Pickering Forward: Official Plan Review

Growth Management and Urban Structure Engagement Summary Report

January 2025

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Executive Summary

During engagement on the Growth Management and Urban Structure component of Pickering Forward, the City of Pickering's Official Plan Review, input was gathered from over 200 residents through two Public Information Centres and an online survey. Key emerging themes included the importance of thoughtful urban planning, design, and land use that balances growth with preserving community character. Key priorities included the integration of mixed-use developments to promote walkability and equitable access to commercial, social, and community services. Residents highlighted the need for the strategic placement of differing building heights and land uses (particularly for industrial businesses) to achieve liveable neighbourhoods with vibrant public spaces and streetscapes – while addressing challenges such as traffic management, adequate infrastructure, preservation of natural areas or preservation of natural heritage, and building shadows. This input will guide the development of the updated Official Plan, ensuring it reflects the community's ideas regarding Pickering's growth.

This report was written by LURA Consulting, the independent community engagement team retained to deliver the community engagement. It summarizes the community's diverse input and offers recommendations and pathways for the City of Pickering's Official Plan to align with modern community goals.

Section 1: Project Overview
Project Description and Engagement Objectives

The City of Pickering is updating its Official Plan, the City's long-range, comprehensive planning document that guides land use decision-making in the City. An Official Plan addresses issues such as the following:

- Where new housing, industry, offices, and shops will be located.
- What services will be needed, such as roads, water mains, sewers, parks and schools.
- How to protect what is important, such as the natural environment and cultural heritage.
- When, where, and in what order the community will grow.
- Where and how the City will invest in community improvement initiatives.

The purpose of the engagement activities was to:

- Provide a recap of the Pickering Forward process and topics
- Describe growth pressures faced by Pickering and the legislative requirements that the City must meet
- Discuss how to accommodate that growth in a balanced manner
- Identify resident and stakeholder priorities as growth occurs

This engagement report summarizes input from the second community conversation of the City's Official Plan Review. Community input on how and where growth will occur in Pickering will inform the major themes in the Official Plan.

Figure 1 – Pickering Forward project logo.

Section 2: Engagement Process and Communication Methods

Figure 2 – Image of attendees engaging in the table activity at the in-person Public Information Centre.

Engagement Methods

For input on Growth Management and Urban Structure, the City of Pickering engaged with residents throughout November and December of 2024, hosting both an in-person and virtual Public Information Centre and an online survey to gather input from the community. In total, 211 people participated during this round of engagement.

In-Person Public Information Centre

On November 27, 2024, the project team hosted an in-person Public Information Centre at the Chestnut Hill Developments Recreation Complex (1867 Valley Farm Road). Approximately 20 people attended the event. A brief presentation was given by City staff at the start of the event, discussing Pickering's growth management and urban structure, including how many people and jobs are projected to be accommodated in the future, the provincial and regional rules that the City must follow, as well as the importance of imagining how, where and in what form the growth will occur within the city in the future. Afterward, small groups were formed to participate in a hands-on exercise, using colour-coded blocks to visualize and demonstrate how to accommodate different building heights and uses within imaginary city blocks.

Appendix A includes a more detailed summary of the in-person Public Information Centre.

Virtual Public Information Centre

On November 28, 2024, the project team hosted a virtual Public Information Centre via Zoom. Approximately 22 people attended the online event. A presentation was given by City staff at the start of the meeting, discussing Pickering's growth management and urban structure, including how many people and jobs are projected to be accommodated in the future, the provincial and

regional rules that the City must follow, as well as the importance of imagining how, where and in what form the growth with occur within the city in the future. The presentation was followed by a question and answer period with attendees.

Appendix B includes a more detailed summary and the raw comments from the virtual Public Information Centre.

Online Survey

From November 27, 2024, to December 13, 2024, the City of Pickering hosted an online survey on Let's Talk Pickering. Survey questions sought community input on key priorities for urban intensification, industrial compatibility, residential neighbourhood enhancements, housing strategies, and best practices for creating lively streetscapes, vibrant public spaces, and seamless transitions between building types. In total, 169 people responded to the online survey, providing their comments, thoughts, and preferences to inform the Growth Management and Urban Structure section of the Official Plan review. Survey respondents' demographic details are in the **Who Participated** section below.

Appendix C includes a more detailed summary and the results from the questions**.**

Communication Methods

The City of Pickering used various communication methods to advertise the Official Plan review and engagement opportunities. Information was shared through the following channels:

- Via email with interested parties, registered ratepayers' groups, and Committee of Council liaisons.
- Published multiple notices on social media, including paid pushes on Facebook.
- Issued a media release.
- Displayed digital message boards throughout the City.
- Posters were placed in all City library branches.
- Details were posted on the City's website and online public notices section.

Engagement and Reach

Table 1 showcases the reach of engagement throughout the engagement period.

Table 1: Summary of engagement activities.

Engagement Activity	Date	Location or Format	Attendance or Response Count
In-Person Public Information Centre	November 27, 2024, 6 pm-8 pm	In-person at the Chestnut Hill Developments Recreation Complex	**20**
Virtual Public Information Centre	November 28, 2024, 7 pm-8 pm	Online via Zoom	**22**
Online Survey	November 27, 2024 - December 13, 2024	Online via Let's Talk Pickering	**169**
		TOTAL	211

Data Analysis Methodology

Input was gathered through in-person and virtual PICs, as well as through an online survey. Where responses were received to a quantitative question, results have been quantified. All qualitative responses received during this phase have undergone a thematic analysis. This involves summarizing and categorizing qualitative data to capture important concepts with the data set.

Section 3: What We Heard

This section summarizes the key themes heard throughout community engagement on Growth Management and Urban Structure.

In-Person Public Information Centre

Below are highlights of the findings from the in-person Public Information Centre. Discussions from each table are captured thematically based on discussion during the activity.

Table One

Figure 3 - Image of the Table One participants engaging in the table activity

Table One's design placed most blocks along the main street, creating mixed-use development. They were mindful of balancing impacts on neighbourhood character and potential backlash to higher density development. They aimed to minimize the overshadowing of schools and existing neighbourhoods, create gradual height transitions from high to low areas, and maintain mixed-use zones. They focused on the interactions of building heights near the school, opting to include mixed-use developments to provide amenities near the school. The group discussed the role of parkland, with suggestions for incorporating green roofs and adding parks near schools and underserved neighbourhoods. No specific input was provided regarding vibrant public spaces and lively streets, leaving this aspect underexplored. Table One achieved agreement on

some elements but required more time to reach a full consensus. Overall, the biggest challenge was navigating difficulties related to mixed-use assumptions and constraints posed by existing neighbourhoods.

