

What We Heard Report

Park User Survey for the Rehab Lands Planning

May 2021

HALIFAX

What We Heard

Overview of the Park User Survey for the Rehab Lands Park Planning

An online survey was conducted to better understand the community's recreational needs and values for purposes of planning a new park on the lands of the former Halifax County Rehabilitation Centre on Bissett Road in Cole Harbour. The online survey ran from December 3, 2020 to January 18, 2021 and received 775 submissions. The survey was organized into four parts with questions on demographics, current use of parks, future recreation uses for the new park, and dog off-leash considerations.

Who Participated

Over half the respondents (58%) are from the immediate local area of Cole Harbour with an additional 12% from nearby neighbourhoods of Cow Bay, Eastern Passage and Lawrencetown. People from Dartmouth and Halifax neighbourhoods make up 20% of respondents, and the remainder are from other parts of the municipality and province. (Figure 1)

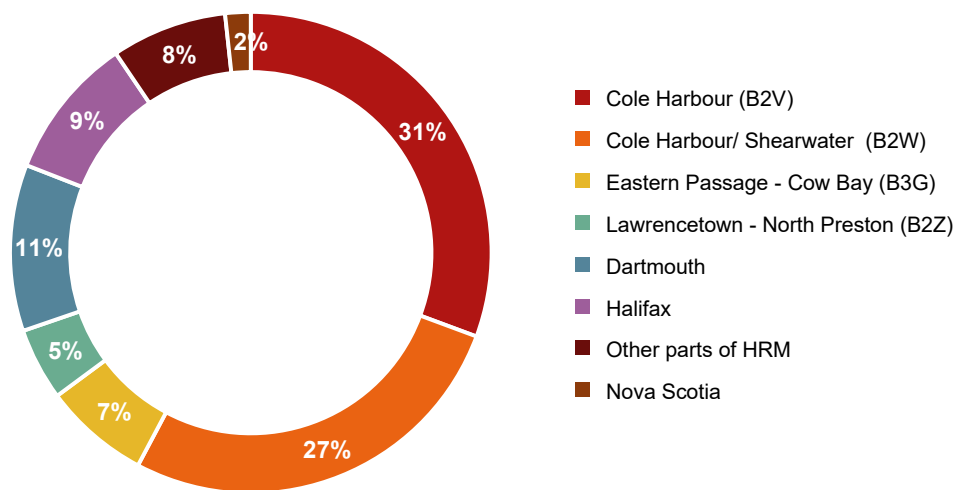


Figure 1: Participants' Home Neighbourhoods

Household Makeup:

- The largest number of respondents are from 2-person households (43%). Single person households make up 10% with the remainder from larger households of three, four or five persons.
- About two-thirds of the participants are from households that do not have children age 18 or younger.

Age & Gender:

- The largest age group are between the ages of 35-49 years (39%) followed by those between the ages of 50 to 64 years (30%); Seniors, 65 years and older, make up 11%, young adults make up 19% of respondents and 2 individuals are under the age of 18.
- The majority of survey respondents identify as female (59%) and 39% identify as male; 2 respondents identify as non-binary. (Figure 2)

