SANDY LAKE SPECIAL PLANNING AREA

PHASE 1
ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

HALIFAX

Halifax Regional Municipality
PO Box 1749, Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada B3J 3A5

halifax.ca

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1. Project Overview

On March 24, 2022, Sandy Lake was designated a Special Planning Area (SPA) by the Nova Scotia Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This designation is a part of a broader provincial effort to address housing challenges in the Capital Region. To date, sixteen (16) Special Planning Areas have been identified across the Halifax Regional Municipality. The *Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality Act* allows the province to designate Special Planning Areas and delegates approval authority for planning matters in those areas to the Minister of Housing with the intent of supporting the timely planning and development of new communities.

On May 16, 2025, the Province directed the Municipality to begin comprehensive planning for the Sandy Lake SPA. The comprehensive planning process, also known as secondary planning, considers all aspects of planning a new neighbourhood.

The planning process includes:

- Community engagement,
- Background studies, such as land suitability, transportation, archaeological resource impact, potable water and wastewater servicing,
- Detailed review by HRM staff and other review agencies, and
- Drafting of planning policies, land use by-law amendments and development agreements for consideration by decision makers.

The purpose of the comprehensive planning process is to create **complete communities**. This includes neighbourhoods that integrate housing, employment, recreation, and essential services within walking distance for current and future residents. A key input to the planning process is the recently completed Future Serviced Communities (FSC) Study. This study provides the technical foundation needed to evaluate the feasibility of developing the Sandy Lake area. The study helps both the Municipality and the Province understand the servicing, environmental, and infrastructure considerations that must be addressed before new communities can be planned and built. The study was completed in January 2025 and can be found here:

The outcome of this process will be a coordinated set of new municipal land use policies and regulations to guide and support development in the area, informed by HRM priority plans, community engagement, collaboration with internal and external review agencies, rightsholders proposals, and supporting technical studies.

2. This Document

This document offers a summary of engagement activities and feedback received during Phase 1 of the Sandy Lake Special Planning Area public engagement process that took place in 2025.

The following sections in this report provide an overview of all feedback and ideas collected from various forms of public engagement. Those include:

- an online survey hosted on the “Engage Halifax” website;
- public open houses; and
- email correspondence received by HRM staff.

Feedback is organised into key themes that emerged throughout the engagement process. Within this section, blue text boxes highlight quotes from residents who attended various public engagement sessions.

The report also outlines the upcoming stages of the planning process and outlines future public engagement opportunities.

3. How We Engaged

A number of engagement opportunities were created to promote community awareness and understanding of the planning process, facilitate accessible participation from the public, and support the contribution of meaningful and informed feedback. While feedback is welcomed throughout the planning process, feedback received during phase 1 engagement is most able to inform the planning process. Each method forms one part of the broader public participation program, and feedback from all methods were considered in the writing of this What We Heard Report. The statistics on this page are accurate to January 2026.



Project Website
4,193 Visits
885 Document Downloads



Public Meeting
184 Participants - November 12 meetings (cumulative)



Mailouts
926 Notices Mailed



Social Media
Posts on municipal accounts
Advertising on Facebook



Online Survey
588 Surveys submitted by residents



Phone Calls and Emails
5 phone calls received (unique phone numbers)
58 emails received (unique email addresses)

3.1 Public Open House

Three (3) in-person community engagement sessions were held. Municipal employees were available to answer questions in-person and take record of questions and feedback. A looped, pre-recorded presentation giving background information on the planning process, special planning areas, and the subject lands was available for viewing. Information boards on the planning process and background studies were stationed around the space. Tables and seats were stationed in the middle of the room with maps and sticky notes for attendees to sit and record their feedback or questions. There was an option for attendees to provide their personal emails to municipal employees to be given future updates. Landowners were also in attendance with information on their development proposals.

Date: Three (3) sessions were held on November 12, 2025

Time: Morning (10AM – 12pm), Afternoon (2:30 PM – 4:30 PM) and evening (6:30 PM – 8:30 PM) sessions of the open house were held.

Venue: Bedford United Church

Number of open house participants: 184 (62 in the morning, 54 in the afternoon, and 68 in the evening)

3.2 Online Survey

The online survey was hosted on the Engage Halifax platform to collect community input and gather ideas about the project to help inform key components, including parks and open space, housing, mobility, amenities and recreational uses, and more. The majority of responses were received from people who self-identified as living in the area (61%) or as visiting the publicly owned lands in Sandy Lake for recreational activities (67%). Responses were received from residents in every provide age cohort with the highest proportion of residents self-identifying as between 40-49-years-old (20%) followed by 60-69-years-old (18%).

Residents provided feedback regarding the phrasing and structure of the survey, indicating the phrasing of questions and available responses did not sufficiently present a full range of interests and allow respondents to communicate a preference for no development. Municipal staff acknowledge these limitations and note the survey is just one of method of engagement used to collect public feedback.

Dates: The survey was live from 5 November 2025 to 3 December 2025

Number of survey responses: 588

3.3 Correspondence

Municipal employees received correspondence by email and phone throughout the first phase of public engagement.

Number of notices mailed: 926 letters mailed to residents who live within 150 metres from the project site.

3.4 Promotion of Engagement Opportunities

Mail out: A mailout was sent in October of 2025 notifying recipients of the public open houses scheduled for November. The notice included information on the open house schedule and format, and a fact sheet providing an overview of the project, a link to the related website, and how to contact the lead planner.

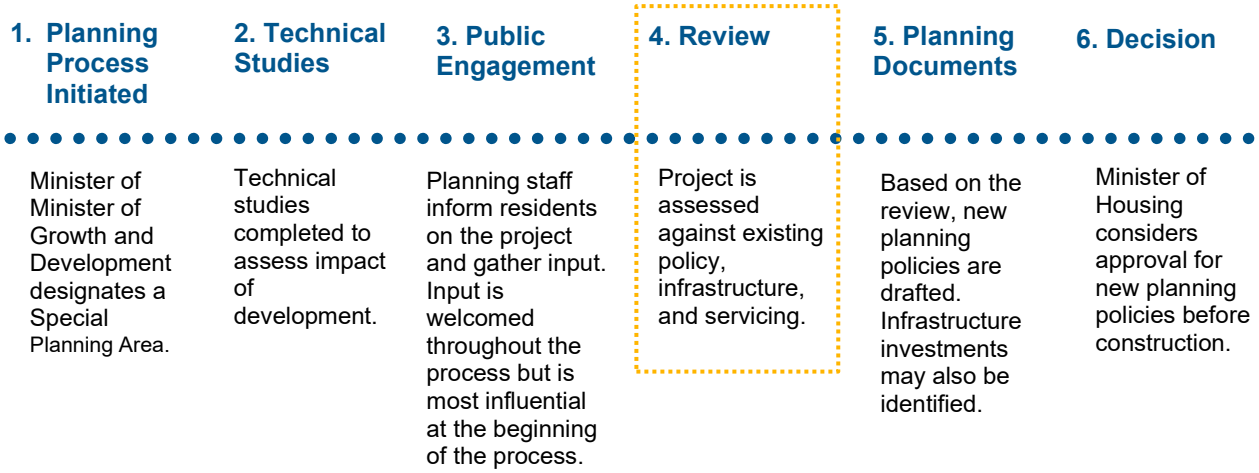
Engage Halifax website: The dedicated Engage Halifax webpage served as a central hub for project information, offering detailed background, timelines, and engagement opportunities, including direct access to the online survey.

