

# What We Heard Report Castle Down Park- Concept Plan Update

January 2024

[edmonton.ca/CastleDownsParkConceptPlan](https://edmonton.ca/CastleDownsParkConceptPlan)

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Public engagement summary and results	3
	a. Project Overview	3
	b. What We Heard	4
2.	Public engagement approach	11
	a. How We Engaged	11
	b. What We Did	12
3.	What happens next	14
	Appendix A: Survey Respondents	15

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY AND RESULTS

### Project overview

The objective of this project is to develop an updated Concept Plan for Castle Downs Park that incorporates input from the public and stakeholders, while aligning with strategic objectives, plans and policies of the City.

A new Concept Plan will ensure a long-term strategic approach for the development, management, programming and use of Castle Downs Park. It will also better serve the needs of existing site stakeholders/partners,



Figure 1 Aerial View of Castle Downs Park

residents of adjacent neighbourhoods and City residents at large. The updated Concept Plan will articulate a vision for future open spaces and amenities, with a particular focus on shared or enhanced facilities.

Currently, there is no funding available for designing, building and operating the preferred concept plan. Having a well thought out updated plan outlines potential opportunities for partner/community-led projects/programming and informs phasing and associated funding to support future budget cycles. However, components that relate to improved sidewalk, pathway and bike connections will be adopted as part of the [Dunluce Neighbourhood and Alley Renewal project](#).

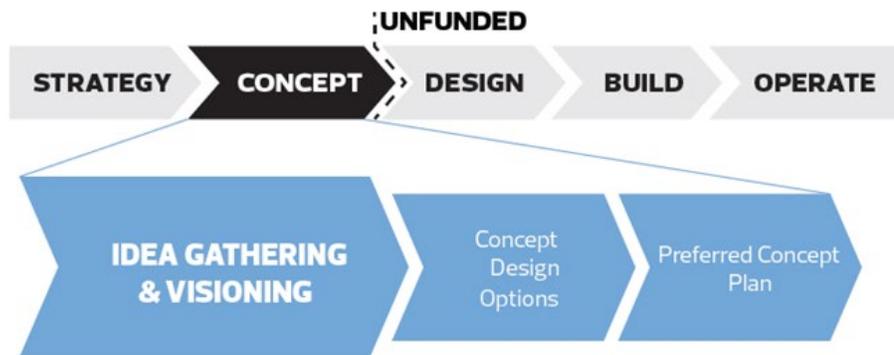


Figure 2 Project Phases

### What we heard

#### Stakeholder meeting

The project team held three stakeholder meetings in November 2023. The project introduced the scope of the project, the initial site analysis and facilitated the conversation with the group for their experiences, needs and wants for the Park in relation to the key themes.

During these information sessions, these key themes came up:

- Consider the feasibility of incorporating a turf field(s) and/or dome to provide year round sports and competition hosting opportunities
- There is an opportunity to redesign the layout of the fields to better accommodate user groups and community-led projects
- Concerns about feeling safe and occurrence of crime with the park

#### Public engagement

All public engagement activities (including an online survey, and in-person events) took place November 7 to 21, 2023. More details on how the City engaged with the community can be found below. Some initial findings from the online survey included:

- 58 per cent of respondents are residents of adjacent community leagues
- 73 per cent of respondents visit the park for the festival/events/gathering
- 35 per cent of respondents take part in winter activities in the park
- 34 per cent of respondents use the sports fields in the park

#### Q1: How frequently do you visit Castle Downs Park?

Sixty-two per cent of respondents visit the park once a month, or more often.

