

Report prepared for City of Toronto, Shelter Support and Housing Administration by:



SUMMARY REPORT OF EARLY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West
Project Site

January 2021

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Early Community Engagement Report

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report is a summary of early community engagement activities implemented from mid-September to early December 2020. It is a report outlining activities undertaken in the Early Community Engagement process, which took place as a result of Councillor Mark Grimes' Council motion of July 28, 2020. This report includes community feedback and recommendations for the 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West proposed shelter and/or affordable housing site.

REPORT CONTEXT

On December 2, 2020, at the conclusion of the Early Community Engagement process, and just prior to the writing of this report, the City of Toronto communicated that they would not proceed with the purchase of 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West. This decision was reached as part of the due diligence phase of the proposed real estate purchase.

The final recommendations from Barnes Management Group, the Community Engagement Facilitators for the project, have been adjusted to reflect the fact that the proposed shelter will no longer be considered at this particular site. Recommendations captured from stakeholder conversations provide options for the community to consider. Although the City will not be moving forward with the purchase of 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West, community members, local organizations, and the Councillor's Office may use this report to undertake activities to address the concerns they identified. Some of these activities have already commenced. These recommendations will be a benefit to the community as a whole and to any future potential shelter or affordable housing projects contemplated in this community.

PURPOSE OF EARLY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In July, a motion made by Councillor Grimes called for early community engagement for the proposed 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West site. This motion was unanimously supported by City Council; the motion can be found at the following link: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.GL14.11>.

The intent of the Early Community Engagement process was to share preliminary information with community members and hear from community stakeholders about community services needed to support the potential shelter and/or housing at the site, about potential partnerships for the service, and about how the community would like to be engaged in potential future phases of the project.

EARLY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Third-party community engagement facilitators from Barnes Management Group led the Early Community Engagement process. This process was guided by an Early Community Engagement Plan, which was developed at the commencement of the engagement process.

The high level early engagement plan included:

- Communications:
 - ❖ Creation of a site-specific webpage for 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West.
 - ❖ Establishment of ongoing communications and tracking of correspondence with community members, including tracking locally led letter-writing campaigns and petitions for and against the project.
 - ❖ Creation of regular community bulletins to community members.
 - ❖ Collection of anonymous input into future engagement opportunities via an online community engagement form.
 - ❖ Finalization of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document.
- Design and facilitation of a virtual community information session.
- Development of a community safety walk framework and implementation of a Community Safety Walk.
- Identification of and meeting with key community stakeholders.

EARLY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The following section summarizes the activities completed and information collected throughout these various Early Community Engagement activities.

COMMUNICATIONS

Several communication mechanisms were established in order to ensure that community stakeholders were informed of activities occurring within the Early Community Engagement process and had a means to communicate with the community engagement facilitators throughout the process. These activities included:

CREATION OF A SITE-SPECIFIC WEBSITE FOR 2950 & 2970 LAKE SHORE BOULEVARD WEST:

A City website with project-specific information was created and included reports on engagement activities, community bulletins, and a video recording of the Community Information Session. Information on how to contact the community engagement facilitators was also on the project specific website. The project website can be found at www.toronto.ca/ShelterExpansionSites.

PROJECT SPECIFIC EMAIL ACCOUNT:

A public email account - clc.2950.70lakeshoreblvdwest@gmail.com - was created for ongoing communications with community members. Community engagement facilitators utilized this email account to send regular community updates addressing some of the more frequently

asked questions and to share key project updates. All emails sent to this account were tracked, including active letter-writing campaigns by resident/ratepayer associations.

The public email account received 402 emails from local residents (98%) and business owners (2%). Of these, 60% of the correspondence was related to a series of letter-writing campaigns organized by the New Toronto Ratepayers Association.

The remaining correspondence received by the project-specific email account either expressed support for the proposed shelter site (16%) or had questions about the project and was neutral.

