



COWICHAN VALLEY REGIONAL DISTRICT

Regional Harmonized Official Community Plan for the Electoral Areas

Phase 1 Engagement Results Executive Summary

Prepared by: MODUS Planning, Design & Engagement Inc.

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OVERVIEW

The Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) is developing a harmonized official community plan titled, Regional Harmonized Official Community Plan for the Electoral Areas (RHOCP). This work involves the harmonization and then modernization of seven electoral area official community plans (OCPs) and eight zoning bylaws to create one unified OCP (including complementary local area plans) and one zoning bylaw for the following nine electoral areas:

Area A - Mill Bay / Malahat

Area B - Shawinigan Lake

Area C - Cobble Hill

Area D - Cowichan Bay

Area E - Cowichan Station / Sahtlam / Glenora

Area F - Cowichan Lake South / Skutz Falls

Area G - Saltair

Area H - North Oyster / Diamond

Area I - Youbou / Meade Creek

In February 2019, the CVRD initiated a consultation process on the RHOCP commencing with the electoral area Advisory Planning Commissions (APCs). The APCs reviewed the RHOCP draft objectives and policies for general consistency with existing electoral OCPs. In February 2020, the CVRD invited electoral area residents to participate in an initial community engagement process to build relationships with community members, inform them of the RHOCP process, prioritize the RHOCPs goals and values, and gather input on how they would like to be involved in the Regional Modernized Official Community Plan (RMOCP) process moving forward.

602 participants were engaged in this first phase through four interactive open houses and an online questionnaire. Participants were asked a series of questions organized around the following key questions and emerging issues:

What do you value most? Participants were asked to rank the draft RHOCP goals and prioritize emerging regional trends.

Where will the next 5000 people live? Participants were asked questions relating to the emerging issue of growth management.

What kinds of jobs will the next generation have? Participants were asked questions relating to the emerging issue of a changing economy.

How will we adapt to extreme weather events? Participants were asked questions relating to the emerging issue of climate change.

How would you like to be involved? Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the engagement to date and share how they would like to be involved in the future.

The overall response pattern from the 602 respondents across all engagement activities and questions provides a general understanding of the values and priorities on CVRD residents' minds, confirming the goals of the draft RHOCP and indicating the values and priorities that could drive the next steps of the RMOCP process. The input has also helped build an understanding of engagement preferences for future phases of RMOCP engagement, which will shape a communications and engagement strategy for the RMOCP. Moving forward, a series of engagement events, likely this fall, will allow residents to build on this initial understanding of values and priorities and further shape an RMOCP vision and set of growth principles.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

The Cowichan region is changing. Population growth, an evolving economy and a changing climate require regional coordination and local action. To support this coordinated effort, the CVRD is updating its regional official community plan (regional OCP), the main tool guiding how we use land and shape our communities. The CVRD began this process by harmonizing its existing electoral area OCPs into the Regional Harmonized Official Community Plan for the Electoral Areas and is now moving towards modernizing that document to address regional trends. The result of this process will be a Regional Modernized Official Community Plan for the Electoral Areas (RMOCP) that will set the foundation for the Cowichan Valley to be an attractive place to live, work and play for years to come.

Key to the success of this project is communications and engagement with the CVRD's electoral area residents and thus a communications and engagement strategy was developed to guide the process.

The objectives of the communication and engagement process were to:

- *Build relationships* with key stakeholder groups and the public
- *Educate and share information* on the basics of planning and development and why it is important
- *Tell the story of the RHOC/ RMOCP development process*, why we are undertaking this work and the benefits of doing so
- *Validate and prioritize the values* that have driven the RHOPC
- *Introduce and gather feedback* on the values and regional trends that will drive the RMOCP
- *Gather stakeholder and public input* on engagement and outreach preferences

The following questions were featured on the promotional materials used to raise awareness of this process and build interest in the process:

Where will the next 5,000 people in the Cowichan Region live?
How do we provide good jobs in our region for the next generation?
How will we adapt to more extreme weather?