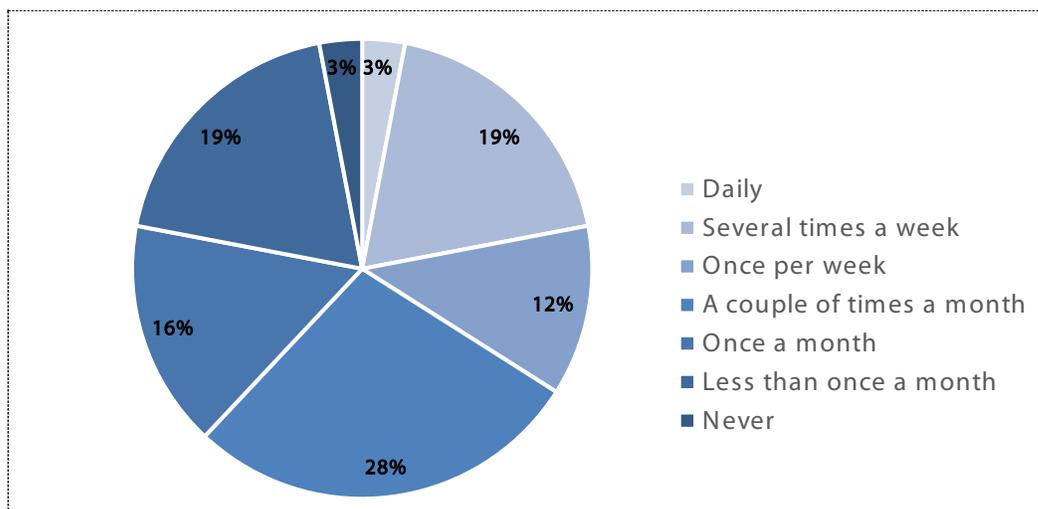


Figure 3 How Often Respondents Visit Castle Downs Park

**Q2: How do you currently get to Castle Downs Park? Check all that apply?**

Forty-four per cent of respondents use their personal vehicle when traveling to Castle Downs Parks and can be attributed to the organized sports that occur on the site. Indicative of the existing surrounding communities, walking (29 per cent) and bicycling (18 per cent) are the next most used mode of transportation.

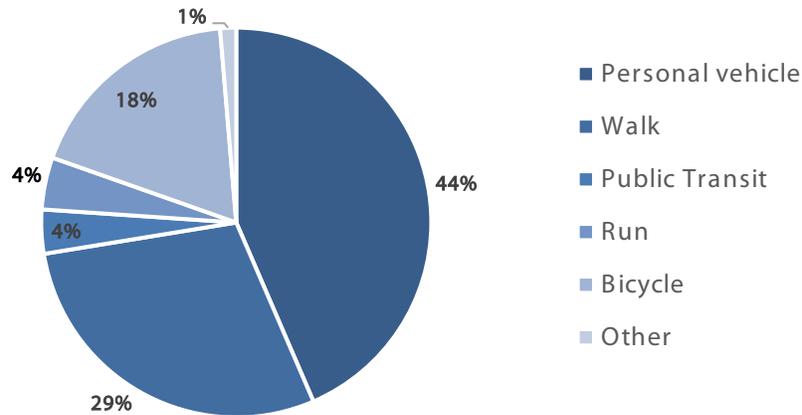


Figure 4 Mode of Transportations Respondents use when visit Castle Downs Park

**Q3: How do you currently use Castle Downs Park?**

Based on the current uses recorded from the site analysis respondents indicated how they use Castle Downs Park. Respondents were welcome to provide uses the project team did not identify.