Table Two

Figure 4 - Image of the Table Two participants engaging in the table activity

Table Two's design achieved a general consensus by prioritizing a distinct central core and creating pedestrian-friendly, livable spaces. They avoided placing self-storage facilities in residential zones and emphasized having institutions and infrastructure to support growth. The group concentrated on placing high-density developments in the central area and along the main street, with building heights tapering near schools and neighbourhoods. Parkland influenced the layout significantly, with strong agreement on having many green corridors, shaded walkable areas, and integrated parks. Businesses were placed along the main street to ensure vibrant public spaces and active streets. Overall, Table Two's biggest challenge included resistance to self-storage and balancing design constraints with achieving a layout that meets the community's needs as a whole.

Table Three

Figure 5 - Image of the Table Three participants engaging in the table activity.

Table Three's design aimed to create a successful, complete community with equitable access to amenities. Their priorities included walkability, and distributing stores and parks across neighbourhoods. Taller buildings were strategically placed along transit routes and behind mid-rise structures on the main street to avoid canyon effects, while clustering of high-rise buildings was avoided. Parkland was designed as smaller, evenly distributed parks throughout the community. The group was inspired by vibrant public spaces and lively streets in Toronto (e.g., Regent Park and Queen Street). Overall, Table Three's biggest challenge was balancing the needs of new developments with existing neighbourhoods.

Table Four

Figure 6 - Image of the Table Four participants engaging in the table activity.

Table Four achieved general consensus by focusing on high-density planning and urban growth. Their priorities included placing promenades near towers, situating commercial spaces at major intersections, and balancing car dependency with urban design. Services were strategically located near homes to minimize traffic impacts. Density was spread evenly across the map, with efforts to integrate the community, provide supportive services, and avoid excessive shadows or traffic issues. Parkland was incorporated as mixed-use spaces featuring natural elements. The group approached vibrant public spaces by incorporating promenades with mixed-use buildings, including retail at street level and apartments above. Overall, Table Four noted challenges associated with limited space for affordable housing, uncertainty about transit stops and traffic flow, and the need for a context-specific map to better align with Pickering's unique landscape.

Commonalities across all four tables

Overall, all the table participants prioritized placing most blocks along the main street using mixed-use development to create a distinct and pedestrian-friendly central core. This is except for Table Three, which valued the distribution of stores across the entire map evenly to ensure accessibility to all areas. Another shared priority included avoiding overshadowing and overcrowding by creating gradual height transitions using an intentional placement and mix of high-rise, mid-rise, and low-rise developments. Regarding parkland, the groups shared an interest in creating connected and well-distributed park systems and increasing the presence of parks near schools and underserved neighbourhoods. Overall, the biggest challenge faced by the table participants was coming to a consensus that appropriately balanced new growth with existing communities and their needs.

Online Survey

Below are highlights of the findings from the online survey. Each multiple-choice question includes a graph showing responses and themes emerging from ideas respondents provided under 'Other' in the list of survey answers. Open-ended questions are summarized thematically.

Mixed-Use

As intensification occurs in the City Centre and along the Kingston Road Corridor, which aspects are most important for the community? Choose all that apply.
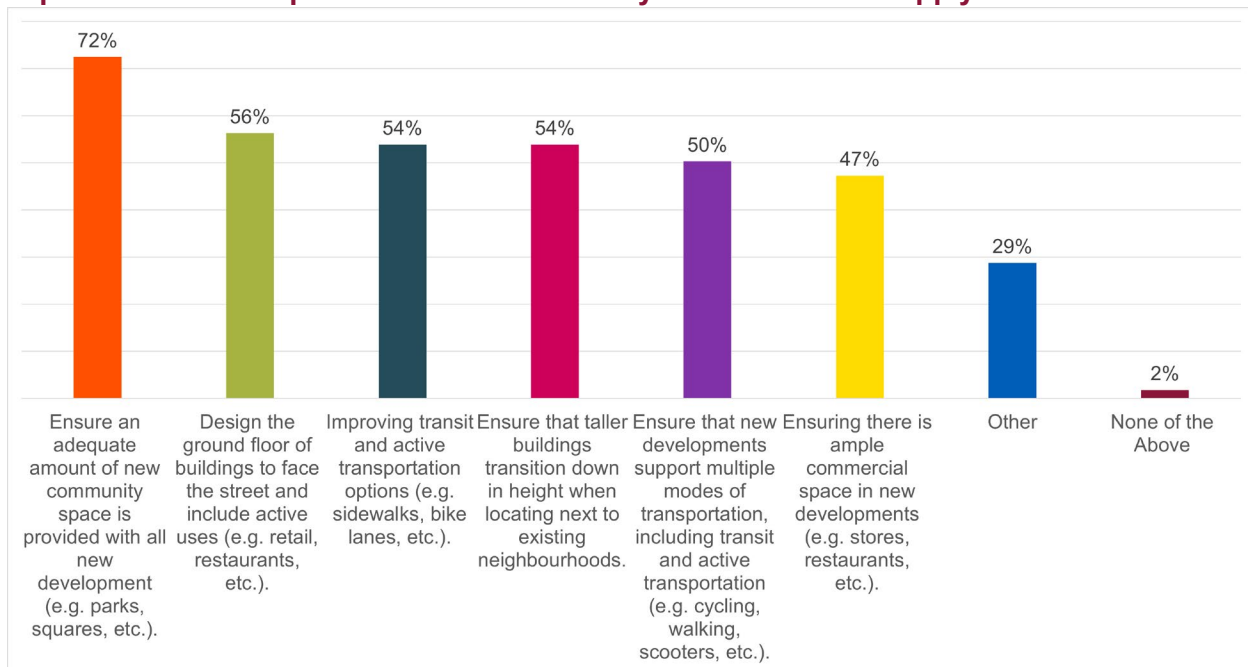

Figure 7 – Summary of the most important aspects to the community when intensifying the City Centre and along Kingston Road Corridor.   *n = 167*

Figure 7 shows most respondents selected "Ensure an adequate amount of new community space is provided with all new development (e.g. parks, squares, etc.)" (72%) as the aspect most important for the community as intensification occurs. The remaining selections each received similar support (47%-56%).