These themes (growth, economy and climate change) were also used to organize the questions participants answered at the open houses and in the online questionnaire and to organize the analysis and report on results.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Engagement Principles

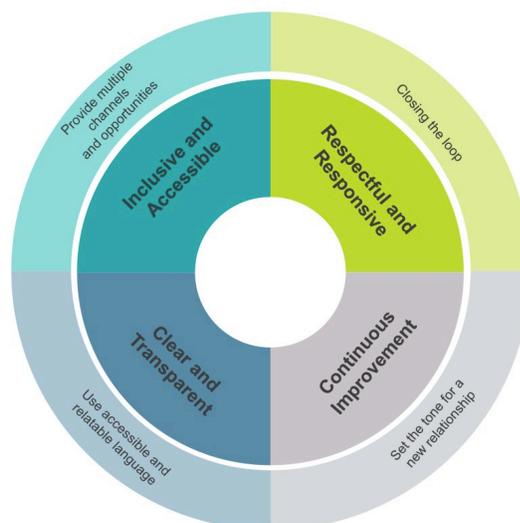
This work is driven by the following CVRD Public Engagement Guide principles:

1. *Inclusive and accessible*: Everyone who could potentially be affected by a decision must be afforded an opportunity to provide input.
2. *Respectful and responsive*: The engagement process must be thoughtful, relevant and value the input and interests of participants.
3. *Clear and transparent*: Information about the project and the engagement process itself must be easy to understand. Communication must be open, honest, thorough and frequent.
4. *Continuous improvement*: Each process is evaluated, so that lessons learned can be captured and applied to future engagements.

This specific process was designed based the following additional principles:

1. *Set the tone for a new relationship*: The process will invite participants to shape the CVRD's approach to engagement by providing participants with the opportunity to share their engagement preferences.
2. *Use accessible and relatable language*: Materials will be "translated" from complex policy information to more common and simpler terms and be presented in dynamic and fun ways, ultimately drawing new voices in the process.
3. *Provide multiple channels and opportunities*: This process will provide participants with opportunities for both in-person and online opportunities to get involved, recognizing different engagement preferences.
4. *Closing the loop*: This process commits to reporting back on the results of engagement and informing participants and the broader community on how these results will shape future engagement activities for the RMOCP.

Figure 1 CVRD engagement principles



1.2.2 Communications Activities

The following communications activities were undertaken:

- *Project website* (www.cvrld.bc.ca/regionalocp) launched in October 2019 with information including project backgrounder, project videos, links to the online questionnaire and engagement opportunities.
 - The project backgrounder provided foundational knowledge on CVRD community planning and information about the regional OCP harmonization and modernization process and described the benefits of a regional OCP and opportunities to get involved.
 - Videos were designed to introduce community members to the project and provide basic planning education. They were posted on the project website, on CVRD's YouTube channel and on social media. These videos included:
 - Introduction to the 9 Electoral Areas
 - From Harmonization to Modernization
 - What is an OCP?
 - What is a Zoning Bylaw?
 - How does Development Work?
- A *social media campaign* was launched with regular posts sharing project information and inviting participation in open houses and the questionnaire.
- A *postcard* was mailed to 30,000 residents across the nine electoral areas with information about the project and an invitation to get involved in open houses and the online questionnaire.
- Ads were taken out in the following *print publications* for two consecutive weeks:
 - An item in the CVRD News (<https://www.cvrld.bc.ca/news>)
 - A weekly ad in the *Chemainus Courier*
 - A weekly ad in the *Cowichan Valley Citizen*

1.2.3 Engagement Opportunities

Approximately 75 APC meetings were held between February 2019 and February 2020.

Four open houses were held in February 2020:

- February 1, 2020 – The HUB at Cowichan Station
- February 2, 2020 – Cowichan Lake Arena
- February 8, 2020 – North Oyster Community Center
- February 9, 2020 – Kerry Park Recreation Center

An online questionnaire was available on PlaceSpeak and Placelt from February 1–February 22, 2020.

1.2.4 Response Rate

Between February 1 and February 22, 2020, 602 participants were engaged in the following activities:

- **Open houses**
 - 411 participants broken down into the following four open houses:
 - February 1, 2020 – The HUB at Cowichan Station: 100 participants
 - February 2, 2020 – Cowichan Lake Arena: 30 participants
 - February 8, 2020 – North Oyster Community Center: 150 participants
 - February 9, 2020 – Kerry Park Recreation Center: 131 participants
- **Online questionnaire**
 - 191 respondents¹



Figure 2 Sample Postcard

¹ Of the 191 online participants, 128 respondents were CVRD residents and 63 lived outside of the electoral areas. A similar response pattern between residents and non-residents was observed.

