



Township of Essa New Official Plan

Engagement Summary #3
November 2025



DILLON
CONSULTING

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1.0 Introduction

Like every municipality, the Township of Essa has an Official Plan, a key document that lays out where and how we plan to grow into the future, and guides where we live, work, and play. The Township's current Official Plan was put into effect on July 6, 2001. In 2020, the Township of Essa started developing a new Official Plan to bring the document into conformity with the latest provincial policies and community interests. The Official Plan Review was placed on hold in 2022 while the Township engaged with the Province and County of Simcoe to better understand the impact of legislative changes. Engagement on the New Official Plan resumed in August 2024.

A first round of engagement was conducted in the fall of 2024, as summarized in Engagement Summary #1. The outcomes of that round of engagement alongside background research informed the development of a set of key policy directions as well as criteria and data gathering around settlement boundary expansion in Essa, in order to accommodate future residential growth. A second round of engagement was conducted in June 2025, as summarized in Engagement Summary #2. The outcomes of the second round of engagement were used to inform the development of the Draft Official Plan and preliminary selection of lands be brought into the settlement boundary. The third round of engagement summarized in this report was conducted in November 2025 to gather feedback on the Draft Official Plan policies, which built on the background review and outcomes of engagement to date.

This summary provides an overview of the in-person and online public engagement held in November 2025. Please refer to the project website for summaries of past engagements that were completed in earlier stages of the review for the Essa Official Plan, which are also being considered and feedback brought forward into the current development of the new Official Plan: <https://www.essatownship.on.ca/official-plan-review/>.

2.0 Community Open House #3

An in-person session was held at the Essa Township offices in Council Chambers on November 12th, 2025 from 5:00 - 7:00pm. Approximately 25 people attended the session. Poster boards were set up for residents to share their input on the Draft Official Plan policy directions and potential locations for settlement boundary expansions. The key feedback heard included:

- Input from landowners about potential lands to be considered as part of the settlement area boundary expansion around Angus and Baxter.
 - Concerns about parking and access for higher density residential development, and impact on the surrounding neighbourhoods.
 - Support for more walkable community design, trails, and routes for cycling and walking.
 - Importance of protecting the natural environment and agricultural lands.
 - Support for some flexibility in permissions for rural areas.
 - Concerns about the quality of new builds for multi-unit residential development, and the need to maintain standards and prevent issues with waste management, parking, and noise.
 - Concern about capacity of fire department servicing to support additional growth, particularly taller buildings.
 - Support for more planning for recreational spaces and interest in the approach to planning for access to parks and recreational areas.
 - Input on lands to be brought into the Settlement Area Boundary to support future growth.
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3.0 Online Survey #3

3.3 Participant Profile

Background

The third survey garnered 101 responses in total, of which 65 were complete to the end of the survey. The participant profile shown in **Figure 2-1** shows the majority of participants being Current Essa residents (84%), along with a number of people who work or have a business in Essa (25%), have a professional interest in growth and planning in Essa (15%), and a few who are frequent or occasional visitors to Essa, are potential future Essa residents, or are Canadian Forces Base Borden personnel.

