



Town of Aurora

OFFICIAL PLAN REVIEW

Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report

November 2020





INTRODUCTION

The Town of Aurora (“the Town”) is undertaking the review of its Official Plan. The Town’s current Official Plan was adopted by Town Council in 2010, and approved by York Region in 2012. The Official Plan is now in the process of being updated to help guide the Town’s growth and development to the year 2051.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report is to provide an overview and evaluation of the initiatives undertaken and a summary of the input received from the public and key stakeholders during Phase 1 of the Official Plan Review (“OPR”).

OBJECTIVES

The engagement objectives for Phase 1 were:

- To educate the public about the purpose of the Project and the importance of the Official Plan;
- To develop a recognizable project brand and use it consistently;
- To collect feedback during activities / events through visual and tactile engagement techniques and leveraging the digital platform and its online tools; and
- To refine the OP vision, which will be used as the basis for understanding issues and developing policy.

TIMELINE OVERVIEW

THE PRE-LAUNCH

In Summer and Fall 2019, the Town conducted a Pre-Launch for its OPR to introduce the Project and build public awareness. A series of Planner Pop-Ups were held across the community, prior to the release of the issuance of a draft Public Engagement and Communications Strategy (“PECS”) on November 6, 2019. The purpose of the PECS was to serve as a framework to guide members of Council, key stakeholders and residents of the Town and ensure they are kept informed during all phases of the OPR. On December 3, 2019, a Staff Report to General Committee was presented which recommended that public notice be given for a Special Meeting of Council in accordance with Section 26 of the *Planning Act*. On February 11, 2020, Town staff held a Special Meeting of Council to formally initiate the OPR process and invite the public to identify matters of interest relating to the process.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PROJECT TEAM

In February 2020, the Town retained WSP as the Public Engagement Consultant for the OPR. As a first measure, WSP developed a Public Engagement Plan (“PEP”) consistent with the Town’s proposed project timeline and PECS. In Summer 2020, the Town retained SGL as the Study Consultant Lead, to undertake the technical review of the Official Plan.



THE LAUNCH OF PHASE 1

In Fall 2020, Phase 1 of the Project was officially launched publicly through various communications, including a media release, social media and mobile signs. The launch promoted the Town’s new web platform, Engage Aurora, including the OPR project website (engageaurora.ca/opr). The project website (see Figure 1) included a video and leveraged a number of interactive tools (such as a live poll) to solicit feedback from the public. The project website also contained important information about the project, such as a timeline, relevant documents, and a FAQ.

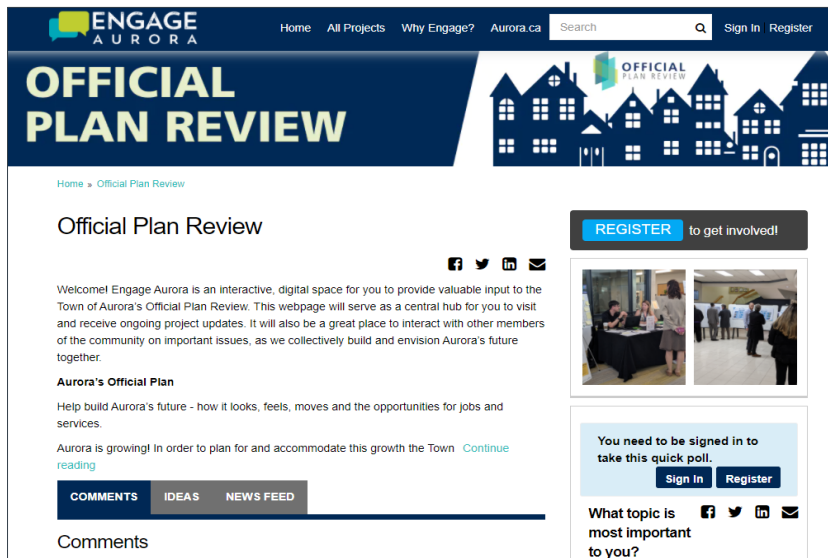


Figure 1: Project website

PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT

Following the launch, the Project Team established a Community Steering Committee (“CSC”) based on a hybrid approach of Town appointed members and an open call for participants. The purpose of the CSC is to provide a sounding board to the Project Team and share insights into key issues and draft policy during the OPR process. A Leadership Team (“LT”) was established which included select members of Council and senior-level Town staff. The purpose of the LT is to provide high level project oversight and to identify issues of significance to be addressed through strategic policy directions. Introductory meetings were held in Fall 2020 with both the CSC and LT.

