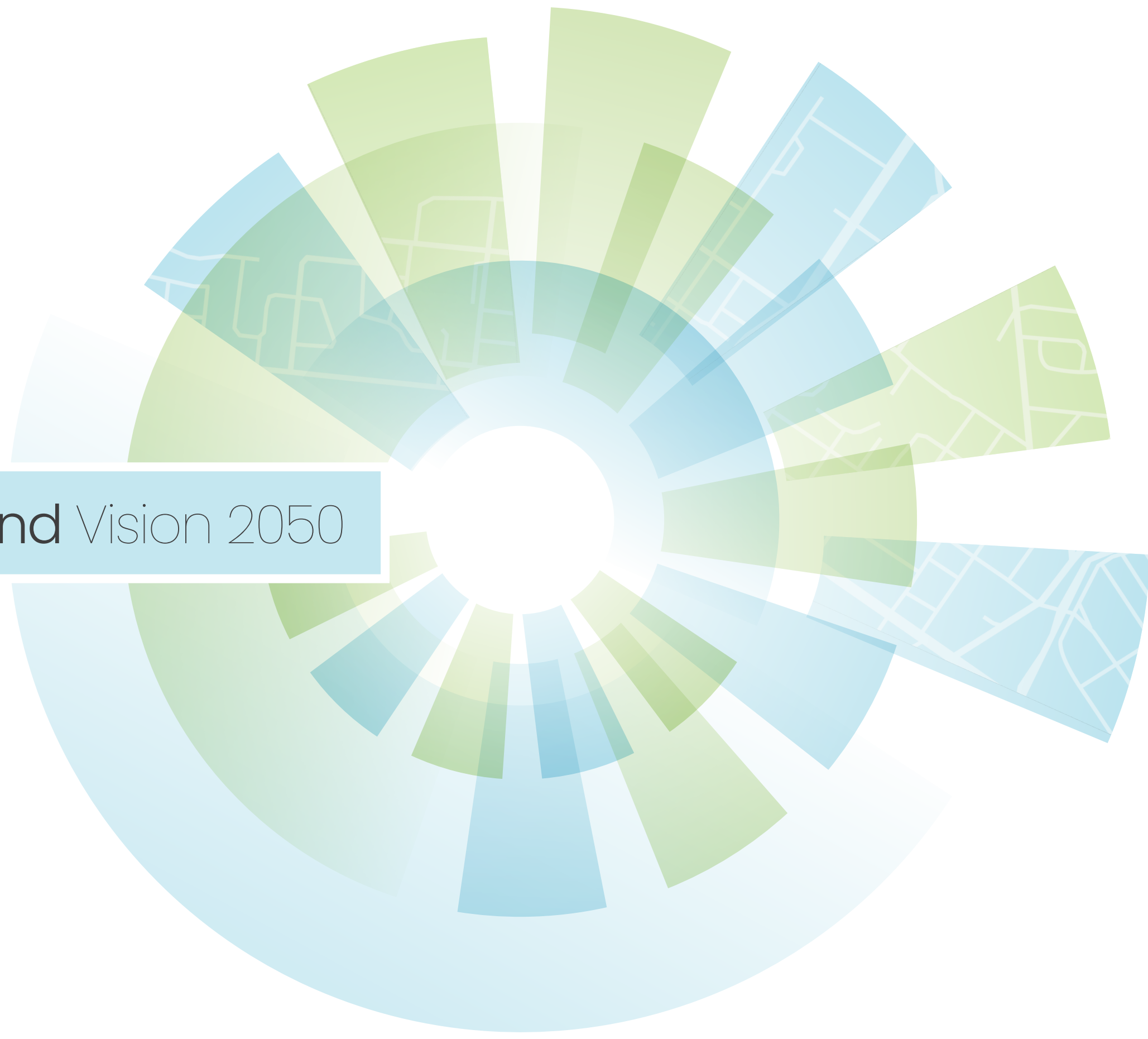


SURVEY REPORT

# Future Owen Sound Vision 2050

Developed by Jay Pitter Placemaking  
September 2024



# Acknowledgments

Jay Pitter Placemaking would like to acknowledge the support of the following individuals who played an integral role in ensuring that the Future Owen Sound—Vision 2050 Survey initiative was a success:

Thank you to the members of the City of Owen Sound's Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Committee, including: Mayor Ian Boddy, Deputy Mayor Scott Greig, Councillor Suneet Kukreja, Councillor Marion Koepke, Steve Lowe, Trish Meekins, Jennifer Smith and Clark MacFarlane.

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# Introduction

This report summarizes community stakeholder responses to the City of Owen Sound's Future Vision 2050 Survey.

This is the first step in the Future Owen Sound—Vision 2050 strategic planning initiative, intended to create a collective roadmap to respond to immediate-, mid- and long-term challenges and opportunities. It is understood that planning for 2050 requires us to take action today and to plot out a series of steps that lay a solid foundation for the journey forward. The current strategic planning process is relevant to all, whether you are a youth who will, in 2050, inherit both the benefits and consequences of the decisions made today, or an elder who will not be here in 2050 but is deeply invested in seeing change today. Also, this work builds on the important work that informed the previous Strategic Plan Refresh, and leverages existing local expertise while creating space for deeper engagement, capacity building and collective learning.

Based on the reach of this survey (1000+ respondents), the number of responses to open-ended questions (5000+ responses), the diverse range of people who completed the survey (33% of individuals identified as being from an equity-deserving group), the dedication of our local expert circle (15+ community and council members) and the lengthy list of identified community assets curated (dozens of people, organizations and places), it is clear that the current process is living up to its ambitious goals.

As with all municipal processes that create space for both critical and celebratory insights, some of the findings from this survey may be challenging, and even uncomfortable, to process. This is to be expected. Like all cities, Owen Sound is navigating numerous intractable challenges, such as homelessness, demographic shifts and overall prosperity. Public conversations pertaining to these and other urban challenges are oftentimes polarizing, and lacking compassionate and productive exchange. Some of the survey responses reflected the tone of similar conversations taking place across many, many cities. That said, we also received a large number of constructive inputs and brilliant insights. Overall, the fact that so many community stakeholders took the time to share a range of both critical and positive feedback—concern, hope, disenchantment, creativity and aspirations—points to passionate participation. The kind of passionate participation that, if guided by compassion, constructive conversation and mutual respect, has the potential to forge a pathway to a flourishing, collective future.

Walk with us through the survey process towards collective priorities.

Jay Pitter,

Principal Placemaker, Jay Pitter Placemaking  
Adjunct Urban Planning Professor, University of Waterloo

# Objective

Develop and implement an accessible, short-form survey that enables the City of Owen Sound to reaffirm and, if required, update its current strategic priorities through substantial and diverse community contributions—both qualitative and quantitative.