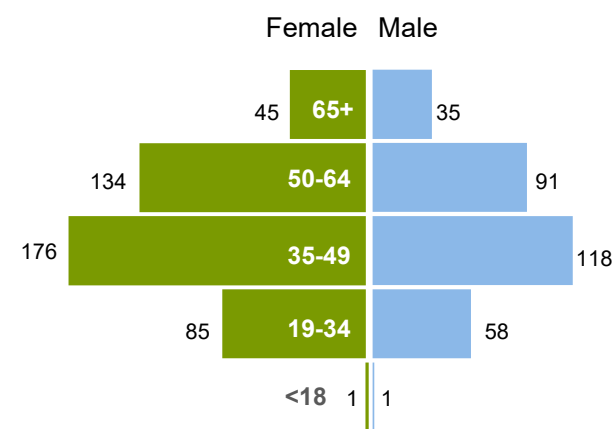


Figure 2: Demographics Chart for Age and Gender Identification

Section 1: Current Use of Parks in the Area

This section of the survey asked questions that address current use of parks, trails and recreation open spaces in the area. Participants were directed to consider a typical year before the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The majority of respondents describe themselves as active park users who visit a park or trail a few times per week and spend 1 hour (46%) to 1-3 hours (48%) per visit.
- 67% of respondents usually visit a park with 1 or 2 others and 24% usually visit alone. Only 8% indicated that they usually visit a park in a group.
- Only 36% of respondents visit parks with children whereas 56% visit parks with a pet. This corresponds to the responses that most do not have children living in their household.
- During the summer, 64% visit a park a few times per week. In the winter this figure drops down to 32%. In the spring and fall, slightly more than half the respondents frequently visit a park. (Figure 3)

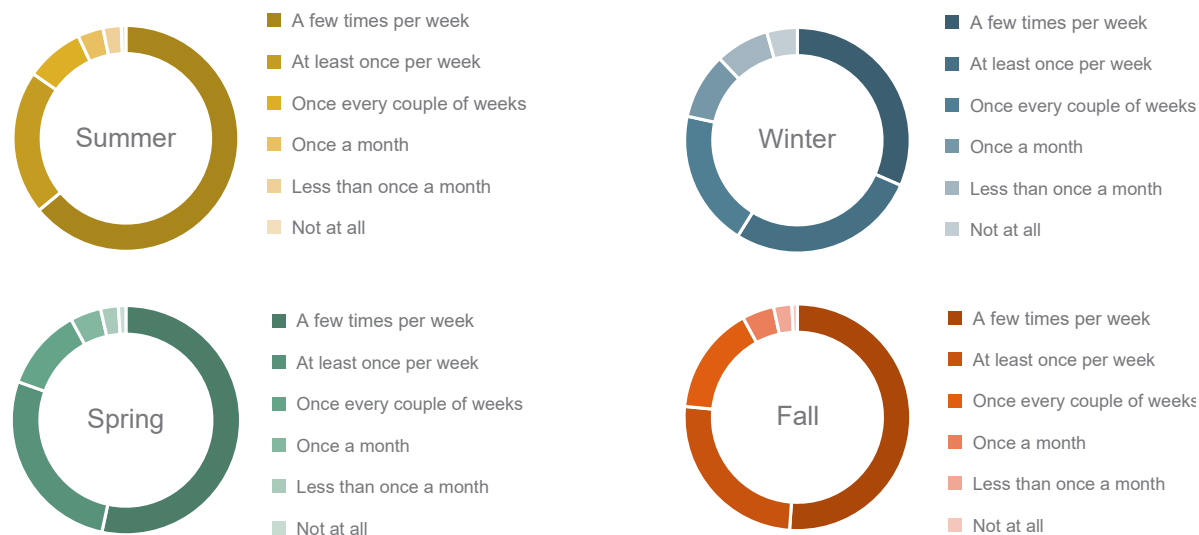


Figure 3: Seasonal Use of Parks

Use of other Parks

Respondents were asked how frequently they visit other major parks in the area.

- Shearwater Flyer and Salt Marsh Trails are visited the most, at least once a week, followed by the Cole Harbour Heritage Park, which is across the road from the site, and Bissett Lake District Park which is connected to the site via the Bissett active transportation trail.
- Rainbow Haven beach has the highest occasional visits (44% visit a few times per year)
- Cole Harbour Common has the least number of visits with 42% indicating they do not visit the park at all. (Figure 4)

