

Open House Event Summary

Project Overview

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is in the process of developing a Housing Strategy that will inform its new Official Plan. The Housing Strategy will be informed by the current housing conditions, future demographics, and existing gaps between current and future housing needs. The Housing Strategy objective is to ensure that there will be sufficient housing options in the Town to meet the housing needs by 2051. The Housing Strategy will also inform policy directions for the new Official Plan and conform to Provincial Plans and Regional housing policies. The Town will be identifying housing options to meet the full spectrum of housing needs and affordability and assisting decision-makers, stakeholders, and community members in understanding key issues facing the housing market.

A Housing Summit was held to launch community engagement on the Strategy on December 9, 2021, which was accompanied by an online survey hosted on the Town's Come Together project page. This document provides an overview of the Open House event which followed on March 8, 2022.

Open House Overview

The Open House was held on March 8, 2022 on Zoom from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM to comply with the current public health guidance in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 38 people attended the meeting. The purpose of the Open House was to present work to date on the Housing Strategy for comment, gather resident insight and feedback on preliminary vision, goals, and recommendations to shape the next iteration of the Housing Strategy, and answer questions.

The feedback and questions received during the discussion will assist the project team in developing and refining the Strategy recommendations.

The event included a presentation delivered by Ryan Taylor of Tim Welch Consulting, followed by a Q&A with panellists from the project team, including:

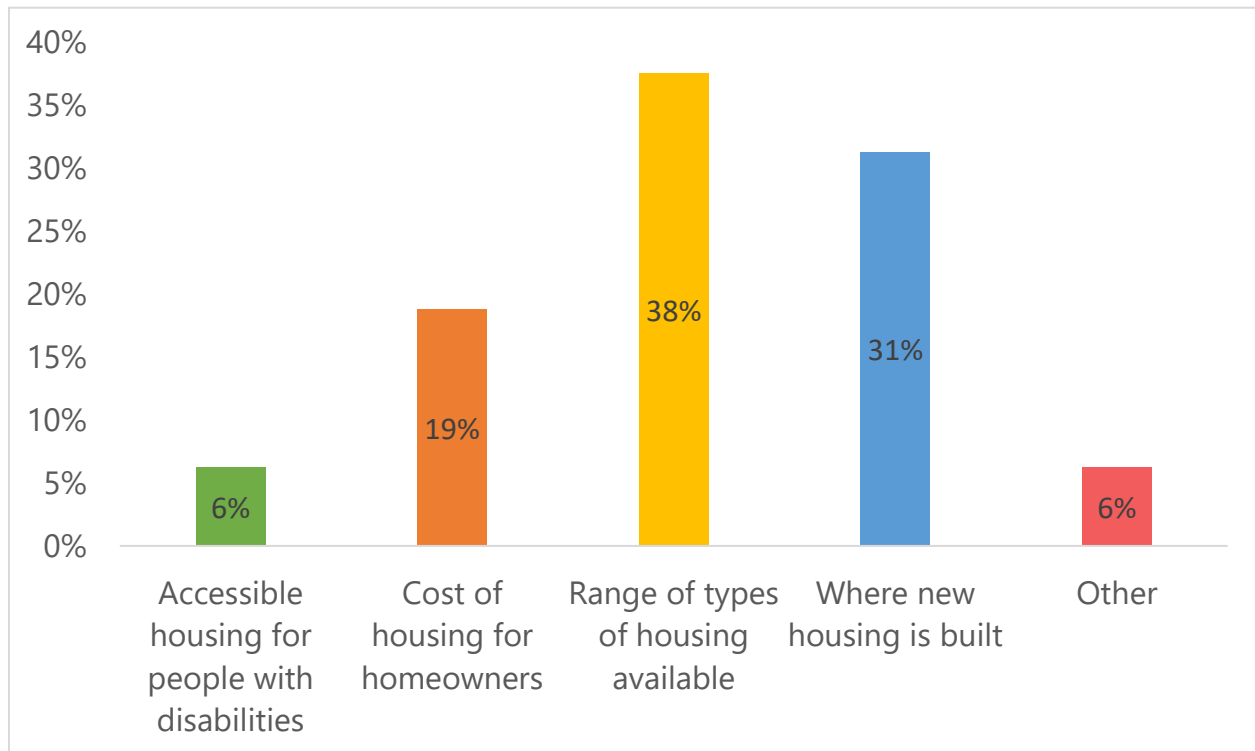
- Randall Roth, Senior Policy Planner – Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville
- Meaghan Craven Manager Policy Planning - Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville
- Tim Hayward, Policy Planner - Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville
- Tim Welch, President – Tim Welch Consulting
- Ryan Taylor, Housing Consultant – Tim Welch Consulting
- Kelly Martel, Planner – Dillon Consulting Limited