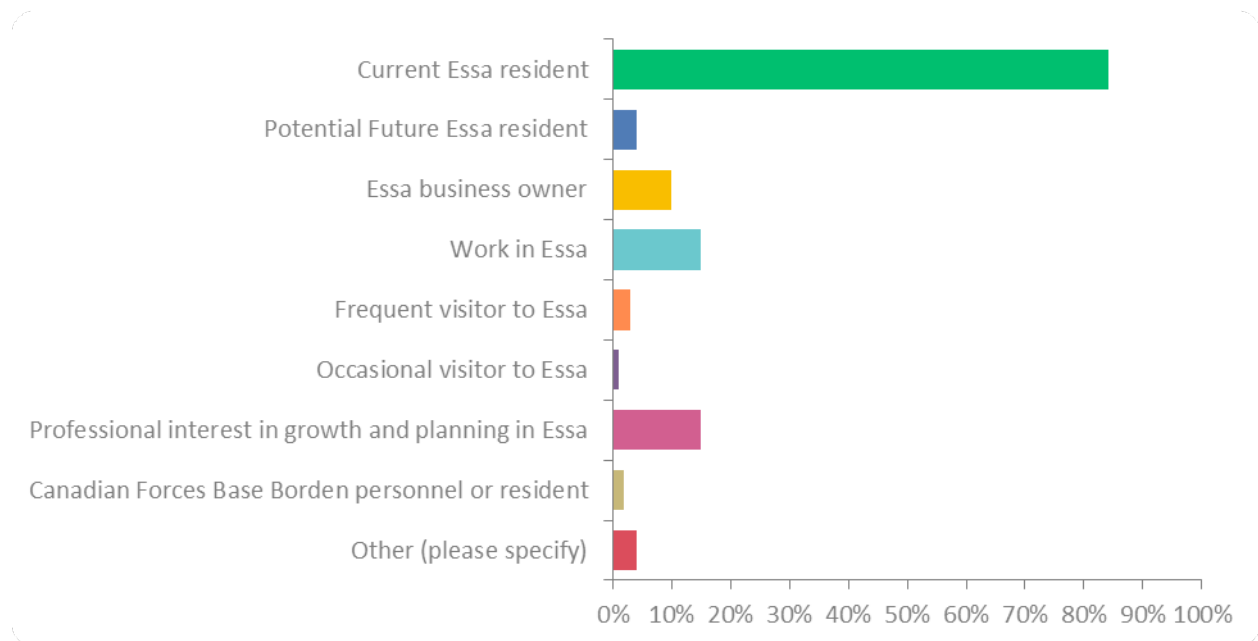


Figure 2-1 Survey #3 Participants – Background

Neighbourhood of Residence

There was some variability in the areas of Essa that survey participants resided in, with the highest number being from Angus (60%) followed by Thornton (7%), Baxter (6%), and Utopia (6%). Rural/Agricultural areas accounted for around 4%. A summary of where the survey respondents lived is shown in **Figure 2-2**.

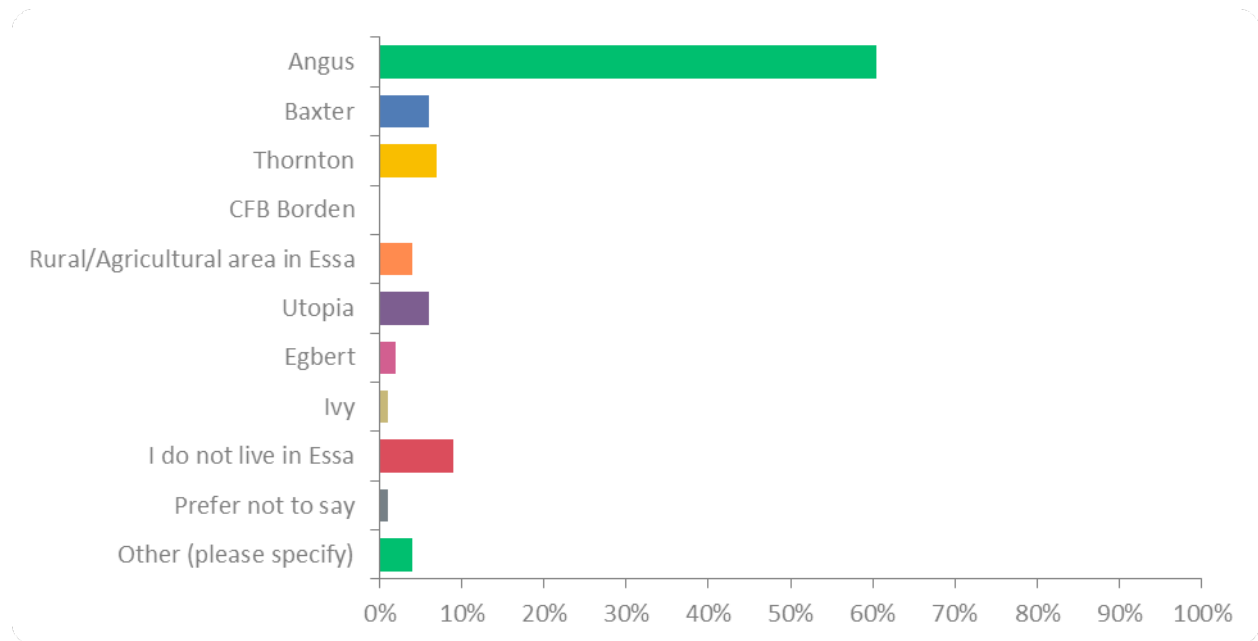


Figure 2-2 Survey #3 Participants – Neighbourhood of Residence

3.4 Proposed Approach to Growth

Overall Growth Approach

The Draft New Official Plan directs most new growth to Angus, with smaller growth in Thornton and Baxter. Utopia, Ivy, Colwell and Egbert are Rural Settlement Areas, with no municipal services and limited growth. How much do you agree or disagree with this approach?