In addition, community residents initiated three petitions:

- Two petitions supporting the proposed shelter site: <https://tinyurl.com/y23umvs4> and <https://www.elndp.ca/support-the-shelter.html>
- A petition in opposition of the proposed shelter site: <https://tinyurl.com/y2omgf63>.

REGULAR COMMUNITY BULLETINS:

Anyone interested in the Lake Shore Boulevard West site could sign up to be included in a mailing list for the regular community bulletins that provided updates on the site. Regular community bulletins were sent to this list of 203 individual contacts. The community bulletins were also posted to the project website.

ONLINE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK FORM:

An online feedback form was posted on the project website between October 20 and November 1, 2020. Of the 132 completed forms submitted, over 80% of respondents expressed interest in receiving updates on community safety and the Early Community Engagement process. Of the 132 respondents, 62% were interested in receiving information on the 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West site and opportunities to be more involved in the project and/or have a leadership role in welcoming the site into the community. An additional 34% of respondents wanted to receive only information about the project. See *Figure 1 in Appendix A* for further information on responses to the community engagement form.

The results demonstrated that there was community interest to remain involved in the project, should it proceed. This is reflective of the passion and commitment of community members observed by the Community Engagement Facilitators during the Early Community Engagement process.

CREATION OF AN ISSUE RESPONSE PROTOCOL:

A protocol was developed to ensure timely responses to issues and/or concerns received from community members, as well as to outline how any inquiries from the media would be handled.

REGULAR CHECK-IN MEETING WITH CITY STAFF:

Regular weekly check-in meetings were held with the project lead from Shelter Support Housing and Administration (SSHA) to review and seek direction on current activities occurring in the Early Community Engagement Process. Monthly check-in meetings were held with Councillor Grimes' office to share updates about the Early Community Engagement process and to ensure that all stakeholders worked collaboratively for the success of the project.

COMMUNITY INFORMATION SESSION

On October 20, 2020, a Community Information Session was organized and facilitated to offer a forum for discussion between residents, businesses, local organizations, City staff, and Councillor Grimes. Over the course of the community information session, 200 people joined.

The information session was facilitated by Barnes Management Group, with remarks from Councillor Mark Grimes and presentations and responses to questions and comments provided by City of Toronto staff. The Q&A portion of the information session generated a large number of questions, which were summarized and themed in a report of the session. The full report can be found on the project website at: www.toronto.ca/ShelterExpansionSites.

COMMUNITY SAFETY WALK

In response to the many concerns voiced around community safety, a Community Safety Walk was coordinated and convened on October 24, 2020. The walk took participants around the immediate 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West neighbourhood, following a route that was identified by Toronto Police, 22 Division and Councillor Grimes' Office. The safety walk was a first step in identifying safety issues and areas of concern for consideration when looking at how best to successfully integrate the proposed shelter into the community.

Many of the safety concerns raised by community residents pertain to the area as it currently exists and form part of the existing conditions in the area surrounding the proposed shelter/housing site on Lake Shore Boulevard West. These are not issues that have arisen because of the introduction of a shelter into the community. Community members are active and passionate about identifying existing issues, having these addressed and mitigated before a shelter or affordable housing is developed in the community.

In an attempt to include as many representatives from as diverse a group of community stakeholders as possible, the following representatives from 14 community groups joined the walk:

1. Lakeshore Village BIA
2. New Toronto Ratepayers Association
3. New Toronto-Lakeshore Village Residents Association
4. South Etobicoke Cluster Steering Committee on Homelessness
5. CAPREIT Apartments Inc.
6. LAMP Community Health Centre
7. Local Co-op Housing Associations
8. Women's Habitat
9. School Trustee
10. Faith Community
11. 22 Division, Toronto Police Services
12. Two independent residents identified by Councillor Grimes's office
13. Two additional community residents who joined during the walk
14. City of Toronto, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration.

