

Mill Cove Land Use Planning Project

Phase 1
What we heard report

March 2026

Prepared by Happy Cities for Dialog and Halifax Regional Municipality

Happy Cities

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1. Project Overview

1.1 Project Background

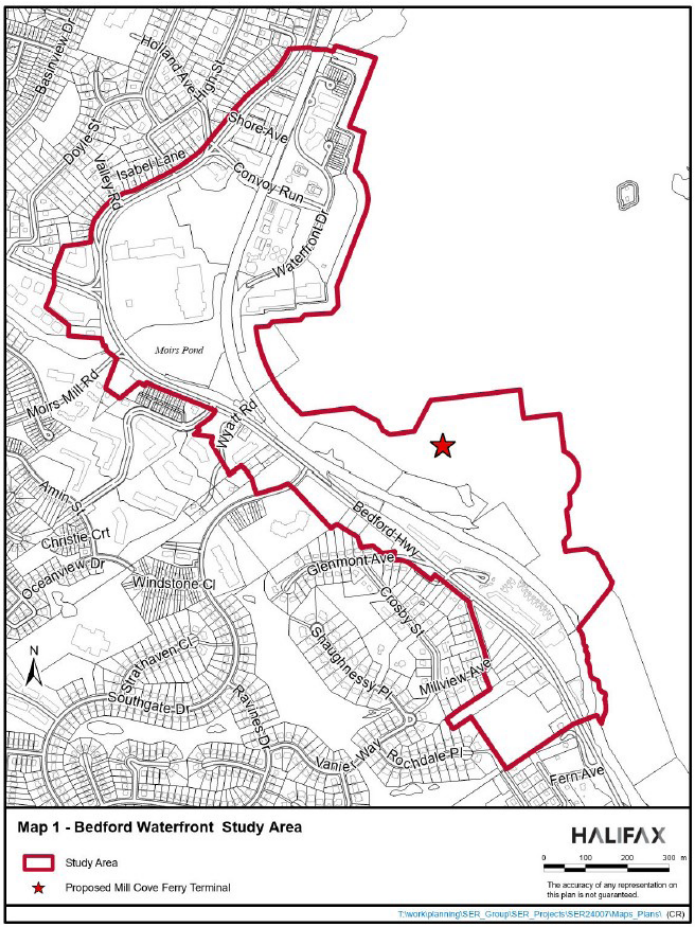
Beginning in winter 2026, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) will launch the Mill Cove Land Use Planning Project. This project will include planning and community engagement processes to create a Conceptual Development Plan for the Mill Cove area, including the Bedford waterfront.

The Mill Cove area is currently underdeveloped for a higher-volume transit destination. However, the future Mill Cove Ferry Terminal, along with a commitment to co-locate a new public library, present a unique opportunity to support the development of a mixed-use and transit-oriented community in the area. One that serves not just as a departure point but also as a destination.

Through collaboration with rights holders, residents, and interest groups, the project will develop a shared future vision for the Bedford Waterfront as a connected and vibrant community. The plan for the area will provide recommendations to guide future policies and decisions related to housing, land use, public space and parks, transportation, water and wastewater servicing, climate adaptation, and other priorities identified through the process.

1.2 Project Study Area

The study area includes the Bedford waterfront as well as the area surrounding the future ferry terminal, which extends approximately from Lindsay Hill (west) to Fern Avenue (east). The project's boundaries will be refined over time as the project develops.



1.3 Project Objectives

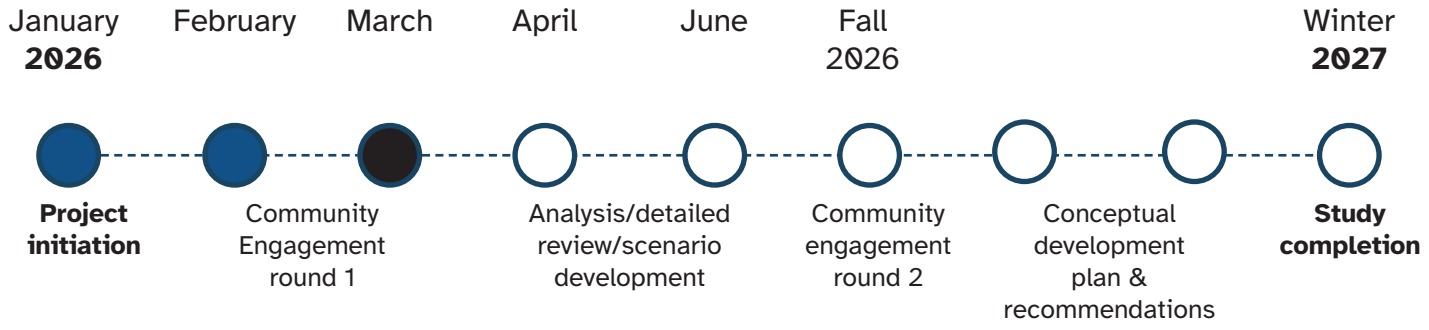
The plan's objectives include to:

- Establish urban design direction, including building heights, land uses, built form, view corridors, and parking;
- Address coastal hazards and sea level rise through resilient and nature-based solutions;
- Create welcoming, pedestrian-friendly public spaces;
- Enhance waterfront access and amenities, including parks and natural areas;
- Improve walking, rolling, and cycling connections;
- Identify mobility network upgrades needed to support ferry service, transit, public amenities, and connections to surrounding communities;
- Promote accessibility and inclusion along the waterfront; and
- Recognize, protect, and celebrate cultural landscapes.

1.4 Engagement Objectives

- Inform recommendations;
- Establish a clear understanding of community desires and concerns;
- Identify opportunities and recommendations for redevelopment;
- Gain input on opportunities for new and improved public open spaces including parkland;
- Understand needs and aspirations for supportive municipal and provincial public facilities and services (e.g., recreation facilities, emergency services, schools, childcare, etc.);
- Engage a range of voices to advance equitable access, accessibility integration, and cultural inclusion; and
- Collect input on urban design guidelines.