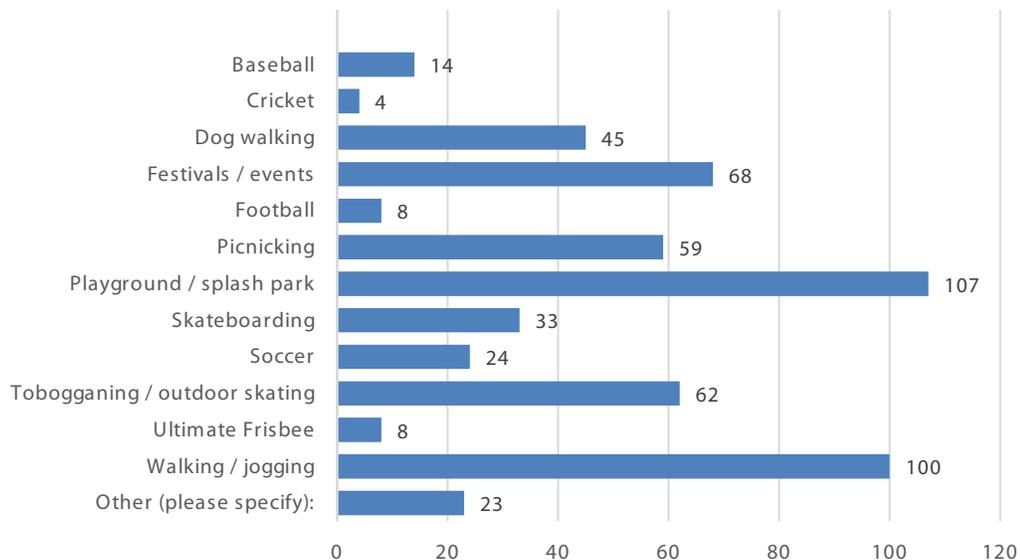


Figure 5 Respondents Participated Park Uses

**Q4: In your view, how would you rate the current recreational opportunities at Castle Downs Park?**

The feedback suggests several opportunities for improvement in the layout and amenities of the park. There is a strong demand for expanding the playground area due to its consistently high usage. Providing year-round sports options is recommended, either through the feasibility of a dome facility or turf field similar to Mill Woods park. Additionally, there is a need for irrigation, field-specific lighting and updates to the skatepark and basketball court. It was also suggested to create a loop within the park boundaries for walking, biking and jogging activities, similar to the Beaumaris Lake loop.

Here is a sample of what we heard:

- “Opportunity for improved layout of fields.”
- “Playground is usually very popular and busy for children and families.”
- Provide year-round sports by considering the feasibility of a dome facility or alternatively a turf field similar to Millwoods park
- Lack of Irrigation
- Field specific lighting
- Update to the skatepark and basketball court
- The park would benefit from a loop for walking/biking/jogging
- Competing users, challenge of coordinating various scheduled need to be considered
- Suggested future additions: pickleball, tennis, 400m running track, bocci, disc golf course, outdoor pool, dog park, dedicated spaces for events and festivals all year round, outdoor fitness equipment

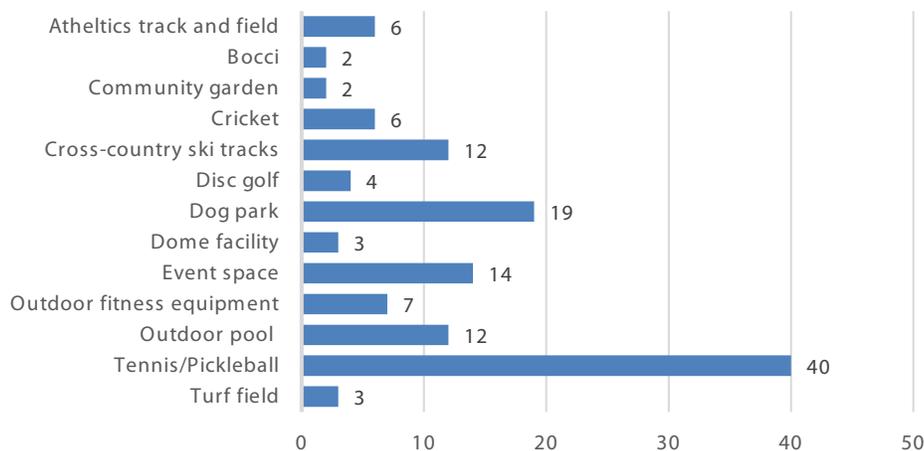


Figure 6 Respondents Suggested New Facilities for the Park

Tables and seating are recognized as supplementary to active and passive recreational activities. The following is what we heard:

- “Most seating seems to be mostly in one area of the park. The park needs more walkways for people to walk through”
- “Uncomfortable benches/seating areas. I usually sit in my car when my kids are playing within the park.”
- “During the weekend in the peak prime seasons, the picnic tables are in high demand and a lot of families camp at the tables to ‘reserve’ it for their personal/private parties leaving few or none left”
- “Seating is uncomfortable and no shaded areas for hot days”
- “Additional areas for gathering and event hosting”
- “Not enough seating or shade to accommodate families. The tables are far away from the playground/freeplay areas”
- “Walkways only really skirt the outside of the park”