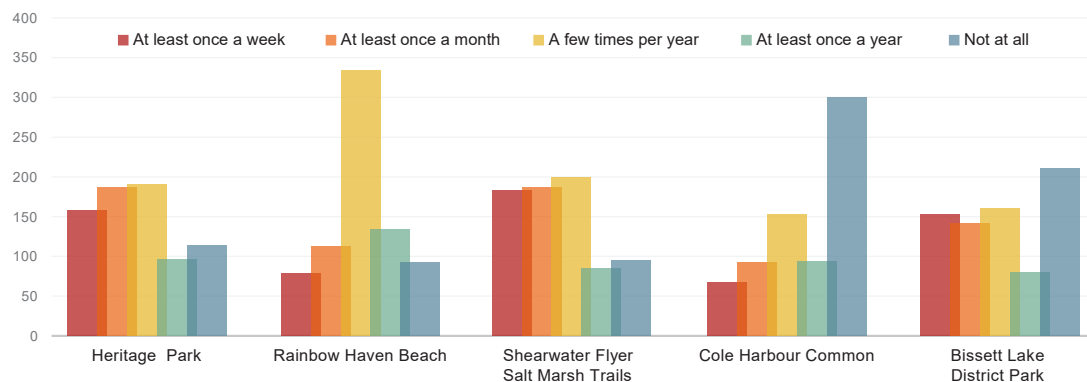


Figure 4: Visitation of Nearby Major Parks

Section 2: Future Use of the New Park

This section of the survey asked questions about recreational interests and potential park infrastructure for a new park on the Rehab Lands site. Participants were asked to consider their future use of the site as a park.

Travel and Visitation

- Nearly half of respondents currently visit the Rehab Lands property (46%).
- The majority indicated that they would drive to the site (79%), but there was a high number who would cycle (36%) or walk (32%).
- 40% chose multiple modes for traveling to the site but 49% answered they would drive as their only mode of travel.
- 24 respondents indicated that they would take public transit for part of their trip. Arriving by kayak was also noted as another mode of transportation.
- The most popular areas now being visited are the paved trail (40%) and the top of the hill (28%). The water's edge on Bissett Lake is visited by 26% of respondents.
- Only 25% felt comfortable allowing children to visit the new park on their own, 29% would not feel comfortable, and many admitted they don't know or are not sure (46%). Reasons noted for not feeling comfortable were that children need supervision or are too young. The unsafe conditions of the site such as the shoreline, steep slopes, and remoteness of the area were also noted concerns.

Park Development

Participants were asked to choose what they thought was a reasonable level of development for this site from a series of choices that ranged from highly developed - with park infrastructure and facilities for active recreation - to leaving the site mostly natural. More people felt that the site should be left mostly natural (21%) than highly developed (11%). Most indicated that some level of development was appropriate, more for low impact passive recreation use (38%) than for active recreation use (28%). (Figure 5)

Recreation Interests

Participants were asked about their level of interest or participation in 12 different outdoor park activities. (Figure 6)

- Physical activity, such as walking, jogging, cycling or exercising, is the most popular activity people are already doing (37%) or are very interested in doing (46%).
- Nature based activities is the next popular activity people are already doing and it ranked fourth in activities people are 'very interested' in doing.

