



Burlington Housing Strategy Virtual Launch: Feedback Report

Introduction

The City of Burlington’s Strategic Plan “2018 -2022 Burlington’s Plan: From Vision to Focus” highlights Housing as a top priority. It identifies the need for a Burlington Housing Strategy to increase options for housing across the city. The Housing Strategy will provide an opportunity to look for creative and innovative solutions to address local housing issues by exploring planning policy and financial tools, partnerships, collaboration and advocacy opportunities, strategies and initiatives that will build on and support the Region’s Housing Strategy to develop innovative local solutions to housing issues in Burlington.

In January 2021, City Council endorsed the Burlington Housing Strategy Terms of Reference, directing staff to commence work on the Housing Strategy. Through this meeting Staff received direction from Council to:

“... coordinate and implement an initial community engagement event intended to introduce the Housing Strategy initiative to residents and key stakeholders in the community in an effort to seek public input as to how the community would like to collaborate on the Housing Strategy...”

On March 8, 2021 Staff hosted the Housing Strategy Virtual Launch to seek public input about how they would like to be involved in the Housing Strategy project and to inform the DRAFT engagement plan.

DRAFT Engagement Plan

Over March 2021 a DRAFT engagement plan was developed by City staff to present a road map of the engagement activities that will take place over the course of the project, highlighting at which points in the process engagement will take place, who will be engaged and the level of engagement. The DRAFT engagement plan outlines that public input, among other inputs, are required to inform the following decision:

In 2022, Burlington City Council will consider endorsing a City of Burlington Housing Strategy to increase options for housing across the city.

The DRAFT engagement plan also clearly defines which aspects of the process that cannot be influenced: either because they are beyond the City's control, or because they are outside of the scope of the project as set out in the Council-approved work plan.

Engagement Feedback: March 8, 2021

A critical objective set out in the DRAFT engagement plan is to create an ongoing record of what is said during engagements and to make it available to the public throughout the process, so that they can track the progress of the project, including reports back to the community to highlight how feedback was or was not incorporated in the final recommendation to Council. The purpose of this report is to provide that record.

This feedback report summarizes what we heard through the pre-engagement Virtual Launch on March 8, 2021 and includes the feedback received up to and including March 19th through the online survey.