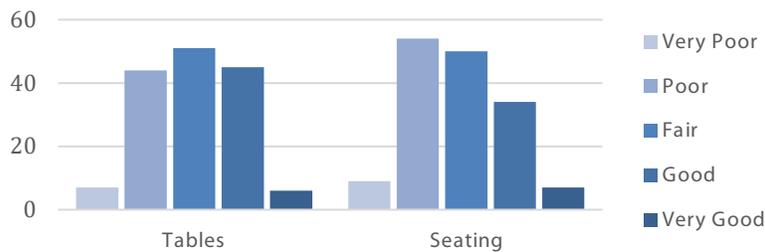


Figure 7 Tables and Seating, Rating

**Q5: Overall, how would you rate the current outdoor accessibility features of Castle Downs Park?**

The lack of accessibility for all individuals to reach certain sports fields and enjoy watching games was a concern. To address this issue, there is a need to increase the number of pathways and update access points within the park. Currently, the limited accessibility makes it difficult, if not impossible, for anyone using mobility assistance supports such as walkers, crutches, wheelchairs, or canes to reach the sports fields.

Here is a sample of what we heard:

- “The lack of a path connecting east and west side makes traveling during wet conditions unfavourable”

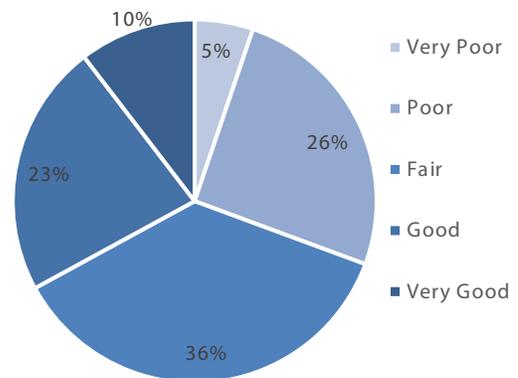
- “Lack of parking”
- “Need for lights”
- “Without a car, getting to the park can be unsafe and a bit of a struggle”
- “It is not accessible to anyone using mobility assistance supports (walkers, crutches, wheelchair, canes, etc)”
- The tables in the area don't easily allow a wheelchair or similar mobility device to be parked at the table

**Q6: In your view, how would you currently rate Castle Downs Park as a place to enjoy a natural setting?**

Suggestions and concerns included creating a buffer between the future LRT and the playground, installing more plant beds and shade structures, addressing limited shade near the playground and splash pad, increasing trees and naturalized areas, dealing with traffic, noise, and odor issues, expanding public art opportunities and enhancing landscaping around picnic areas.

Here is a sample of what we heard:

- “Buffer between future LRT and playground”
- Install additional plant beds
- “More structures that provide shade...near playground & splash pad”
- “There's not enough trees and no naturalized areas”
- “Too much traffic, noise and poor smell in the area”
- “The area has natural hilly location”
- “Expanding opportunities for public art”
- “Would like to see nice landscaping or naturalized areas around the picnic areas for beauty, shade and biodiversity”
- “Field is designed for organized sports. Playground is usually very popular and busy for children and families. I don't usually use it - Beaumaris Lake is more my speed”
- “I would also like to see additional trees and some naturalized areas”



*Figure 8 Natural Setting, Rating*

**Q7: Do you agree with the vision and guiding principles for Castle Downs Park?**

The proposed vision for Castle Downs Park is to:

“Provide a park which offers accessibility to the community, a range of recreational experiences for the whole district and adds environmental and aesthetic appeal to the district.”

The guiding principles are:

- Providing facilities and infrastructure that support and enhance both active and passive recreational activities.
- Enhancing walkways and signage throughout the park, to ensure easy navigation to park facilities and amenities
- Integrating planned infrastructure for community services such as a high school and LRT.
- Strengthen the environmental and aesthetic values of the park.

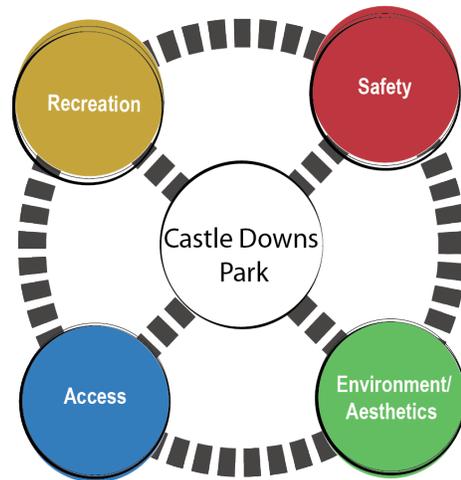


Figure 9 Project Themes Visualization

Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor
32%	40%	12%	8%	9%

**Seventy-two per cent of respondents had a positive (good or very good) opinion of the proposed vision for the Castle Downs Park Concept Plan Update.**

The following is a sample of what we heard from the survey and stakeholders about the proposed vision and guiding principles:

- “I agree that these are the most important considerations for revitalizing this park. I would like to see a heavy focus on the environment and aesthetics”
- “Castle Downs park is a unique chance for the city to create something beautiful and fun for the northside”
- “Appears to be well balanced.”
- “Consider impact to wildlife.”