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# Methodology

The Future Vision 2050 Survey was designed to engage a diverse range of Owen Sound community stakeholders—individuals who generally engage with the municipality and individuals from equity-seeking communities, who are oftentimes excluded from municipal public engagement processes.

The survey was authored in English only, and primarily issued and completed via the City of Owen Sound’s secure online platform. However, paper surveys were distributed across City property and disseminated at public events and summer programs. A special three-question children’s survey was developed and a convening with the business community was undertaken; these survey contributions were also disseminated as a paper survey.

To create space for nuanced and expansive respondent contributions, approximately half the questions were dedicated to ranking the existing strategic priorities and the other half were open-ended, enabling survey respondents the opportunity to provide context for the ranking decisions, storytelling and high-level asset-mapping. Also, the survey questions intentionally prompted constructive critical feedback and celebratory content. This overall approach was intended to gather meaningful and authentic data—both qualitative and quantitative.

Most individuals completed the survey online. However, some individuals, such as youth and social service clients, received support completing the survey. In the interest of increased psychological safety, identity-based questions were optional and all respondents, regardless of identity, had the option of sharing identifying information or submitting an anonymous survey. Finally, to further

validate the qualitative and quantitative data gathered through the survey process, a comparative review of other municipal and broader institutional documents published by organizations such as the Owen Sound Police Service and Community Foundation Grey Bruce was undertaken.

This deeper analysis formed an extraordinarily strong premise for both proposing strategic priorities and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the context, both local and evidence-based, within which the priorities are being proposed.

Throughout the entire process, considerable professional reflexivity—predicated on an equitable participatory research model—and active listening to a group of local community experts helped to mitigate overweighting of any single community stakeholder group perspective and/or data translation errors.

# Outreach & Dissemination Strategy

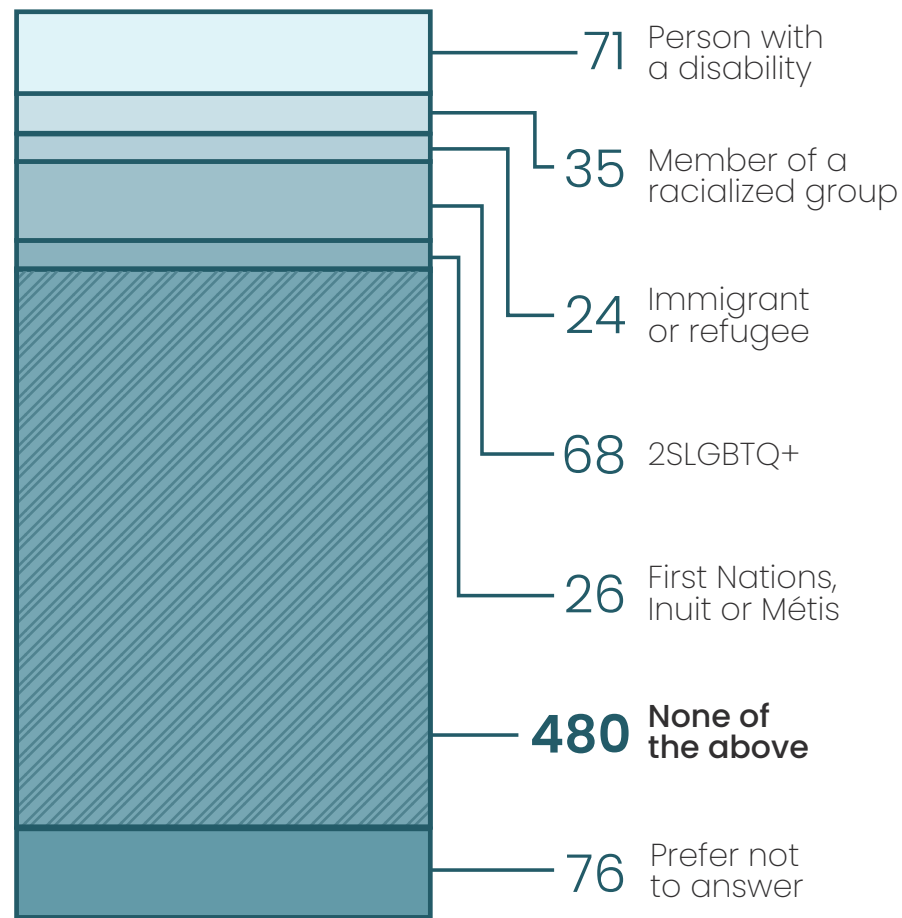
- » Development of City of Owen Sound Stakeholder List
- » Mobile Survey Stations (City Hall, Harry Lumley Bayshore Community Centre, Julie McArthur Regional Recreation Centre, Owen Sound & North Grey Union Public Library)
- » Business Leader Engagement (City Hall, Harry Lumley Bayshore Community Centre, Julie McArthur Regional Recreation Centre, Owen Sound & North Grey Union Public Library)
- » Local Media Amplification
- » City's Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Committee and Additional Contributors
- » Social Media Campaign
- » Paper Posters with Weblink and QR Code to Survey
- » Paper Survey
- » Special Children's Survey
- » Collaboration with Education and Recreational Partners
- » Social Service Organization Amplification