In October 2020, two key project initiatives were launched including a Vision Workshop and a Self-Guided Walking Tour.

The following sections provide detailed information on the approach and methodology used, the analysis of feedback received and lessons learned by the Project Team during Phase 1 of the Project.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

MEDIA & SOCIAL MEDIA

To inform the public about the Project and engagement opportunities, communications were published in the manner described in Table 1. Figures 2 and 3 provide examples of Project communications.

Table 1: Communications during Phase 1 of the OPR

Format	Date (2020)	Purpose
Project Website	June 15	Call for CSC members
Project Website	August 13	Announce CSC and LT
Social Media*	October 5, 14 & 17	Promote Vision Workshop
Social Media*	October 8 & 16	Promote Walking Tour
Project Website	October 7	Promote Vision Workshop & Walking Tour
Mobile Signs	Early October	Promote Vision Workshop

*Note: * includes Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn*

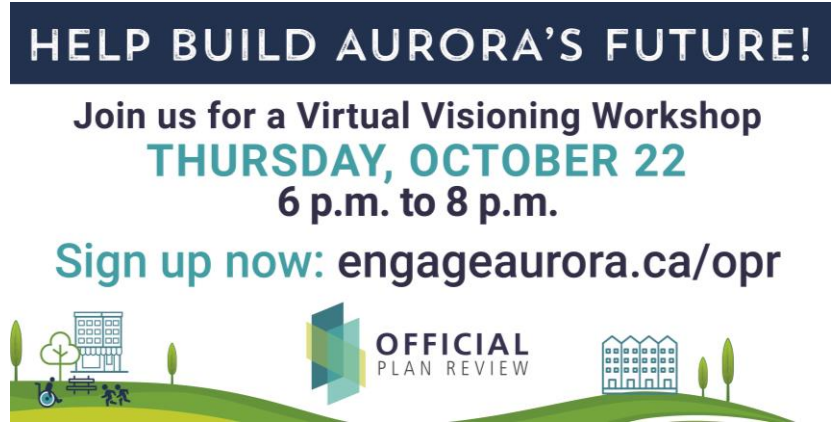


Figure 2: Mobile sign post to promote Vision Workshop



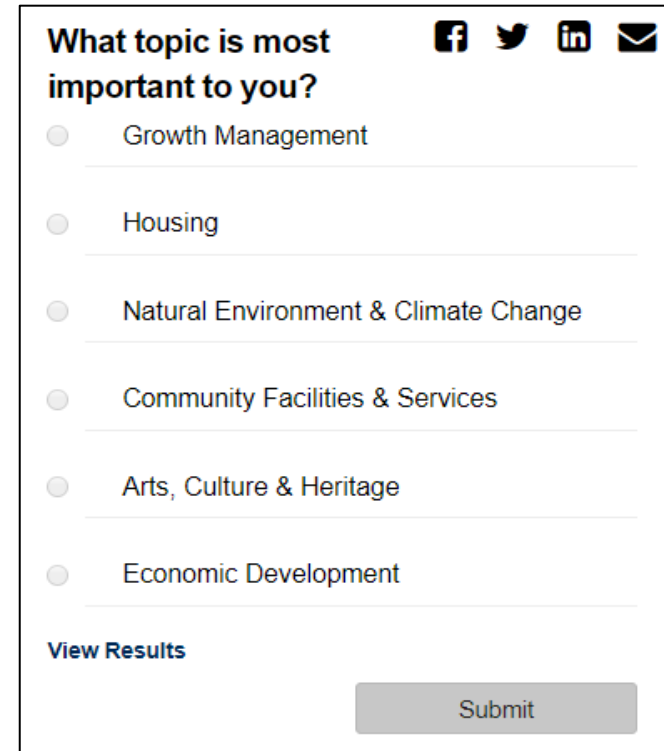
Figure 3: Social media post (Twitter) promoting the Walking Tour

PROJECT WEBSITE

The project website offers a central location to learn about the OPR process and project milestones, upcoming engagement events, as well as the opportunity to participate in ongoing activities. As of October 27th, 2020, there were 744 total visitors to the project website, with 29 visitors who participated in one of the website’s online tools.