- “I feel more could be done. This park needs similar attention given to several south and west parks in this city.”
- “The park is very recreational focused whereas access, aesthetics and environment are lacking. The vision is a great way to improve the park for the community while still maintaining the strong recreational focus.”

Based on the overall positive response to the vision and guiding principles, the themes of **recreation, accessibility, environment and aesthetics** resonate with the Castle Downs Park community. The project team also determined **safety** as an important theme to consider. The notion of improving safety within the park was a recurring theme in open-ended commentary as a byproduct of the presented themes.

#### **Additional Theme: Safety**

Safety concerns regarding the park, particularly during the late fall and winter seasons due to the site being fairly dark, were raised. Suggestions include adding safety measures to the park, such as locked bathrooms and security personnel. There was a desire for increased lighting, security cameras and design features to deter crime, especially in high crime areas. The presence of needles and encampments was mentioned as contributing to a sense of unsafety. Concerns about the crime rate between the park and Beaumaris Lake were also expressed. Here is a sample of what we heard:

- “Safety is an issue, especially during late fall winter season since the site is fairly dark.”
- “I worry about homelessness and safety. It would be great to have locked bathrooms and security”
- “Would like to see an increase in lighting and CCTV security cameras. Proper CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) to help deter crime, as this is a high crime area.”
- “Doesn't feel safe...needles and encampments make it less safe”
- “Encampments are a growing issues”
- “Concerns about crime rate from [Castle Downs Park] Park to Beaumaris Lake”

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

### How we engaged

The first round of public engagement for this project followed the Advise level on the City of Edmonton’s Public Engagement Spectrum. More information on the City’s public engagement spectrum can be [found here](#).



Figure 10 City of Edmonton’s Public Engagement Spectrum

The primary goal of the first round of engagement was for the project team to consider park-users' current experiences in order to develop and present well-informed design options for the next round of engagement. Public engagement events utilized a hybrid approach; both in-person and online components were available to stakeholders and the public.

### Decision making

Decision making is established by a strong commitment to the project's goals and objectives from the beginning. By using these goals and objectives to assess different design options, decision making can occur.

The involvement of diverse stakeholders in the project presents an opportunity for decision making within the Project Team. While it may be perceived as a risk and challenge, it also offers the chance to gather valuable perspectives and insights from various stakeholders, leading to more informed and comprehensive decision making.

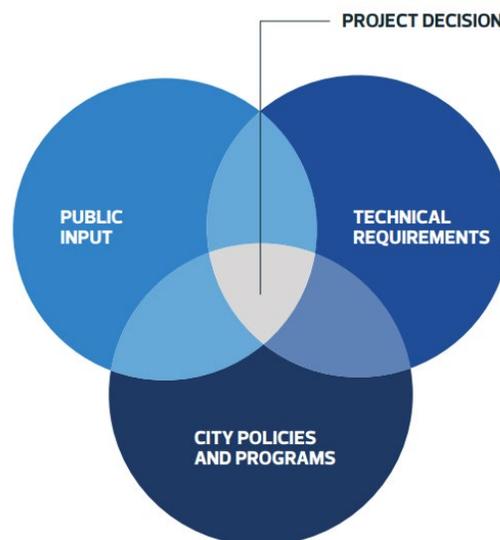


Figure 11 Decision-making matrix

## Communication

Advertising for the public events included posters distributed digitally, displayed at community facilities in the area and social media posts. A direct invitation to participate in the engagement was sent to the external stakeholder register list and other community organizations.

This social media campaign archived the following results:

- Campaign achieved 324,900 impressions
- Reached 67,000 unique individuals.
- 5,600 link clicks for a click-through rate\* of 1.74 per cent, over double the benchmark of 0.70 per cent.
- Post was shared 98 times

\*This percentage is the rate the audience was clicking the ad to the landing page to learn more about the project.