1.2.5 Engagement Activities and Limitations

Response Rate: As described above, a total of 602 participants were engaged in the open houses and/or the online questionnaire. The results are not weighted to the Cowichan Valley Regional District population and not statistically significant; however, the consistency in the responses provides us with a general understanding of the values and priorities on CVRD residents' minds.

PlaceSpeak: The PlaceSpeak platform allows us to tie responses to a residential address, providing information about differences between electoral areas and to ensure that the input provided is coming from CVRD residents. It is interesting to note that there are no significant differences in the response patterns between residents and non-residents. One of the disadvantages of the platform is that participants report finding it cumbersome. For many, this may be a barrier to participating that could have impacted our response rate.

Dot Voting: At the open houses, a series of questions was presented on display boards and participants were asked to indicate their responses by voting with sticker dots. At the initial open house, some participants used more dots than were allocated. At subsequent events, facilitators held on to dots and distributed them at the boards. For the question that involved ranking goals from 1 to 8, dots were numbered to help participants rank each goal only once.

Postcards: 30,000 postcards were mailed to residents in the nine electoral areas promoting the engagement process and the open houses. Due to technical limitations, Canada Post could not ensure that only electoral area residents received the mailouts, meaning some residents from the incorporated areas received the mailouts. Some residents in electoral areas G and H reported not receiving postcards. The CVRD prepared flyers for area G and area H residents and distributed these along with a second postcard drop. Despite these challenges, the open house held near areas G and H at the North Oyster Community Center had the highest attendance.

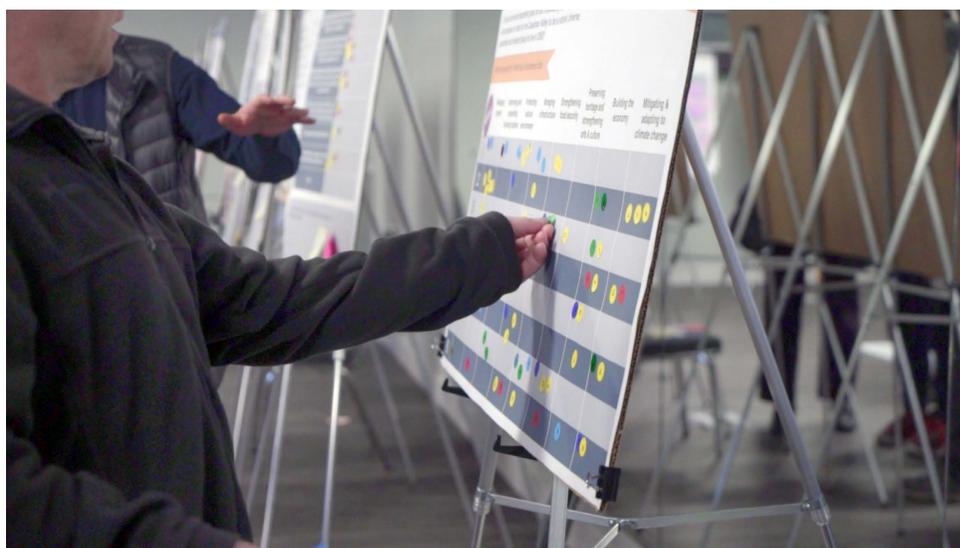


Image 1 Open house activity in February 2020.