There were 97 responses to this question as summarized on **Figure 2-3**, with majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this growth approach (58%). Another 24% were neutral or not sure, and the remainder (18%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

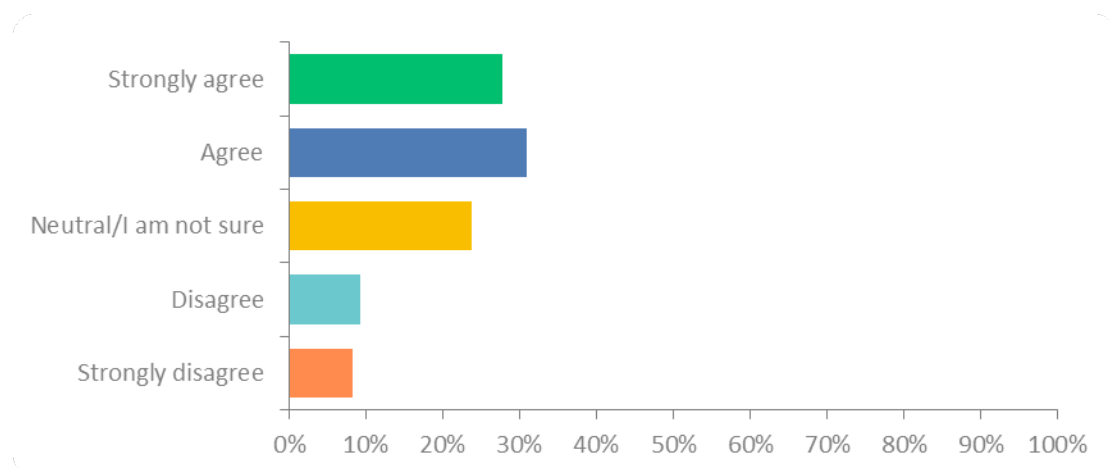


Figure 2-3 Agreement to Growth Approach.

Growth in Rural Areas

How do you feel about growth in rural areas (outside settlement boundaries)?

There were 97 responses to this question summarized on **Figure 2-4**. Of the three approaches to growth in the rural areas, the most preferred was to allow small-scale growth (41%), followed by allowing limited growth (35%) and then allowing for more housing and business options (23%).

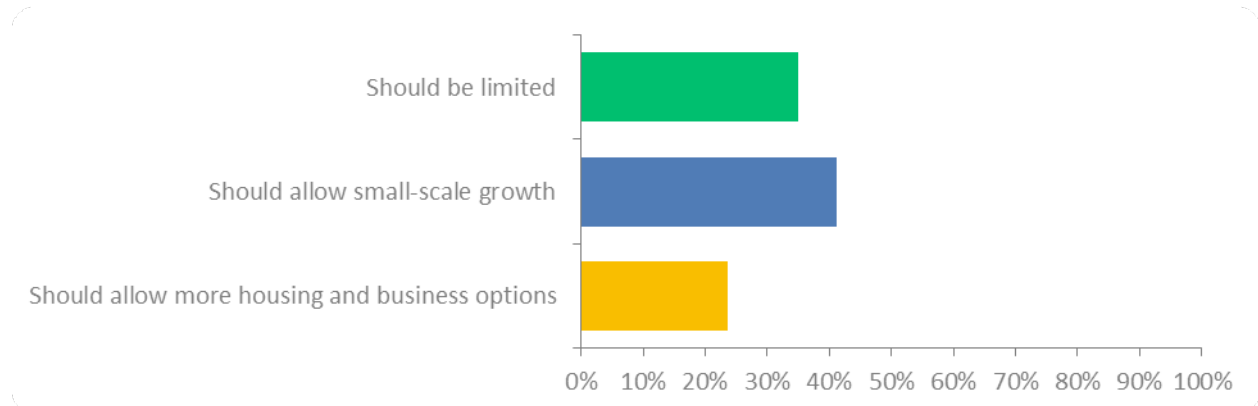


Figure 2-4 Growth in Rural Areas

In addition, respondents shared the following suggestions related to planning for growth in rural areas:

- Expanding the Baxter Settlement Area Boundary and addressing the sewage in the same manner as the Brookfield subdivision with an installation of a 'stand-alone' wastewater treatment plant.
- Tax breaks to encourage employers (for businesses where 20 or more local employees could be hired).
- Allowing growth as long as water is available.
- Allowing growth only for industrial and job creation opportunities.
- Evaluating non-agricultural or environmentally significant lands for growth over vulnerable lands within boundaries.