Number of page views: 4805
Max Daily Visits: 417

Social Media: Facebook, Instagram, and Bluesky were leveraged to amplify awareness of the project, actively promoting the online survey and community workshop to engage a diverse and digitally connected audience.

4. Project Timeline

The planning process will take approximately two years to complete and include the following steps:



5. What We Heard

All resident feedback was complied and synthesized into key takeaways and grouped into the following corresponding sections throughout this report:

- Environmental Sustainability
- Housing
- Mobility and Transportation
- Community Services, Amenities, and Parks
- Infrastructure Capacity and Floodplains

In each topic section, reoccurring themes were identified and the top three feedback categories are discussed in detail.

6. Environmental Sustainability

Residents provided feedback relating to the environment, environmental sustainability, and the potential impacts of development on the environment. Resident feedback was complied and recurring themes were identified. These themes and their respective response proportions are presented below in Figure 1, and detailed below. The three themes with the highest proportion of related comments are:

- Ecosystem Impacts & Endangered or At-Risk Species,
- Climate Impacts, and
- Maintaining the Natural Character.

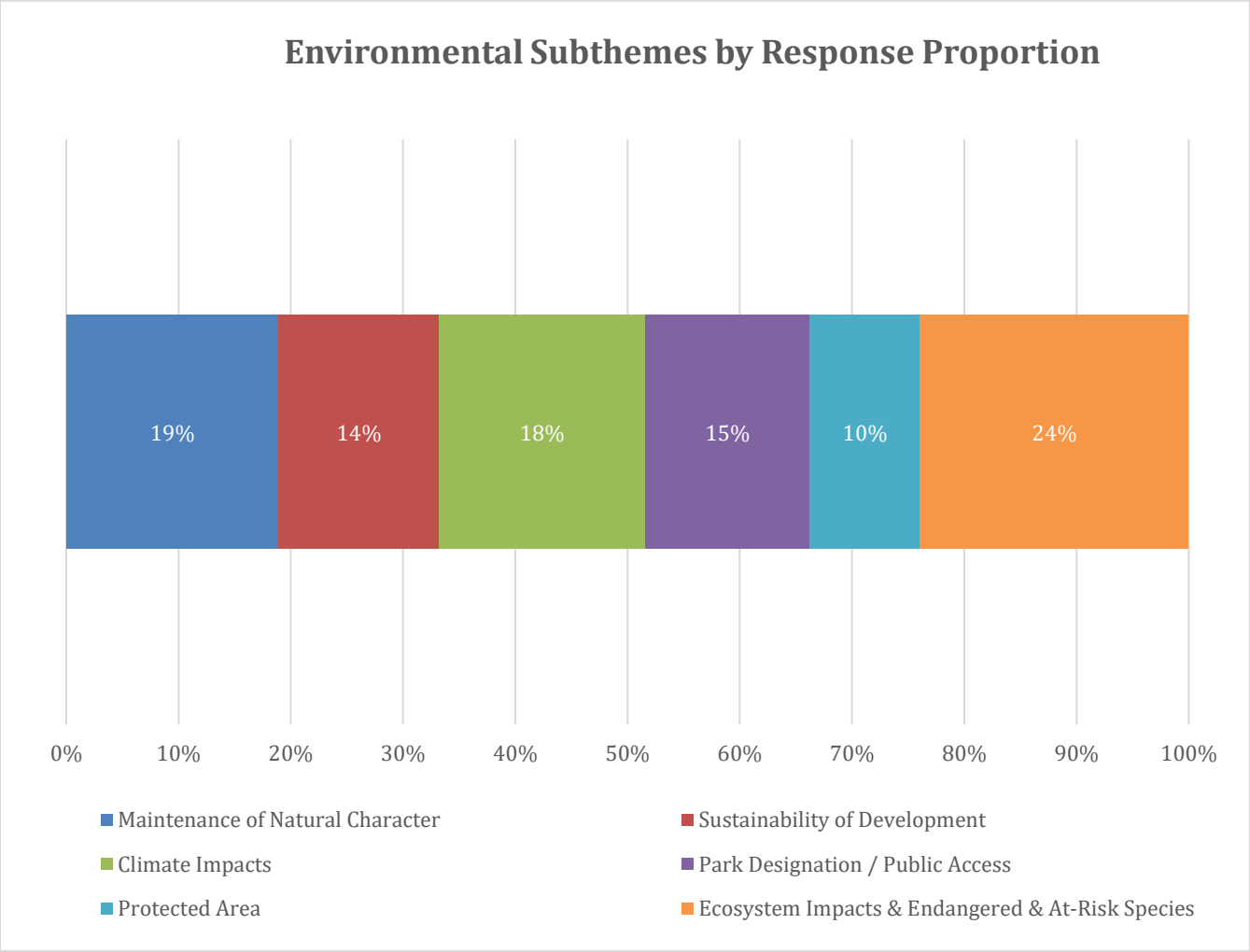


Figure 1: Environmental Sustainability Subthemes Identified from Resident Comments and Survey Responses

6.1 Ecosystem and Endangered or At-Risk Species

Residents raised concerns about environmental sustainability focused on potential impacts of the proposed development on the existing ecosystem and the at-risk and endangered species local to the area. Other residents emphasized the importance of minimizing disruptions to the current ecological balance and creating measures that support local wildlife, including specifies such as Atlantic Salmon.

> *"The environment here has been preserved completely. Housing has been built instead on less sensitive areas elsewhere in the HRM. The watershed has been kept clear for salmon and other important species and there is still an abundance of frogs; signals that the air and water are clean."*
>
> *- Resident, in response to survey question regarding the area as imagined in 20 years.*

6.2 Maintaining Natural Character

Residents expressed interest in maintaining the natural character of the area. Many expressed the desire to see the area remain undeveloped to preserve the nearby Sandy Lake Regional Park, noting the park's unique natural features and its proximity to the city.

Other residents emphasized the importance of balancing the existing natural aspects within the development. Comments highlighted preserving older and mature trees throughout the development, conserving wetland areas, and the implementing environmentally considerate, low-impact development practices.

> *"Balanced housing with the ecology of the area. For me this means, preserving continuous natural corridors for waterways and wildlife in the area, developing in clusters so larger connected natural areas stay intact and form a central part of the community, and special bylaws to help reduce light/noise pollution that could impact species in the area. Limit impervious surfaces, low-impact development (LID) techniques, maintain marshes and waterways in their natural state."*
>
> *- Resident, in response to survey question regarding the area as imagined in 20 years.*

Some residents, while assuming come level of development would occur, focused on ensuring adequate buffers are implemented between the new development and the existing environmental features of the area. Comments highlighted completing an environmental assessment and implementing its recommendations; maintaining existing riparian buffers; establishing wildlife corridors for local fauna and aquatic life; and implementing sustainable, climate-proof development practices.