During Phase 1 of the Project, the **Tour (Places)**, **Poll**, **Comments** and **Ideas** tools were used to solicit public feedback. The Newsfeed tool was also used to provide ongoing announcements and updates on engagement initiatives.

The Poll, Comments and Ideas tools remain active / open and offer opportunities for participants to identify their top priorities or concerns for Aurora. The Poll tool asks participants to identify what topic is most important to them, as shown in Figure 4. The Comments tool asks participants, “What are the most important issues facing Aurora in the next 25+ years, and how do you see the community evolving”? The Ideas tool offers the opportunity for participants to share their vision for the future of Aurora.



What topic is most important to you? Facebook Twitter LinkedIn Email

- Growth Management
- Housing
- Natural Environment & Climate Change
- Community Facilities & Services
- Arts, Culture & Heritage
- Economic Development

[View Results](#)

Figure 4: Project website poll

The Tour (Places) tool was used to gather feedback through a Self-Guided Walking Tour during the period of October 5th to October 28th (see Figure 5). This tool provided the opportunity for participants to share their ideas on features or characteristics in the Town that are the most meaningful to them, should be protected, or need improvement.

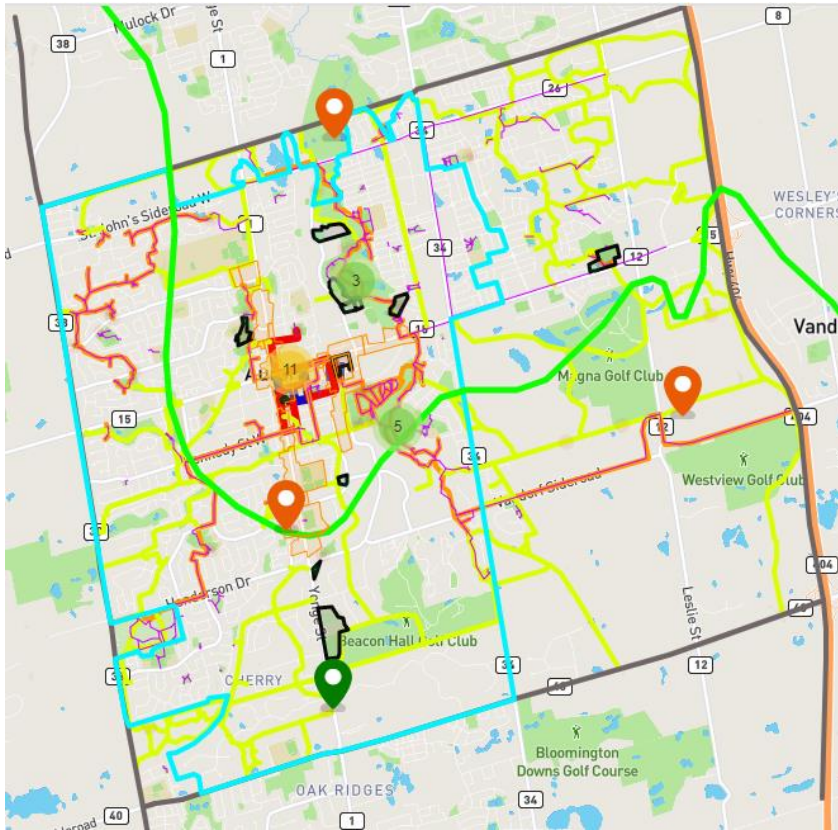


Figure 5: Self-Guided Walking Tour on project website

CSC members and the Project Team, review the OPR process, define the role of the CSC, and discuss key issues within the Town.

LEADERSHIP TEAM MEETING #1

The first LT meeting was held virtually on October 13th, 2020. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce LT members and the Project Team, review the OPR process, discuss key issues and review the next steps of the Project.

VISION WORKSHOP

On October 22nd, 2020, a Vision Workshop was held virtually with the public (see Figure 6). The event was advertised through EventBrite and required an RSVP. Twenty (20) participants registered for the event, and ten (10) attended the workshop. Notably, Mayor Mrakas attended the workshop and provided introductory remarks.

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the gaps and changes required to the existing Official Plan vision and guiding principles. The workshop ended by informing attendees about the Project's next steps and how to stay involved in the process.