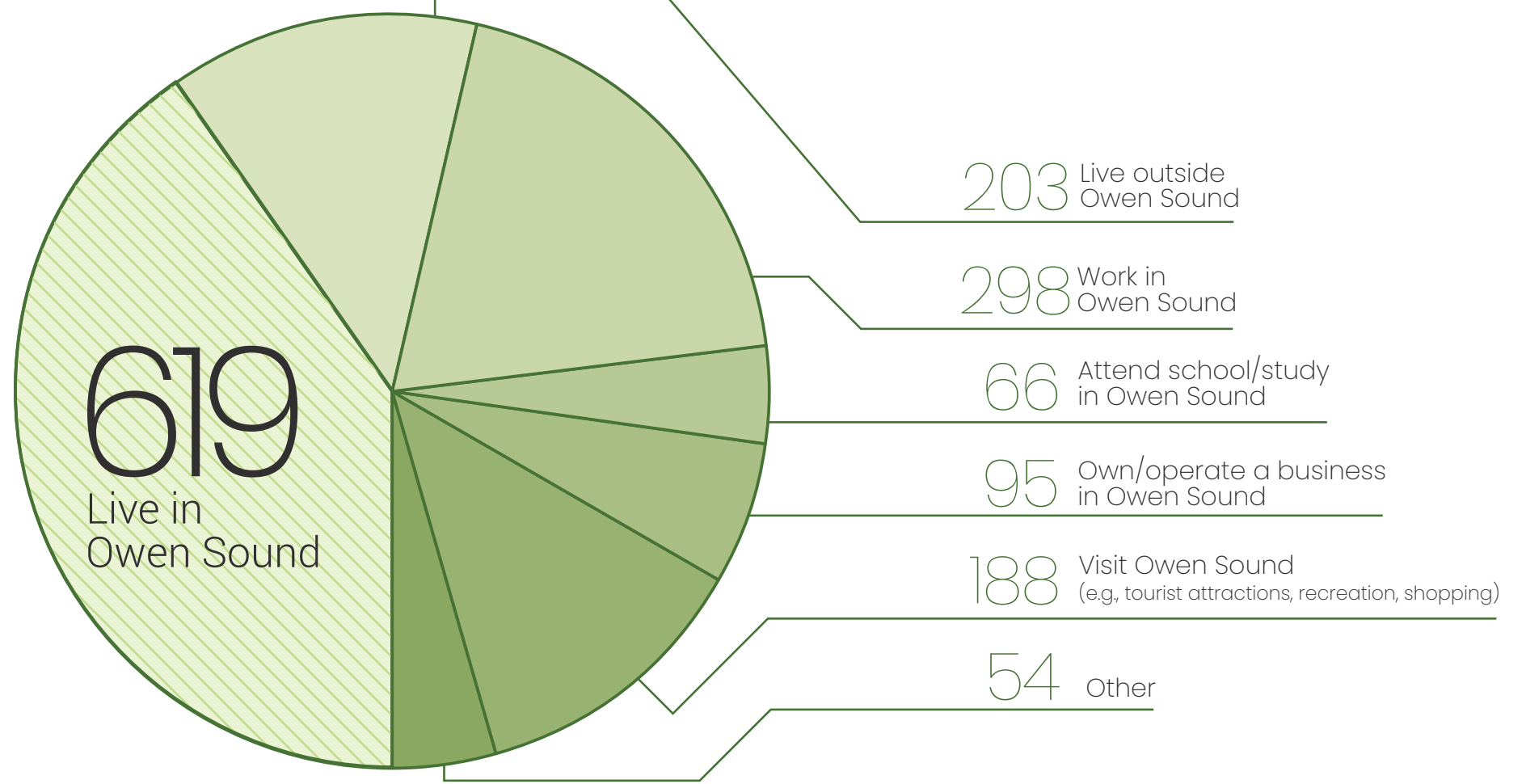


# Who We Engaged

## GROUP IDENTIFICATION



## CONNECTION TO OWEN SOUND



In addition to reaching a solid number of survey respondents, significant emphasis was placed on hearing from a broader range of voices than previous municipal surveys. Specifically, we wanted to hear from more individuals who identified as being from an equity-seeking group, younger individuals, and individuals living on lower and middle-class incomes. We surpassed all of the aforementioned goals, reaching a diverse range of survey respondents. Household income and age

representation were fairly balanced. We're especially pleased with the amount and quality of feedback from children and youth, often referenced as being the future despite being excluded from city-building processes that will impact their lives. Sixty percent of survey respondents were women, while another 7% identified as a gender other than male or female and/or opted not to identify. A whopping 33% of survey respondents identified as belonging to an equity-seeking

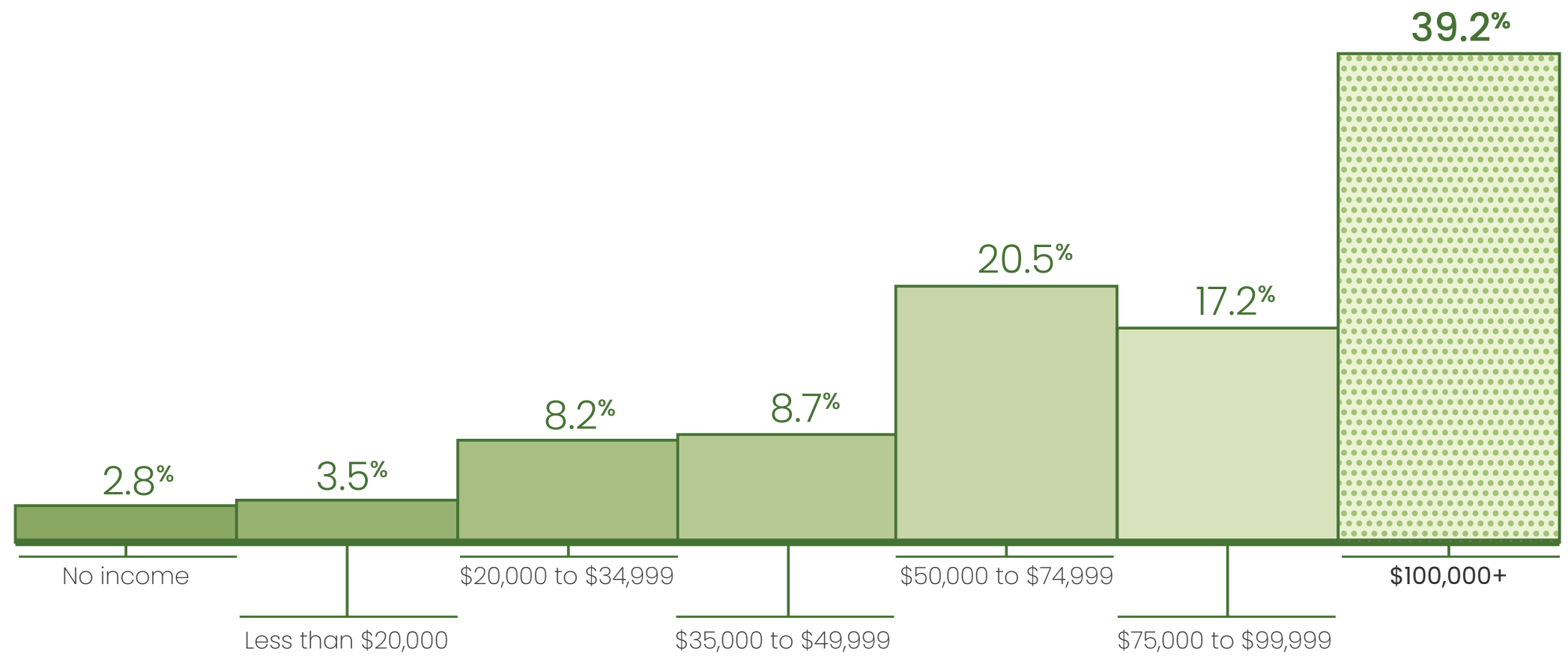
group (racialized, two-spirited, LGBTQ+ and disabled), which is exceptional given Owen Sound's local demographic. Taking this percentage into account along with age, class and gender representation, this survey did an excellent job amplifying historically excluded voices as well as reaching community stakeholders conventionally engaged in municipal processes. A wide range of equally valuable people and perspectives were respectfully considered.