### What we did

The following events were held to engage with the various stakeholders and the public.

Supplementary to these events, the project web page included a description of the project, outline of the project phases, a project timeline and the display boards. The online survey invited participants to share their feedback.

### Internal engagement

City staff and departments involved with Castle Downs Park were engaged initially, including Community Services, Integrated Infrastructure Services, Urban Planning and Environment, and City Operations.

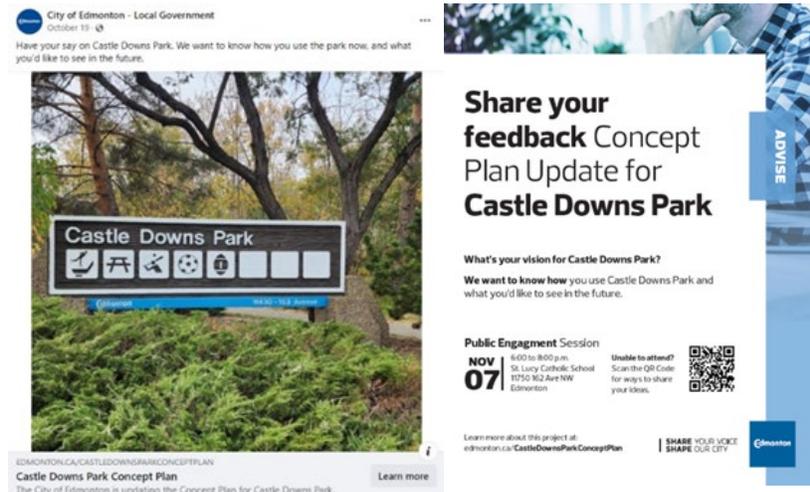


Figure 12 Project social ad and poster

### Stakeholder meetings

Stakeholders, community groups and interested parties were invited to meet with the project team to provide input on Castle Downs Park's strengths and weaknesses as well as to discuss "wish list" uses for the site.

Date	Stakeholders/Community groups and interested parties	Format
October 10, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Park Little League</li> <li>North Edmonton Minor Football- Seahawks</li> <li>Castle Downs Recreation Society</li> </ul>	In-person presentation and question and answer
October 11, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Edmonton Catholic School District</li> <li>YMCA</li> <li>Dunluce Community League</li> <li>Griesbach Community League</li> <li>Edmonton Public Library</li> </ul>	In-person presentation and question and answer
October 12, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capital District Minor Football Association</li> <li>Flag Football</li> <li>Cricket Association</li> </ul>	In-person presentation and question and answer
November 7, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Edmonton Public Library</li> <li>Athletics Alberta</li> </ul>	Email Survey

### Open house event

Phase one of public engagement included a public open house held on November 7, 2023 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at St. Lucy Catholic Elementary School. A total of 25 people attended the event. The Project Team and City Staff were available to project information and answer questions as well as encourage attendees to engage with the display board activities.

A project team member was also on hand at the Dunluce Neighbourhood and Alley Renewal open house event to answer questions and direct people to the survey.

### Pop-up events

Two locations were selected strategically based on their proximity to the park and their potential to engage a diverse range of demographics. At these locations, the project team interacted with attendees in person. They discussed the project, addressed inquiries and sought feedback on the park designs using display boards and online survey.

In total, 81 Edmontonians were actively engaged at the pop-up activities.

Date	Location
November 9, 2023	St. Lucy Catholic Elementary School   3 5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
November 15, 2023	Castle Downs Family YMCA   10:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
November 16, 2023	Edmonton Public Library Castle Downs   1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

### Online survey

The public survey was hosted on the City's project web page from November 7 - 21, 2023. Information on how to participate in the online survey was communicated to the community leagues, stakeholders and user groups. Physical copies and submissions of the survey were also available upon request.

There were a total of 176 online participants and two hardcopy submissions.

### What happens next?

For the next round of public engagement (anticipated to occur in early 2024), the project team intends to present the updated vision and guiding principles based on Phase 1 engagement, and collect feedback on concept options for the future usage of the park.

The project team thanks all who participated in this round of engagement. Project updates can be found on the project website at: [edmonton.ca/CastleDownsParkConceptPlan](https://edmonton.ca/CastleDownsParkConceptPlan).

