions and minimize potential hazards.

## OPEN HOUSE FORMAT

Generally, participants liked the open house format (53%). Thirteen percent somewhat or did not like it at all, and 34% were unsure. The comments below summarize thoughts on the format.

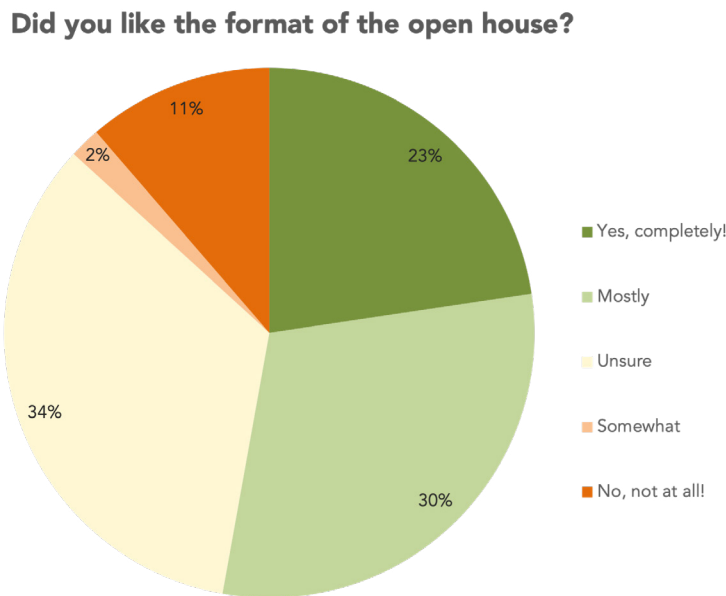


Figure 22. Level of support of the Open House format.

### Good process (11)

Participants found the open house to be informative and well organized.

### Materials Development (8)

There was suggestion to pay closer attention to detail needed to reflect current community features (e.g. some key areas not included)

### City representative (2)

Some participants would have liked to have seen a City representative at the engagement

### Standard process (2)

Participants found the open house to be standard practice, nothing out of the ordinary.

## C. WEBINAR

As part of the engagement process, the Benchlands team hosted a Zoom webinar on May 3, 2023 from 7:00 to 8:30pm to provide an opportunity for community members to learn more about the project if they were not able to join the in-person open house. To maintain consistency with the information provided, the engagement boards were presented, followed by an in-depth question and answer session.

Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and engage in detailed discussions. Key takeaways from the Q&A session included considerations for connectivity, phasing, housing options, active transportation, public transportation, traffic management, infrastructure, and sustainability. Below are some themes from participants' comments.

### Support For:

- Various housing options including affordable housing rental, middle income housing, freehold mortgage helper rental units, aging in place
- Housing forms such as stacked townhouse, rowhouse, multi family housing
- Connectivity with roads, bike lanes, generous sidewalks

### Suggestions:

- Create a sense of community through design such as streetscape elements, good public realm, artist live work
- Create connections to the larger community and social fabric of Powell River, such as with public permeability through the site, seating/areas to rest, incubator retail

## **D. COMMENT FORM/LETTER**

On the project website, there was a section for people to provide comments through a form to the project team. We received eight forms through the website and also a letter at the open house event. The feedback from the comment forms and the letter has been summarized below.

### **Project Implementation/Development (4)**

There were a couple comments from community members who were interested in learning more about the potential implementation and development. They have been connected with the project team.

There were comments on ensuring that there is transparency and accountability throughout the process, and to ensure that the solutions meet the needs of the community.

### **Environmental Protection (2)**

There is a recognition that the population is growing, but development on forested land does not seem to be the solution. This project is not seen as valuable to the city and would destroy the forests.

### **Housing for All (2)**

There are suggestions to consider diverse housing options and zoning to include medium density options (townhomes, multifamily buildings, market rental, below-market rental, co-op, co-housing), and housing to meet cultural needs.

### **Sustainability/Balanced Approach (2)**

There is general consensus for support as long as community assets and sustainable approaches are considered. This included a desire for an indoor soccer facility, net-zero buildings, and green spaces.

### **Media (1)**

There was one comment from a media outlet looking for further information which resulted in a CBC radio interview with Couverdon and the Powell River Mayor on April 18th, 2023.