1.5 Project Timeline



2. Who We Engaged

2.1 Community Engagement

Community workshops
153 participants

Online Survey
373 responses

Interest group engagement
8 participants

Community workshop participants

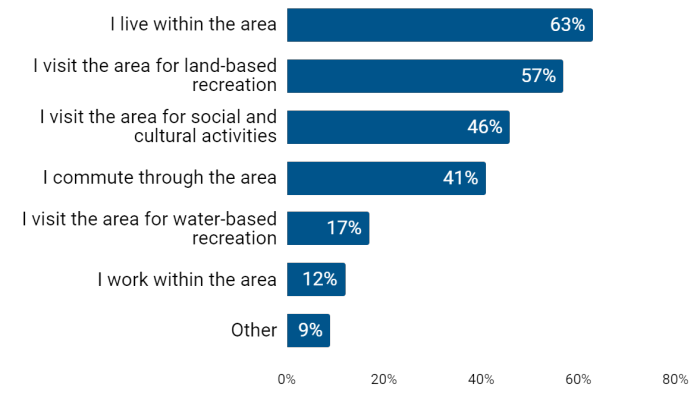
A total of 153 community members attended the two community workshops, with 92 participating in the afternoon session and 61 in the evening session.

Survey participants

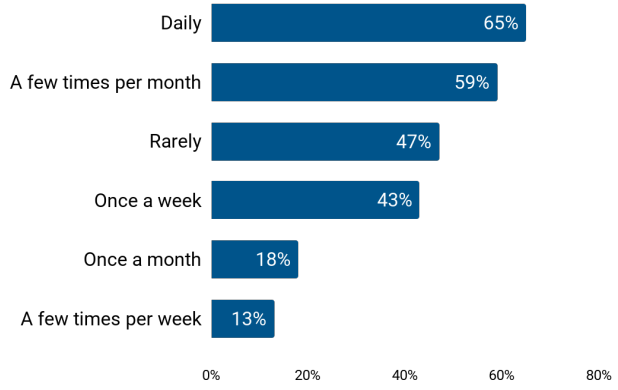
The online survey received a total of 373 responses with the majority of participants in the Bedford area (33%) followed by Mill Cove (4%) and Hammonds Place (4%). When asked what their main connection to the area, the majority of respondents (63%) reported living in the area. A number of respondents said that they visited the area for land-based recreation (57%), social and cultural activities (46%), and water-based recreation (17%). Many respondents said that they commuted through the area (41%) while 12% of respondents work in the area.

Respondents reported a range of visitation frequencies to the Mill Cove area based on summer and winter months. In the summer months, the majority of respondents reported visiting daily (65%), visiting a few times per month (59%) and rarely visiting (47%). In the winter months, daily visits drop significantly to 16%, with 25% of respondents saying they rarely visit the area followed by visiting the area, or only visit a few times per week (20%) or month (19%).

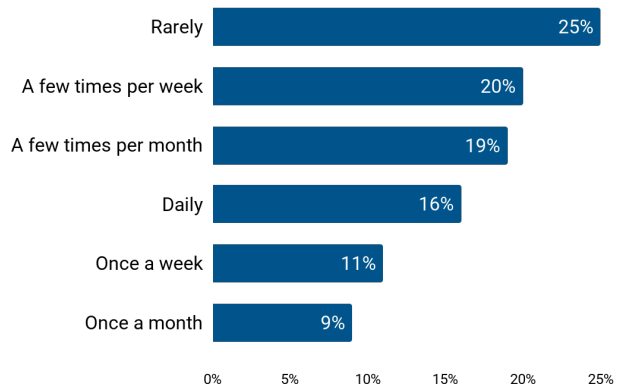
Main connection to the area



How often do you visit the Mill Cove area, including the Bedford Waterfront, in the summer months?



How often do you visit the Mill Cove area, including the Bedford Waterfront, in the winter months?



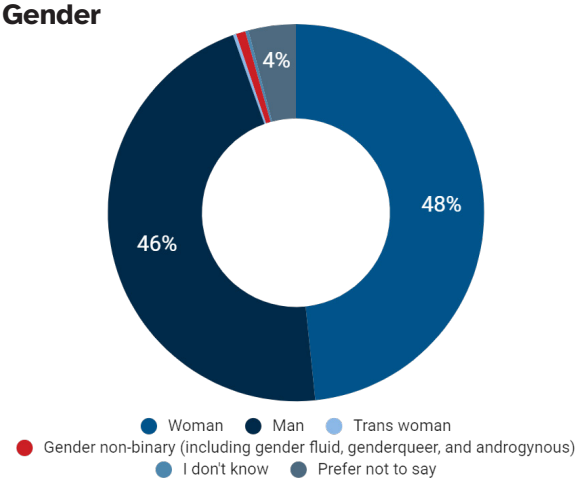
Respondents were able to select multiple options. As a result, percentages indicate how frequently each item was selected, rather than representing a share of a whole and totals may exceed 100%.

Survey Demographics

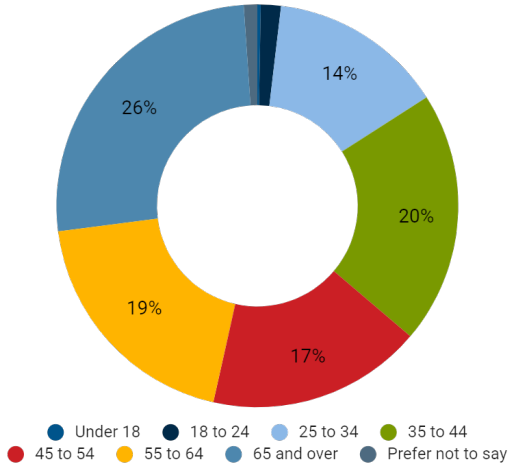
Survey respondents were asked to share optional demographic data. Of those who shared demographic information, the majority of respondents were aged 65 or older (26%) while there was a nearly even split between respondents who identified as women (48%) and men(46%). Additionally, the presence of older adults (17%), children under 12 (15%) and teenagers (9%) were reported in households.