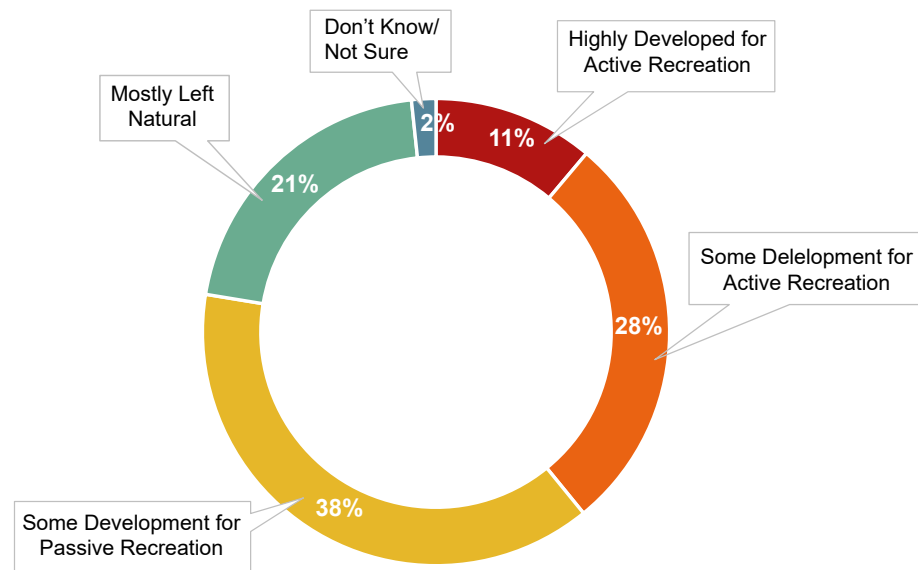


Figure 5: Level of Park Development

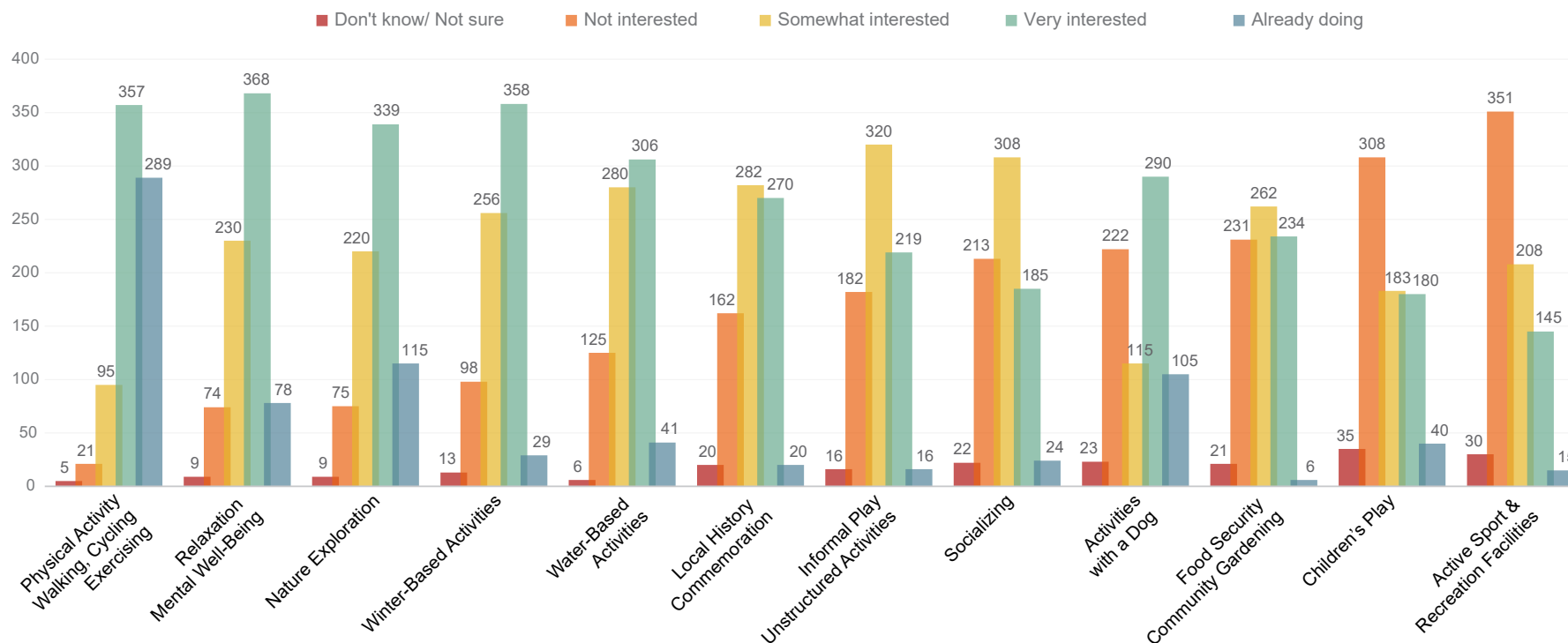


Figure 6: Recreation Interests for New Park

Top Activities 'Already Doing':

1. Physical activity, such as walking, jogging, cycling or exercising (289 responses, 37%)
2. Nature exploration and appreciation (115 responses, 15%)
3. Playing with or exercising a dog (105 responses, 14%)

Top Activities 'Very Interested':

1. Relaxation and activities for mental well-being (368 responses, 47%)
2. Winter-based activities, such as snow shoeing or skating (358 responses, 46%)
3. Physical activity (357 responses, 46%)
4. Nature exploration and appreciation (339 responses, 44%)
5. Water-based activities, such as fishing, kayaking, or swimming (306 responses, 39%)

Top Activities 'Not Interested':

1. Active recreation sports or facilities (351 responses, 45%)
2. Children's play (308 responses, 40%)
3. Community gardening, food security (231 responses, 30%)
4. Playing with or exercising a dog (222 responses, 29%)
5. Meeting and socializing (213 responses, 27%)

“Naturalization! I like visiting natural areas with native species and wildlife.”