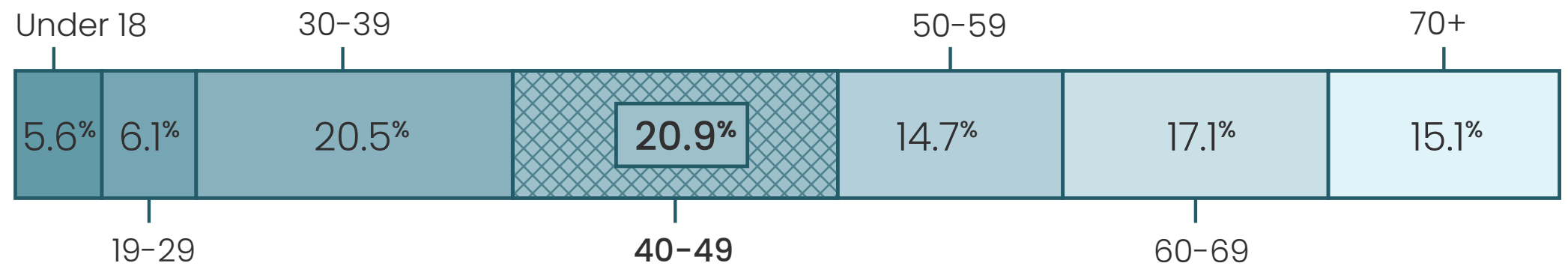
GENDER IDENTITY

|     |                                |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| 499 | Women                          |
| 274 | Men                            |
| 42  | Preferred not to answer        |
| 9   | A gender not listed            |
| 7   | Doesn't identify with a gender |
| 7   | Non binary                     |
| 4   | Two spirit                     |
| 3   | Trans women                    |
| 3   | Trans men                      |
| 3   | Genderfluid                    |

ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME



AGE



# What We Asked, Heard and Learned

First, to avoid unnecessarily reinventing the wheel and undoing considerable City staff and council work, we presented the following previous Strategic Plan Refresh (2021) priorities tethered to their respective definitions:

The following priorities, along with their original descriptions, were identified in the Owen Sound 2021-2023 Strategic Refresh. Given today's context (e.g., post-COVID-19, changing demographics, development needs, and other rapid changes), how would you rate these priorities now?

**Safe City:** Supporting inclusivity, diversity and accessibility in our community and recognizing the importance of a safe and secure community.

Low  Medium  High

**Prosperous City:** Working towards a positive business environment and support initiatives that increase our competitive economic advantages.

Low  Medium  High

**A City That Grows:** Achieving the population target for Owen Sound as set out in the Grey County Growth Management Plan.

Low  Medium  High

**Green City:** Enhancing the city's resiliency and capacity for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Supporting and promoting healthy lifestyles.

Low  Medium  High

**A City That Moves:** Facilitating sustainable transportation options and creating community connectivity.

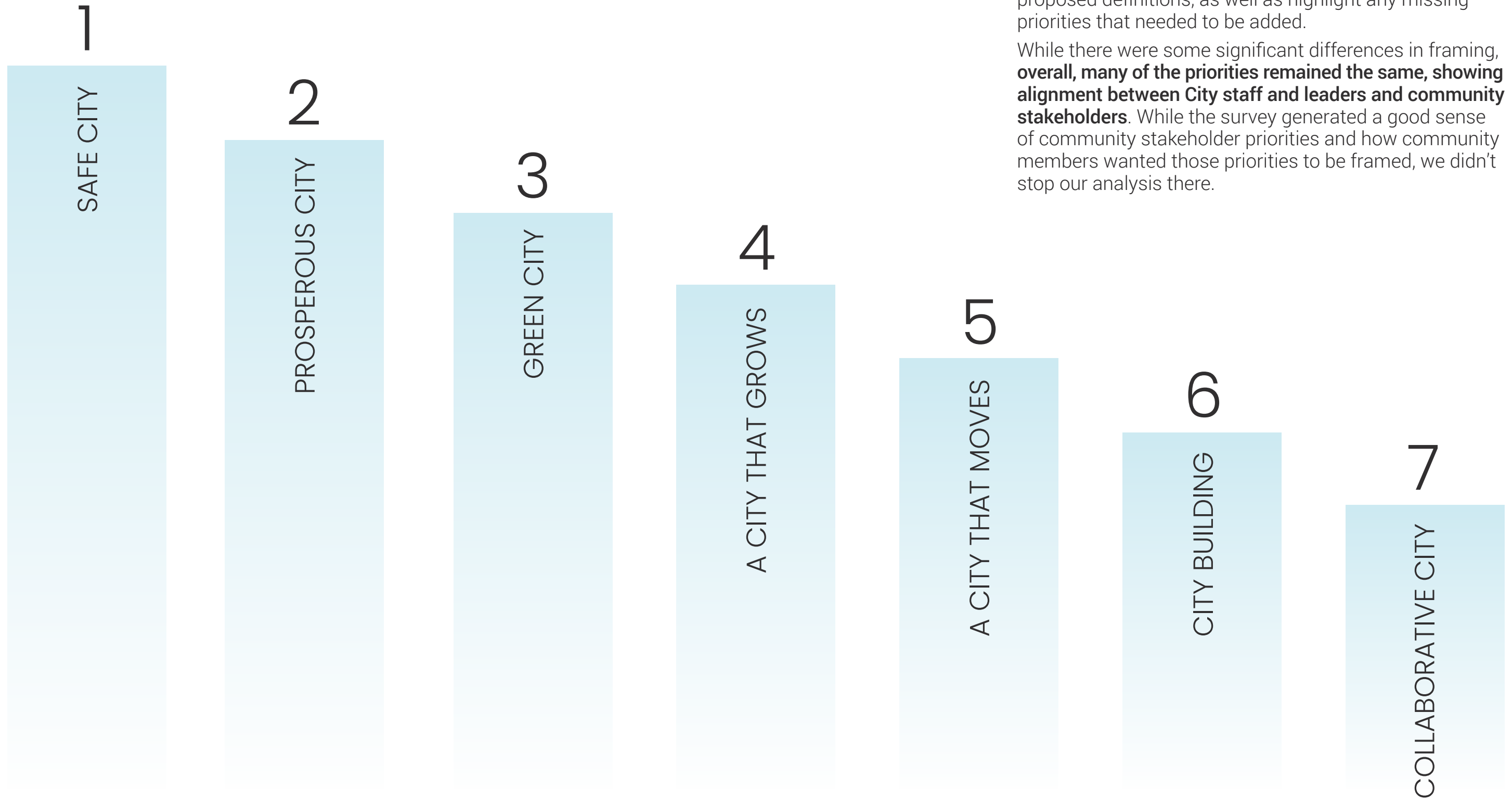
Low  Medium  High

**City Building:** Planning community amenities that create great places and spaces for community living. Cultivating a vibrant and diverse arts, culture and heritage environment throughout the city.