The following charts summarizes the demographic responses to the survey:

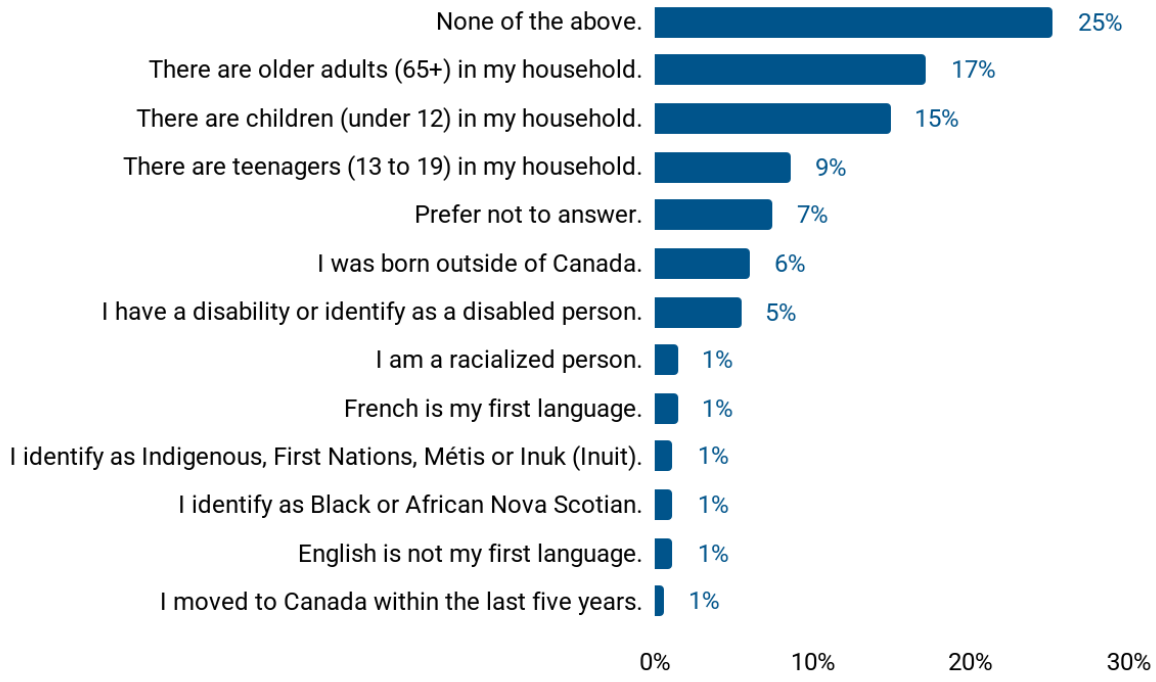
Gender



Age



Additional demographic information



Respondents were able to select multiple options. As a result, percentages indicate how frequently each item was selected, rather than representing a share of a whole and totals may exceed 100%.

2.2 Interest Group Engagement

We conducted two interest group focus groups. The sessions were organized thematically:

- Community Services and Amenities
- Destination Planning

A total of eight people took part in these sessions. They represented the following interest groups:

- Halifax Public Library
- Halifax Regional Centre for Education
- HRM Parks and Recreation
- Discover Halifax

3. How We Engaged

3.1 Community Workshops

We conducted two three-hour community workshops at Bedford United Church; One session was held in the afternoon, while the other took place in the evening. They took place at the following times:

- Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 1:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, March 4, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. (rescheduled from February 11, 2026 due to a winter storm)

The sessions followed the same format:

- Welcome & Presentation
- Five roundtable discussions
  - Relationship to Mill Cove
  - Experience Amenities & Programming
  - Accessibility, Safety & Comfort
  - Culture, Heritage & Climate
  - Vision, Identity & Guiding Priorities
- Group reflections
- Q&A
- Next steps

A series of engagement boards were also positioned within the space, offering additional information on the project and offering additional prompts for participants to respond to independently.

3.2 Online Survey

The project team prepared a survey on HRM's Engage Halifax platform. The survey was open from February 9 to March 9, 2026. A total of 373 respondents completed the survey. The survey asked people about their connection to the area; cultural, recreational and historical elements they would like to see; accessibility and safety; and the guiding principles they felt would be important to successfully realize this project.

3.3 Focus Groups & Interviews

We conducted two virtual focus group sessions involving key interest holder groups. The two-hour sessions were organized by theme:

- Community services and amenities
- Destination planning

Each session began with a project overview, and engagement was tailored to the themes above and reflected the interests and expertise of participants. The sessions followed a semi-structured discussion-centred approach and feedback was captured with Miro, a digital canvas tool.

3.4 Promotion of Engagement Opportunities

The project team used a variety of engagement promotion methods, including press releases, social media, and a project webpage hosted on the Engage Halifax platform.

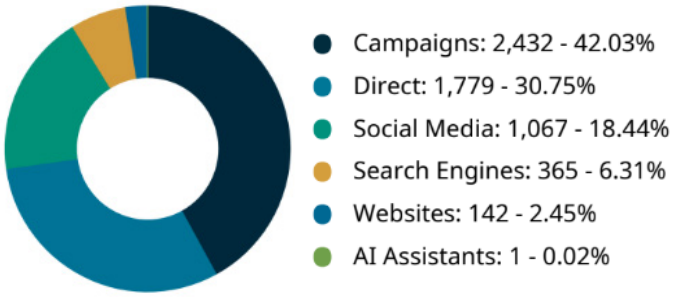
Media coverage

Engagement opportunities for the Mill Cove Land Use Planning Project was covered by one radio station (Surge 105), and one newspaper (The Chronicle Herald):

- Mill Cove planning begins with big turnout, strong community voices, by Surge 105 on February 13, 2026
- 'It's just the follow through': Halifax opens conversation on Mill Cove by the Chronicle Herald on February 11, 2026

Project page

The project page received 6,512 views by a total of 4,631 visitors. Visitors reached the project through the following channels:



*Campaigns: Visitors arriving from marketing efforts like email campaigns or paid ads.

Social media

Social media was used to promote and remind the public of engagement opportunities through Planning and Development and Halifax Regional Municipality social media accounts.