The event was facilitated by Faith Oloruntoba of Dillon Consulting Limited, with support from Nicole Beuglet and Zahra Jaffer.

Quick Poll Results

Polls were used to collect input on the Housing Strategy recommendations.

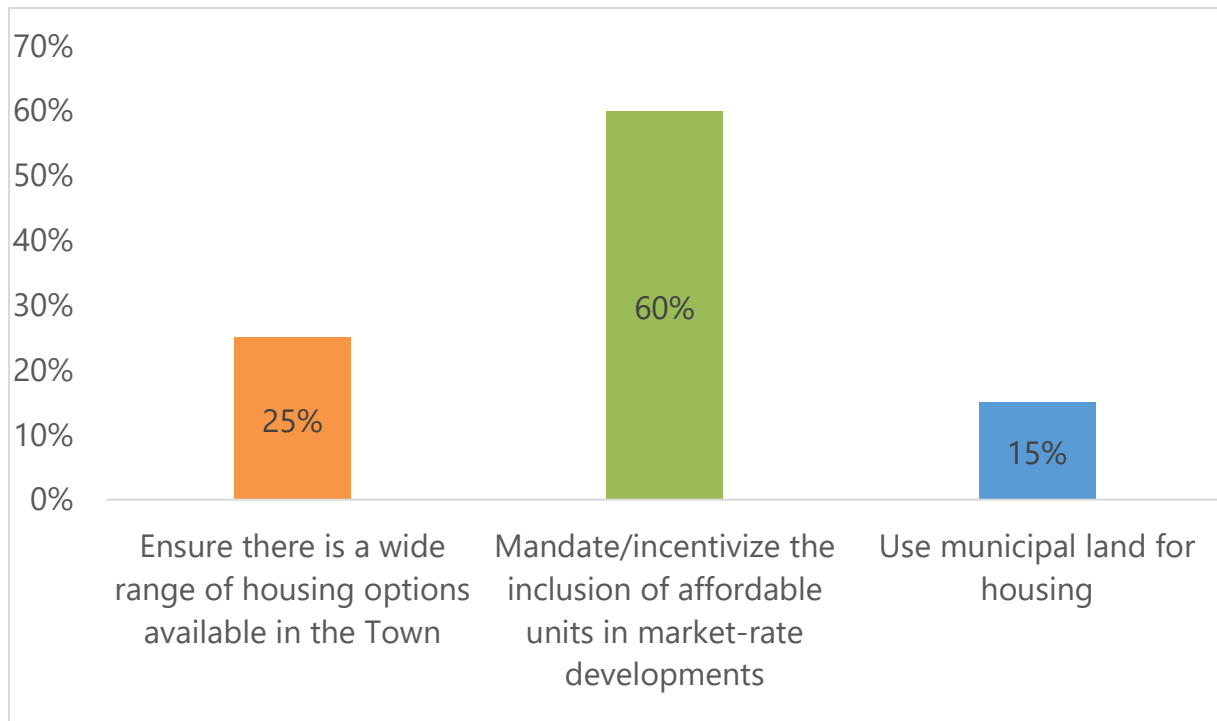
Poll #1: What aspect of housing in Whitchurch-Stouffville is most important to you?