6.3 Climate Impacts

Another recurring theme from resident comments about environmental sustainability were concerns about potential climate impacts and, more specifically, the potential impacts on natural mitigation infrastructure, such as the forested areas acting as natural carbon capture and the wetlands as flood mitigation. Many residents emphasized the importance of preserving the area's wetlands, noting their ecological value as well as their role in climate mitigation.

> *"After recent flooding and forest fire events, environmental considerations are top priority. Maintaining a large nature reserve in the area is a desire, walking paths and community spaces are crucial for people in the area."*
>
> *- Resident provided a comment from the first public engagement session*

Residents also shared concerns about potential pollution associated with the development. These included impacts of construction, increased population, higher traffic volumes, and waste.

7. Housing

Residents across the entirety of the Municipality have experienced drastic changes in the context and conditions of the housing market in recent years. With its importance to everyday life and its wide-ranging impacts, housing concerns were a prominent theme among residents. Residents provided a range of comments and raised various concerns relating the housing in the potential development area. Resident feedback was complied and recurring themes were identified. These themes and their respective response proportions are presented in Figure 2 and detailed below. The three themes with the highest proportion of related comments are:

- Housing Typology & Surrounding Land Uses,
- Affordability Impacts, and
- Buffers and Setbacks.

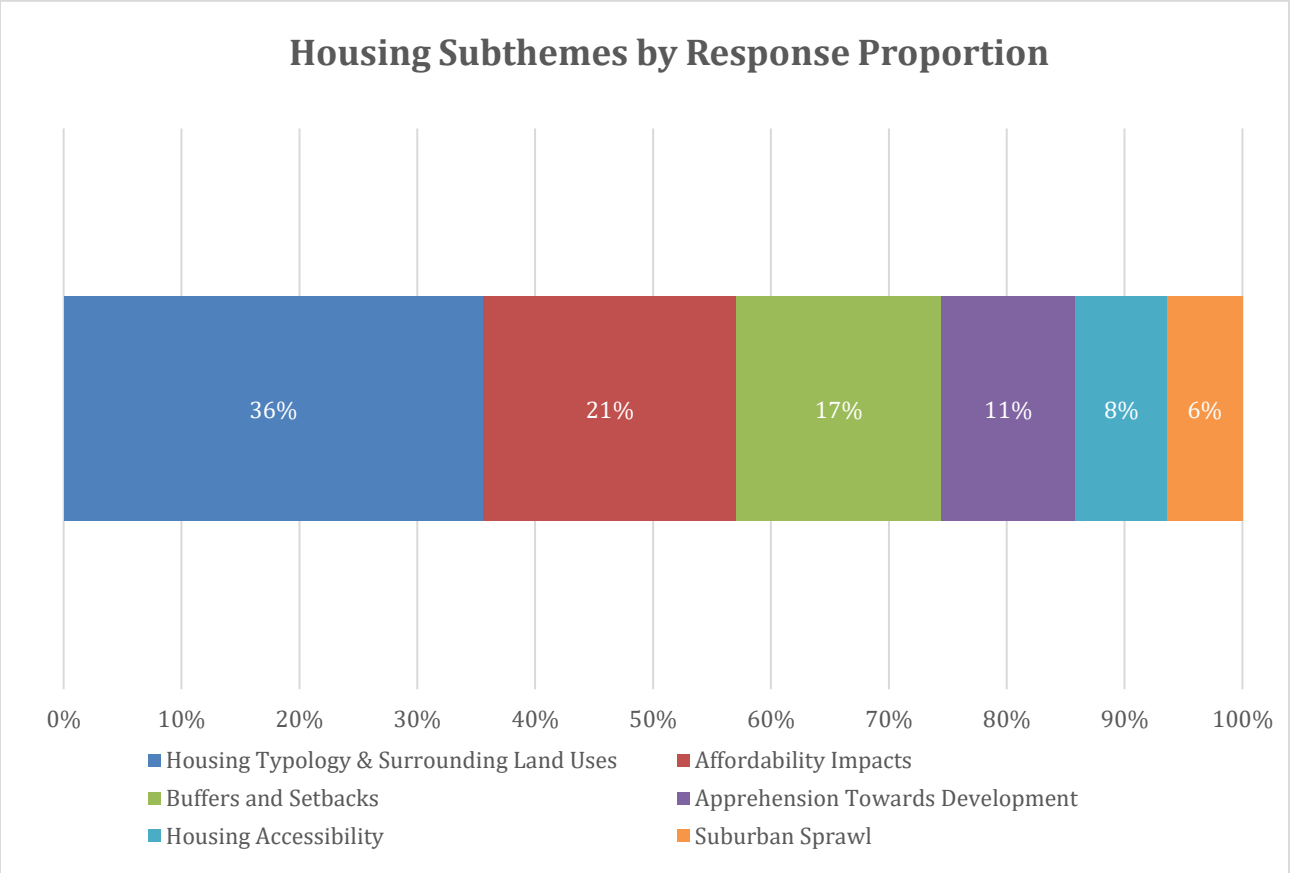


Figure 2: Housing Subthemes Identified from Resident Comments and Survey Responses

7.1 Housing Typology, Density, and Land Use

Many residents shared their views on future housing types, densities, and complementary or surrounding land uses. Opinions were varied as some residents preferred a low-density approach while others supported higher densities. Residents expressed the importance of preserving the area's natural character.

> *"I envision a low-density community with residential and small businesses nearby. There will be pretty of green spaces, hiking trails, wooded areas and play areas. Transportation will be small roads with access to the highways."*
>
> *- Resident provided a comment from the first public engagement session*

Residents that preferred low-density development referenced safety aspects, access to nearby recreational amenities, and an interest in maintaining a quieter alternative to a more urban environment.

Residents that supported high-density development focused their feedback on minimising building footprints and maximising greenspace, amenities, active transportation options, and public transit infrastructure. Along similar lines, residents also expressed concerns about the potential for suburban sprawl, hoping to discourage a development of primarily single-family homes and few complementary amenities.

> *"If there must be housing, it is not single-family housing but multi-unit, dense, and walkable. There are sidewalks for pedestrian safety. There is retail within the neighbourhood including groceries, cafes, etc. There are new schools built to accommodate the already stretched population. There are playgrounds and spaces for children and teens. A gazebo for outdoor events. The impact on wetlands and surrounding wilderness has been minimized, and a proper environmental assessment has been done."*
>
> *- Resident provided a comment from the first public engagement session*

7.2 Affordability Impacts

While residents expressed a range of views on housing, there was a broad agreement on concerns related to affordability. Residents raised concerns over the impact of the development on the housing shortage and, consequently, overall housing affordability in HRM. Primary among

these concerns were questions over the extent of the impact that this new supply could have on the affordability of the existing housing supply in HRM. Some residents also noted that development in the Sandy Lake area could influence the socioeconomic character and profile, with possible implications for access to the park and lake, specifically that park and lake access would be restricted to landowners in the development area.