Low  Medium  High

**Collaborative City:** Maintaining and improving relationships through engagement.

Low  Medium  High



We asked survey respondents to not only rank their top themes, but indicate if anything was missing from the proposed definitions, as well as highlight any missing priorities that needed to be added.

While there were some significant differences in framing, **overall, many of the priorities remained the same, showing alignment between City staff and leaders and community stakeholders.** While the survey generated a good sense of community stakeholder priorities and how community members wanted those priorities to be framed, we didn't stop our analysis there.

# We reviewed 5000+ responses to the following open-ended questions:

- Do any of the previous Council Priorities need to be reframed or enhanced?
- What is one positive quality of Owen Sound that is not currently being celebrated or optimally leveraged? (e.g., generating revenue from engaging and diverse tourism events, striking landscapes, potential of local business, caring communities, etc.)
- What is one characteristic of Owen Sound that is uncomfortable to speak about or is a significant opportunity for improvement? (e.g., poverty, race relations, homophobia, homelessness, young talent leaving, etc.)
- Is there a priority (or priorities) that should be added to the list of Council Priorities?
- What is one significant missed opportunity that, if embraced, would positively impact the city?

Although the previous questions are quite distinct, the following common themes emerged as a throughline across them:

- Addressing issues related to poverty, homelessness, drug use and the fostering of safer spaces, particularly in the downtown area. More broadly, however, also addressing cost-of-living issues, including affordable housing and lower taxes. (NOTE: Some respondents, representing a far less diverse group of respondents in terms of age, race and class, noted that they received good value for their taxes.)
- Encouraging economic development through job creation (e.g., trades, industrial sector, healthcare) and local business development, particularly in the downtown.
- Building on an already vibrant arts and culture scene by supporting more local talent and the events/programming that showcases it.
- Supporting youth and young families to both remain in, or relocate to, Owen Sound by creating more educational and workforce opportunities.
- Ensuring the city's natural spaces and streetscapes are clean, beautiful, lively and well-maintained, specifically the waterfront area, for the enjoyment of residents as well as a way to encourage economic prosperity through tourism.
- Addressing congestion issues and providing more transportation options, including public transit, rideshare (e.g., Uber), and more walkable and bikeable streets.

While the majority of comments across all questions fit within these overall themes, there were also more specific comments that were echoed by several people.

For example, some residents felt that creating better access to healthcare and addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation were key priorities. Several respondents also mentioned they felt the city wasn't currently leveraging its position as a regional hub and that there were opportunities to look to other municipalities for ideas, while others pointed out they felt the city wasn't currently tapping into local talent as much as it could. The local food scene and its restaurants was another common thread when people were asked about a positive characteristic of Owen Sound that they felt wasn't currently being celebrated. Finally, Harrison Park was mentioned multiple times as a great space that could be even better, with one person calling it "a jewel that does not get enough attention."

Survey respondents also identified several topics they felt were uncomfortable to speak about and that represented significant growth opportunities for the city. At the top of the list was addressing the issues of homelessness, poverty and drug addiction with compassion and care. However, many also noted a growth opportunity pertaining to addressing different lived experiences and identities. Economic issues such as retaining young people who are leaving the city as well as revitalizing the local business district in the downtown area were other key points for respondents. Lastly, the strained trust and lack of engagement between residents and the city itself—both elected officials and City staff—was another common theme.

We also heard many comments that were about pride of place and the things that people loved about living in Owen Sound. Many of these were related to showcasing and uplifting local arts and culture talent, including music and food, and recognizing the untapped potential of the city's youth. Another point of pride was leveraging the city's natural beauty, particularly the waterfront area, to create a space for both residents and visitors to enjoy. People also mentioned the growing cultural diversity of the city and the recent arrival of many newcomers as strengths, while others also recognized the need to better embrace Indigenous culture and history. Finally, people mentioned things they wanted to see more of in the city, like recreational amenities (e.g., gyms, basketball courts, pickleball), job opportunities, local shops and easier ways to get around (e.g., public transit, bike lanes, parking, walkable, car-free areas).