Meta advertisement
117,000 impressions
2,789 link clicks

Facebook
41,710 post impressions
39647 post views

Instagram
22,223 post views
76 post interactions

Bluesky
14 post reposts
24 post likes

4. What We Heard

4.1 Key Takeaways

Several takeaways emerged from the online survey, focus groups and community workshops:

Historical integration: There is strong interest among survey respondents in embedding local history, stories, and identity into the waterfront. Survey respondents highlighted Bedford's marine, wartime, industrial, and recreational history, along with the importance of meaningfully integrating Mi'kmaq presence, stewardship, and cultural connections through programming, partnerships, and visible cultural presence beyond signage.

Safety, accessibility, community, amenities and natural features: Survey respondents emphasized the need for safe, inclusive, and well-connected movement for all modes of transportation, along with improved accessibility and access throughout the site. The area should also protect green space, natural features, and views, and create well-lit, community-oriented spaces with amenities that overall support daily use while maintaining the area's character.

Public spaces and amenities: There is strong enthusiasm for the proposed library, as well as support for the possibility of new green spaces and plazas. However, successfully delivering a great public realm will require the project team to manage the sometimes competing expectations around public space scale and utility.

Desire for public space that can accommodate public events: Community members expressed a desire for designing a public realm that could be used for events. Specific design considerations will need to be identified to accommodate this, including materials, greenery, power supply, and street planning.

A new destination: The site has potential to become a new destination in the Halifax region. This coupled with new development in Dartmouth can further contribute to making Halifax a city known for its.

Access and connectivity: While the waterfront is highly valued, access to it remains constrained by the rail corridor, with limited crossings and circulation challenges. Creating safe and intuitive connections between the ferry, park, neighbourhoods, and waterfront is critical to unlocking the site's potential.

Amenities and year-round use: The area lacks the amenities and programming to support longer stays and consistent use across seasons. Washrooms, seating, lighting, and food options, combined with all-season programming, are essential to shifting Mill Cove from a pass-through space to a destination.

Complete community and character: Beyond simply serving as a transit hub, there is strong support for a mixed-use, mid-rise waterfront that prioritizes public space and reflects local identity. Future development is expected to balance growth with community character, ensuring the area functions as a complete, people-oriented waterfront rather than a transit-focused node.

A site with great potential: Workshop participants identified numerous challenges at Mill Cove. However, they also talked about the scenic views, sunsets, access to green space and walking paths, and the benefits of a direct ferry service to downtown Halifax. There are undoubtedly challenges about the existing sites and concern about development, but there was also a consistent sentiment that with careful planning and design, the Mill Cove development can become a great place to live, work and visit.

4.2 Current Strengths, Challenges, & Barriers

Strengths

A number of strengths were identified among survey respondents, focus group participants and community workshop participants.

Survey

Accessibility: We asked survey respondents to rate the physical accessibility of the Mill Cove area and the waterfront. The majority of survey respondents reported the area as accessible, with over 50% of respondents marking the area as accessible (30% selecting "somewhat accessible" and 24% selecting "very accessible"). Conversely, 17% of respondents noted the area as not very accessible.

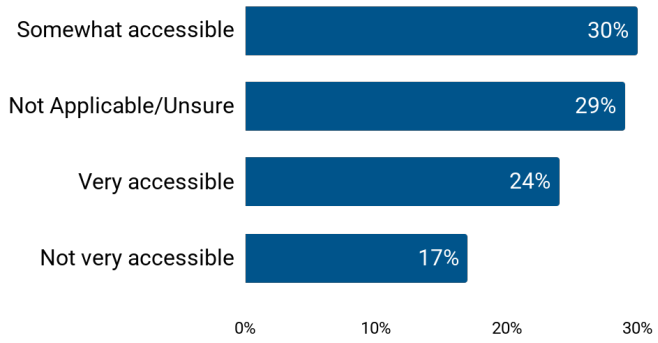
Safety: The majority of survey respondents (54%) reported an overall sense of safety in the area (30% reporting feeling "somewhat safe" and 24% reporting feeling "very safe"). About 1 in 6 of respondents (17%) reported the area as not very safe.

Several respondents indicated that the area feels safe and well-used during the day and that current use contributes to having eyes on the area.

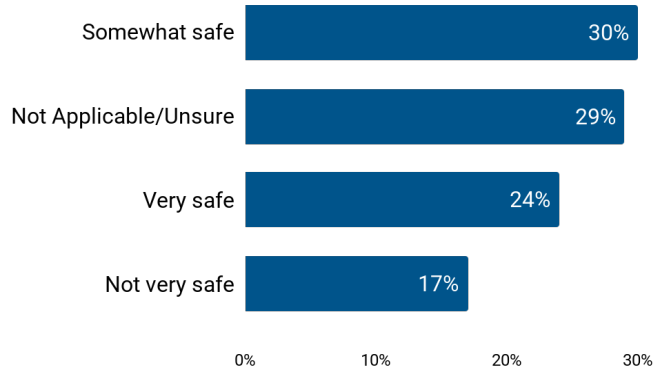
Focus groups

Participants in the focus groups identified several strengths of transit-oriented development in Mill Cove. Particularly that the new ferry creates strong potential for development along the waterfront that provides not only a great place to live but the potential to become an important destination in the region.

Accessibility: How would you rate the physical accessibility of the area and waterfront?



Safety: How would you rate your overall sense of safety in the area?



Community workshops

Participants in the workshop noted that Mill Cove benefits from a well-used waterfront park, scenic views, and an established role in the community as a local gathering place. De Wolf Park and the surrounding trail network support daily use for walking, recreation, and social activity, and the area is widely recognized for its natural character and coastal identity. Existing assets, including the ferry and library, contribute to its role as a community hub, while community events and informal use reinforce its social value.

Challenges & barriers

A number of current challenges and barriers were identified among survey respondents, focus group participants and community workshop participants.

Survey

While general accessibility and safety was seen as an overall strengths, survey respondents highlighted accessibility and safety challenges and barriers.