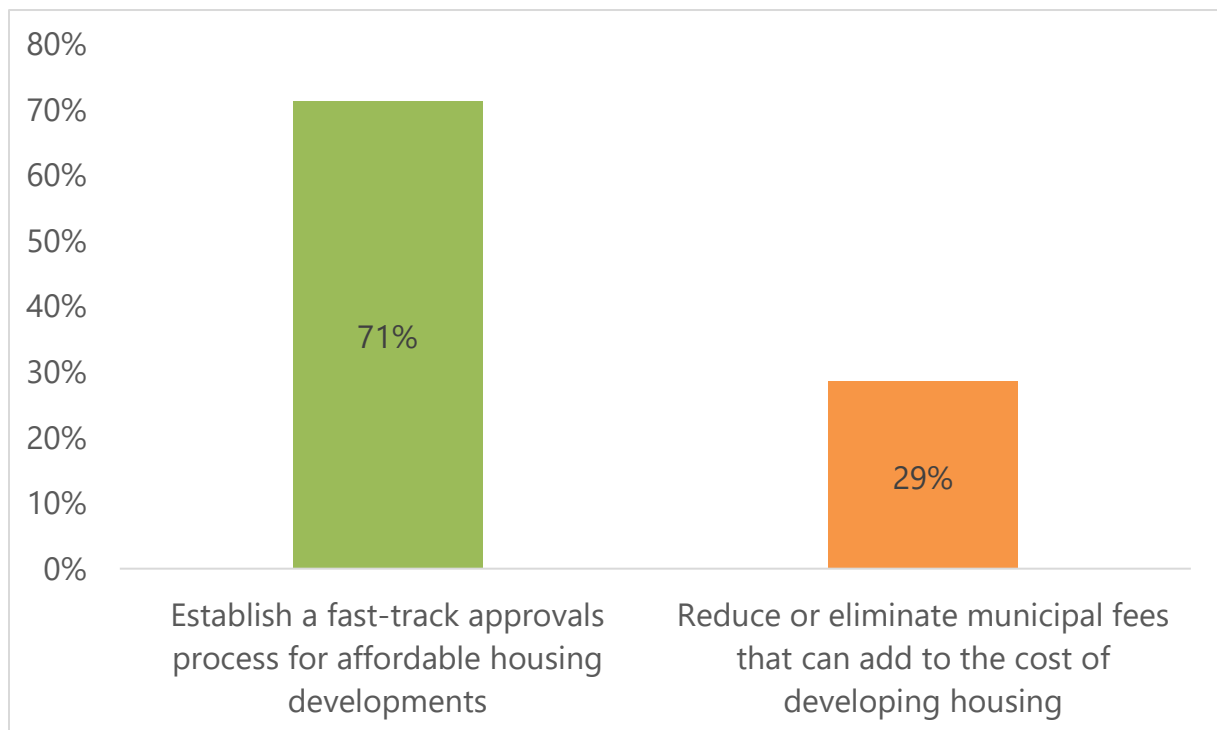
Other answer:

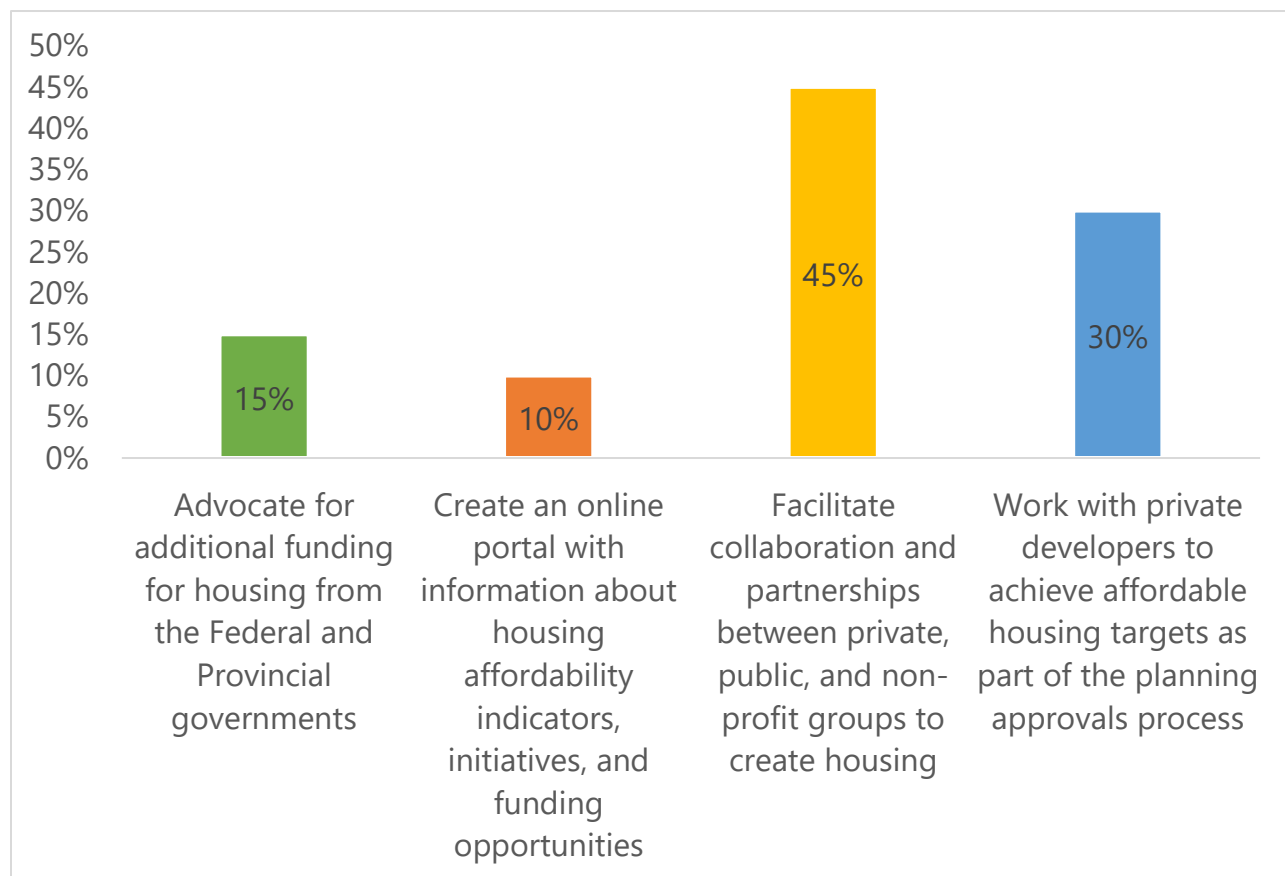
- Affordable housing

Poll #2: Which Policy and Zoning action is most important to you?



Poll #3: Which Financial Incentive action is most important to you?



Poll #4: Which Advocacy, Awareness, and Outreach action is most important to you?**Discussion of Vision and Goals**

Attendees were asked to provide feedback on the following preliminary vision statement:

"Housing that is dignified and affordable is available for all residents of Whitchurch-Stouffville no matter their age, income, or life stage"

The following is an overview of the comments received on the vision:

- Statement should include wording around providing a variety of housing options
- Suggestion to change "life stage" to "family composition"
- Ensure vision is specific to Whitchurch-Stouffville and reflects a sense of community

Attendees were asked to provide feedback on the following preliminary goals:

1. Increase diversity of built form and tenure to provide more housing options for residents

2. Promote greater intensification and density to leverage existing physical and social infrastructure and reduce sprawl
3. Protect and expand purpose-built rental supply
4. Increase support from Council, Town staff, local developers, and residents for new housing developments through awareness and outreach

The following is an overview of the comments received on the goals:

- It is important to consider multi-generational housing
- Impacts on the environment and municipal infrastructure of more housing must be considered
- A housing summit with landowners, developers, and Town should be considered as part of Goal #4
- It is important to highlight that density supports additional green space
- Purpose-built rental supply is important in addition to basement flats

Question & Answer Session Summary

The following is an overview of key themes identified from the question and answer period.