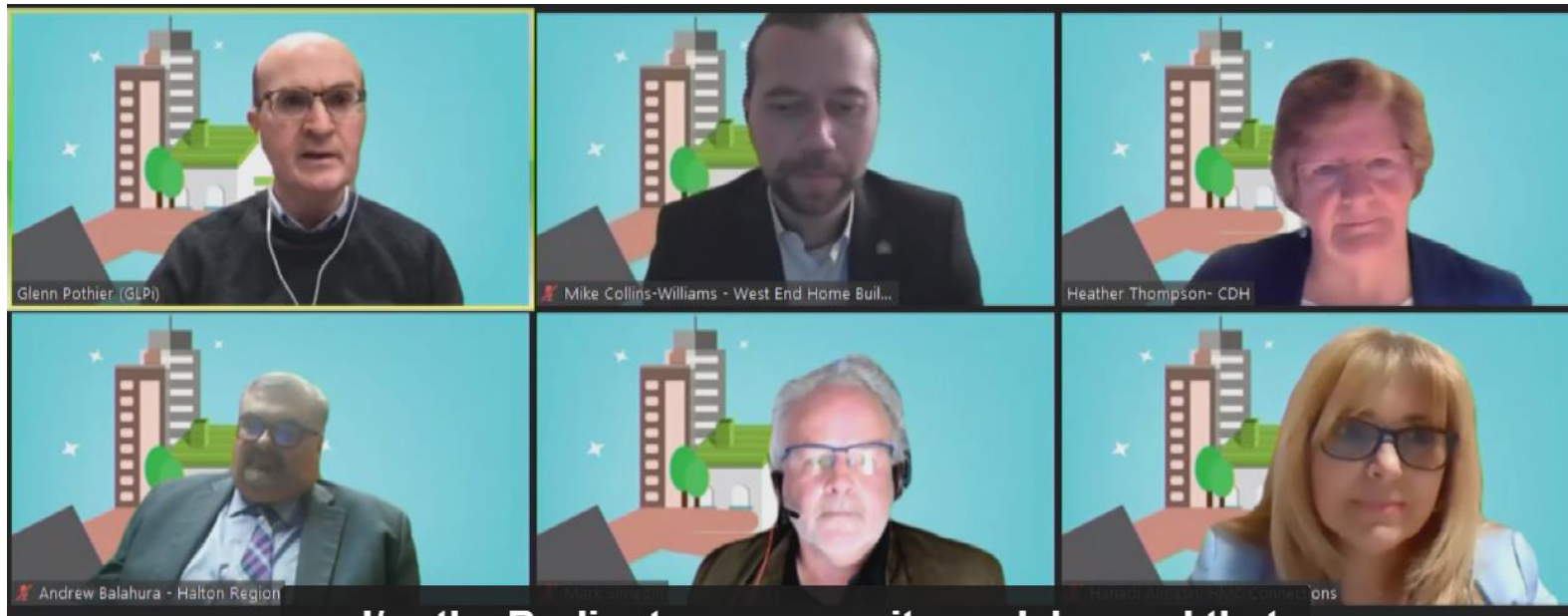
Engagement Tactics

Housing Strategy Virtual Launch

On March 8, 2021 Staff hosted the Burlington Housing Strategy [Virtual Launch](#). Residents and stakeholders were invited to join City staff and a community panel to learn and talk about housing in Burlington. The Virtual Launch was hosted on Zoom.

The launch was hosted by City staff and featured a community panel of key stakeholders from government, the private sector and the community to share their ideas. Ted Hildebrandt of Community Development Halton gave a brief presentation, followed by a discussion period for community members and stakeholders to give input, voice concerns and share experiences.

Residents were encouraged to take the online Burlington Housing Strategy survey as well. The survey opened on Monday, March 1 and was open until Friday March 19. The feedback gathered from the survey and during this meeting was considered as City staff developed the DRAFT Housing Strategy Engagement Plan.



The Community Panel consisted of 5 panelists from various sectors within housing:

Mark Simeoni, Director of Community Planning Department, City of Burlington

Andrew Balahura, Director of Housing Services and Chief Operating Officer, Halton Community Housing Corporation, Halton Region

Mike Collins-Williams, CEO of West End Home Builders Association

Heather Thompson, Manager of Age-Friendly Initiatives, Community Development Halton

Hanadi Al Masri, Director of Business Development, Halton Multicultural Council

Once the Community Panel was complete the community and stakeholder discussion took place and was framed by the following questions:

1. In your opinion, what do you think is already working well to provide housing options in Burlington?
2. In your opinion, what are the housing concerns or issues in Burlington?
3. If the City of Burlington could do one thing to improve housing options, what do you think it should be?
4. Keeping the pandemic in mind, how can we involve you throughout this project?

Online Survey

The Housing Strategy Launch Survey was another key tool for pre-engagement. The survey was designed to be delivered online and meant to work together with the community and stakeholder discussion undertaken during the Housing Strategy Virtual Launch on March 8, 2021. The survey questions were intended to start a conversation with stakeholders about housing in Burlington, the housing strategy and to get feedback on how people would like to be involved throughout the project and to set the context for the housing strategy moving forward.

The survey was completed entirely online due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Survey Questions:

1. In your opinion, what do you think is already working well to provide housing options in Burlington?
2. In your opinion, what are the housing concerns or issues in Burlington?
3. If the City of Burlington could do one thing to improve housing options, what do you think it should be?
4. The City of Burlington wants to know what you think and offer you as many chances to be involved as we work through the Burlington Housing Strategy. Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all public involvement will be virtual. Keeping the pandemic in mind, how can we involve you throughout this project?
5. Do you have any additional comments or feedback that you would like to share?

Summary of What We Heard

Housing Strategy Virtual Launch

The Housing Strategy Virtual Launch was an opportunity to hear from both key stakeholders and the community on housing matters and to provide feedback on how they would like to engage throughout the project. Through the discussions that took place during the Virtual Launch, several themes emerged. They have been summarized and grouped into the following themes:

Housing is about community

Respondents articulated that housing isn't just a building to live in, it provides a sense of belonging, community and autonomy. Accessibility, inclusivity, diversity and social integration were all identified as important themes in the feedback. Residents want a safe place and community for their families to live. The importance of providing the opportunity to age in place with access to services and public transit was also identified.

Housing Options

The provision of housing options for all stages of life was identified as important during the launch event. It was highlighted through the panel discussion and through comments. Everyone has the right to housing and housing options. An increase in both in types and tenures of housing are needed to provide adequate housing for current and future residents that want to remain in the city. Staff also heard that people working in Burlington should also have the option to live here. Further, the need for more co-op housing and semi-detached dwellings were specifically identified, as well as housing reflective of family compositions and housing with universal design. It was communicated that beyond housing types, consideration should be given to different housing models such as co-housing, and home-share. A mix of housing options brings people closer together while living and working in the same communities can address climate change.

Affordable & Attainable Housing

During the discussion, housing affordability and attainability was highlighted as a major concern. Through the panel discussion, there was conversation about some of the tools that exist to assist with the development of affordable housing such as community improvement plans, development charge deferrals and inclusionary zoning which is a planning tool

which requires a percentage of affordable units in new developments. This conversation highlighted the issue of how to keep affordable units affordable for the long term.