Other residents also offered suggestions aimed at supporting affordable housing units in the area. These suggestions included: provincially or federally subsidized housing; rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units; and alternative ownership models like co-operative or non-profit housing.

> *"There is multi-use housing here, including affordable housing that is rent-geared-to-income.*
>
> *- Resident provided a comment from the first public engagement session*

8. Mobility & Transportation

Related to housing – especially where new development and intensification are concerned – are the topics of mobility and transportation. With more houses, come more cars, and consideration of the transportation network become necessary. Concerns regarding the existing road and transit networks, their continued viability, and the potential for mobility improvements for the area were all subjects discussed by residents during the engagement period. Resident feedback was complied and recurring themes were identified. These themes and their respective response proportions are presented in Figure 3 and detailed below. The three themes with the highest proportion of related comments are:

- Traffic Impacts,
- Transit Access & Options, and
- Road Network Capacity.

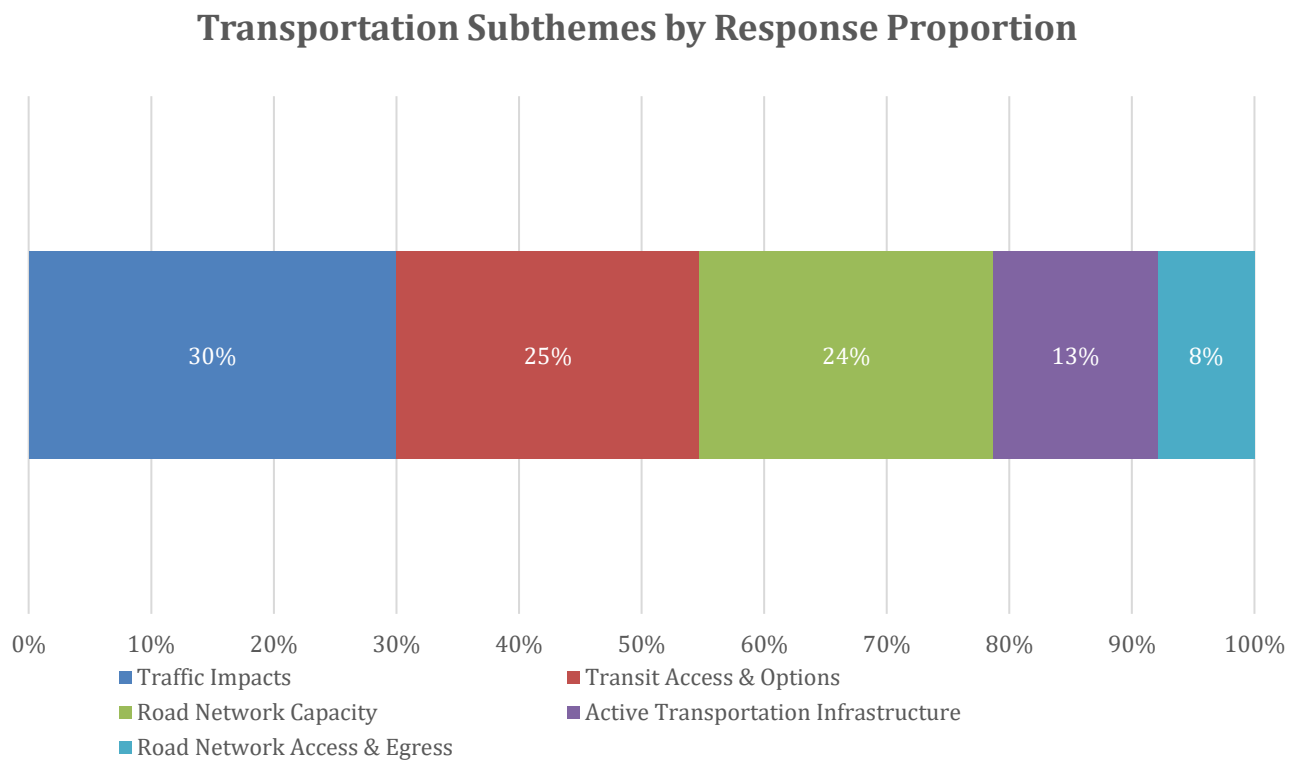


Figure 3: Transportation Subthemes Identified from Resident Comments and Survey Responses

Resident concerns were focused primarily on road capacity, specifically the traffic currently experienced on the Hammonds Plains Road and Highway 102. Other responses mentioned the local schools being overcrowded, a lack of public transit options, and concerns regarding the number of points of egress from the proposed development.

Respondents to the engagement survey were also asked to provide their views on the importance of the various modes of transportation in the new community, including walking/rolling, bicycling, Bus Rapid Transit and local bus routes, and automobiles. The same categories of importance were used in this portion of the survey as with the housing portion. Respondent answers are represented proportionally in Figure 6 through Figure 9, found in APPENDIX A: Survey Result Overview. Overall, the majority of respondents considered walking and rolling infrastructure, cycling infrastructure, and BRT and local bus route infrastructure to be either "Extremely Important" or "Somewhat Important". Automobile infrastructure, conversely, was considered by the plurality of respondents to be "Not at All Important" with the second highest proportion of respondents considering it "Extremely Important".

8.1 Traffic Impacts

Citing the present condition of traffic in the area, residents were concerned that new development could intensify these issues. Feedback frequently mentioned congestion, access and egress, safety, and environmental impacts. Some residents also requested traffic impact studies and a more detailed mobility plan aimed addressing these concerns.

> *"Main roadways in surrounding areas (Hammonds Plains, Larry Uteck, Lucasville, Hwy 102) must be upgraded before new residential developments. Existing housing, business, and current developments are already putting huge stress on this area."*
>
> *- Resident provided comment from the first public engagement session*

8.2 Transit Access and Expanded Transit Options

Residents shared views on transit access and the expansion of transit services. Some residents felt current transit options are limited and expressed their concerns this would continue with new development in the area, contributing to increased traffic. Others considered the development an opportunity to improve transit access in the area, noting its importance for affordability. Residents felt that the development could explore the opportunity to introduce new transit options, including Light Rail Transit (LRT), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes, and expanded active transportation (AT) infrastructure to reduce dependency on private automobiles as the primary means of

> *"We need to start considering mixed use zoning and high density in any and all future planning along with transportation that gets people out of cars. We need rapid transit, we need connected bike lanes. We need people to feel safe moving around."*
>
> *- Resident provided comment from the first public engagement session*

transportation. Even in cases of residents having a negative view on development in the area, many expressed hope that transit improvements could be expanded to increase access to Sandy Lake Regional Park.

8.3 Road Network Improvements

Residents provided comments regarding changes and improvements to the existing road network, often asking how the present traffic conditions would be addressed and improved by this development. Some residents felt that it would be necessary to increase the number of traffic lanes in the area to support population growth and increased traffic due to the development.

Others offered a different perspective, suggesting that this development is an opportunity to shift focus away from cars by improving infrastructure for other modes of transportation. Suggestions included adding bike lanes throughout the development, enhancing permeability and walkability, and creating complete communities where daily needs can be met within walking or cycling distance.