3.5 Policy Directions

The questions on policy directions were divided into key themes. For each theme, participants were asked about their level of support for the key draft policies, and for any additional comments or suggestions related to the theme.

Theme #1: Housing and Residential Areas

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following housing policy directions:

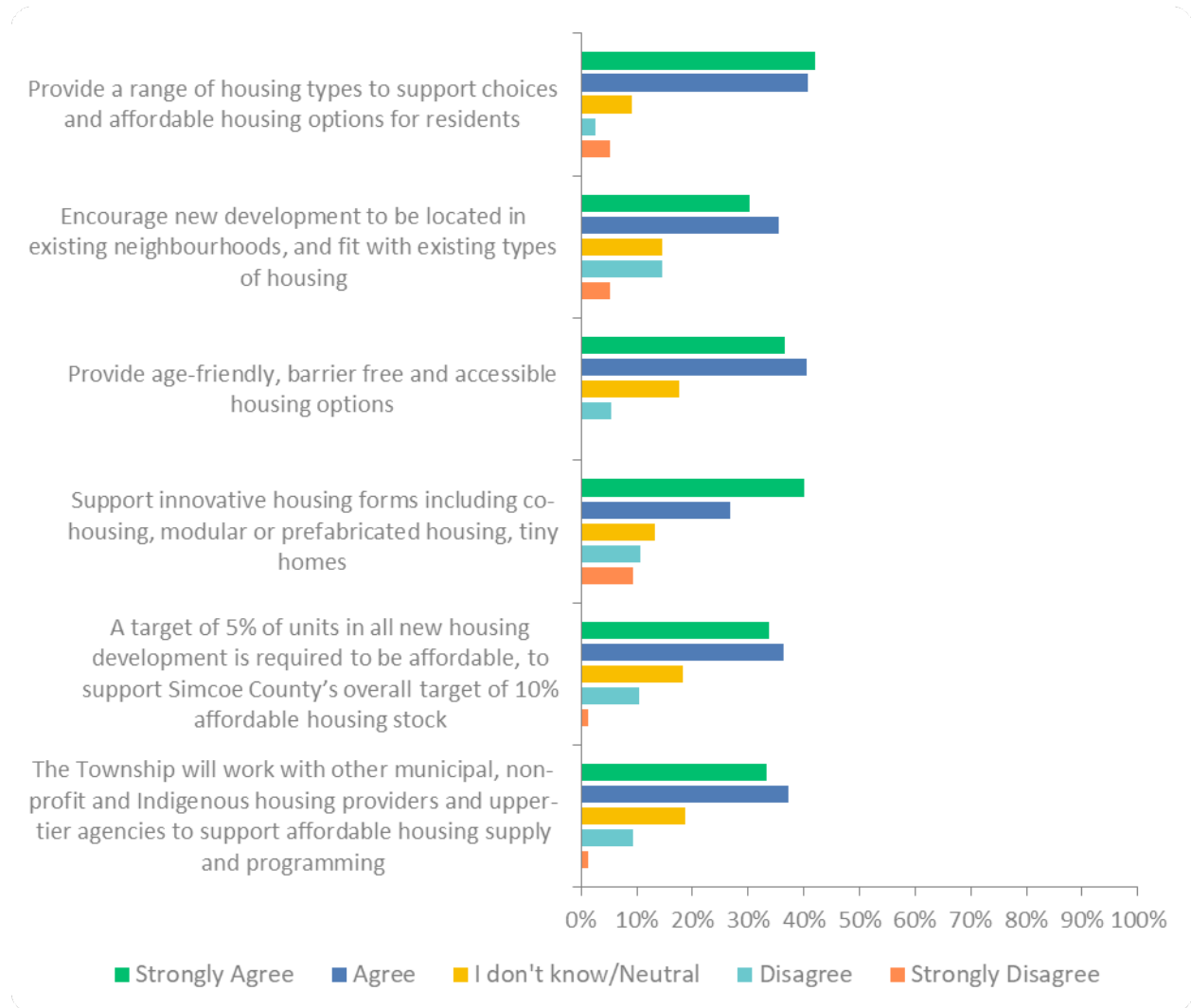


Figure 2-5 Housing - Policy Directions

There were 77 responses to this question, as summarized on **Figure 2-5**. Participants were generally supportive of the proposed policies. The top three with highest agreement (total of agree and strongly agree) were:

- Provide a range of housing types to support choices and affordable housing options for residents (82%).
- Provide age-friendly, barrier free and accessible housing options (77%).