2 WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST?

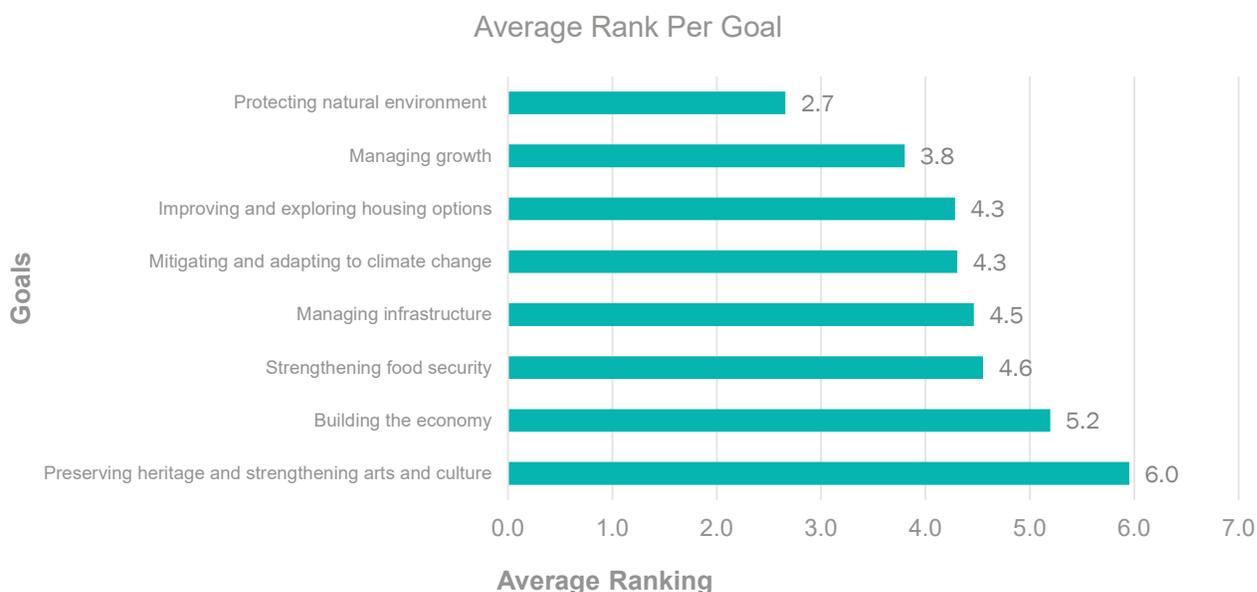
At the open houses and in the online questionnaire, participants were asked to rank the draft RHOC goals (see results in Figure 3) and prioritize the need for action on several emerging regional trends. The overall comments indicate that participants strongly value protecting the natural environment and their communities' rural character.

Participants reported that tranquility, rural landscapes and proximity to nature are the community characteristics they cherish the most. Many residents expressed a desire to live close to nature and were concerned by the loss of wildlife habitats, trails, greenspaces, watersheds and farmland. They also value growth management that protects their natural environments and rural lands.

Strategies to protect the natural environment were linked by some to the region's capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change, another emerging trend some residents considered a high priority. Through protecting forests, watersheds and other natural ecosystems, the region could sequester carbon in its forests, reduce risk of wildfire and protect against major flooding events, erosion and landslides. However, not all participants agreed that mitigating and adapting to climate change was a high priority for the CVRD to address. Some expressed that this is beyond the scope and jurisdiction of the CVRD and encouraged the Regional District to work with other levels of government to address climate change as a global issue.

Overall, the key themes shared by participants validate the draft RHOC vision and goals and provide an indication of the values and priorities that should guide the RMOCP.

Figure 3 Average rank per goal.



3 WHERE WILL THE NEXT 5,000 PEOPLE LIVE?

Several questions at the open houses and in the online questionnaire asked participants to consider strategies for accommodating growth and to share information on their housing needs. As evident in their answers and overall comments, participants value the tranquil, rural nature of their surroundings and cited quiet, peaceful greenspace and agricultural lands as the heart of their communities. In order to preserve that, the majority of participants felt that it was suitable to focus population growth in areas where there is existing servicing (water and sewer) with hopes that upgrades and improvements can be made on current infrastructure and that adequate access to water can be addressed. Participants were in favour of cautiously increasing density, but only in existing communities where populations are already concentrated to help ensure that green space and agricultural lands remain shielded from development. Many valued the balance their current communities afforded them and cited equal proximity to the outdoors and amenities as a treasured character of where they lived. Respondents felt that expanding growth along transportation routes, improved public transportation and planning for increased walkability were important to reduce reliance on personal vehicles, increasing the ability of those in rural areas to access services without sacrificing access to their natural surroundings.