## Appendix A: Survey Respondents

The following is the breakdown of survey respondent demographic information.

### How old are you?

64 per cent of respondents are over the age of 35

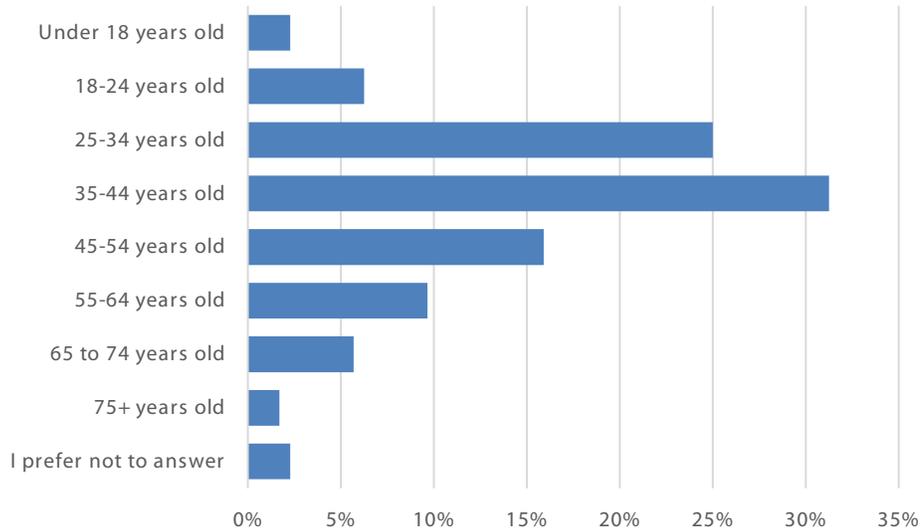


Figure 13: Survey Respondents by Age Groups

### What gender do you identify as?

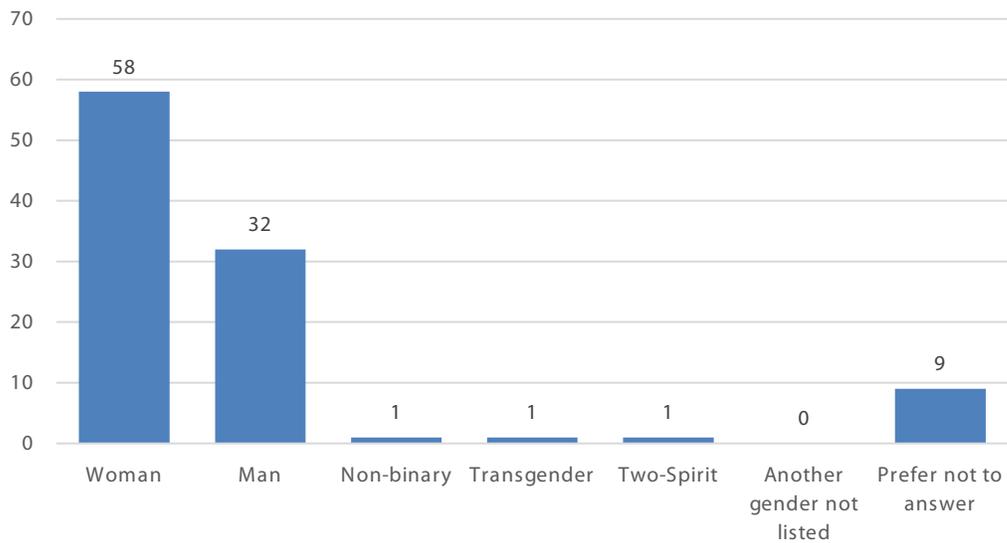
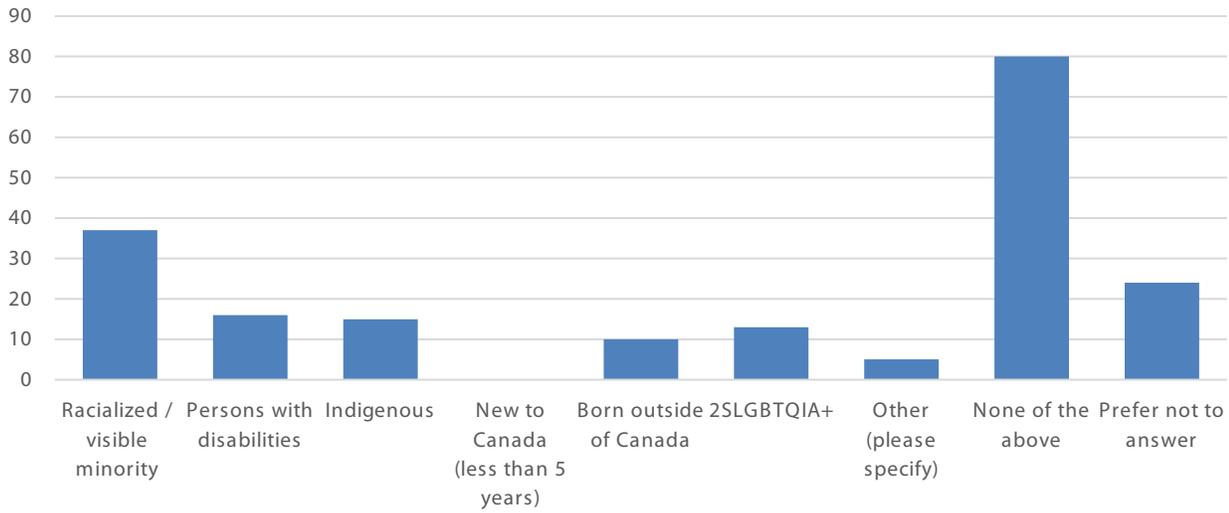