Additional comments received as "Other" (29%) are summarized below:

- Infrastructure Improvements
  - Upgrade public utilities (water, sewer, electrical, broadband) for higher density.
  - Expand schools, hospitals, and recreation facilities to meet population growth.
  - Widen key roads and enhance traffic management at bottlenecks like Bayly Street and Kingston Road.
- Community-Centric Urban Planning
  - Prioritize compatible land use to ensure new developments respect existing uses.
  - Actively involve residents to address diverse community needs and priorities.

- o Prioritize accessibility for all ages and abilities.
- Environmental Considerations
  - o Preserve and expand green spaces, gardens, and tree canopies.
  - o Integrate green roofs, pathways and sustainable features in new developments.
  - o Beautify intensification areas with landscaping, lighting, and seasonal features.
- Mixed-use Development and Housing
  - o Encourage diverse housing, including low-rise buildings, and affordable and family-friendly units.
  - o Include retail, cultural and community spaces in new developments.
  - o Ensure setbacks to reduce noise pollution and enhance pedestrian experience.
- Long-Term Planning
  - o Spread development beyond Kingston Road Corridor to balanced urban growth.
  - o Ensure social services (e.g. police, fire, and medical facilities) can address increased demands.
  - o Safeguard long-time businesses and provide affordable commercial.

What industrial-type businesses are appropriate to be built near stores and homes? Choose all that apply.
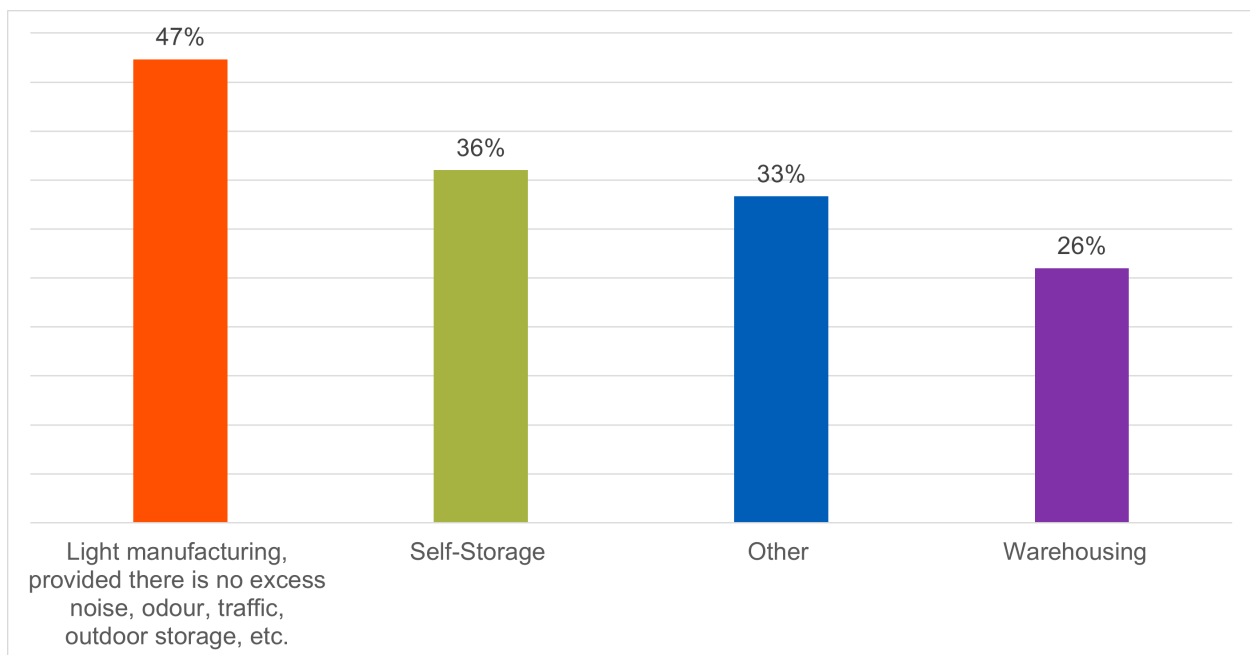
Figure 8 - Summary of the appropriate industrial-type business to be built near stores and homes. n = 150

Figure 8 shows, most respondents selected "Light manufacturing, provided there is no excess noise, odour, traffic, outdoor storage, etc." (47%), followed by "Self-Storage" (36%), and "Warehousing" (26%), as a response to which industrial-type businesses are appropriate to be built near stores and homes.

Additional comments received as "Other" (33%) are summarized below, including those who responded "none":

- Do not locate industrial businesses in these areas
  - Concerns about property value decline as well as increased noise, pollution, and traffic congestion.
  - Disapproval of self-storage and warehouses for aesthetic purposes.
- Mitigation Strategies
  - Ensure that industrial businesses near homes are safe and well-designed.
  - Confine large-scale industrial developments to designated industrial zones.
  - Traffic flow, noise, pollution, and security risks should be minimized, particularly in areas close to schools, parks, and recreation centers.
- Other Businesses
  - Prioritize small-scale retail that serve local needs (e.g. restaurants, coffee shops).
  - Support professional service and entrepreneurial ventures connected to academic institutions.
  - Prioritize green industries and tech-focused hubs (e.g., renewable energy and recycling facilities).

What are the most important considerations for ensuring industrial-type businesses are compatible in locating near stores and homes?

- Green Mitigation Strategies
  - Control noise, air pollution, odor, and light pollution near residents.
  - Use green infrastructure (e.g. landscaping, green rooftops, and tree planting) to buffer industrial uses from residential areas.
  - Prioritize sustainability among industrial buildings (e.g. solar panels and energy efficiency).
- Traffic Management
  - Restrict truck routes and hours of operation to ensure pedestrian and cyclist safety and provide ample parking to reduce congestion.
  - Separate industrial traffic from residential and commercial traffic.
  - Ensure industrial areas near residential homes are walkable and have transit options.
- Building Design
  - Industrial buildings should blend into the aesthetic of the neighbourhood (well-maintained exteriors, decorative landscaping, etc.).
  - Implement underground parking, hidden loading docks, and compact building footprints.
  - Include public amenities (green spaces, pathways, sidewalks, and third spaces) to foster a sense of community to surrounding residents.