A full report, written in collaboration with participants on the walk, highlights key issues and recommended actions for follow-up. The report is available on the project website at: www.toronto.ca/ShelterExpansionSites.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Key community stakeholder groups were identified by Councillor Grimes's office. The City also provided the names of stakeholders who had reached out directly to them expressing interest in being part of the Early Community Engagement process. Barnes Management Group did a further stakeholder identification and analysis to ensure that a range of stakeholders in the community were included in the Early Community Engagement process. Meetings were then scheduled with these groups to ensure that key stakeholder groups had current and accurate information pertaining to the proposed shelter and/or affordable housing site, as well as to engage with and hear from these groups on a range of issues, including learning about existing services, understanding local service needs and identification of gaps in services, and hearing from community members as to how they would like to be engaged in potential future phases of the process; and to identify possibilities for collaboration and partnership.

Information was also gathered, along with recommendations on any necessary community services required to support the potential shelter and/or affordable housing at the site.

From September to early November, the community engagement facilitators held 13 stakeholder group meetings. Participants in the stakeholder group meetings included 84 individuals representing 24 stakeholder groups. Meetings were primarily conducted online using the video conferencing platform WebEx. Two of the meetings were conducted in person, using physical distancing measures to be consistent with public health COVID-19 guidelines. The two in-person meetings were conducted at the request of key stakeholder groups and included meeting with people with lived experience of homelessness and frontline workers from local community organizations.

Representatives from the following stakeholder groups were met with:

1. New Toronto-Lakeshore Village Residents Association
2. New Toronto Ratepayers Association
3. CAPREIT Apartments Inc.
4. Lakeshore Village Business Improvement Association (BIA)
5. Arts Groups: Akin Collective, Lakeshore Arts
6. South Etobicoke Cluster Steering Committee on Homelessness:
 - Albion Neighbourhood Services
 - Daily Bread Foodbank
 - Out of the Cold - St. Margaret's Anglican Church
 - Etobicoke Services for Seniors
 - John Howard Society
 - Stonegate Community Health Centre
7. LAMP Community Health Centre
8. Local residents with lived experience (in person meeting)
9. Frontline workers (in person meeting)
10. Lakeshore Affordable Housing Action and Advocacy Group (LAHAAG)
 - Humber College
 - YMCA Settlement
 - Mimico Lakeshore Community Network
 - York Program on Affordable Housing
 - Seniors Forum

11. Jean Augustine Centre for Young Women's Empowerment
12. Women's Organizations:
 - Jean Tweed Centre
 - Women's Habitat
 - Haven on the Queensway
13. Local School Principals and School Trustees

WHAT WE HEARD FROM COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK REGARDING USE OF SITE

A clear preference of resident/ratepayer associations, people with lived experience, and service providers was for affordable housing designed with adequate transitional supports to be at 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West. The use of a “Housing First” model was supported as a long-term solution that needs to be prioritized. This viewpoint was emphasized by a majority of stakeholder participants.

Differences of opinion were heard with respect to the site as solely a community shelter. Fewer community members favoured a shelter at this location. Some stakeholders suggested a mixed model where there could be a smaller shelter component, in order to serve immediate needs in the neighbourhood. In particular, there was a widely held recognition of the need for affordable housing for families in the neighbourhood.

COMMUNITY SERVICES NEEDED TO SUPPORT THE POTENTIAL SHELTER AND/OR HOUSING PROJECT

While there are two shelters serving women in the immediate community, there are no shelters in South Etobicoke to meet different and increasing population needs. Service providers and frontline workers who track needs and gaps in the community stressed the growing need for affordable living spaces, which are lacking for many segments of the population. Shelters are seen as a temporary solution, and it was noted that a shelter was needed, at least in the interim, to assist in getting people off the streets and away from sleeping in doorways and alleyways. Certain groups in the community were noted as particularly vulnerable.