Figure 14: Respondents by Gender

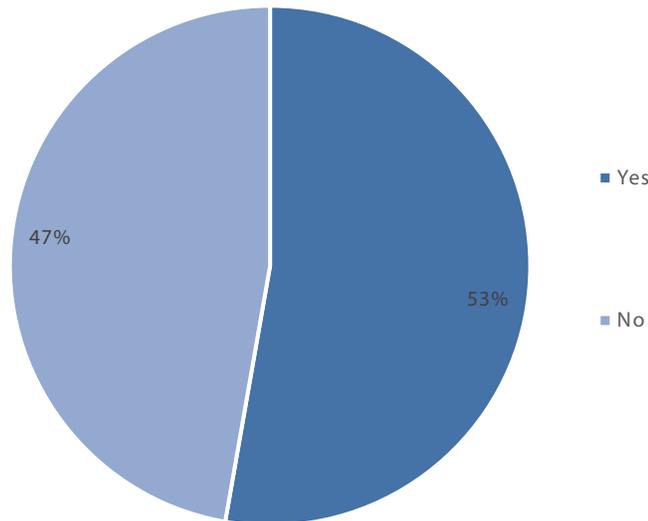
**Do you identify with any of the following?**



*Figure 15: Respondents by Minority Groups*

**How many children/grandchildren 18 or under living at home do you have?**

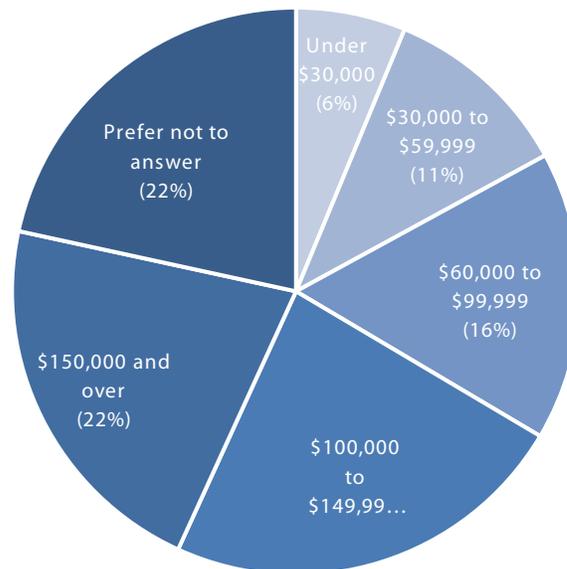
More than 50% respondents indicate they have a child/grandchild residing at their home.



*Figure 16: Child/grandchild Residing in Respondents Home*

**Which of the following categories best describes your total household income in 2022 before taxes?**

Forty-five per cent of respondents indicated their total annual household income was over \$100,000 before taxes.



*Figure 17: Annual Household Income of Survey Respondents*