COMMUNITY STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING #1

The first CSC meeting was held virtually on the evening of September 24th, 2020. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce

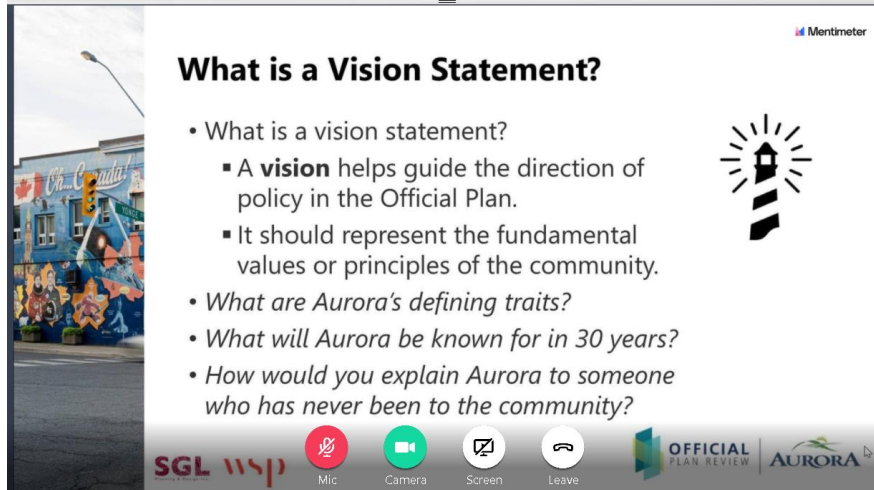


Figure 6: Presentation slide from vision workshop

In order to generate discussion, the online live polling tool MentiMeter was used to ask questions during the workshop, followed by group discussion questions.

WHAT WE HEARD

Feedback received during Phase 1 Engagement ranged in topics, however, key themes emerged and will be incorporated into the Vision and Guiding Principles for the OPR. For a detailed summary of feedback heard during each of the Phase 1 engagement activities, please refer to Appendix A. The following subsections provide a summary of the key emergent themes.

VISION

The Town of Aurora offers the charm and appeal of a small town, with access to natural and cultural amenities that are valued by the community. However, Aurora is also experiencing significant growth, an increasing lack of housing affordability, and ongoing vacancies among storefronts in the downtown core. Thus, it is important to manage the Town's growth in a way that preserves its existing natural features, while encouraging economic development and sustainable practices to provide employment opportunities. To ensure households of all abilities and life stages can afford to rent or own a place to call home, a range of housing typologies are required to provide a more robust housing stock and options for residents. As the Town is growing in population and demographics, it is imperative that it evolves to build communities where all residents feel safe, valued and accepted.

When considering the future vision for the Town, Figure 7 provides key terms that resonated with Vision Workshop participants. This includes terms from the current Official Plan Vision such as sustainability, housing, healthy, public transportation, accessibility and heritage, which are depicted in coloured text. The black text provides new terms the participants believe should be added to the Vision, including diversity and inclusion, housing choice and affordability, job availability, dynamic and safe.



Figure 7: Word cloud of key terms to be considered for the Town vision during vision workshop

KEY THEMES

The following themes were identified following analysis of feedback received from the Phase 1 engagement activities:

- **Growth Management**
- **Attainable Housing**
- **Preserving Natural Areas**
- **Sustainability and Climate Change**
- **Diversity and Inclusion**

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

With ongoing development and growth pressures within the Town, it is essential that natural and cultural features are identified and preserved. With future growth, it is also important to manage the increased pressure to the Town’s existing infrastructure and ensure there is capacity to accommodate future development. This includes traffic controls to mitigate congestion, as well as encouraging active transportation options through increased transit service and pedestrian-oriented design.

ATTAINABLE HOUSING

Providing a range of housing options is critical to addressing the increasing housing affordability concerns within Aurora. To complement the existing neighbourhood character, gentle density should be considered, such as semi-detached houses, townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, court apartments and secondary units. A variety of rental and home ownership tenures should be made available to meet the needs of diverse individuals of different income levels, ages and abilities. This would allow housing choice for residents, while also contributing to creating a vibrant and active community.

During the CSC meeting, its members identified Complete Communities as being their top priority, as shown in Figure 8. Many members raised the concern of housing affordability and providing a mix of housing typologies as a top priority.