The City's Housing Strategy is not specifically an Affordable Housing Strategy. Affordable Housing is a defined term (Halton Region Official Plan and City of Burlington Official Plan) that will be used in the project. However, through the Housing Strategy the concept of attainable housing will be explored in the Burlington context.

Innovative Made in Burlington Housing Strategy

The feedback highlighted the need for a made in Burlington Strategy; one reflective of the City's identify and unique community. Specifically, as part of the panel discussion panelists challenged the City to look at things differently through the Housing Strategy; to be creative, think big and be bold. Advice provided was that the strategy should be innovative, nimble enough to adapt to change and have clear targets to report on and measure success.

Partnerships, Collaboration and Communication

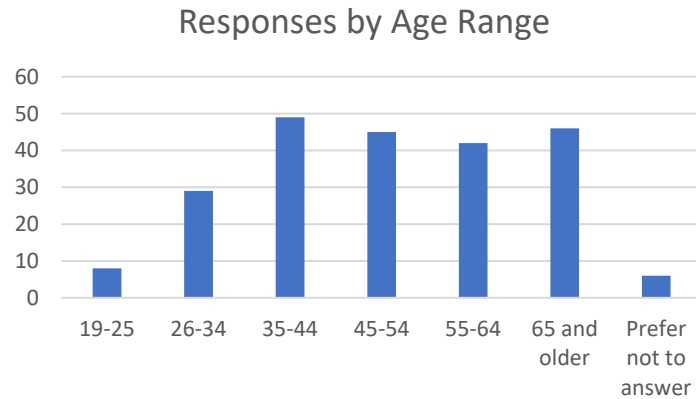
Partnerships and collaboration were key themes heard throughout the discussion. The importance of everyone working together - governments, builders, not for profits and the community to address local housing needs. The discussion emphasized the need for everyone to be at the table. Open communication and dialogue with housing partners and the community are important as it provides an opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and bring innovative ideas to the table. Staff also heard that virtual meetings and townhalls where ideas can be shared provide opportunities for continued involvement throughout the Housing Strategy project.

Survey

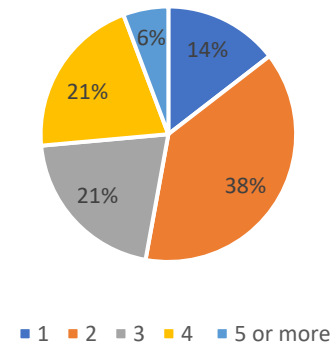
Who responded to the Survey?

One of the key advantages of the online survey is that it offers a simple way to collect basic information about the people who have responded to the survey. Reporting on these statistics is useful for evaluating the City's success in obtaining feedback from a diverse range of interested and affected parties, which was identified in the DRAFT Engagement Plan as an important objective. Understanding the demographics of who has participated in the process to date also allows the City to adapt to ensure that underrepresented demographics can be better represented in subsequent phases of engagement.

Overall, there were 230 responses to the survey from a wide range of age groupings and household sizes. The survey had respondents from all age groups and household sizes. The largest age group represented was 35-44.



Responses by Household Size



Overall

Overall, the survey’s responses to questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 fell into 5 principle themes: Affordable & Attainable Housing, Housing Options, Accessible & Age-Friendly Housing, Complete Communities, and Non-profit Housing. Question 4 sought feedback on how the public would like to be involved throughout the project. The consolidated feedback from that question is detailed below.

Affordable & Attainable Housing

Overall, affordability and attainability were the most widely discussed concerns in the online survey. The comments surrounding the affordability and attainability of housing fell into the sub categories of the increasing costs of private home ownership, the brisk pace of home value increases in Burlington and the need to preserve and maintain the affordability of rental units.

The availability and high cost of rent in Burlington was also highlighted as a serious concern of respondents. There were a substantial number of responses that spoke to a need to ensure that new developments dedicate a percentage of new residential units to affordable housing. Respondents also spoke to concerns for affordability for the next generation of Burlington residents as well as concerns about the ability of older residents to age in place.

Housing Options

Responses to the survey frequently identified a need for increased options for housing types and attainability. More tenure types (ownership, rental, co-op etc.) and a greater variety of building types (tall buildings, mid-rise buildings, townhouses, singles and semis) were identified as important to increasing attainability. As well as a need for an increase in housing options suitable for families, singles and seniors. Many respondents also identified a need to streamline and simplify the processes for allowing the flexibility to create secondary units such as basement apartments, granny suites and laneway housing.