The information below relates to the motion from Councillor Grimes, which called for identification of necessary community services required to support the potential shelter and/or affordable housing at the site. Community partners identified the following challenges faced by various vulnerable populations in the New Toronto Area. Below are some of the insights provided by the key stakeholder groups:

- Associations representing residents were strongly opposed to a shelter at this location; however, they supported a shelter at another location in the neighborhood or ward. If the site must be a shelter, community members asked that it be a dignified space, as there is already so much pain in being homeless.
- Homelessness continues to increase as rents become more unaffordable.
- Organizations such as Jean Tweed, LAMP, and Haven on the Queensway shared their experiences regarding an increase in overdoses and increased injury and death from overdoses.
- Growing hunger and food insecurity is being seen by many community organizations.
- Families and seniors were seen to be in desperate need of supported affordable housing. Service providers estimated that approximately 30% of families in the community are under-housed or living with other families and cited examples of infestations of bugs, rodents, and poor building maintenance. Several service providers

shared that The Children's Aid Society is often called into homes due to unsafe housing conditions.

- People are being forced to leave their community in South Etobicoke to find shelter elsewhere in the City or outside of Toronto. This resulted in them losing their local support system, losing access to mental health services, and creating a deeper sense of isolation.
- More single men are found to be sleeping rough in the community. Service providers estimated that approximately 40% of men leaving the Toronto South Detention Centre have nowhere to go, but remain in the community.
- Women remain in the shelter system much longer than they need to because there is a housing crisis. Women's Habitat reported having turned away at least 300 women during the spring outbreak of COVID-19. As a result, some women are forced to remain in violent domestic relationships or life threatening situations.
- Women trying to exit human trafficking situations are often forced to stay in hotels at this time, due to distancing requirements in many shelters. This creates unsafe conditions and poses threats to their safety. Young women in particular are vulnerable and have been seen sleeping rough in the neighbourhood.
- Artists in the New Toronto area find themselves precariously housed and in need of studio spaces for their work. The artist groups met with estimate that approximately 40% of artists in the area are living at or below the poverty line.
- Stakeholder groups spoke of the economic challenges they witnessed and that those challenges are exacerbated for people who were already struggling with unemployment, addictions, food insecurity, precarious housing, and mental health concerns. Many felt they are in serious trouble and heading for possible homelessness.
- Many stakeholders expressed worry about this coming winter. With cold weather approaching, some people in the neighborhood have nowhere to go and cannot get inside to find places to warm up, get hot food, or attend to personal hygiene needs. There is also a great need for public washrooms available for people who are living on the streets, at all times of the year.
- People experiencing homelessness or precarious housing expressed fear that existing crime in the neighbourhood can make them a target. They are at risk of getting pulled into criminal activity, or, having no safe place to be, can be a target of violence.
- The residents/ratepayers associations and the local BIA opposed the location of the potential shelter site. They expressed concern that the location of the site on the main street of the neighbourhood would negatively impact existing businesses and impede the potential for improved conditions in the small commercial strip in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES NEEDED TO SUPPORT THE POTENTIAL SHELTER AND/OR HOUSING AT THE SITE

Many of the concerns raised by stakeholders centered on broader community concerns that are currently in existence and were not solely related to the proposed shelter and/or affordable housing project. In order for a shelter or affordable housing project to be successful in the neighbourhood, these broader community needs and challenges should be addressed by various stakeholders from multiple sectors. All key stakeholders indicated that there are not enough supports for people experiencing homelessness in South Etobicoke.

The community stakeholder groups identified the following recommendations to improve life for all residents:

COMMUNITY SERVICES

- Increased mental health supports must be put in place immediately.
- More food banks to respond to increasing levels of food insecurity are required.
- An immediate replacement or substitute for the Out of the Cold Program during COVID-19 is critical.
- Additional shelter space is required to meet the needs of various populations and to address the lack of shelter beds in South Etobicoke, if only until adequate affordable housing is available.
- More opportunities to connect with the community are needed. Schools particularly noted the critical need to have better communication flow between schools, principals and parents. This has also been affected by the pandemic, with principals stretched to implement changing requirements and ensure their students are kept safe.