Accessibility barriers: Accessibility is constrained by structural barriers, path conditions, and limited multimodal access. When asked about accessibility, respondents identified surface conditions and path maintenance as key barriers, with uneven surfaces, broken pavers, narrow pathways, and potholes limiting movement for people using mobility aids, strollers, or wheelchairs.

Access to the area was also a concern with the rail tracks and reliance on a single road (Convoy Run) as the entry/exit point causing congestion and limiting safe direct connections. Additionally, parking pressure during peak times and events was noted as a significant challenge.

Access to transit in the area was also identified as a challenge, with the area viewed as predominantly oriented to cars and lacking sufficient public transit service.

Respondents also identified gaps in amenities such as seating and public washroom, further limiting comfort and accessibility for a range of users, as well as a lack of shaded areas or trees.

We heard from many participants throughout the engagement process; quotes highlighted throughout the document reflect a sample of what was shared.

“Only one road way in. A footpath across the train tracks is not safe.”

“Lack of tactile navigation features (and other features for people who are blind/ low-vision)”

“Challenges include uneven surfaces, long stretches without seating or rest areas, limited shade or shelter, and unclear or indirect access points…”

“There aren’t enough paths to access the waterfront from the surrounding area, especially if walking/ cycling or with limited mobility.”

Challenges & barriers (continued)

Safety concerns: Respondents shared safety concerns related to poor lighting and winter maintenance and traffic-related issues. Poor lighting, particularly in the evenings and winter months, create a lack of comfort and deter use. Physical conditions including inadequate winter maintenance, uneven or deteriorating surfaces, and slip hazards, were also frequently raised. Public safety concerns such as drug use, loitering, and a lack of visible security create barriers for people using the space. Additionally traffic-related issues including speeding, limited crossings and a single access point, were identified as safety risks for pedestrians and cyclists.

When asked about safety concerns in the area and what improvements could be made to enhance safety of the waterfront, recommendations included improved lighting and year-round maintenance, as well as better traffic management.

Focus groups

Participants emphasized that expanding the site presents several complex challenges, from how the site will be used to how it will be developed, with some participants noted the significant public opposition associated with infilling the harbour at this location.

Within the existing physical constraints, there is a tension between the desire for large event spaces or sports fields and the limited space available for these activities. Further, these amenities often conflict with the desire for quieter spaces for surrounding residential zones. There are also logistical hurdles regarding parking capacity and event access.

Participants also noted that there are few opportunities for people to directly interact with the water throughout Halifax, and encouraged the team to consider direct connections to the waterfront, rather than just visual connection.

Finally, there was considerable interest in a new school and/or recreation centre to serve the community. However residents discussed the potential of there not being enough new residents to warrant this.

Community workshops

Several challenges and barriers were identified around waterfront accessibility, safety, and traffic congestion.

The rail corridor restricts access to the water and creates safety concerns, particularly where informal crossings occur. The waterfront itself remains underutilized, with gaps in amenities such as washrooms, seating, and weather protection. Environmental issues, including odour from the wastewater treatment plant, water quality concerns, and flooding risks, further affect comfort and perception of the area.

Traffic congestion along Bedford Highway and within the site, combined with limited and poorly organized parking, affects both access and user experience. Pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is inconsistent, with narrow or uneven pathways, insufficient lighting, and limited wayfinding. Safety concerns are heightened in winter months due to reduced visibility and maintenance challenges.

"...I tend not to go in the winter as much because of the poor snow clearing on the walking areas and the fear of slipping..."

"It is highly unsafe to walk and bike to the Bedford Waterfront and buses are not fast and frequent enough."

4.3 Findings by theme from the community workshops

During the community workshops, participants had the opportunity to express more nuance around key aspects of the project. Key findings by theme are reported here.

Connection, use & seasonality

Mill Cove is used frequently, particularly for walking, recreation, and socializing, but visits are often short and concentrated in warmer months. The space functions more as a pass-through than a destination. Strengthening connections across the site particularly over the rail corridor and extending trails to surrounding neighbourhoods were consistently identified as priorities. There is also strong interest in expanding water-based uses, including boating, paddling, and marina activity, supported by improved access points and continuous waterfront routes.

Transportation & parking

In addition to the active transportation concerns detailed in Current Challenges section, traffic and parking concerns were consistently raised by participants—both in the present and post-development. Congestion on the Bedford Highway and Convoy Run were both highlighted as current issues, while some participants expressed concern about the park and ride nature of the ferry terminal. Participants also noted that, during events at DeWolf Park, parking in the area was full and that some street parking created unsafe conditions for pedestrians. There were also several concerns about parking at the new ferry terminal, including lot capacity and overflow; as well as the experiential, visual and climate impacts of a large at grade lot.

Culture, heritage & climate

There is a strong desire to reflect local identity in the design and programming of the area. Participants highlighted the importance of recognizing Mi'kmaq history, African Nova Scotian communities, and the site's waterfront and boating heritage. Cultural spaces, public art, and community programming are seen as key components of this identity.

Climate and environmental concerns are also prominent, including flooding, harbour infill, sea-level rise, storm impacts, and water quality. There is an expectation that future development will incorporate resilient design and improve environmental performance. There is also a desire for people to be able swim and interact with the waterfront, which requires water quality improvement and improvements to the local wastewater treatment plant (it is unclear whether these are improvements to technical processes, perception, or both).

Vision, identity & priorities

The future vision for Mill Cove is a walkable, active waterfront that supports daily life and community gathering. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining public access to the water, integrating a mix of uses, and ensuring development remains at a human scale. There is clear resistance to high-rise development and concern about losing the area's character. The preferred direction is a balanced approach that combines activation with preservation of the site's natural and community qualities.

Accessibility, safety & comfort

Movement through the site is constrained by incomplete and, in some cases, unsafe infrastructure. Informal and illegal crossings over the rail line are a major concern, highlighting the need for formalized, safe connections such as pedestrian bridges or crossings. Rough and uneven sidewalk conditions; poor lighting; and limited wayfinding further affect accessibility. Traffic flow and safety issues, particularly along Convoy Run and Bedford Highway, were repeatedly noted, with recommendations for improved crossings, including zebra crosswalks with lighting, and clearer separation between travel modes. Enhancing transit service and connectivity to the ferry is also seen as critical.