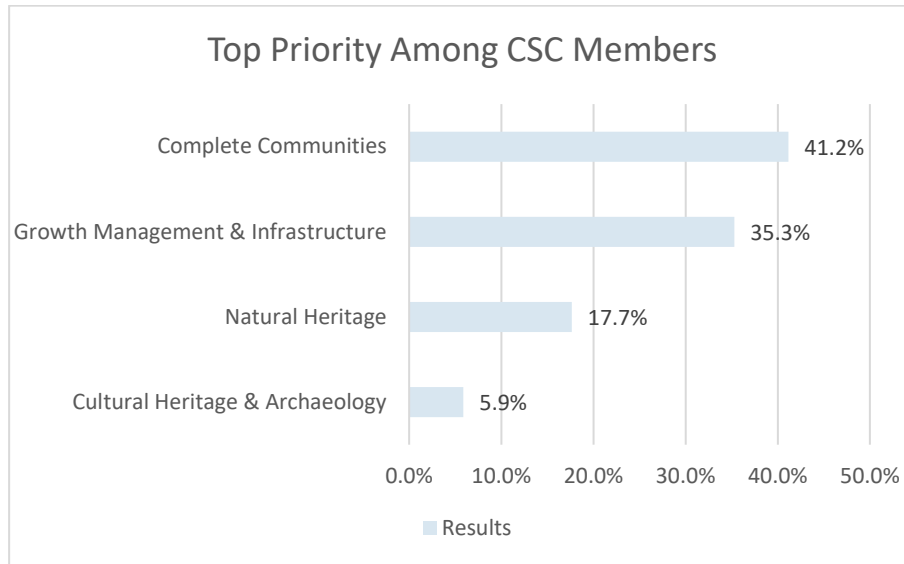


Figure 8: Top priorities in Aurora among CSC members

PRESERVING NATURAL AREAS

The Town of Aurora is located within close proximity to a variety of natural areas including the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Greenbelt, conservation areas, parks, trails, woodlots and wetlands. As such, it is important to preserve these areas as well as provide greater access to these amenities within the Town.

As shown in Figure 9, the project website’s polling results identified Natural Environment & Climate Change as the topic most important to participants.

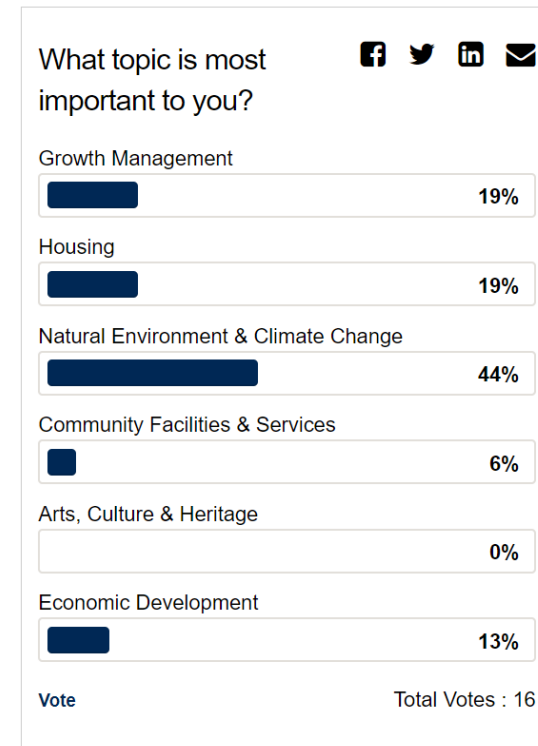


Figure 9: Poll tool results from the project website

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

To foster sustainability, the Town’s Official Plan will need to consider multiple factors that:

- Protect the natural environment;
- Encourage healthy activities;

- Build self-sufficiency and resilience;
- Encourage climate resilient growth;
- Support alternative transportation options; and
- Balance growth and preservation of greenspace.

The Official Plan should also support climate change mitigation strategies, and should consider the development of targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adoption of sustainable practices.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The Town of Aurora has changed since its last Official Plan, and the updated Plan should respond to the Town’s growing and diversifying population. This includes building a community where all residents feel safe, valued and accepted, which can be achieved by providing services, amenities and housing options that are suitable to different needs of residents.

PHASE 1 EVALUATION

To ensure that the community engagement approach continues to be meaningful and effective moving forward, the Project Team has committed to evaluating each phase of engagement to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement and to articulate the lessons learned.

STRENGTHS

Project Branding & Collaboration: Working with the Town’s Communications and Graphics teams, there has been a coordinated effort regarding messaging and media posts for the project. Materials shared on the project website, social media platforms and mobile signs share the same messaging and project branding. Further, a set of icons were developed to represent each key focus area (Growth and Infrastructure, Complete Communities, Natural Heritage, Cultural Heritage & Archaeology), which will be used throughout the project.