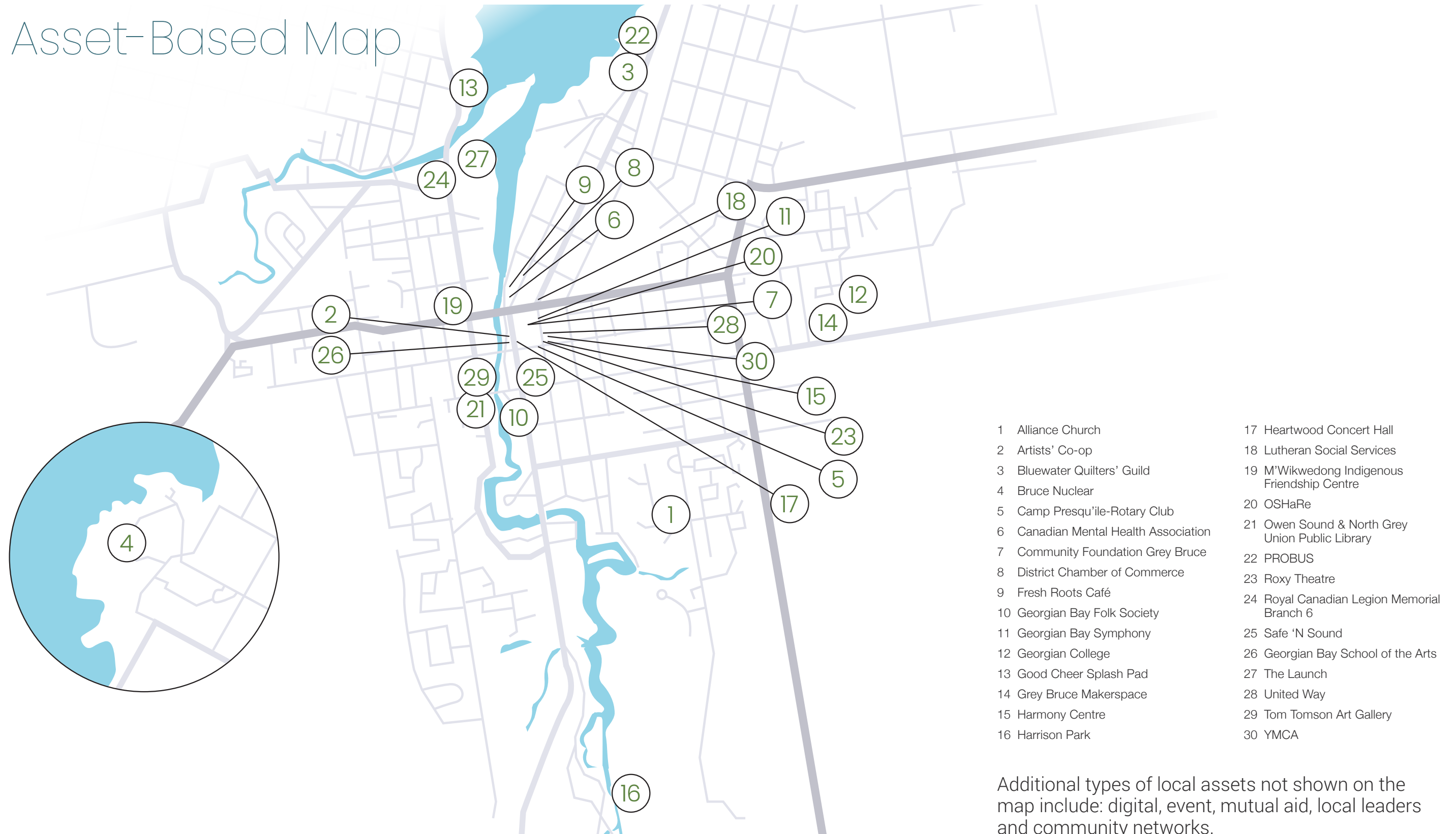
Many of the comments we received, which canvassed a large number of uncomfortable topics, were aligned with both previous and existing priorities. This points to an even greater urgency to learn how to have these conversations in a manner and in spaces conducive to constructive exchange. The comments across the survey's open-ended questions also helped enhance and reframe previous priorities in ways that are more meaningful and specific to current community-identified priorities. For example, it was clear that "safety" and "prosperity" were existing priorities that resonated; however, it was also clear that people wanted to see issues such as homelessness, reviving the downtown, youth supports and waterfront investment specifically articulated within those priorities.

The final question asked pertained to what expertise and talent already existed in Owen Sound to help move the strategic plan forward. Understanding the complexity and daunting nature of the challenges facing Owen Sound—however similar they may be to other cities—we wanted to end the survey using an asset-based lens that created space for people to reflect on what is currently good about their beautiful and historically rich city.

Along with extensive critical feedback, we received significant positive and hopeful answers to this question which honoured local people, places, organizations and institutions. Below is the first phase of our asset map, which we will be expanding and deepening with a local community planning table.



# Asset-Based Map



Following our review of thousands of survey responses and the beginning of an asset-mapping process, we still weren't done.

In the spirit of building on local expertise, and in keeping with our evidence-based practice, which includes scholarship, we conducted a high-level comparative review of numerous documents previously published by the City of Owen Sound and organizations such as Community Foundation Grey Bruce and the Owen Sound Police Service. The following is a summary of data points from these documents directly aligned with the survey data.

Citizen Satisfaction Survey, 2021  
(City of Owen Sound)

- Most important issues identified by respondents were affordable housing/cost of living/homelessness; drugs/crime/public safety; and jobs/economic development.
- 52% feel Owen Sound's aging population is a concern.
- 25% of people were enthusiastic about recommending Owen Sound as a place to live, while 40% were less likely to recommend it or unenthusiastic in recommending it.
- 74% of residents rated their quality of life as good or excellent, which is below the Canadian average of 84%.
- 75% say they receive good value for tax dollars.

Vital Focus on Housing, 2022 / Vital Focus on Youth, 2019 (Community Foundation Grey Bruce)

- 36% of Owen Sound residents said affordable housing was their top concern.
- More than 40% of homes in Owen Sound are rented—double the rate of Grey County as a whole.
- Over 15% of homeowners and almost 50% of renters in Bruce and Grey Counties spend more than 30% of their monthly income on housing costs.
- 95% of children/youth aged 12 to 17 in Grey Bruce Counties feel a strong sense of community belonging, which is higher than the same age group for Ontario.
- For youth aged 10 to 17, just 25% said they would stay in the area after completing school, while 53% said they would move.

Owen Sound Police Service Community Survey, 2022 (Owen Sound Police Service)

- 72% of people said they felt crime had increased, which was slightly up from 70% who said the same in 2019.
- The areas ranked the lowest in terms of where people felt safe were the downtown river district (day or night) and along bike paths, walking trails and in parks at night.
- When asked to identify public safety issues, respondents identified drugs, homelessness, the downtown area, mental health and theft in their top five. Police service members, when asked the same question, identified drugs, mental health, homelessness, repeat offenders and theft.

RentSafe in Owen Sound Landlord and Tenant Survey Findings, 2024  
(Presentation by RentSafe Owen Sound Collaborative)

- 45% of respondents reported living in a duplex or triplex, while 20% reported living in semi-detached, townhouse or single-family units.
- 47% of respondents reported living in co-operative, non-profit or County housing.
- 75% of respondents reported spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs.

Community Safety and Well-Being Planning Indicator Report, 2022 (Bruce and Grey Counties)

- 77% report a somewhat or strong sense of belonging in Bruce and Grey Counties.
- 25% of children in Owen Sound live in low-income households, compared to 18.84% for Ontario.
- 23.7% of tenant households in Owen Sound are subsidized housing, compared to 15% for Ontario.
- The median household after-tax income in Owen Sound is \$46,875, which is the lowest in the County, compared to \$65,285 in Ontario and \$56,458 in Grey County.
- 23.9% of the combined population of Grey and Bruce Counties is over 65, compared to 16.7% for Ontario.