Experience, amenities & programming

Participants emphasized the need for amenities that support comfort and longer visits. The absence of washrooms, seating, shade, and food options limits how long people stay. There is demand for cafés, restaurants, markets, and flexible event spaces, along with recreational facilities that serve a range of ages and interests. Programming is seen as essential to activation, with interest in regular events, cultural activities, and year-round offerings. There is a clear desire for the new development and density to also deliver benefits to the existing community.

The new library was widely supported by participants. Specific ideas to enhance it included an emphasis on local public art, theatre space and family-friendly offerings.

4.4 Future Vision, Guiding Principles, and Opportunity Areas

Survey

Future vision

The waterfront in 15 years will be a vibrant, people-focused waterfront destination that balances activity, nature, and connections. We asked survey respondents to describe what a visit to the waterfront in 15 years would look like. Respondents envisioned a lively, human-scale waterfront that supports both everyday use and special experiences (events, festivals etc), with amenities and commercial spaces such as cafes, markets and community amenities that make it a year-round destination. Incorporating more natural features such as green spaces and trees frequently mentioned, alongside opportunities for walking and cycling along the waterfront, as well as water-based recreation. Strong multi-modal access and connections including ferry, transit, and safe pedestrian and cycling routes were seen as essential. The overall atmosphere that was described by participants was a welcoming, safe, inclusive and culturally diverse community that balances spaces for vibrant activity and relaxation.

Vision key words and themes

When asked about important words to be included in the vision, respondents most frequently identified *access/accessibility* and *safety* as core priorities alongside a strong emphasis on *community, history/culture, inclusivity*, and *creating a welcoming space for all*. Key words such as *nature, green space*, peaceful/relaxing and water/*waterfront* highlight the community's local identity and the importance of preserving and improving the environmental qualities of the area.

Terms such as *vibrant, active, hub* and *fun* were frequently mentioned, reflecting a desire for a lively destination supported by *amenities* and programming. *Connectivity* also emerged as a key theme with respondents identifying *walkability, transit* and the *role of the ferry* in linking the waterfront to the broader region.

"The library and ferry terminal are now a community hub with a variety of programs and amenities, outdoor and indoor."

"Ferry access, food vendors, local art, indigenous acknowledgment, new library with maker space... library, more seating and shaded areas, more parking"

"Netukulimk (living in balance with the natural world)"

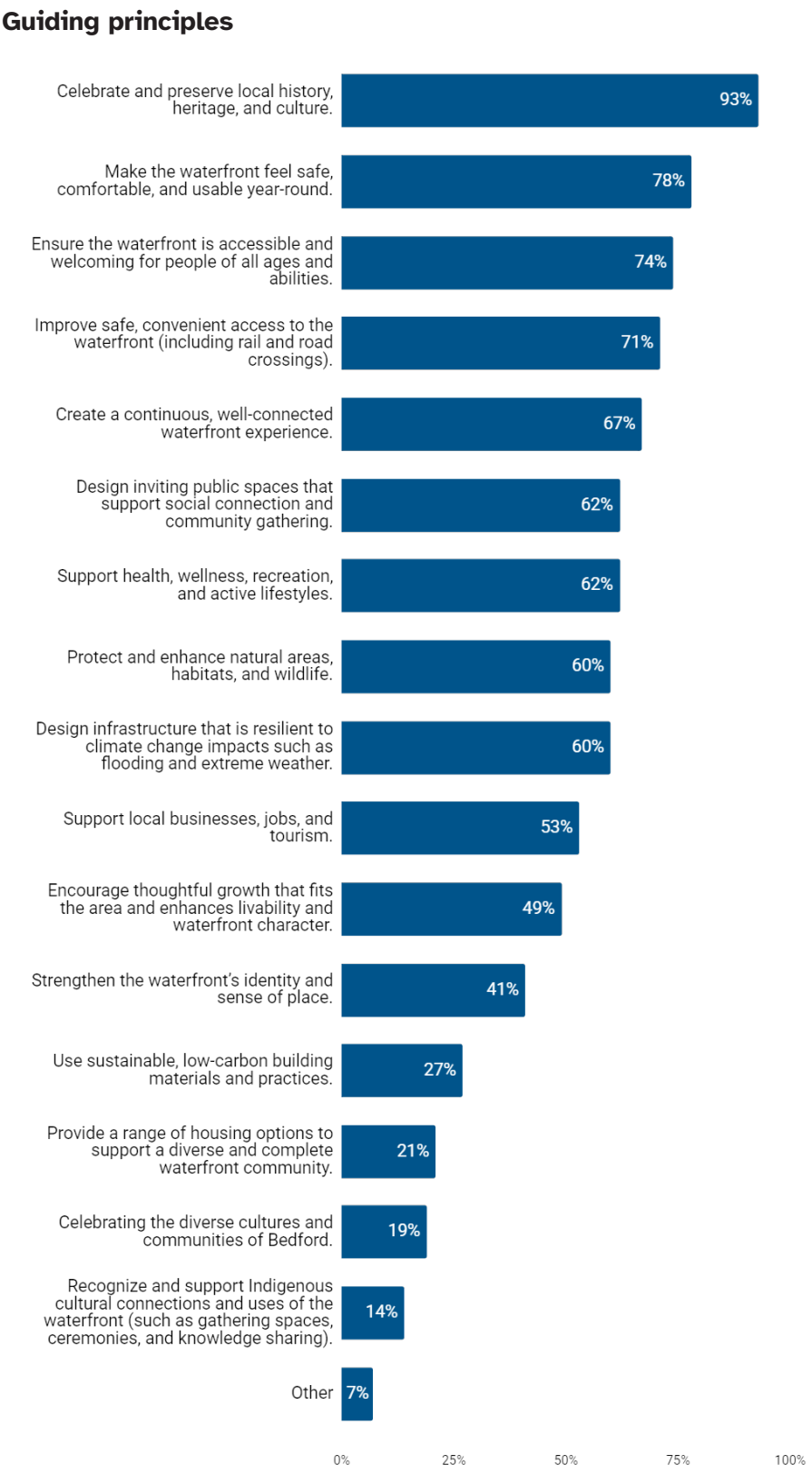
"Community. Accessibility. Belonging. Gathering"

"Accessible, Safe, People-First"

Guiding principles

We asked survey participants to identify guiding principles for the project, allowing up to 5 selections per respondent, including an “other” option. Nearly all respondents identified celebrating and preserving local history, heritage, and culture as a key guiding principle (93%), with a large majority also emphasizing the need to make the waterfront feel safe, comfortable and usable year-round (78%). There is also strong demand to ensure the waterfront is accessible and welcoming for people of all ages and abilities (74%) and to improve safe convenient access to the waterfront (71%). About two-thirds of respondents supported creating a continuous, well-connected waterfront experience (67%).