“I was hoping a disc golf course could be included in this park. It brings a whole host of people there and is not intrusive.”

“I would love to have a bike park in my neighborhood.”

- Relaxation and activities for mental well-being was the top activity type people are the most interested in doing. Winter-based activities and water-based activities both ranked in the top five ‘most interested’.
- Traditional park development for active recreation sports or children’s play received the least interest among survey respondents.
- Activities that have a narrow margin between ‘very interested’ and ‘not interested’ include community gardening (234 to 231 respondents); socializing (185 to 213) and informal play (219 to 182). Recreation activities with dogs was also divided with a close margin (290 to 231).

Other Recreation Interests

In addition to the listed activities, survey participants were also asked if there are other outdoor activities they are interested in for the new park. This question received 345 comments, or 45% of participants.

The most frequent comments included:

- **Dog off-leash area:** 25% of the comments were for a dog off-leash area or a dog park.
- **Disc golf** had a large showing with 15% of commenters advocating for a disc golf course for the new park.
- **Bike parks and mountain bike trails** were also popular suggestions with 14% of commenters suggesting bike infrastructure including pump tracks, bike skills park, or single-track mountain bike trails.
- **Recreation facilities:** 14% of commenters are interested in built facilities such as a splash pad, playground, fitness equipment, hockey rink, skatepark or pickleball courts.

Other comments can be organized around the following themes:

- **Trail development:** from rustic wilderness trails to flat, paved trails for roller blading and electric scooters;
- **Nature:** bird watching, wildlife, preserving natural areas, pollinator and native plantings;
- **Park programming:** nature education, local history interpretation, outdoor exercise classes, outdoor performances, night sky astronomy, and geocaching;
- **Park amenities:** hilltop viewing area, meditation and quiet seating areas, picnic area, and gardens;
- **Lake access:** pier with docks for kayaks, canoes and paddleboards, boat rentals, swimming, and fishing;
- **Winter activities:** skating, snow shoe rentals, cross country skiing, winter biking, skijoring and sledding;
- **Food and social gathering:** picnics and cookouts; fire pit, campfire singing; community oven, barbeques and grilling;
- **Commemoration and history:** memorials to individuals, local history of the area and past uses of the site, natural history, and Mi’kmaw culture.

Section 3: Dog Off-Leash Area Considerations

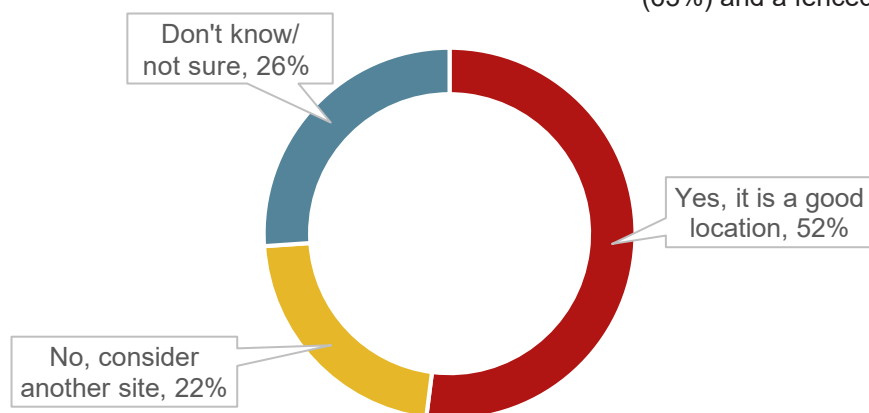
This section of the survey asked questions about the need and location of a dog off-leash area for the community of Cole Harbour, and questions about the Rehab lands property as a potential site for this activity.