Existing Neighbourhoods

Aside from homes, what other things are appropriate in residential neighbourhoods? Choose all that apply.
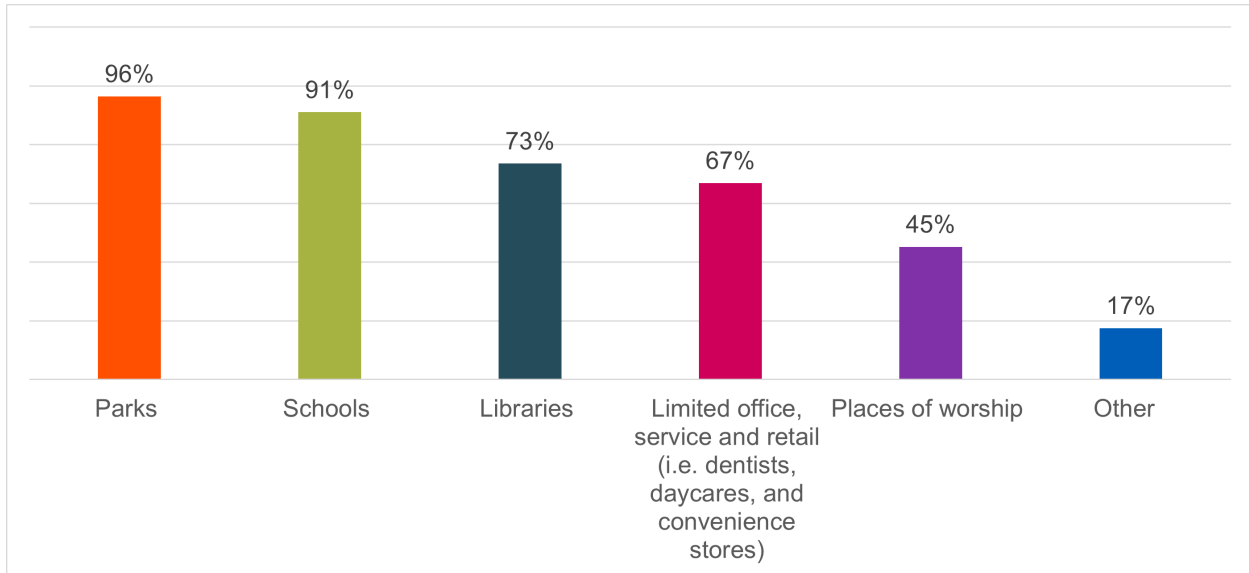

Figure 9 - Summary of features that are appropriate in residential neighbourhoods.   *n = 166*

Figure 9 shows most respondents selected "Parks" (96%), "Schools" (91%), "Libraries" (73%), and "Limited office, service and retail (i.e. dentists, daycares, and convenience stores)" (67%) as a response to what other things are appropriate in residential neighbourhoods, aside from homes.

Additional comments received as "Other" (17%) are summarized below:

- Recreation and Green Spaces
  - Natural spaces such as gardens and trails.
  - Active areas such as playgrounds, splash pads, fitness stations, and multi-use activity courts.
- Community and Social Spaces
  - Community hubs for activities and events (e.g., food vendors).
  - Plazas designed for walkability with mixed-use and small-scale businesses.
  - Infrastructure to support pedestrian, cyclist, and transit use.
- Retail and Services
  - Grocery stores, coffee shops, and small retail.
  - Include essential services such as fire stations, clinics, banks, and daycares.
- Public and Cultural Facilities
  - Cultural spaces (e.g. museums or galleries).
  - Community centres with shared facilities for multiple uses.

How should the City plan to add more homes to existing neighbourhoods? Choose all that apply.
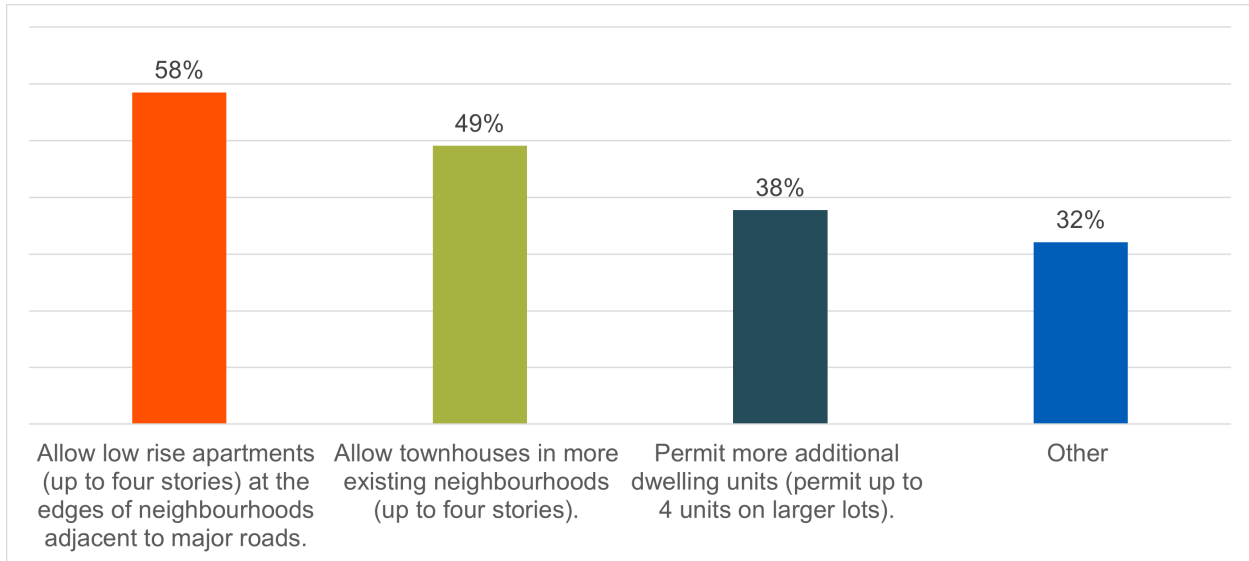

Figure 10 - Summary of how the City should plan to add more homes to existing neighbourhoods. n = 159

Figure 10 shows most respondents selected "Allow low-rise apartments (up to four stories) at the edges of neighbourhoods adjacent to major roads" (58%), followed by "Allow townhouses in more existing neighbourhoods (up to four stories)" (49%) as a response to how the City should plan to add more homes to existing neighborhoods.

Amongst those who provided "Other" replies, there was both support and resistance to adding more homes (intensifying) within existing neighbourhoods. The responses below (32%) reflect the concerns that respondents want to see mitigated.