Most respondents opposed expanding populations to areas that have less concentrated populations and likewise did not support master-planned neighbourhoods with private utilities as participants feared the loss of the unique rural character of the region and the loss of greenspace.

While the large majority of participants live in single-detached homes, with a small number residing in apartments, secondary suites, townhomes and mobile homes, many expressed a desire for greater flexibility in housing options to accommodate secondary suites and residences on large, rural lots. Participants hoped that alternative housing options would increase accommodation opportunities for young families and agricultural workers, and that a diverse housing market would also encourage an influx of professionals in the technology sector. They also hoped to have more compact housing options near both outdoor amenities and community services, as the few participants who planned to move in the next five years would do so predominantly to seek a smaller space, to access shops and services, or to move closer to nature.

Participants indicated a strong desire for aging in place options, as many participants felt they could not maintain their rural lifestyles in advanced age. Older participants hoped to have better, walkable access to services, especially medical, and expressed a desire for single-storey housing to meet mobility challenges.

Overall, participants valued small communities where neighbours know each other by name and where they can access a balance of outdoor recreation and services and amenities. Participants welcomed densification where appropriate, but not at the expense of greenspace and agricultural land. Participants envisioned a future where the next 5,000 people would live in an array of housing options to meet every income bracket and stage of life, where infrastructure upgrades would occur in tandem with development, and growth would be monitored as not to outpace local water supply.

4 WHAT KIND OF JOBS WILL THE NEXT GENERATION HAVE?

A series of questions asked during the open houses and in the online questionnaire invited participants to consider which economic sectors the CVRD could promote through policy, investment and the provision of land. Through their answers to these questions, and supported by overall comments shared by participants, agriculture was identified as the most important sector for the CVRD to promote. Overall, participants valued food security and saw the deep significance in creating community through food and farming. Many participants cherished the rural nature of their surroundings and identified local economic hubs—like bustling Saturday markets, the vibrant Mill Bay Centre and the local farm store run by friendly neighbours—as the hearts of their communities.

Given the mild climate and sprawling rural lands, our region is an ideal area to grow a wide variety of food items, cultivate acres of vineyards and raise a variety of healthy livestock. Within the food system sector, participants were in favour of field agricultural, specifically, as well as rural destination restaurants and pubs. The majority expressed a strong desire for sustainable agriculture to protect biodiversity, promote regenerative farming and deepen community connections with local food systems. Participants valued locally grown food with minimal environmental impacts and envisioned achieving this through a return to small-scale agriculture and environmentally innovative approaches, including hydroponic systems and land-based aquaculture.

Innovation was equally important to participants as many felt that climate adaptation and environmental services were integral to shaping the economic landscape for the next generation. Participants felt strongly that renewable energy, including wind and solar, was a key avenue to pursue to protect these peaceful ocean views and quiet forest trails, alongside agroforestry and low-impact tourism. These approaches would allow visitors to experience the wonders of each natural marvel, while provisioning its future. While participants generally supported tourism, they felt it was important to provide job security in this typically seasonal sector to ensure year-round living wages for workers.

Participants also had interest in promoting the burgeoning technology sector and saw opportunities to integrate climate change adaptation with technological innovation. There was a strong desire to promote education and health, and participants felt there was a need to expand jobs in senior services and childcare, specifically.

There was little support for financial services, transportation, warehousing and the cannabis industry, with those opposed to the latter firm in their belief that those activities should operate indoors, away from residential areas, schools and hospitals.

Overall, participants supported economic sectors that did minimal harm to the environment, while promoting community connections through local farms, food establishments and wild spaces, all together making up the heart of communities across the CVRD. Participants valued nature and agriculture in harmony, and they see a vibrant local economy underpinned by fair wages and sustainable practices, where both people and planet thrive.

5 HOW WILL WE ADAPT TO EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS?

Participants were asked to consider which additional measures the CVRD should take, if any, to address climate change. In addition, mention of climate change measures and values relating to climate change were observed in the overall comments shared by participants.