How do we define housing, and what are the design elements that matter?

- Consider the definition of housing or use of the term to encompass a broader range of types of shelter

Who are we planning for when we plan for housing growth?

- Definition of housing that is affordable
- Housing for support workers
- Housing for newcomers to Canada, and planning for the related supports
- Housing for families with young children, accessible housing for people with disabilities, and older adults
- Policies for building materials and sustainable building

What are related areas to successfully grow the community?

- Policies and planning for infrastructure and services for higher intensification areas
- Consideration of how housing development relates to provision of community amenities and services

Breakout Room Discussions – Review of Policy Recommendations

Attendees were placed into breakout rooms to discuss and provide feedback on the preliminary recommendations.

Recommendation Theme #1: Policy and Zoning

1. Ensure there is a wide range of housing options available in the Town
2. Mandate/incentivize the inclusion of affordable units in market-rate developments
3. Protect existing rental housing from demolition or conversion to non-rental housing
4. Use municipal land for housing

The following is an overview of the comments received about the Policy and Zoning recommendations:

- Affordable units should be incentivized, not mandated
- Affordable units should be mandated, not incentivized
- The rationale for any differentiation in policy or zoning between affordable and market housing should be clearly communicated
- Need to be specific about what “housing options” means
- Need ensure neighbourhoods have a diversity of housing types
- The municipality does not have unoccupied or unused land available to develop housing
- Look at other municipal assets besides empty land for housing (parking lots, libraries)
- Consider other lands where mixed-use developments can be incentivized (places of worship, community centres, daycares)
- Developments must respect heritage
- Make more land available for higher-density housing
- Need to make sure that accessible housing is include in the recommendations

Recommendation Theme #2: Financial Incentives

1. Reduce or eliminate municipal fees that can add to the cost of developing housing
2. Establish a fast-track approvals process for affordable housing developments

The following is an overview of the comments received about the Financial Incentives recommendations:

- There should be clarity that a reduction in fees would be for affordable housing only
- Reduction in fees need to be realistic for the current financial situation in Whitchurch-Stouffville; the impact of reduced fees needs to be carefully explored
- It would be helpful to have a better sense of what existing fees are and the cost they add to development
- It would be helpful to understand how long the approvals process takes
- Fast-tracking should include all developments with an affordable component
- Need to ensure affordable units stay affordable in perpetuity
- Not confident that eliminating development charges will result in more affordable housing
- It is important to use fees to incentivize the type of development the Town wants
- Fast-tracking is important but may be difficult without adequate resources
- Questions relating to how the financial incentives would impact the infrastructure that the municipality needs to support new developments and growth

Recommendation Theme #3: Advocacy, Awareness & Outreach

1. Advocate for additional funding for housing from the Federal and Provincial governments
2. Create an online portal with information about housing affordability indicators, initiatives, and funding opportunities
3. Work with private developers to achieve affordable housing targets as part of the planning approvals process
4. Facilitate collaboration and partnerships between private, public, and non-profit groups to create housing

The following is an overview of the comments received about the Advocacy, Awareness & Outreach recommendations:

- Examples of these sorts of partnerships would be helpful
- Public-private partnerships for housing should be explored
- There is concern with potential liability associated with an online portal
- York Region provides most online housing information; any online information from Whitchurch-Stouffville should complement this, not duplicate it
- Recommendation #1 is good, but it should be the last priority
- It is important to seek out grants for affordable housing
- The Town should consider an advertising/promotional campaign about housing affordability
- Continue to work with existing partners to advance goals
- Create a shared vision and goal for partners to work toward

Other Comments

- There needs to be housing for support workers
- Important to address lack of public transit as an influence on housing
- Suggest weighing additional density and affordability more heavily in new development over the next five years to address immediate need and pent-up demand
- Low impact, sustainable development and growth needs to be considered

Next Steps

The Consultant Team will review and refine the Housing Strategy vision statement, goals, and recommendations using attendee input, as well as feedback from Town staff and the Technical Advisory Team advising the work. An updated Housing Strategy will be presented to Council in May 2022.