- Mitigation Strategies
  - Ensure that increasing housing does not cause overcrowding, increased traffic, or strain on infrastructure such as schools, green spaces, transit and parking.
  - Prioritize sustainability through walkability, bike baths, and public transit.
  - Maintain green spaces, gardens, and backyards to ensure resident well-being.
- Low-Density Options
  - Townhouses, semi-detached homes, and small-scale apartment buildings are desired to fit the neighbourhood character as opposed to high-rises.
- Mixed-Use and Adaptive Reuse
  - Create mixed-use developments, such as rental units above retail spaces.
  - Convert non-residential buildings into housing (e.g., warehouses, offices etc.).
  - Simplify permit processes to allow homeowners to renovate or add rental units.

Employment Growth and Economic Activity

How can the Pickering Official Plan support industrial and economic growth in Pickering? Choose all that apply.

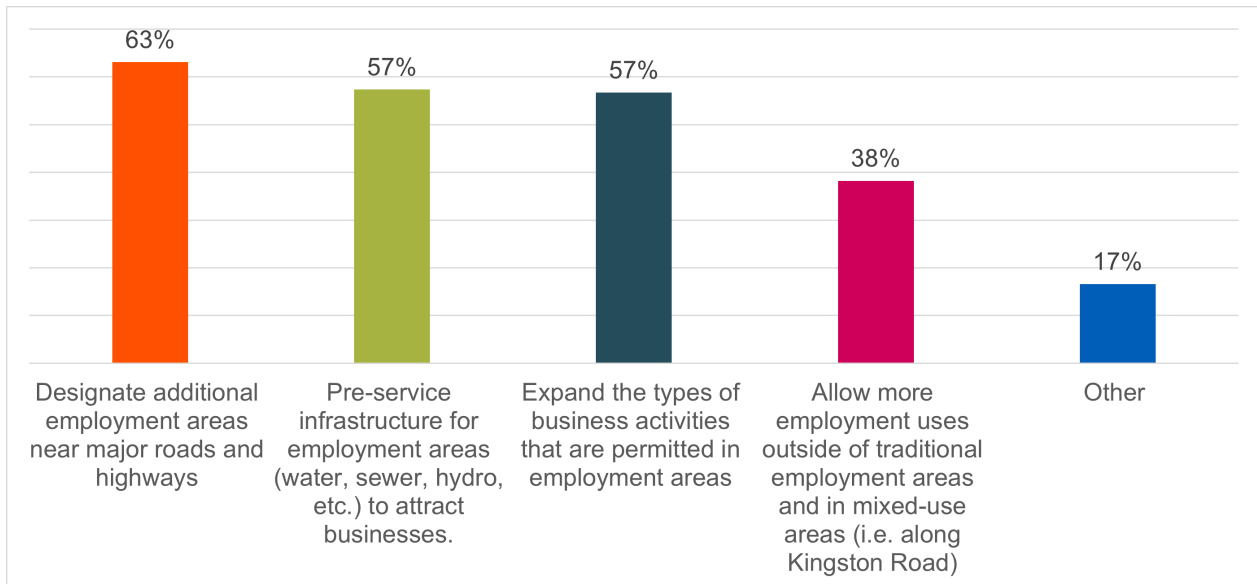*Figure 11 - Summary of how the Pickering Official Plan can support industrial and economic growth in Pickering.*   *n = 157*

Figure 11 shows most respondents selected "Designate additional employment areas near major roads and highways" (63%), "Pre-service infrastructure for employment areas (water, sewer, hydro, etc.) to attract businesses" (57%), and "Expand the types of business activities that are permitted in employment areas" (57%) as a response to how the Official Plan can support industrial and economic growth in Pickering.

Additional comments received as "Other" (17%) are summarized below:

- Traffic and Transit Improvements
    - Address road congestion and improve traffic flow (e.g., expand roads and improve highway access).
    - Build cohesive and diverse transit infrastructure to connect residential and industrial areas (e.g., better bus routes and bike lanes).
- Efficient Use of Existing Resources and Land
    - Protect existing retail zones from being replaced by residential projects.
    - Encourage co-working spaces and small office hubs to support remote workers and small businesses.
- Sustainability and Livability
    - Conduct thorough environmental studies to protect ecosystems and wetlands.
    - Avoid development that harms sensitive areas.
- Innovation and Economic Growth
    - Provide incentives to attract innovative businesses.

      ○   Streamline approval processes for new developments.

Urban Design

Which of the best practices for transitioning from taller buildings to houses are most important? Choose all that apply.
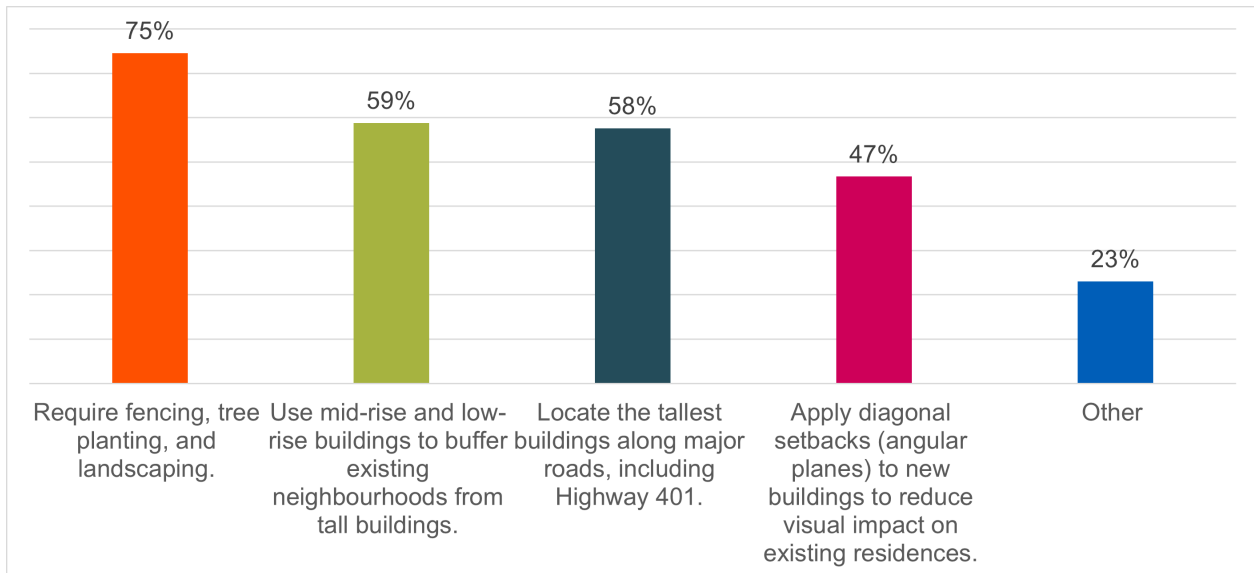

Figure 12 - Summary of the most important practices for transitioning from taller buildings to houses n=165.