The Cowichan region is rich in its natural landscapes and many have moved and continue to live in the Cowichan for its natural environment. It is unsurprising that many participants expressed a strong desire to address climate change through protecting ecosystems, biodiversity and watersheds, an action that not only supports carbon sequestration and adaptation to extreme weather events, but also enhances the quality of life among Cowichan residents. While some expressed skepticism towards climate change and the effectiveness of the CVRD taking action on climate change in the global context, there was widespread support for actions that continue to protect natural ecosystems and habitats.

This protection of nature can also be seen in participant preferences for further restricting development in areas of high risk of sea level rise, flooding, erosion and landslides and in support of adding further protection for properties at risk as a measure to adapt to extreme weather events. Managing growth in an intentional way and increasing sustainable, active transportation options were other high priorities for participants in tackling climate change. Many expressed interest in reducing societal dependence on personal vehicles by promoting more travel by walking, cycling, public transit and rail. This is in line with participant preferences to focus growth where communities are already concentrated.

In summary, despite differing perspectives on the role or effectiveness of the CVRD taking action on climate change, participants appear to strongly value protecting ecosystems, biodiversity and watersheds and the many benefits they provide, climate change mitigation and adaption being only one of them.



Image 2 Open house participants used poster boards, paper maps and other resources to learn about the harmonization and modernization processes.

6 HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE INVOLVED?

At the end of each open house, participants were invited to provide feedback on the event. Across all evaluation criteria, most participants were satisfied or highly satisfied by the open house events (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Participant satisfaction rating of open houses.

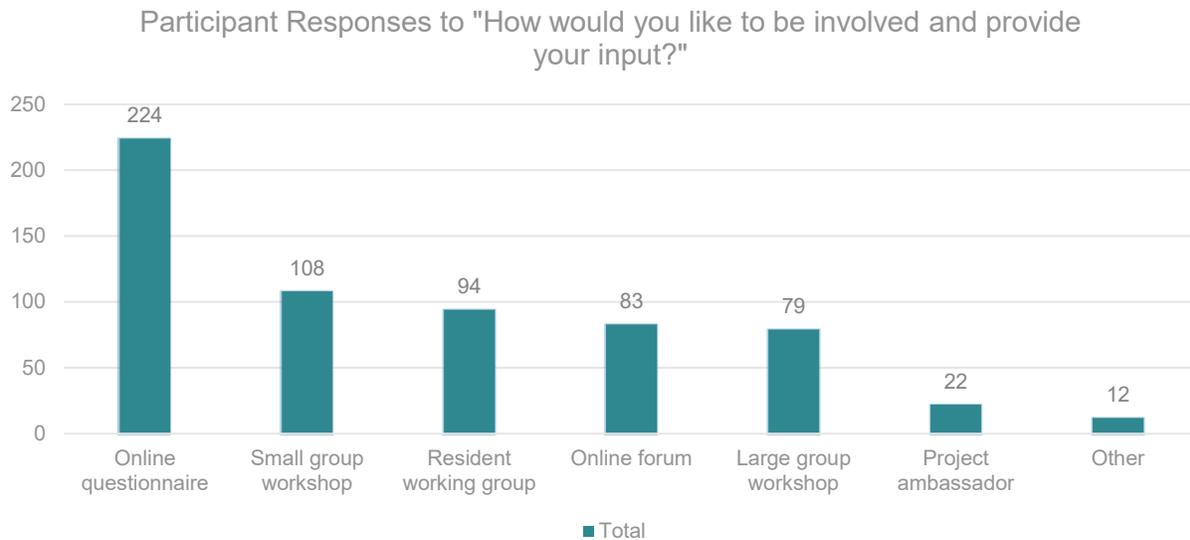


Participants appreciated the opportunity to learn more about this process, to provide input and to have face to face time with CVRD staff and discuss the issues most important to them. Participants considered the videos and presentations highly effective ways to share information about the CVRD's work.

Participants also expressed wanting more specific information in areas such as policies and zoning processes, and felt it was important to define more technical terms. Others wanted to see more opportunity for dialogue with staff and other residents, and more geographically distributed events. Participants were asked through all engagement channels how they would like to be involved in the next phase of engagement for the MOCP.