Nearly all (93%) of survey respondents identified “Celebrate and preserve local history, heritage, and culture” as a guiding principle for the project



Respondents were able to select multiple options. As a result, percentages indicate how frequently each item was selected, rather than representing a share of a whole and totals may exceed 100%.

Opportunity areas (amenities)

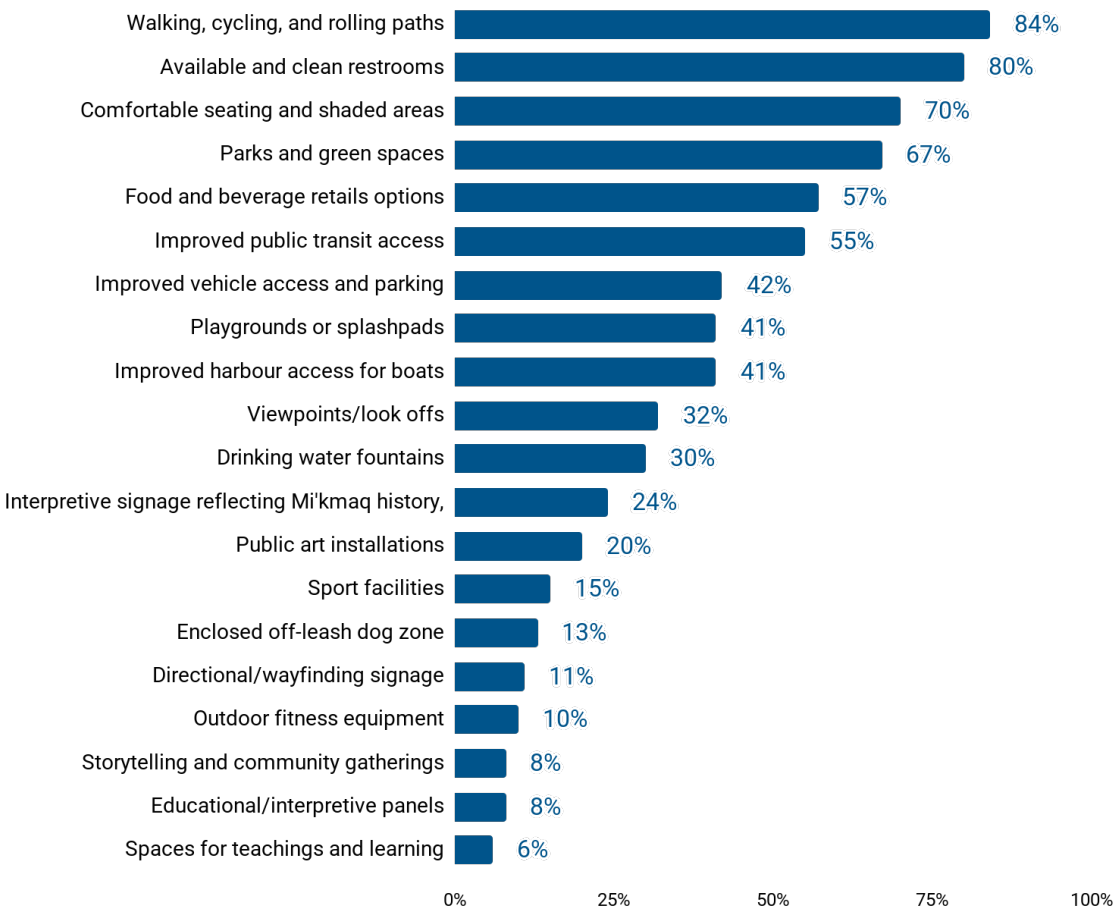
When asked about the types of amenities and infrastructure that would make spending more time on the waterfront more enjoyable and comfortable, survey respondents identified a strong desire for basic comfort, accessibility, and everyday usability. The most frequently selected priorities were walking, cycling, and rolling pathways (84%), access to clean restrooms (80%), and comfortable seating and shade (70%). Parks and green spaces (67%) and food and beverage options (57%) were also commonly noted, highlighting interest for both passive recreation and opportunities to linger in the area.

"Ice cream shop(s) in park(s) and on the waterfront..."

"Interpretive signage reflecting Halifax history."

"Restaurants, cafes, bakery, butcher, dry cleaners, retail shops"

Amenities: What types of amenities and infrastructure would make spending time in the area and on the waterfront more comfortable and enjoyable?



Respondents were able to select multiple options. As a result, percentages indicate how frequently each item was selected, rather than representing a share of a whole and totals may exceed 100%.