Figure 12 shows most respondents selected "Require fencing, tree planting, and landscaping" (75%), followed by "Use mid-rise and low-rise buildings to buffer existing neighbourhoods from tall buildings" (59%), and "Locate the tallest buildings along major roads, including Highway 401" (58%) as a response to which best practices are most important for transitioning from taller buildings to houses.

Additional comments received as "Other" (23%) are summarized below:

- Building Heights
  - Focus on mid-rise and low-rise developments instead of high-rises to ensure a gradual transition to existing residential areas.
- Buffers
  - Create buffers such as parks, green spaces, and landscaping to separate high-rises from low-rises.
  - Require open spaces around and between tall buildings, with a ratio proportional to the height of the building.
  - Use public spaces as shared amenities to foster community (e.g., community gardens, pedestrian-friendly areas, and recreation zones).
- Design and Aesthetics
  - Ensure that privacy is maintained by carefully designing balconies, windows, and setbacks to minimize overlooking of homes.

- o Mitigate shadowing effects on residential areas with thoughtful design and positioning of tall buildings.
- o Promote visually interesting and compatible architecture rather than generic glass condos.
- • Sustainability and Livability
- o Incorporate sustainable elements such as green roofs, forested spaces, and pollinator-friendly landscaping.
- o Include community hubs within buildings (e.g., libraries, coffee shops, bike repair stations, etc.).

Which of the best practices for achieving lively streetscapes are most important? Choose all that apply.
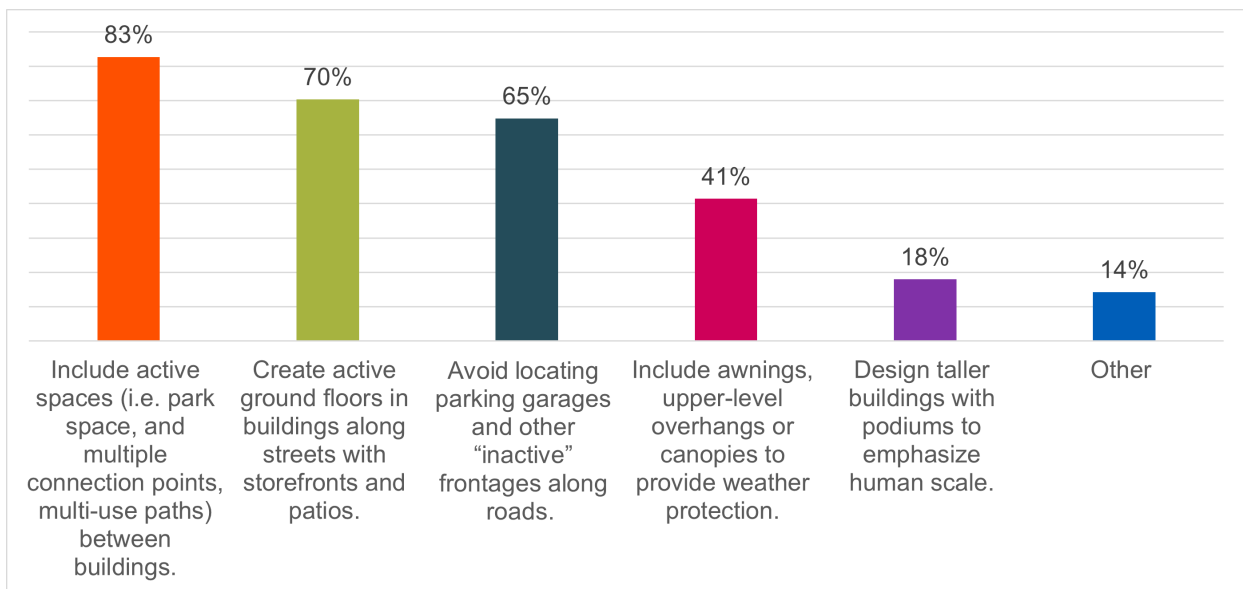

Figure 13 - Summary of best practices for achieving lively streetscapes. *n=162*

Figure 13 shows most respondents selected "Include active spaces (i.e. park space, and multiple connection points, multi-use paths) between buildings" (83%), "Create active ground floors in buildings along streets with storefronts and patios" (70%), and "Avoid locating parking garages and other "inactive" frontages along roads" (65%) as a response to which best practices are most important for achieving lively streetscapes.

Additional comments received as "Other" (14%) are summarized below:

- • Walkability
- o Ensure streets support pedestrians, transit and cyclist use to reduce the reliance on cars.
- o Provide setbacks from busy roads for quieter, more pleasant pedestrian experiences.
- o Incorporate plazas or small squares with retail shops off major roads to encourage community gatherings.

- Greenery
  - Enhance the scenery by incorporating greenery (e.g., trees, plants, and flowers).
  - Create landscaped buffers between buildings and streets.
  - Reduce and replace parking lots with green spaces (e.g., gardens and green roofs).
- Street Furniture and Aesthetics
  - Ensure lively streetscapes remain accessible and comfortable year-round by providing shading, seating, benches, and rest areas.
  - Incorporate outdoor dining, patios, and coffee shops to achieve an activated streetscape.
  - Include public art and other attractions to draw people into the area.