Having dogs off-leash in parks can be a polarizing topic among park users. When combining the number of respondents who are already recreating with a dog with the number who are very interested, this activity ranked fourth in popularity for the question about recreational interests. Yet, recreating with a dog also ranked fourth in activities respondents were not interested in doing at the new park.

When asked if a designated dog off-leash area should be considered for the new park, only a slight majority feel it is a good location and many did not know or were not sure. (Figure 7)

- Just over half of the respondents indicated that they usually visit parks with a pet with 56% indicating yes versus 44% indicating no.
- Although 60% of respondents feel there is a need for a dog off-leash area in Cole Harbour, only 52% felt that the Rehab lands property is a good location. The Cole Harbour Basin Coastal Heritage Park across the street was mentioned most as an alternative site for off-leash, followed by the Cole Harbour Common and Bissett Park.
- 46% of respondents would use a dog off-leash area if it was included in the new park. Of the 355 respondents who would use a dog off-leash area, walking trails ranked highest in interest (81%) followed by open lawn areas (63%) and a fenced area (54%).

“Halifax is one of the best cities I have lived in for active lifestyle but it needs more off-leash parks like Point Pleasant where it is active and allows people the benefit of moving with their dogs - not just standing around.”



Q. Do you feel the Rehab lands is a good location for a dog off-leash area?

Figure 7: Support for Dog Off-leash Area in New Park

“Fenced area with room to play fetch! I can take my dog for walks on trails on a leash, what I need is a safe place to let my dog run, socialize and play without fear he’ll run away.”

“I tend to avoid parks with prominent off-leash areas as they become overrun with dogs.”

“I would hate to see the land on top of the hill used for a dog park.”

Survey participants were asked if they had any other comments about a dog off-leash area for the new park. There were 312 participants who provided additional comments.

Concerns

The most frequent concerns raised were about potential conflicts between off-leash dogs and other park users or other dogs on-leash. Cycling trails, children’s play areas and disc golf courses were noted conflicts with off-leash dog activity. There were also concerns about the negative impacts to the area’s wildlife and lake water quality. A number admitted to a fear of dogs and felt that having dogs off-leash on the main paved trail would be a barrier for them and they would not use the park. Some noted previous altercations with dogs that have left them leery.

Some respondents raised concerns that the park could become overcrowded like Shubie Park with potential increases in road traffic and parking demand. Some gave the opinion that parks with off-leash areas become overrun by dogs as the dominant activity that pushes other users away and ruins the park experience for others. A number felt that the best areas of the site should not be used for the off-leash area but be for the enjoyment of all park visitors.

Other general concerns raised were about inattentive dog owners, untrained dogs, dog poop that is not picked up, and lack of bylaw enforcement and monitoring.

Considerations

Many respondents affirmed the need for a dog off-leash area for Cole Harbour and that having another location would relieve some of the crowding and overuse of Shubie Park. Having a site closer to home was also seen as a positive to reduce travel time. Park designs that encourage owners to exercise with their dogs was noted as a benefit for mental and physical well-being.

Fencing the off-leash area was a frequently raised consideration both for keeping dogs safe and for containing dogs to reduce conflicts in other areas of the park. Many suggested fencing or barriers to separate the off-leash area from the main trail and other park zones. Using natural fencing could tie into the existing rural character of the surrounding area. Some asked that a separate area for small dog breeds also be considered.

Off-leash trails and open lawns are both popular considerations. Many like the looped, wooded trails of Shubie Park or Point Pleasant Park, but some would like to see longer distance trails. Some feel that trails are better because they encourage people to walk, whereas with fields dog owners tend to stand around more. Yet, others like having an open area to play fetch with their dog.

Many brought up the need for signage for clearly marking boundaries and informing about rules, bylaws and responsible dog ownership. Reminders to pick up after your dog or keep dogs on-leash outside the designated off-leash area were noted for consideration.

Other amenities mentioned include having drinking water and shelter for dogs and their owners, adequate number of garbage cans, and dog waste bags.