> *"I envision a neighbourhood that learns from the shortcomings of HRM's current car-centric and pod-based neighborhoods. We would deliberately break from the cul-de-sac and collector road model, implementing instead a network of short, connected blocks. This approach creates a more efficient, healthy, and socially connected community, ultimately embracing Jane Jacobs's enduring principle that a great neighbourhood is built for people, not just for traffic."*
>
> *- Resident, in response to survey question regarding the area as imagined in 20 years.*

9. Community Services, Amenities, and Parks

As areas grow with new dwellings and residents, comparable improvements to community services and amenities, namely parks and recreational facilities, are expected both by existing residents and potential new residents. During public engagement sessions, residents discussed various topics relating to community services and park features and amenities. Resident feedback and themes specific to these topics was captured within Section 6 and Section 10, respectively as well as their accompanying figures. With the importance placed upon these topics by the public and with its inclusion in the online survey, this section has been included to detail the themes identified. The themes identified through received feedback are:

- Access to services (e.g., hospitals, school, and libraries),
- Amenities and parks

Figure 4, included below, provides the response proportions from one of the questions from the online survey. This question asked respondents to identify their 3 preferred park features or activities from a predetermined list. Given the number of choices in the question, any option that received less than 3% of responses was not included in the figure.

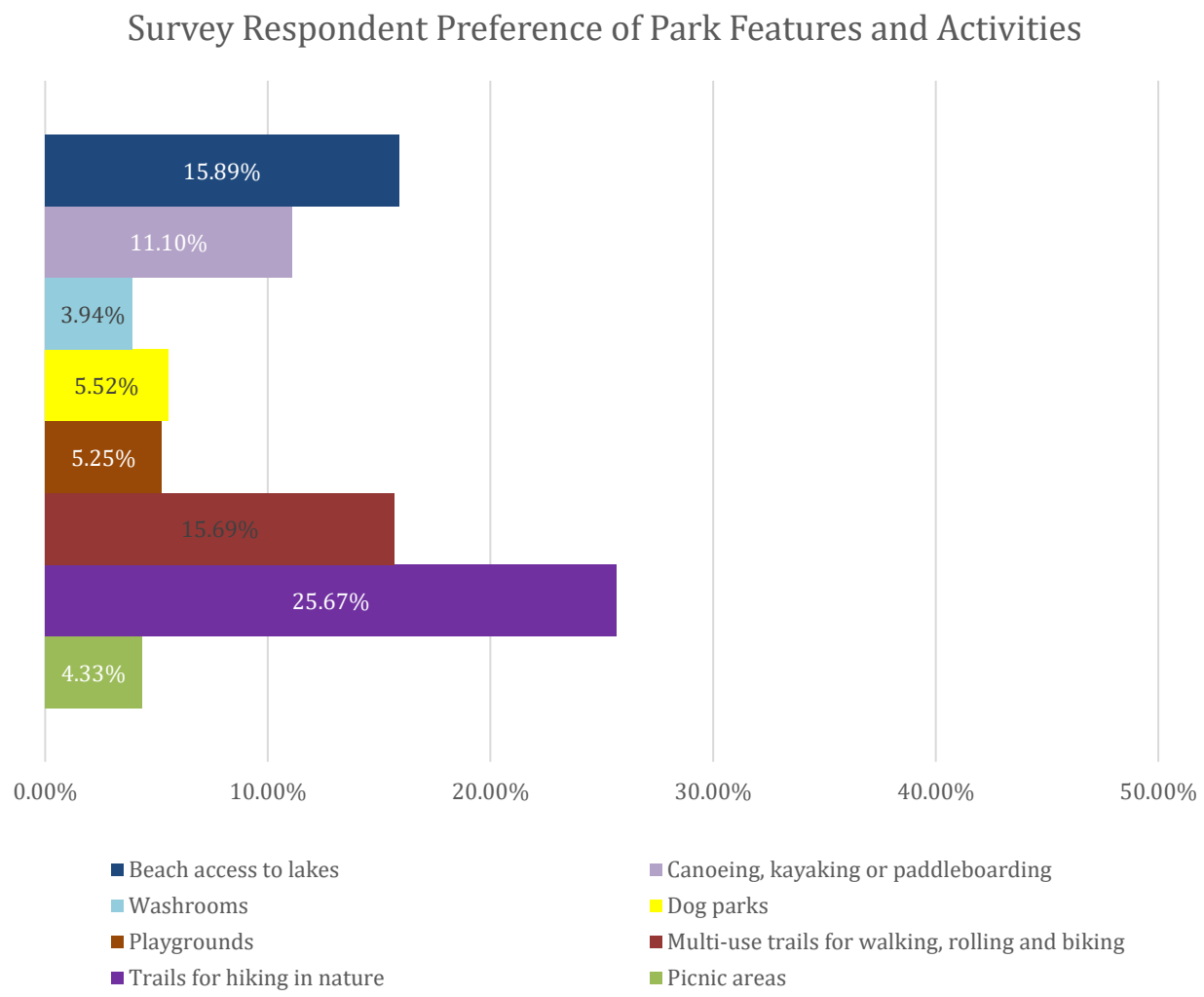


Figure 4: Survey Respondents' Preferred Park Features and Activities

9.1 Access to Services

Residents shared concerns and aspirations regarding healthcare, education, and recreation facilities. Concerns were focused on capacity issues in existing schools, insufficient access to healthcare services, and the required expansion of recreational facilities to support community wellbeing.

Education-related comments focused on the present pressures within the school system and the need for local schools with adequate planning and space to decrease the potential of overcrowding.

On healthcare, residents expressed general concern that additional population growth could result in further strains on healthcare infrastructure and limitations to accessing essential healthcare services such as hospitals and walk-in clinics.

On recreation areas and facilities, feedback focused on the importance of accessible green space for the community's mental and physical wellbeing. Many residents described the area as one of the few parks of its kind within the HRM and valued its accessibility by public transit. There was also interest in creating public gathering spaces to support connection and promote social cohesion within the community.

9.2 Amenities and Parks

Through both the public engagement sessions and the online survey, residents shared comments and concerns related to park access and amenities with their concerns applying both to the present Sandy Lake Regional Park and any future parks in the development area.

Regarding Sandy Lake Regional Park, resident comments focused on maintaining public access to the park and concerns regarding the development's potential impacts on the park's environmental qualities. Specifically, residents were concerned that park access could be restricted to homeowners in the development area. Regarding environmental impacts, concerns were raised regarding the potential disruption the development could have on the wildlife in the area and what are considered by residents to be the pristine wilderness conditions of the park.

Regarding future parks and amenities, Figure 4 presents the results from a question included in the online survey. Respondents were asked to identify their 3 most preferred park features and/or activities from a list provided in the survey. The results show a marked preference for activities that were also mentioned throughout the public engagement sessions, namely: hiking trails and canoeing, kayaking, or paddleboarding. The results show a focus on preserving access to the water, with beach access or access to the lake as the second most often provided answer by survey respondents. Options that received less than 2% of respondent choices are not noted on the graph.