Many responses suggested streamlining the approval process to expedite the construction of other building types such as single, semi and townhouse dwellings in order to make them more feasible and to deliver these unit types faster.

In order to provide an increase of residential units, some respondents recommended increased density and height while others recommended a reduction in density in height focusing on single detached dwelling and townhouses.

Accessibility & Age-Friendly Housing

Accessibility and age-friendly housing was a strong theme throughout the survey responses. Concerns about providing adequate seniors housing and building adequate accessible housing for all was important to a large number of respondents. As was providing support to those experiencing difficulty accessing adequate housing.

Complete Communities & Design

Many of the comments in the survey identified the importance of integrating housing into complete communities that include access to green space, provide pedestrian connections, parking, access to retail and to public transit.

Non-Profit Housing Providers

Many respondents pointed to non-profit housing providers such as co-ops as things that are working well in Burlington and that they'd like to see more of.

Public Involvement Question

The survey responses for question 4 regarding engagement have been grouped into the following categories:

General Feedback

Some survey responses provided general feedback regarding engagement including that well planned engagement needed to receive feedback from residents and given the urgent need for this strategy don't allow unnecessary amounts of public involvement to slow down this process; do whatever public involvement in an efficient manner. Comments received also emphasized the need to for the City to listen to the feedback provided.

Communications

The project page on Get Involved Burlington was identified as an excellent outreach tool. Feedback received also identified the following requested information, which could be included on the project page:

- Project goals and action items
- Regular project updates (in plain language)
- Meeting minutes/transcripts; summary of meeting and work to be done
- Upcoming webinars and engagement opportunities
- Recorded meetings, webinars, and panel discussions (e.g. Burlington Matters episode)
- Background materials seeking feedback; ideally shared in advance of webinars/virtual townhall meetings
- Updates regarding decisions made
- Information regarding what city council is contemplating

The need for a dedicated project email was identified through the feedback received. A project email address has since been established (housingstrategy@burlington.ca) and can be found on the Get Involved project page.

Many responses identified email/email updates as a way be involved in the project. Phone calls, texts, newspaper ads, newsletters, mailouts, and posters around the community (libraries, arenas, bus shelters, community notice boards) were also identified.

Social media was also highlighted as was way to reach many diverse voices and groups to support the conversation around the Housing Strategy, with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram specifically mentioned. A City of Burlington app was also suggested.

Engagement via Get Involved Burlington Project Page

On-line surveys were a popular response as a way to obtain feedback from the community. Additional feedback regarding surveys included more character space per question to provide fulsome comments; publishing survey results on line to see how the community feels; ensuring the full set of responses are made public to avoid skewed or manipulated results, and limit access to surveys for Burlington residents only.

On-line opinion polls, on-line forums and interactive mapping activities were also suggested as a forum to engage and provide feedback.

Virtual Engagement Opportunities

The majority of responses identified virtual meetings (webinars, workshops, roundtables, townhalls, etc.) as a forum for engagement, with Zoom, Skype and Microsoft Teams specifically identified. Feedback received identified the need for virtual meetings to take place on weekends or outside working hours.

Feedback received also suggested that some virtual meetings allow for brainstorming and collaboration in small class sessions or small groups while other responses suggested a combination of virtual meetings – some with citizen involvement and some without.

A number of responses identified participation in a project working group as a means to engage and provide feedback. Focus groups, citizen groups, steering committees, and planning groups, were specifically identified. Feedback received identified the need for these groups to be representative of communities underserved and include local people who are experiencing housing difficulties. It was also suggested that these groups include people from all demographics to provide a wide-ranging view of what is needed.

Other

There were some responses received that simply indicated that they would like to be informed or that they were happy to provide their time and knowledge, however these responses didn't indicate how they would like to be informed or

involved. Other responses indicated that they were not interested or not looking for involvement at this time. There were also a number of responses received that were outside the scope of the question or project.

The feedback received will directly influence how the city will communicate and engage on the Housing Strategy project and will impact the development of the project Engagement Plan.

Other Submissions

The project team also received email and voicemail submissions from members of the public. These written submissions have been considered alongside the other sources of input.

How will this feedback be used?

The feedback, apart from the elements defined as out of scope, will be summarized from the various methods of engagement with the public. The themes identified through the summary of the engagement with the public will inform the DRAFT engagement plan and the Interim Report. Together, this feedback will inform the Housing Objectives and Actions identified in the Interim and Final Housing Strategy Reports.

What is Next

The DRAFT engagement plan and refined project milestones will be brought forward to Council on April 6 at the Community Planning, Regulation and Mobility Committee meeting. The Engagement plan will be refined and finalized by Staff, the Housing Strategy Working Group and the Housing Strategy Steering Committee and will be made available on the project web page in May 2021.