Figure 10: Project key focus area icons

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Vision Workshop Attendance: Prior to the Vision Workshop, twenty (20) people registered to participate, however only ten (10) attended the workshop. This event was promoted on the Town’s social media accounts, project website, mobile signs and by Project participants. However, it would be beneficial to leverage other means to promote the Project and its engagement events in Phase



2. The project team will discuss opportunities and strategies to further promote upcoming initiatives with Town Staff.

LESSONS LEARNED

Project Champions: In addition to promoting engagement activities through channels used during Phase 1, the Project Team recommends selecting strategic champions for the Project as a way to gain more interest within the community.

NEXT STEPS

Over Fall and Winter 2020/2021, the Project Team will issue a Vision Survey to confirm what was heard during Phase 1.

As part of Phase 2 of the OPR, the following engagement events and tactics are planned:

- Four (4) CSC Meetings
- Four (4) LT Meetings
- Four (4) Public Open Houses in support of Discussion Papers
- Four (4) Focus Group Discussions (Business Owners, Seniors, Cultural Groups, Youth)
- Ongoing social media posts, project website content, mobile signs and other communications

These efforts will complement and inform the development of the four (4) Discussion Papers to guide the Town's updated Official Plan.

APPENDIX

A

Engagement Activities Summary

PROJECT WEBSITE - TOUR TOOL

The Self-Guided Walking Tour received a total of twenty-three (23) comments highlighting locations that are important to residents or identified as needing improvement.

The fourteen (14) pins highlighting areas and topics of importance include:

- Various natural areas (Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area, Town Park, Vandorf Woodlot, Aurora Community Arboretum)
- New development should be built to complement surrounding areas (i.e. Edward Street and Yonge Street near Bloomington Road developments)
- Hillary House
- Library Square revitalization

The nine (9) pins identifying areas needing improvement include:

- Various vacant properties along Yonge Street
- Road design and revitalization at the intersection of Yonge Street and Wellington Street
- Unsafe intersection at Leslie Street and Vandorf Sideroad
- Impacts to businesses due to Wellington Street East Metrolinx underpass work