Which of the best practices for achieving vibrant public spaces are most important? Choose all that apply.
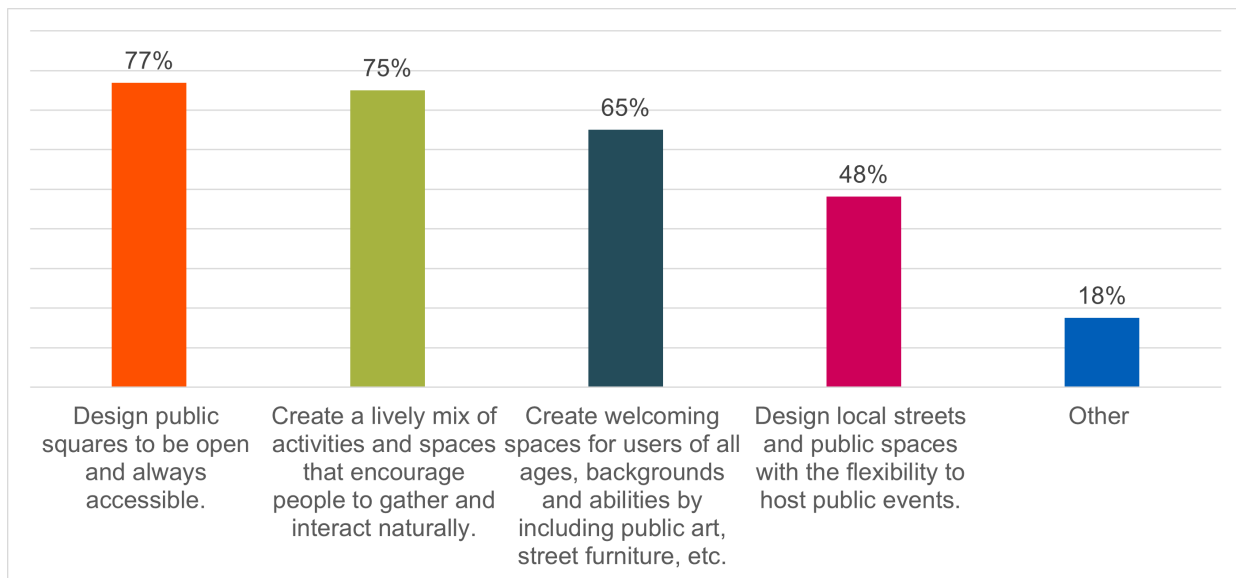

Figure 14 - Summary of best practices for achieving vibrant public spaces.   *n=160*

Figure 14 shows most respondents selected "Design public squares to be open and always accessible" (77%), "Create a lively mix of activities and spaces that encourage people to gather and interact naturally" (75%), and "Create welcoming spaces for users of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities by including public art, street furniture, etc." (65%) as a response to which best practices are most important for achieving vibrant public spaces.

Additional comments received as "Other" (18%) are summarized below:

- Accessibility
  - Ensure public spaces are walkable, bikeable, and accessible to all users.
  - Add seating, benches, shelters, and shaded areas to make spaces usable in all weather conditions.
  - Provide public restrooms.
- Greenery and Landscaping

- Create and maintain parks, green pathways, and natural spaces with trees, plants, and greenery.
- Incorporate multi-use parks that connect the city.
- Consult with experts to ensure public spaces support environmental sustainability.
- Amenities
  - Encourage street food vendors, open-air markets, and spaces for local vendors.
  - Provide public art, interactive elements, and community gardens to foster engagement and connection.
  - Include flexible spaces for diverse activities (e.g., outdoor dining, public performances, and community gatherings).
- Safety
  - Use lighting and CCTV to enhance safety and deter unwanted behavior.
  - Design public spaces to feel open, welcoming, and uncrowded.
- Cultural and Social Opportunities
  - Build performance centers, museums, cultural centers, and sports venues.
  - Host City-sponsored events to activate public spaces (e.g., concerts and cultural festivals).

Additional Questions

Are the current Official Plan maps easy to read and understand (i.e. can you find specific land uses and where higher density developments are anticipated)?
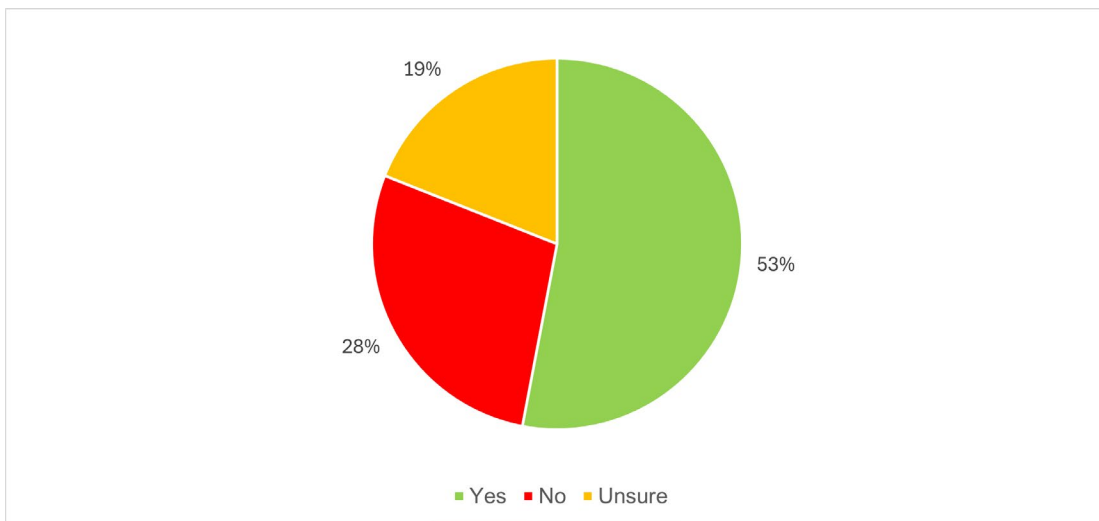

Figure 15 - Summary of how easy the current Official Plan maps are to read and understand.   n=164

Figure 15 shows half of respondents selected "Yes" (53%), and half of respondents replied "No" (28%) or "Unsure" (19%) as a response to if the current Official Plan maps are easy to read and understand.

What improvements would make the Official Plan maps easier to understand?

- Simplicity
  - o Use fewer categories and classifications.
  - o Simplify terms such as "nodes" and "corridors" into plain language.
- Accessibility
  - o Provide maps that focus on smaller regions, wards, or neighbourhoods.
  - o Clearly label major roads, rivers, parks, schools, hospitals, and amenities.
  - o Enhance colour coding by using distinct colours.
  - o Include a digital map where users can zoom in for street-level details or enlarge specific areas.