10. Infrastructure Capacity and Floodplains

Similar to many of the other topics, the capacity of existing infrastructure must be considered when areas are expanding. For low-lying areas near bodies of water, and especially important to consider while storms are getting worse as a consequence of climate change, floodplains and flood mitigation infrastructure are critical components of a sustainable community. Resident feedback on this topic was complied and recurring themes were identified. These themes and their respective response proportions are presented in Figure 5 and detailed below. The themes with the highest proportion of related comments are:

- Infrastructure (e.g., water, sewer, and road), and
- The respective capacities of these systems, residents both raised concerns and provided suggestions to increase and safeguard system capacity.

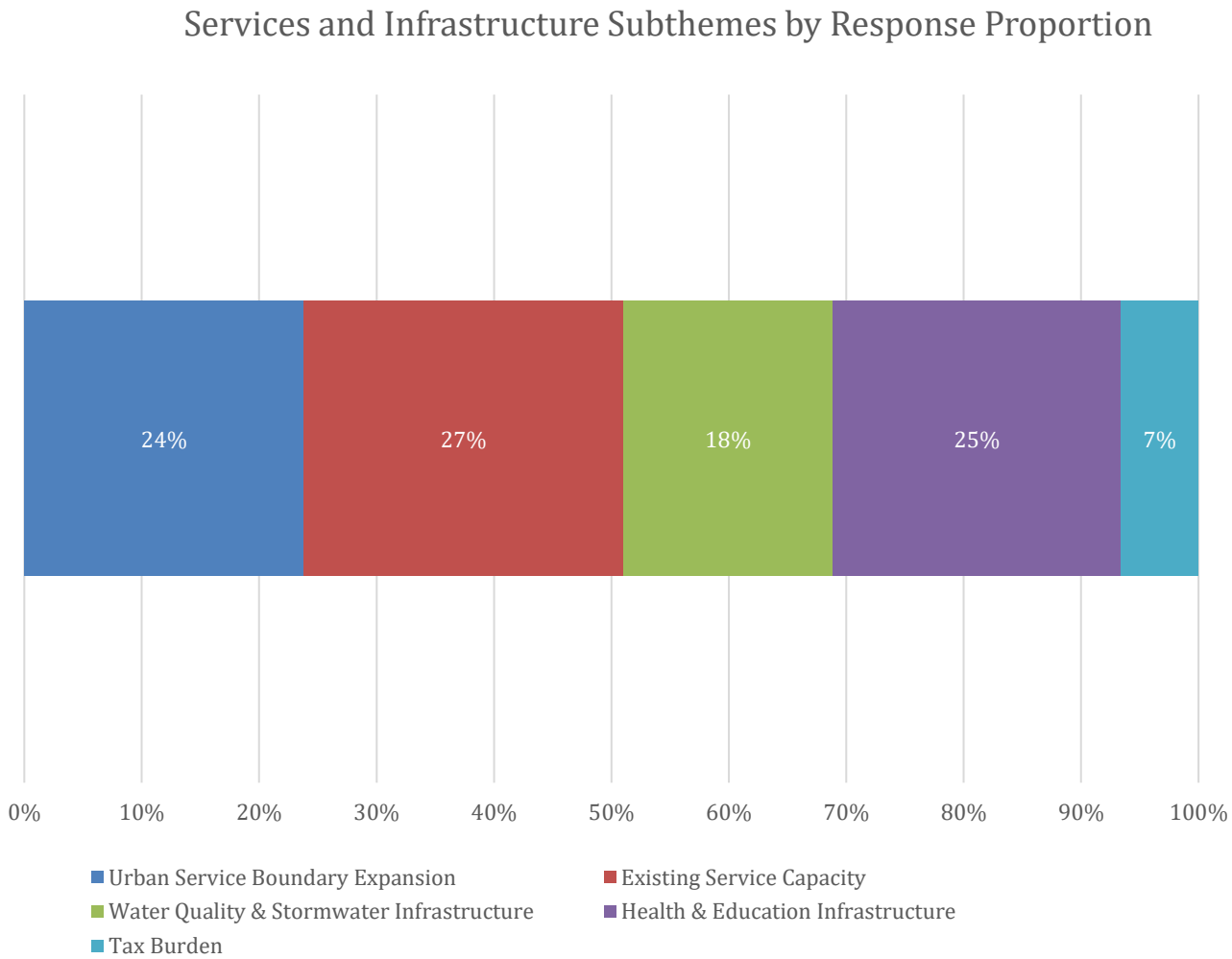


Figure 5: Services and Infrastructure Subthemes Identified from Resident Comments and Survey Responses

10.1 Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

Many residents shared concerns regarding the current capacity of services such as water, sewer, and stormwater management. Comments focused on water quality, the drinking water source for a development of this scale, and flood mitigation. Concerns over the water quality manifested primarily as a secondary impact of development, e.g., the processes necessary to development impacting the watercourses in the area. These concerns took both human and wildlife uses into consideration. Regarding the water source, some residents mentioned the recent drought experienced in Nova Scotia and the plans to manage water throughout the development to avoid critical situations.

> *"I would be most excited to see that development follows the best practices being taught in HRM's living lakeshores program, and that land bordering the lake is preserved as parkland with a generous riparian zone. this will ensure a healthy ecosystem and avoid the problems that plague other urban lakes in the area (water quality issues, blue-green algae blooms, etc.)."*
>
> *- Resident, in response to survey question regarding the area as imagined in 20 years.*

10.2 Flooding

Residents expressed concerns about how stormwater would be managed in the area. In particular, they highlighted concerns related to flood risk and the preservation of wetlands both as natural flood mitigation assets and as important environmental features. Residents expressed the need for updated floodplain assessments, stormwater management plans, and the prevention of run-off and pollution into Sandy Lake.

> *"There are mindful setbacks, drainage systems, and other measures taken to prevent pollution and runoff in Sandy Lake. The building design helps to mitigate the impact on the currently beautiful sight lines."*
>
> *- Resident, in response to survey question regarding the area as imagined in 20 years.*