SUPPORTS AND SERVICES FOR HOUSING AND INTEGRATION

- Transitional program models must be implemented to move people from homelessness to living independently in the community.
- Affordable housing units with three and four bedroom units, needed to accommodate larger families, are required.
- Seniors living in the community need more targeted services and supports so they can age in place, particularly if experiencing age-related cognitive decline, such as dementia.
- The living conditions of newcomers must be addressed, given the risk of long-term health impacts associated with their desperate living conditions.

COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELLBEING

- Street outreach workers are essential for people experiencing homelessness.
- Harm reduction programs are needed to address increased drug use and the rising number of overdoses and death as a result of drug overdose being reported in the community.
- Public washroom facilities that are easily accessible all year round are needed. Because there are no public washrooms for them to access, people, in desperation, will urinate, etc., in public areas, such as in parks and on the street.
- Crime prevention initiatives and an increase in police presence in the area is required. The community recommends more street patrols and a satellite police station located in the neighbourhood.

POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE SERVICE

Key partners in any shelter or housing project are people with lived experience. Community members who have experienced housing difficulties or homelessness provide invaluable perspective and recommendations. The principle of “nothing about us, without us” was expressed by people with lived experience as an important consideration in future community engagements for the opening of new services.

More broadly, many opportunities for partnerships arose in New Toronto. There was much optimism and energy to work collaboratively with the City and/or site operator on this project. In particular, stakeholder groups suggested that the City and/or the operator explore potential partnerships with Lakeshore Arts, Akin Collective artists, Humber College, LAMP Community

Health Centre, local banks, local employers, the local TDSB and TCDSB, literacy groups, and other community organizations who could provide programming and services onsite in one hub.

Many of the stakeholder groups indicated an interest in further exploring partnerships; however, they felt that more clarity was needed with respect to the people to be served at the shelter before being in a position to recommend specific partnership opportunities that would best fit with the needs of that group.

Many local service providers expressed a strong desire to be involved early on in planning around the site. They indicated that they have much to offer in terms of supports and programming and know their community well. For example, organizations indicated they can provide help organizing day care support, transitional supports, addictions counselling, job search help, nurse practitioners, wellness programs and classes, as well as recreational programs, to name a few.

HOW THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TO BE ENGAGED IN POTENTIAL FUTURE PHASES OF THE PROJECT

Many of the community members expressed their appreciation for being invited to participate in the Early Community Engagement process and had some key recommendations for the City's early communications and engagement process around proposed shelters:

- Many participants stated that the City should consider working with communities as early as possible when making key decisions. People affected by the shelter and/or affordable housing location would like to have information and input early on. They felt they may have information the City is not aware of on the ground level, and involvement early on can help to mitigate issues that have not been identified in the City's initial site assessment.
- A strong preference was voiced by participants for the City to keep the community informed on an ongoing basis. It was asked that information be shared in clear and open ways.
- The community expressed an ongoing desire to be engaged to address current community issues and to work toward improving the community. A co-ordinating mechanism or person to bring community members and groups together was identified by the community as a need. Local service providers understood this need also, but felt stretched or short on time and resources. Community associations or groups felt they did not know all the parties or how to go about organizing everyone and recommended that some resources be put in place to bring the community together to help them find common purposes and pathways forward.

BUILDING DESIGN AND OPERATIONS

Community members and local organizations spoke at length about the importance of the design for the proposed shelter and/or affordable housing at 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West. Many felt it was critical to the success of the project, and equally important to the economic viability and community livability of this portion of Lake Shore Boulevard West.

Many community members embraced the possibility of being involved in a design charrette for the proposed shelter and/or housing site. Local artists and arts organizations offered to

contribute ideas to building design and interior and exterior beautification. Recommendations were made to involve design students and to envision an intelligent, human-centered design, to make the facility feel like a home, a part of the community, and a dignified place to live.