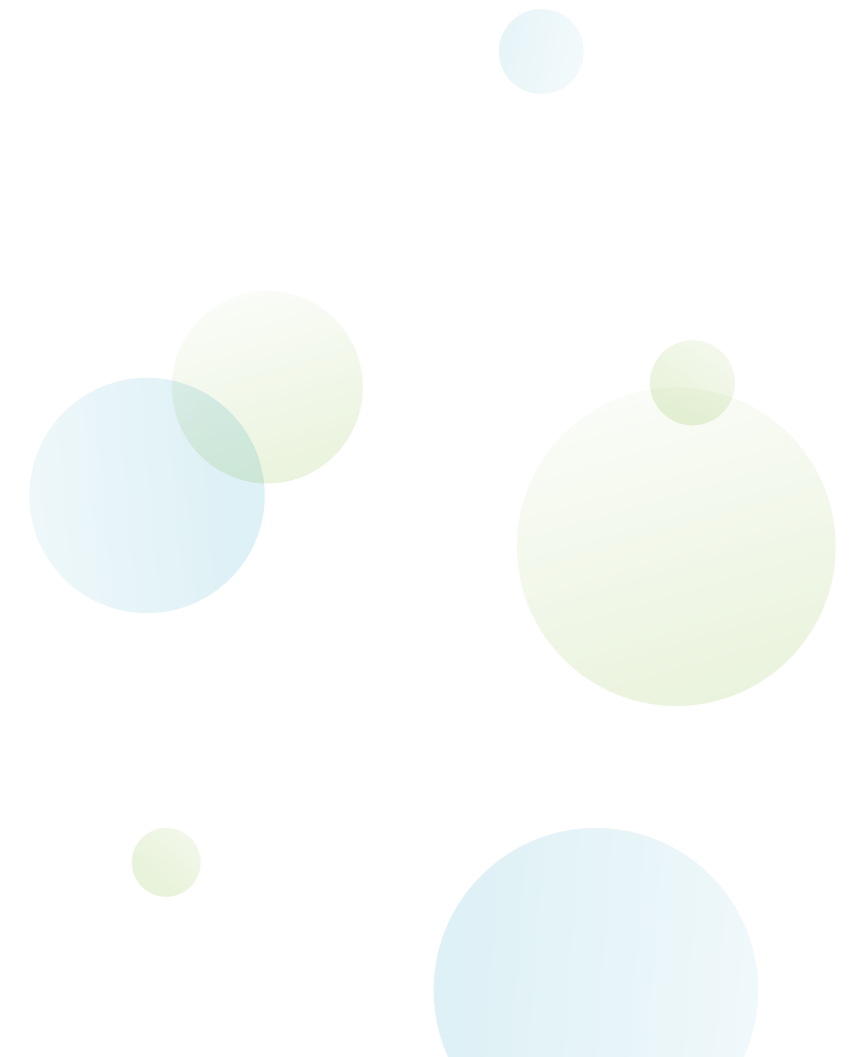
Reviews of past public surveys and recent statistics related to Owen Sound and the surrounding area show clear alignment in many places with the results of the Future Vision 2050 Public Survey.

For example, in our survey, respondents identified homelessness, drug use and a sense of safety, particularly in Owen Sound's downtown area, as top priorities. This follows findings from the Owen Sound Police Service's 2022 Community Survey, which identified the downtown as ranking the lowest in terms of safety by community members, both during the day and at night.

Similarly, affordable housing and cost of living were raised multiple times in our survey. Statistics gathered by Bruce and Grey Counties for their Community Safety and Well-Being Planning Indicator Report show that the reality in Owen Sound is that people earn less than in neighbouring communities and experience housing insecurity at higher rates.

One statistic that stuck with us was from the City of Owen Sound's Citizen Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2021. When asked how likely they would be to recommend Owen Sound as a place to live, just 25% of respondents were labelled as enthusiastic promoters, while 40% were labelled as detractors (the remaining were passive), which places Owen Sound below average compared to other Canadian cities surveyed.

Having a lower-than-average promoter statistic, whether one believes this paints an entirely complete picture of the community or not, represents a significant growth opportunity for the city, and for residents interested in getting involved in the issues the city is facing. Despite this statistic, what our survey demonstrated is a sense of local pride and deep ties to place in Owen Sound that we hope can be drawn on to help move this strategic plan forward.