APPENDIX A: Survey Result Overview

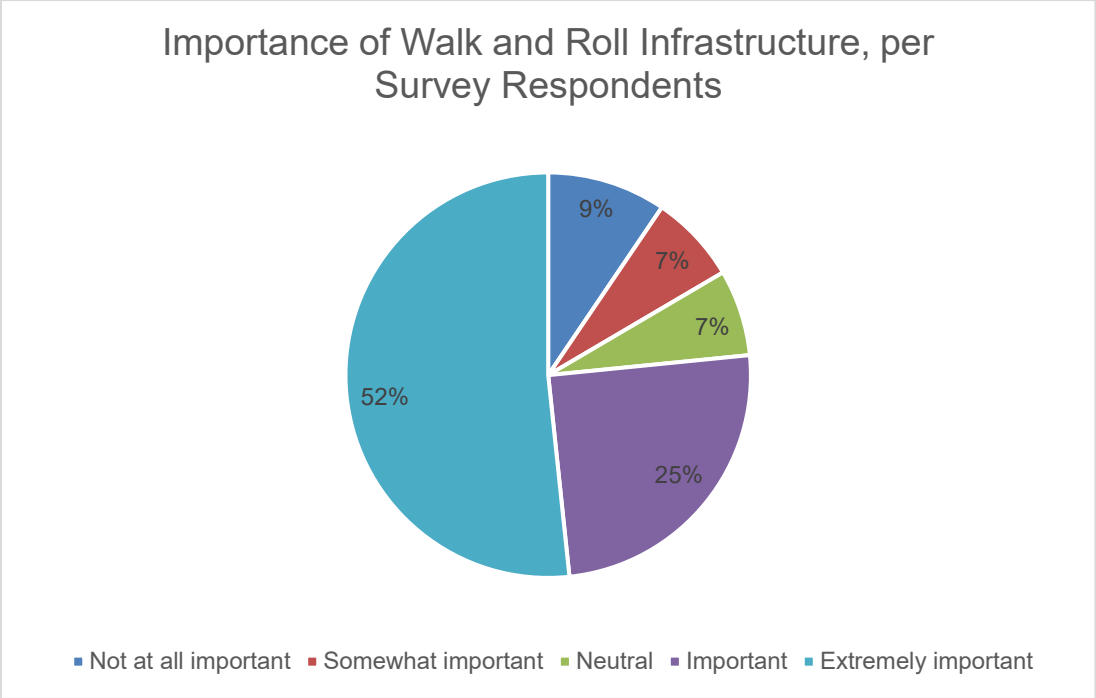


Figure 6: The Importance of Walk and Roll Infrastructure, as indicated by Online Survey Respondents, presented proportionally

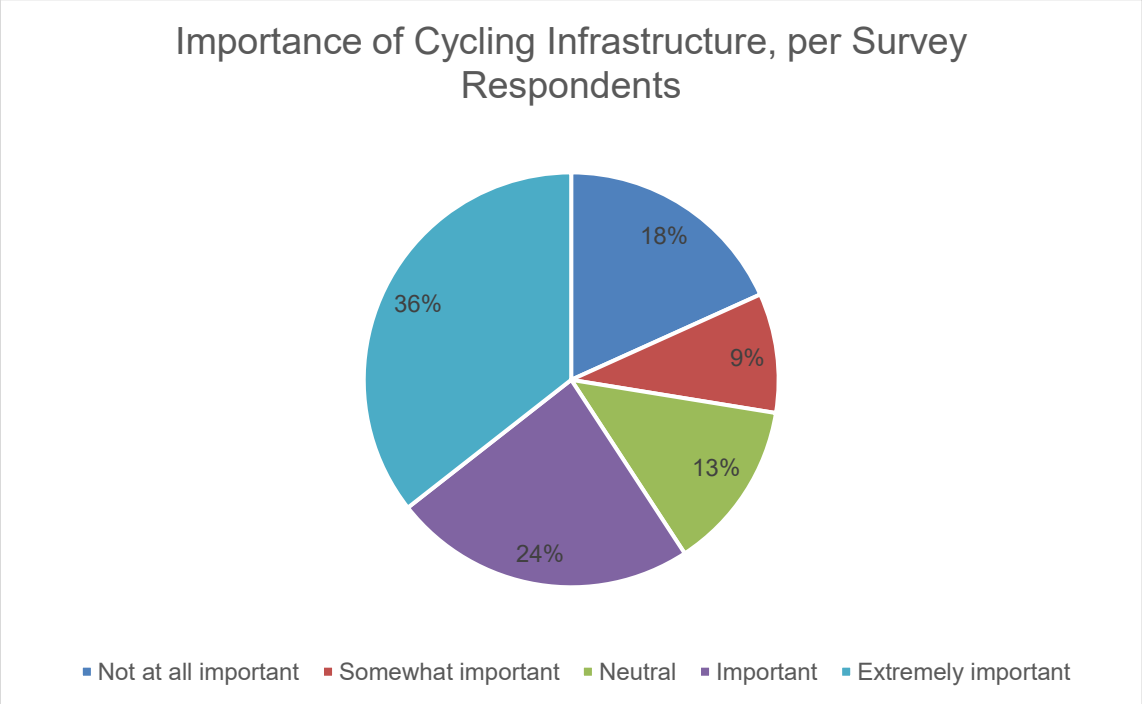


Figure 7: The Importance of Cycling Infrastructure, as indicated by Online Survey Respondents, presented proportionally

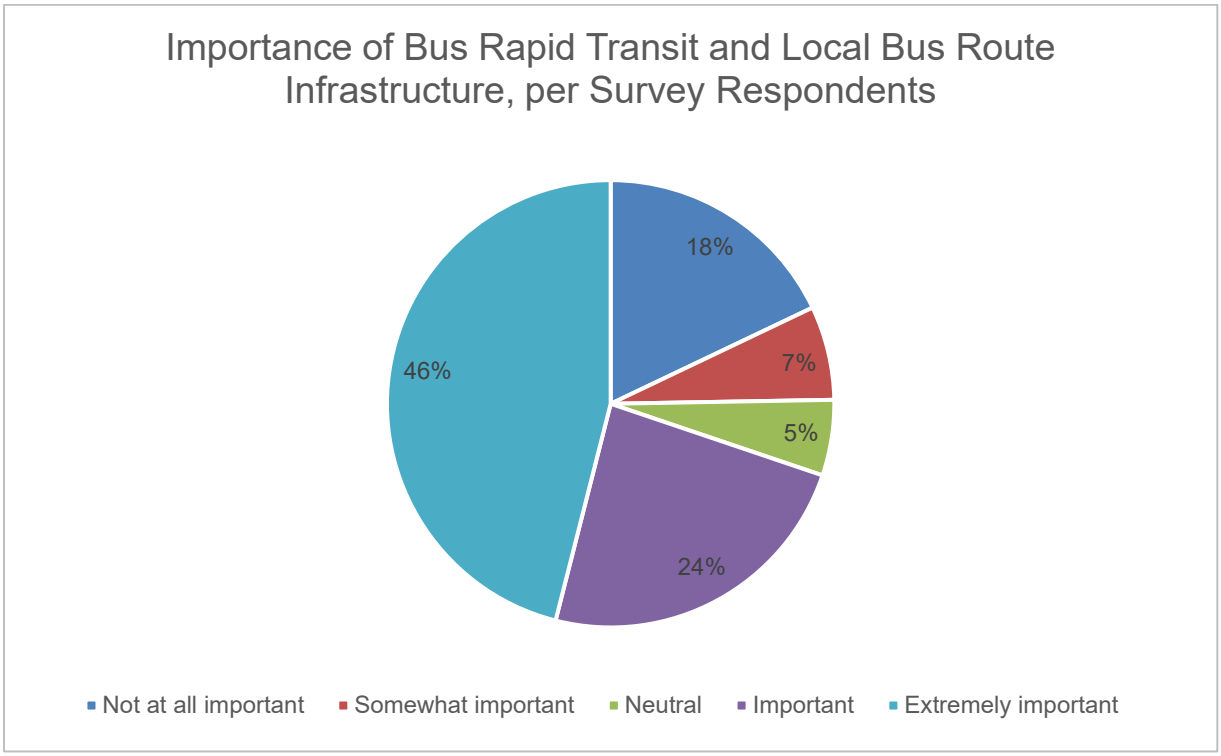


Figure 8: The Importance of Bus Rapid Transit and Local Bus Route Infrastructure, as indicated by Online Survey Respondents, presented proportionally