Other specific design and operational suggestions from key stakeholder groups include:

- Ensuring Wi-Fi is available throughout the building to allow children to complete schoolwork and to allow adults to search for jobs or work from home.
- Building enclosed, safe, and green outdoor spaces or a rooftop terrace.
- Considering the introduction of calming spaces and places people can go to smoke, which would prevent people from congregating on sidewalks outside of the building.
- Creating a ground floor commercial space, which would allocate space for a possible social enterprise.
- Creating ground floor spaces for community that include services everyone can use, such as daycares, meeting rooms, space for workshops, and common computer access.
- Providing offices/rooms for satellite services for nurse practitioners and other service providers within the shelter and/or affordable housing facility.
- Incorporating as many green/environmentally friendly elements as possible.

CLOSING

The Early Community Engagement process at the proposed Lake Shore Boulevard West shelter site was enthusiastically welcomed by many community members. A consistent theme which emerged from this Early Community Engagement process was the love community residents voiced for their community, with a deeply felt desire to make it a safer place for everyone. Community members expressed their concerns, ideas, and questions about the proposed project. Many community members expressed opposition about the location of the project as well as being frustrated that details around the design and operator of the site were unknown during the Early Community Engagement process. A large challenge during the Early Community Engagement process was the amount of misinformation shared in the community and the amount of opposition communication received, especially evident in the Community Information Session. The desire to be actively engaged, combined with the active involvement of a number of skilled community leaders and influencers, could lead to self-directed community organizing to address the issues raised by residents, service organizations, and local business owners during the stakeholder sessions.

APPENDIX A

Graphic information on email tracking data:

2950-70 Lakeshore Blvd West - Contact Tracking

Main concerns:

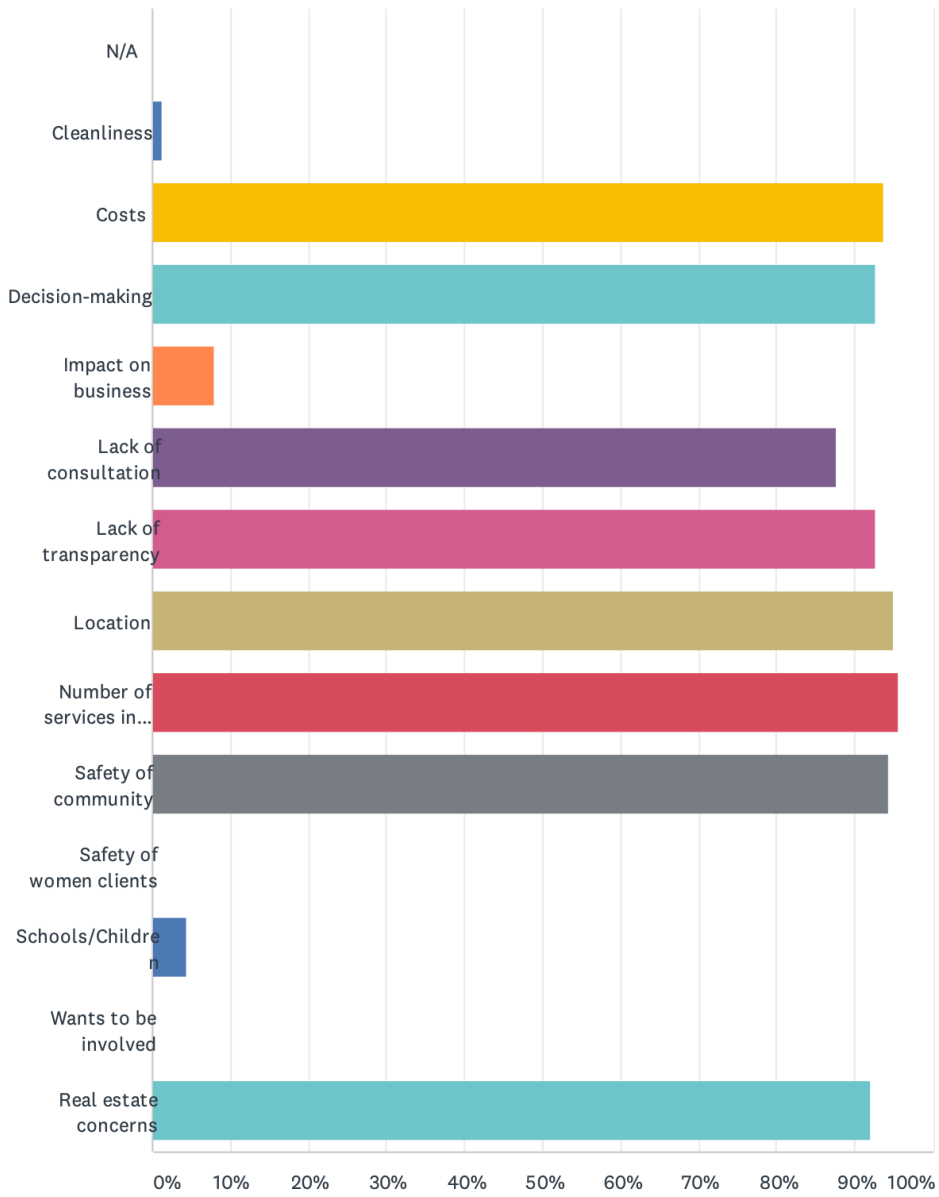


Figure 1

Graphic information on results of community engagement feedback form

Respondents' Level of interest in the project

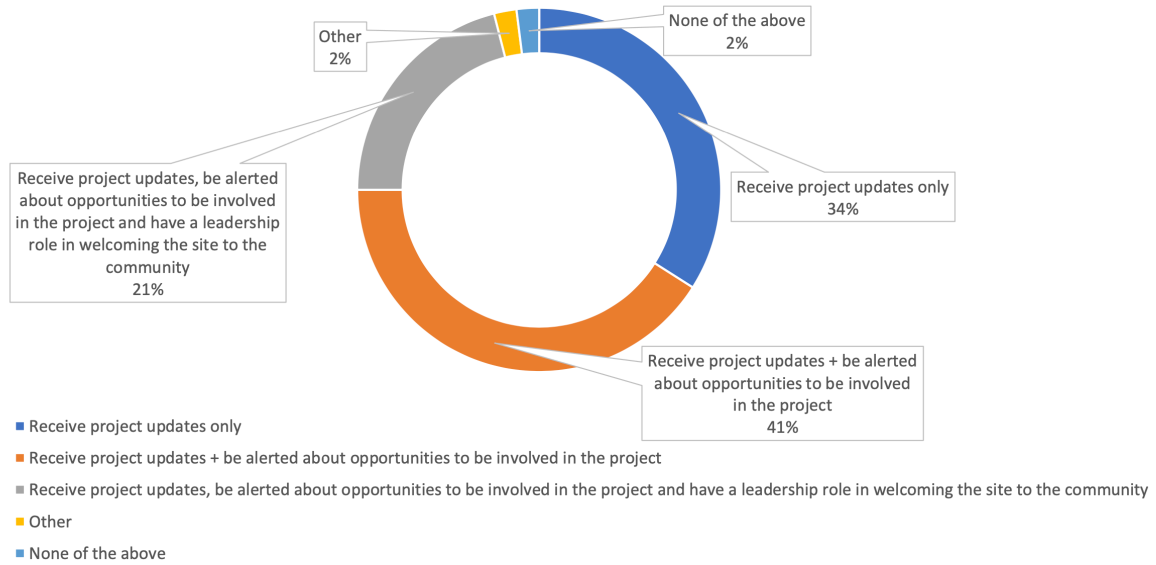


Figure 2