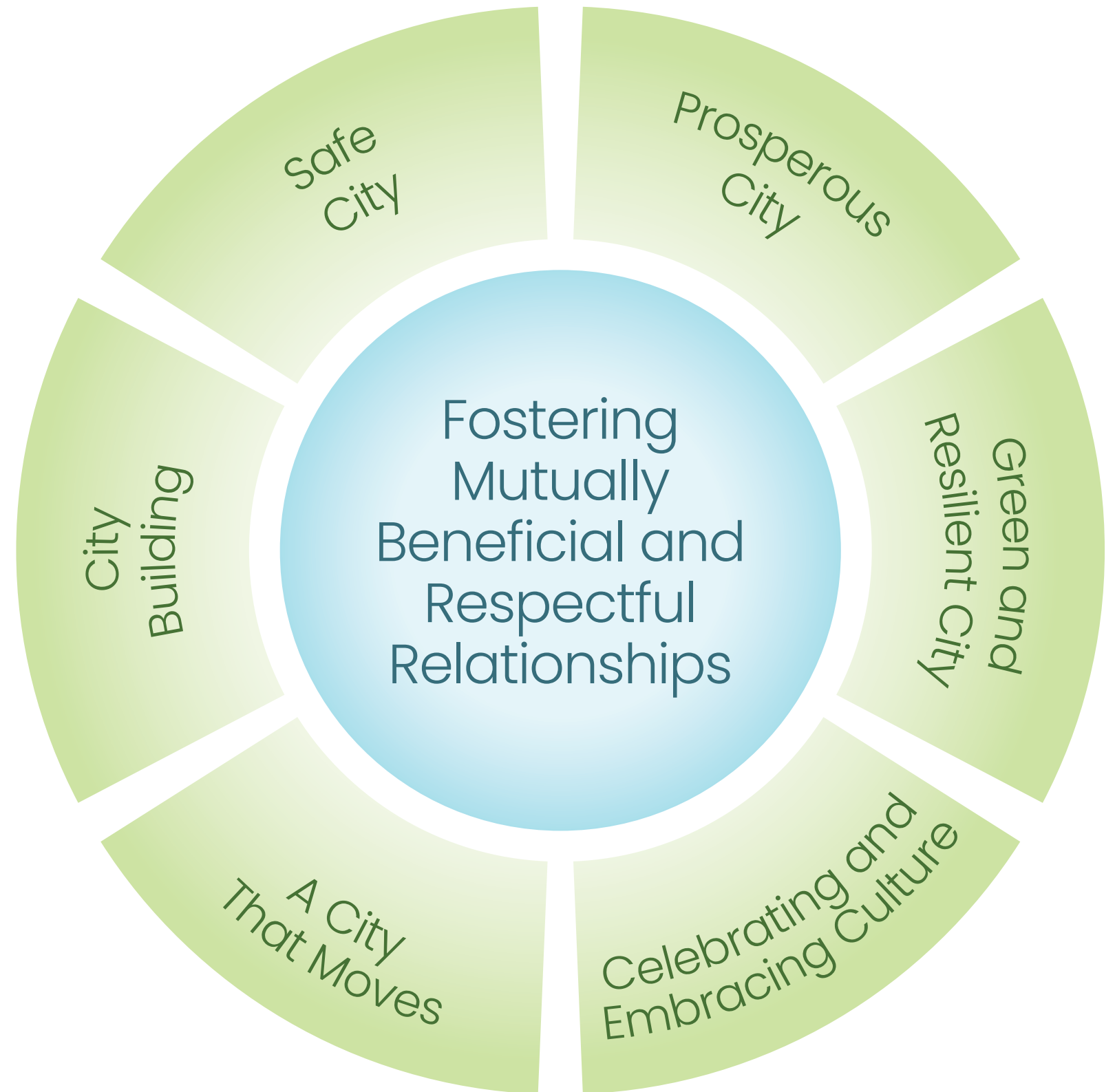
# Collective Strategic Priorities

After reviewing the top-ranking priorities from the previous strategic plan, evaluating 5000+ survey responses, beginning an asset-mapping process and conducting a comparative review, we saw a clear and powerful pattern of alignment, coalescing in the following priorities.

The proposed Future Owen Sound—Vision 2050 priorities, outlined below, were developed following a comprehensive survey process engaging an unprecedented range of stakeholders, a broader institutional comparative review, consultation with a local expert table and applying practice expertise.

Again, these priorities build upon and are largely aligned with the City's previous strategic plan with the additional definition content. One change the practice is strongly proposing is replacing Collaborative City with Fostering Mutually Beneficial and Respectful Relationships, as the latter is considered non-negotiable since collaborative relationships are a core principle for all other priorities.

Another proposed change is replacing a City that Grows with Celebrating and Embracing Culture. This proposed change is predicated on the fact that the previous priority ranked the lowest in the survey, while issues related to culture—from respectfully acknowledging Indigenous Peoples and their cultural practices to uplifting the city's arts and culture assets—were recurring across every survey question. The idea of growth remains embedded in this current proposed priority pillar while being addressed in other priorities such as city building, safety and prosperity, which are explicit about attracting and accommodating new residents.



# PROPOSED PRIORITIES

| PRIORITY   | DEFINITION  | RATIONALE  |
|--|---|--|
| Fostering Mutually Beneficial and Respectful Relationships | Establishing, reconciling and continually nurturing relationships that result in mutual benefit, trust and shared understanding.  | Relationship building is the foundation of every thriving city. It is a prerequisite to all truly impactful and sustainable collaboration. It is critical for welcoming new demographic groups and unites communities navigating challenges. Equally important, the success of all municipal strategic priorities is contingent on fostering mutually beneficial and respectful relationships. |
| Safe City  | Contributing to inclusivity, diversity and accessibility in our community and participating in initiatives focused on a range of long-term, systemic safety solutions that respond to current and future residents.   | Safety issues are rooted in a complex range of historical (both personal and collective), psychological, social and economic factors. Meaningful outcomes cannot be achieved by any one institution or intervention. Active participation and collaboration are required for addressing safety issues.   |
| Prosperous City  | Supporting initiatives that increase competitive economic advantages for current and new businesses and their employees. Also, addressing other aspects of prosperity such as contributing to a good quality of life for all and recognizing the experience of elders, the potential of youth and collective community knowledge as precious local resources. | To foster a strong economic environment, prosperity must be understood in a holistic manner. This means placing value on monetary and non-monetary local resources. Doing so will contribute to creating enriching experiences across the city while cultivating a wealth of opportunity and hope for current and future residents.  |
| Green and Resilient City                                   | Strengthening the city's resiliency (both physical and community infrastructure) in terms of mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Also, leveraging natural resources and infrastructure to support healthy lifestyles.   | Increasingly, notions of environmental resilience are being coupled with community resilience and economic resilience. More and more municipalities are also identifying the ways that collective learning, flexibility and openness to diverse perspectives strengthen institutions, communities and individuals.   |

**PRIORITY**

Celebrating and Embracing Culture

**DEFINITION**

Uplifting all aspects of the city's local culture, including Indigenous Peoples' cultural histories and practices, the cultural histories and practices of all residents, and formal institutional arts and cultural expressions. Also, contributing to creating an inclusive, welcoming and prosperous culture that creates the conditions for harmonious demographic and economic growth.

**RATIONALE**

Much like relationships, the quality of a city's culture impacts many of its aspirations and goals. Culture is broad in meaning. It can refer to ethno-racial identity, but it can also transcend all identities and refer to distinct, yet shared cultural expressions such as storytelling, singing and dancing. Culture can refer to cultural values such as stewardship of the land, innovation and trust, which creates common ground for people of all identities invested in the places where they live, love, learn and work.

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A City That Moves

Facilitating sustainable transportation options and creating community connectivity. Also, this entails ensuring that everyone experiences dignity and accessibility while travelling and recognizing that movement throughout a city is not simply about moving people from point A to point B. It is also about ensuring that everyone is able to access things they need, community connection and opportunities.

Having a range of mobility options opens up pathways to more sustainable and prosperous outcomes for all. This more comprehensive definition exemplifies these more nuanced aspirations and impacts.

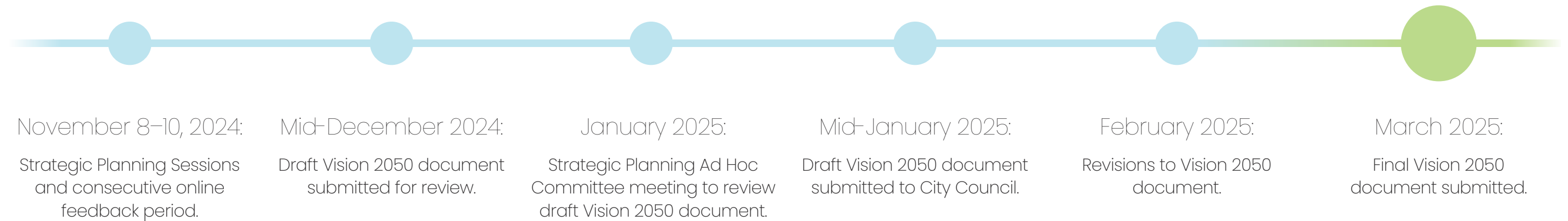
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City Building

Enhancing urban development, planning and placemaking processes to expedite the creation of places and spaces that contribute to complete communities for existing residents, future residents and tourists.

Owen Sound has a striking natural landscape. The development of good-quality places and spaces will better serve current residents, attract tourists, accommodate a skilled workforce and retain young people. Investments in key physical infrastructure will ignite success and growth across several priority pillars.

# Next Steps





Myla



Amelia



Riley



Declan



Wyatt