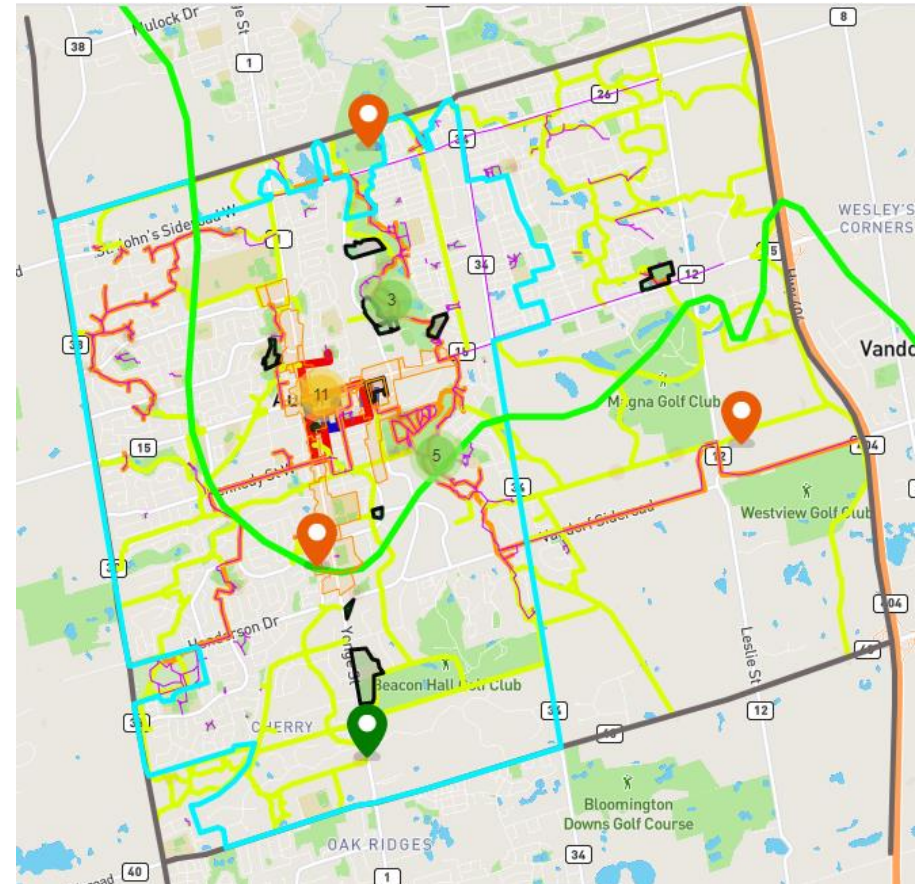


Figure 1: Self-Guided Walking Tour on project website



PROJECT WEBSITE - POLL, COMMENTS & IDEAS TOOLS

Through the project website's Poll, Comments and Ideas tools, feedback received included sixteen (16) responses to the Poll, ten (10) posts using the Comments tool, and two (2) posts using the Ideas tool.

Results from the Poll as of November 3rd, 2020 show that respondents find the Natural Environment & Climate Change to be the most important topic, as shown on Figure 2.

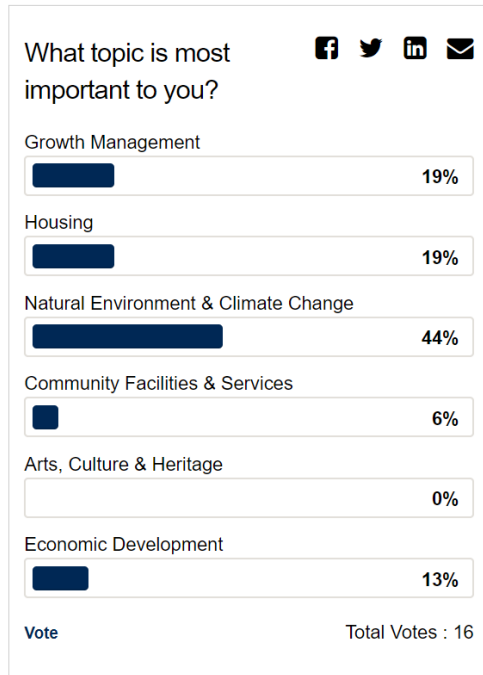


Figure 2: Poll tool results from the project website

Results from the Comments and Ideas tools align with feedback received during other engagement activities, focusing on the following topics:

- Balance growth and the natural environment;
- Preserve green spaces, woodlands, lakes and wetlands;
- Provide affordable housing options;
- Improve transit to help address traffic congestion and create walkable communities;
- Maintain Aurora's small-town charm;
- Ensure community services reflect the needs of the Town's growing and diverse residents; and
- Consider updating Secondary Plans to reflect present day issues and policies discussed during the OPR process.



COMMUNITY STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING #1

During the meeting discussion, CSC members identified their top priorities being Complete Communities and Growth Management & Infrastructure, as shown in Figure 3 below.

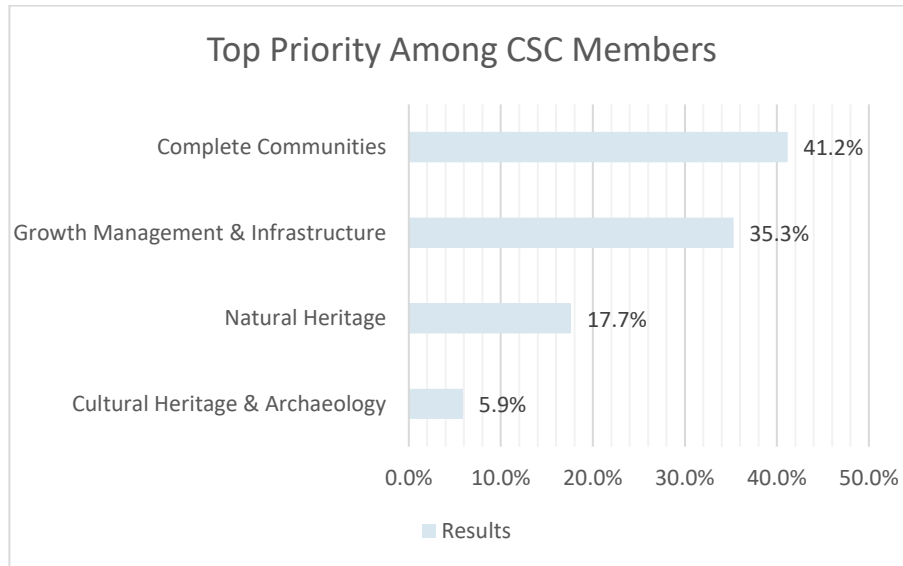


Figure 3: Top priorities in Aurora among CSC members

In particular, the CSC discussion focused on the following concerns:

- Growth pressures in the Town;
- Existing infrastructure capacity and its ability to accommodate growth;

- Maintaining the charm and general “vibe” of Aurora over the next 30 years;
- Providing housing options, such as “missing middle” typologies, and affordable housing for older adults and younger generations;
- Exploring future employment opportunities and means to support existing businesses;
- Preserving natural heritage features and resources by balancing growth and conservation (i.e. St. John’s Forest);
- Prioritizing diversity and inclusion to create safe communities for everyone; and
- Preservation of Town’s cultural heritage features.



LEADERSHIP TEAM MEETING #1

During the initial LT meeting, members discussed the topics of height, density and housing. Highlights from this discussion include:

- Preference to maintain a height of seven storeys or less;
- Investigate the use of townhomes as higher density housing options;
- Investigate bungalows as an option to allow aging-in-place; and
- Revisit CIP enacting policies as they relate to heritage buildings/districts.



VISION WORKSHOP

During Activity 1 of the Vision Workshop, feedback was collected from attendees to identify terms from the Town’s existing Vision that are still applicable as well as those terms that are missing. Existing terms such as sustainability, housing, healthy, public transportation, accessibility and heritage were most prominently identified by participants as terms that should remain in the updated Town vision, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Word cloud MentiMeter results from Vision Workshop

When asked what was missing from the vision, participants identified terms such as diversity and inclusion, affordability and choice.

Do you think there are themes that are missing? If so, what are they?

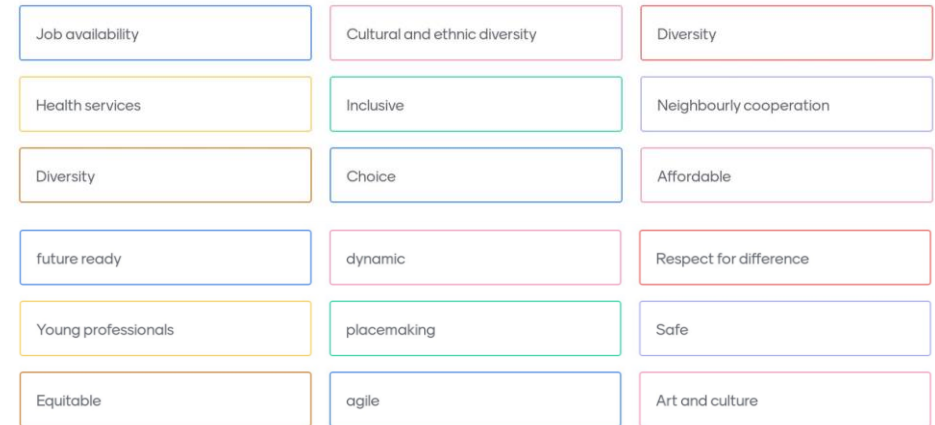


Figure 5: Missing terms identified during Vision Workshop

Further discussion identified key considerations such as:

- Sustainability should encompass multiple facets, such as protecting the environment, encouraging a healthy community, creating a self-sufficient Town, providing public transit and community programming.
- Provide a mix of housing types and choices that can serve a range of income levels with parks and amenities within close proximity.

During Activity 2, the Official Plan’s Fundamental Principles were divided into four themes and discussed as a group. This feedback has been summarized in Table 1.



Table 1: Activity 2 feedback during Vision Workshop

Theme	Feedback
Growth & Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Manage growth to lessen impacts to natural areas; protect natural features- Allow for organic growth by becoming a community of best practices (i.e. sustainable practices, provide community amenities, cultural events, economic opportunities, etc.)
Neighbourhoods of the Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Provide more housing options such as bungalows, triplexes, co-ops, purpose-built rental, etc. (i.e. John Westway offers stacked townhomes, semi-detached units and retirement living options)- Consider innovative housing types (i.e. assisted living with daycare services in same building)- Provide safe parks, green spaces and meeting places within neighbourhoods to create vibrancy

Downtown and Community Vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Community facilities, restaurants, parks, green spaces and trails are important- Maintain small-town charm of downtown main street
Green Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Adopt sustainable practices (i.e. solar panels)- Increase access points to existing green spaces