Opportunity areas - activities

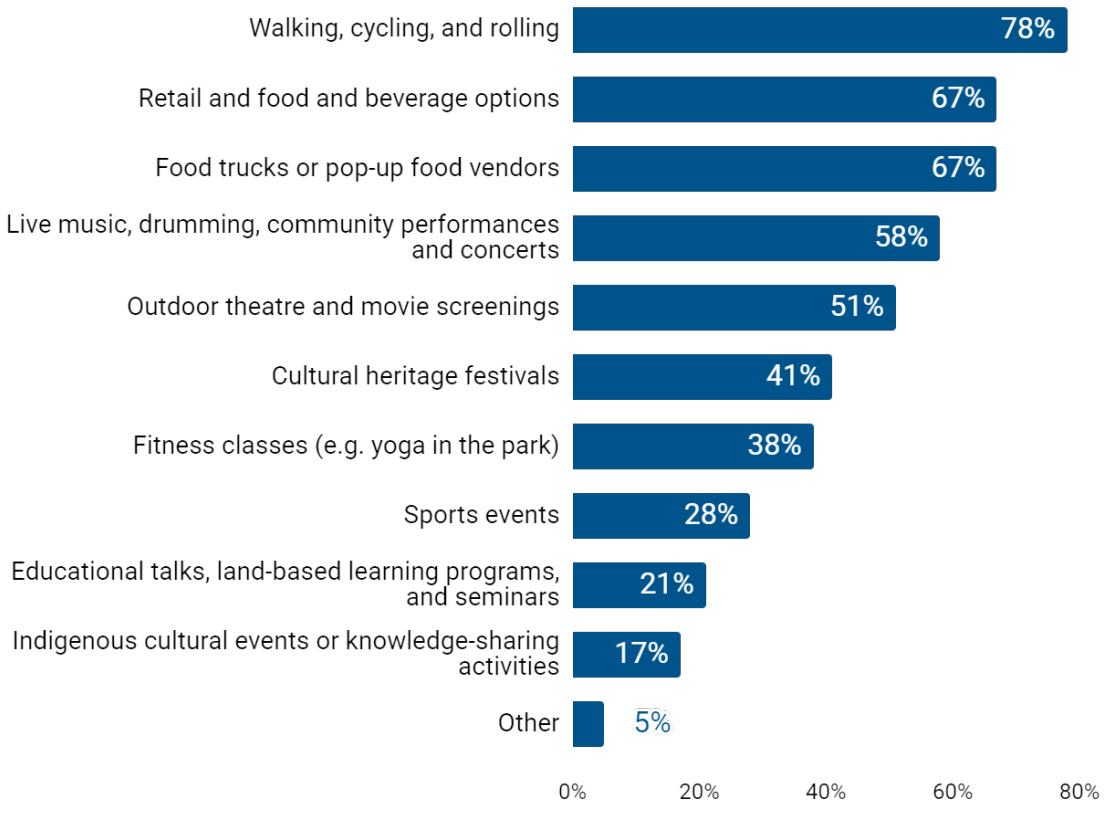
When asked what type of activities, events, and programming would encourage more time spent in Mill Cove and the waterfront area, survey respondents expressed a strong interest in both everyday activities and events. The most frequently selected priority was walking, cycling and rolling (78%), reinforcing respondents interest in an active, accessible waterfront. Food-related offerings were also highly valued, with both retail, food, and beverage options (67%) as well as food trucks or pop up vendors (67%) as top priorities. Community-oriented events such as live music, drumming, performances, and concerts (58%) as well as outdoor theatre and movie screenings (51%) were also widely selected. Moderate interest was shown in cultural heritage festivals (41%) and fitness classes (38%).

"Art community to learn at all ages and display our art work"

"A farmer's market"

"Boating/water related activities"

Activities: What kinds of activities, events, and programming would draw you to spend more time in the Mill Cove area including the Bedford Waterfront?



Respondents were able to select multiple options. As a result, percentages indicate how frequently each item was selected, rather than representing a share of a whole and totals may exceed 100%.

Focus groups

Focus group participants suggested that the new population from development would not be sufficient for developing a new school or recreation centre, based on current population and density projections. In turn, they suggested that the development prioritize the development of outdoor public spaces, citing the Dartmouth North Library and adjacent playspace as an inspiration.

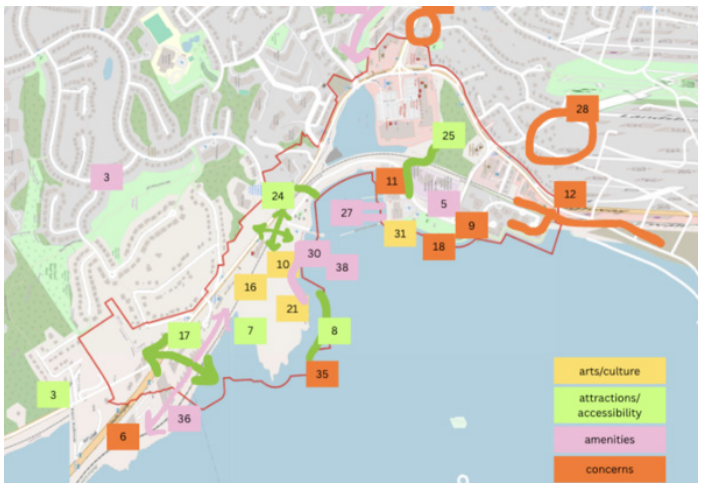
To support a vibrant public realm and make this area a destination, participants emphasized the need for public art, including Mi'kmaq installations. Additionally, there was support for designating streets in the area that could be temporary pedestrian streets. Participants felt that focusing on these details would contribute to a creating a community that people would enjoy living and visiting in.

Community workshops

Mill Cove is envisioned as a complete, year-round waterfront community where public access, everyday use, and local identity shape growth. The waterfront serves as the central feature in the area, with easy access, active public spaces, and a mix of uses that encourage people to stay and return. Development should deliver a mix of housing, local-serving retail, and community amenities, anchored by a walkable, human-scale village centre. Maintaining character is a priority, with providing mid-rise development that preserves views and reinforces a pedestrian-oriented environment.

There was a strong emphasis on the improvement of connectivity across the site, particularly through safe, direct crossings over the rail corridor, and stronger links to surrounding neighbourhoods and the ferry. All-season design including lighting, weather protection, and programming was identified as critical components to supporting consistent use.

Cultural identity should be embedded throughout, including visible recognition of Indigenous and African Nova Scotian heritage. Priority opportunities include extending waterfront access and boardwalk connections, enhancing public spaces and event areas, improving transit and active transportation networks, and addressing infrastructure needs such as wastewater, water quality, and climate resilience.



Maps used throughout the workshop activities for participants to locate key amenities and connections.