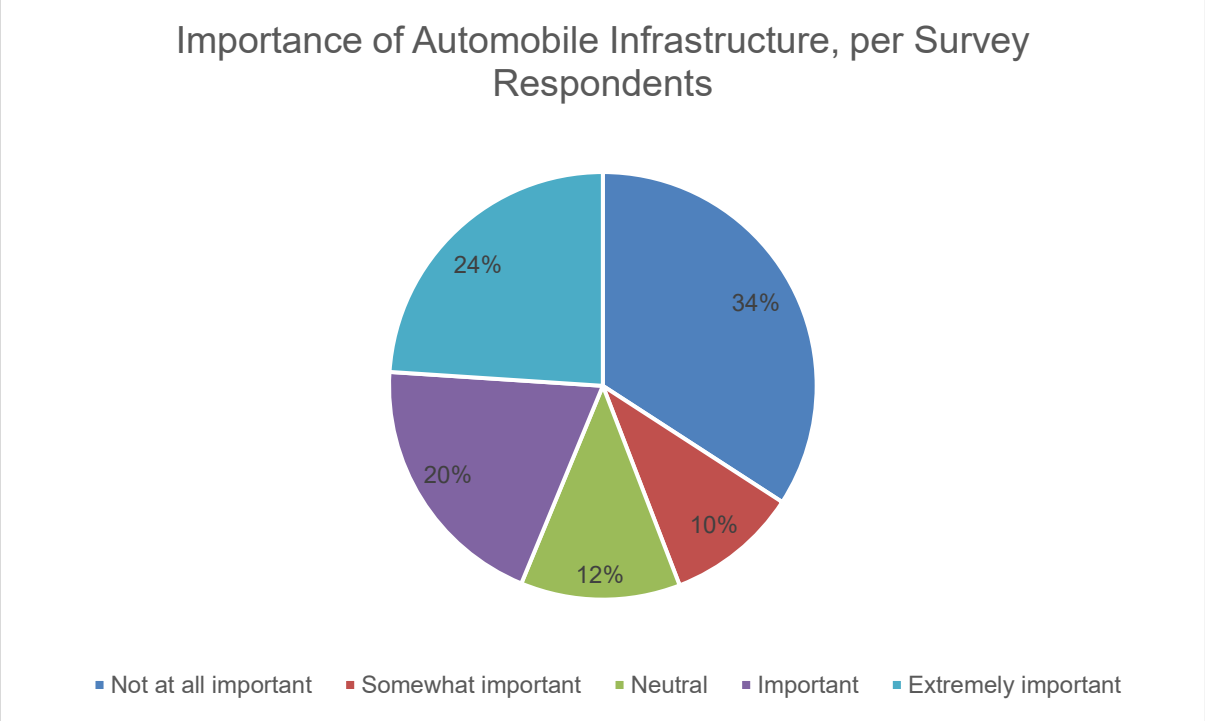


Figure 9: The Importance of Automobile Infrastructure, as indicated by Online Survey Respondents, presented proportionally

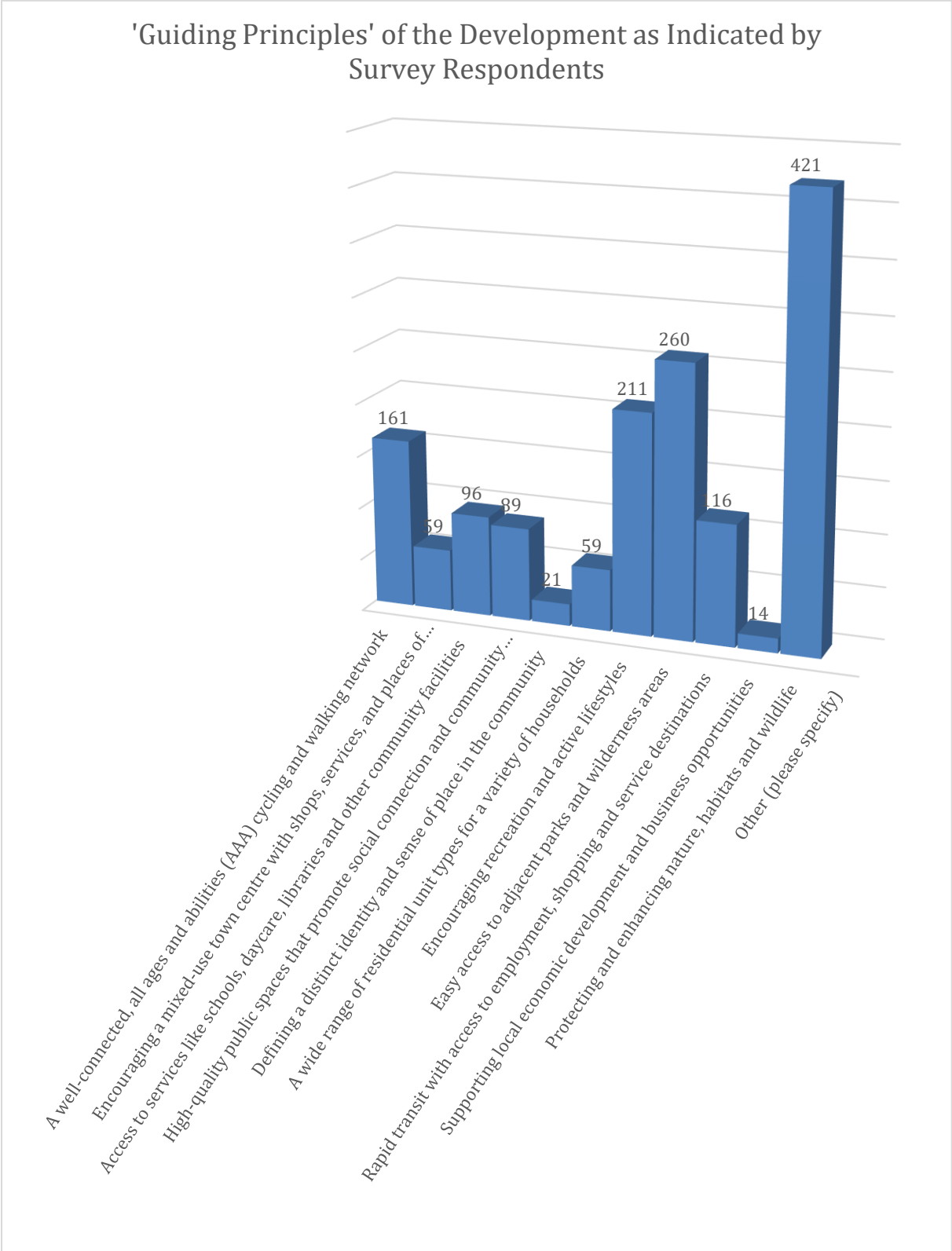


Figure 10: Preferred 'Guiding Principles' of future Development, as Indicated by Online Survey Respondents