Who Participated

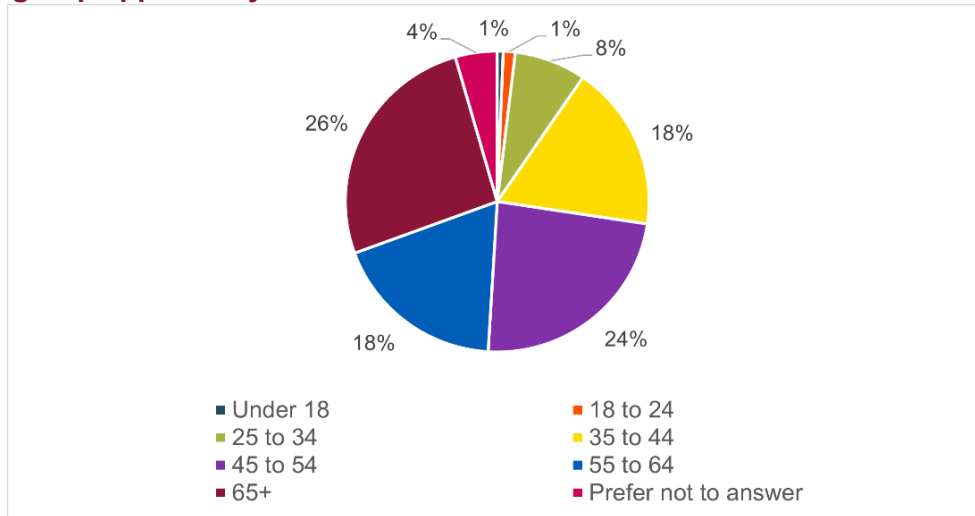**What age group applies to you?**

Figure 16 - Summary of participant ages.   *n = 157*

Figure 16 shows most online survey respondents were between 35 and 65+, with:

- 26% being over 65;
- 24% between 45 and 54;
- 18% between 35 and 44; and
- 18% between 55 and 64.
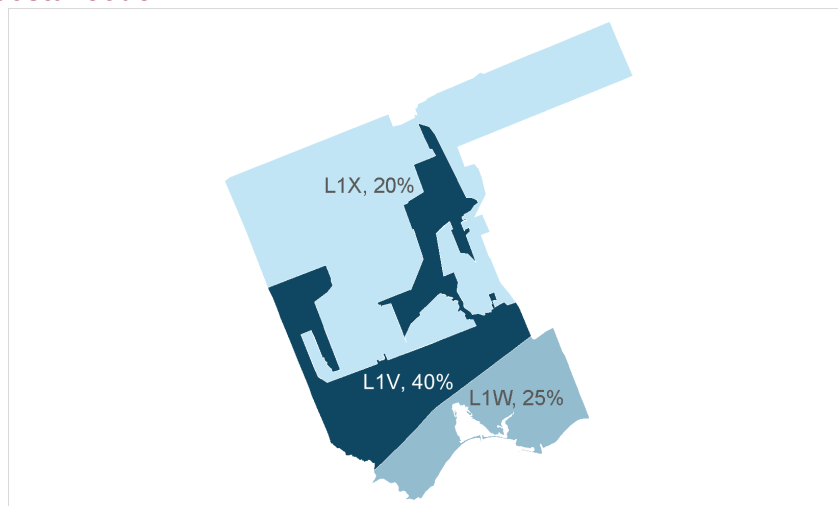
What is your postal code?

Figure 17 – Summary of participant postal codes.   *n = 151*

Figure 17 shows most online survey respondents live in the L1V, L1W, and L1X postal code areas. Forty percent (40%) live in the L1V postal code area, 25% live in the L1W postal code

area, and 20% live in the L1X postal code area, the remaining 15% were respondents from other postal code areas.

Section 4: Next Steps

Input from this engagement will be used to inform revisions to the Official Plan in regard to Growth Management and Urban Structure.

The next PIC will be in February 2025 to discuss *Natural Heritage, Hazards and Sustainability*. This will discuss what elements of the City must be protected and enhanced to support Pickering's long-term prosperity and well-being. Topics include opportunities for conservation of the natural environment, methods to avoid harms from natural hazards, and environmentally sustainable practices to grow the City and its infrastructure.

The PICs will provide an opportunity for more detailed conversations on how legislative changes, Pickering initiatives, and best practices will impact each of the listed topics. Further details on timelines are included below in Figure 18.
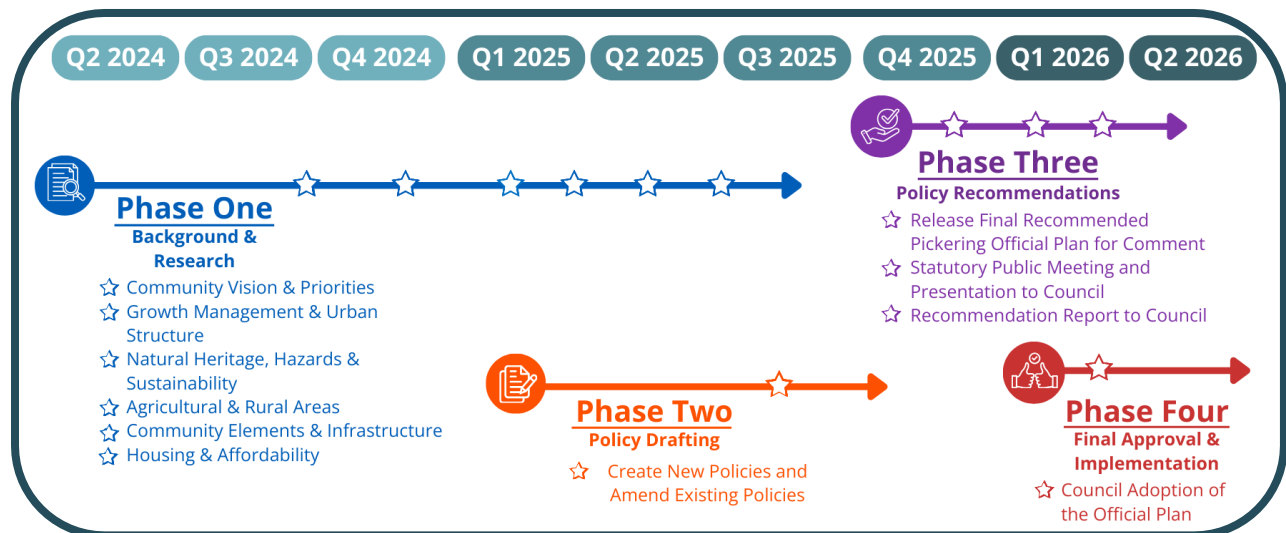

Figure 18 – Illustration of the Pickering Forward phases and breakdown.