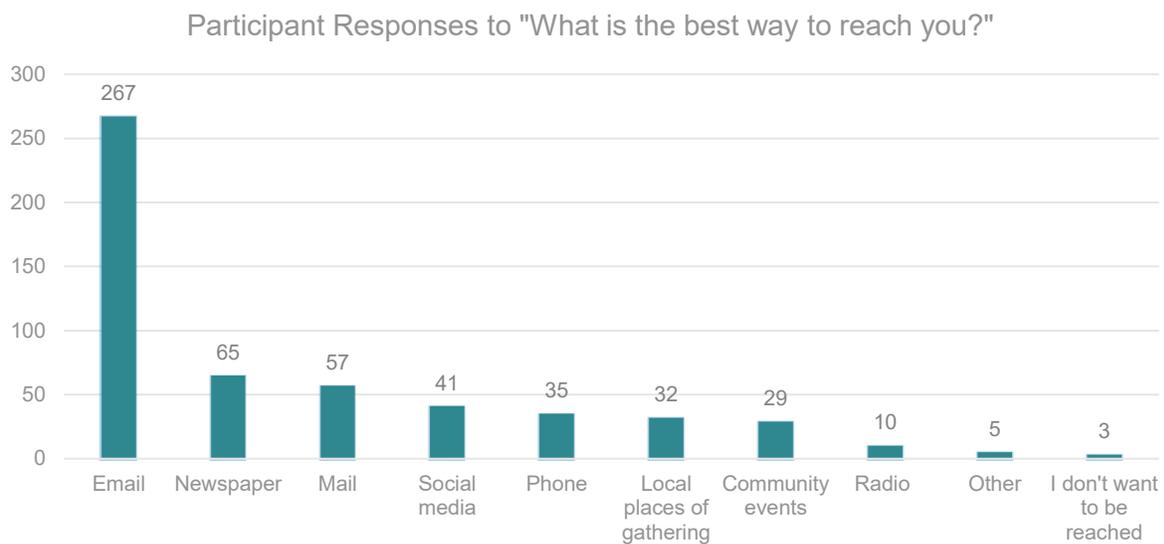
Participants expressed the most interest in taking part in online questionnaires and in small group workshops and resident working groups (Figure 5).

Figure 6 Participant responses to how they would like to be involved in the future



Participants identified email as the preferred method to reach them. This option received more than four times the number of responses than the next most preferred method (Figure 6).

Figure 5 Participant responses to how they would like to be reached



7 NEXT STEPS

Resident participation in the first phase of engagement activities was crucial to exploring aspirations for the future of the CVRD and to building relationships with community members so they are connected and involved moving forward.

Based on the initial understanding of electoral area residents' values and principles, the planning team will begin to develop a communications and engagement strategy for the RMOCP. Moving forward, CVRD residents can expect to see the following types of engagement activities, either in person or virtually:

- *Speaker series:* Participants expressed wanting more information about planning and specific policy ideas. The CVRD will host a speaker series to help raise awareness of planning policy opportunities. This may take place virtually.
- *More diverse opportunities to participate online:* Online questionnaires were by far the most popular way participants would like to be involved in the future; however, we also heard that some participants found PlaceSpeak difficult to navigate and did not like having to sign up for an account. Moving forward, participants can expect diverse online engagement opportunities.
- *Youth engagement:* Participants under 45 are underrepresented to date and an important demographic to engage in this process. Moving forward, the team will plan for targeted youth and family events, including exploring partnerships with local schools and youth groups. These may take place virtually.
- *Mobilizing a network of community circles:* Some participants and groups expressed the desire to host future events, and there was much interest in more geographically distributed small group discussions. For the fall or later depending on Covid-19 recovery we are planning community circles in which community members are provided with a basic orientation and a discussion toolkit to then host their own event and submit their group's feedback to the CVRD. Orientation and meetings could be hosted virtually.
- *Large public events with opportunity for dialogue:* Participants expressed the desire for electoral area-specific townhalls and more opportunities for dialogue. In person townhalls are dependent on COVID-19 recovery and virtual options for a townhall style event are being explored.
- *Active email list:* Email was identified as the most popular way to keep residents informed throughout the process; thus, the team has started to compile a project email list including the emails of organizations who can help spread the word for future engagement opportunities.

We look forward to your continued involvement moving forward. Please check out our project website (www.cvrld.bc.ca/regionalocp) for project updates and to sign up for our project email list.