- The Township will work with other municipal, non-profit and Indigenous housing providers and upper-tier agencies to support affordable housing supply and programming (71%).

The responses demonstrated a strong a community interest in diverse and alternative housing solutions.

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following residential areas policy directions:

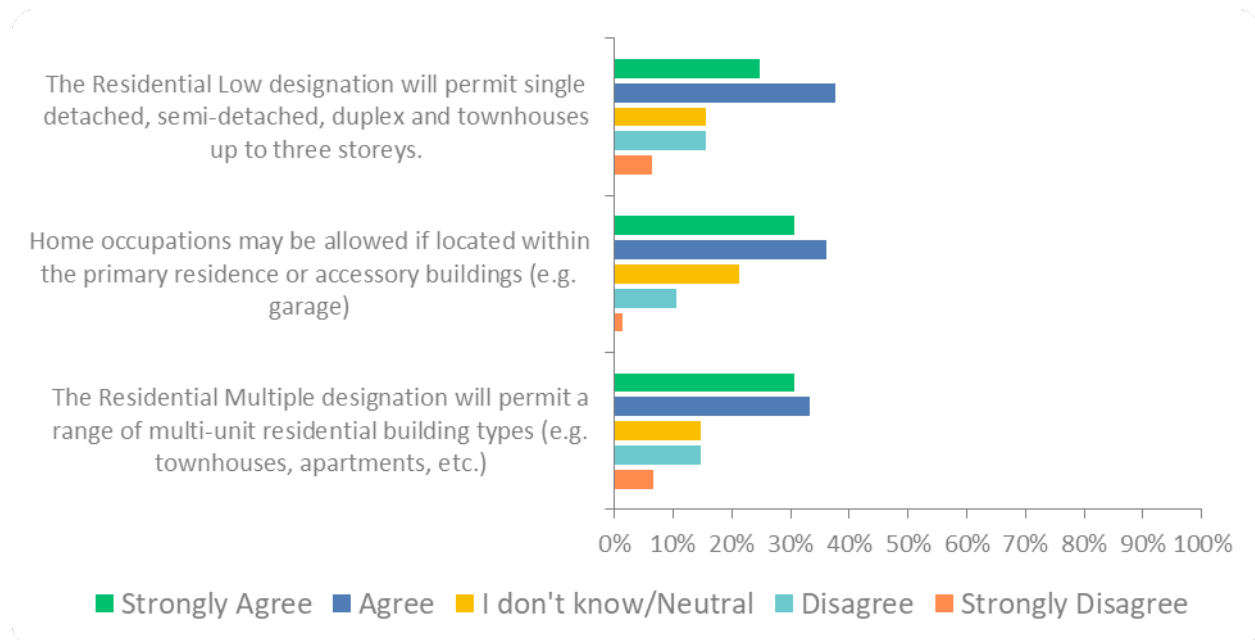


Figure 2-6 Residential Areas - Policy Directions

There were 77 responses to this question, as shown on **Figure 2-6**. Participants had mixed reactions to the policies, with the levels of agreement summarized below:

- The Residential Low designation will permit single detached, semi-detached, duplex and townhouses up to three storeys (62%).
- Home occupations may be allowed if located within the primary residence or accessory buildings (e.g. garage) (67%).
- The Residential Multiple designation will permit a range of multi-unit residential building types (e.g. townhouses, apartments, etc.) (64%).

In addition, respondents noted the following considerations for the residential areas policies:

- Need to address the housing crisis and the increase in unhoused residents, particularly in Angus.
- There is a need to plan for schools and services to support growing communities.
- Consider the safety of new development, particularly for duplexes and triplexes, and develop standards for infill development.
- Need for more senior and assisted living options.
- The importance of locating an expanded site for the local food bank was noted.

- Ensuring sufficient parking for new residential development.
- Need for policies or regulations to address abandoned properties.
- Importance of providing adequate recreational space for new residents.

Theme #2: Commercial, Mixed-Use, and Employment Areas

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following commercial and mixed-use areas policy directions. Explore the maps for Angus, Thornton, Baxter and Ivy to see where these areas will be located.

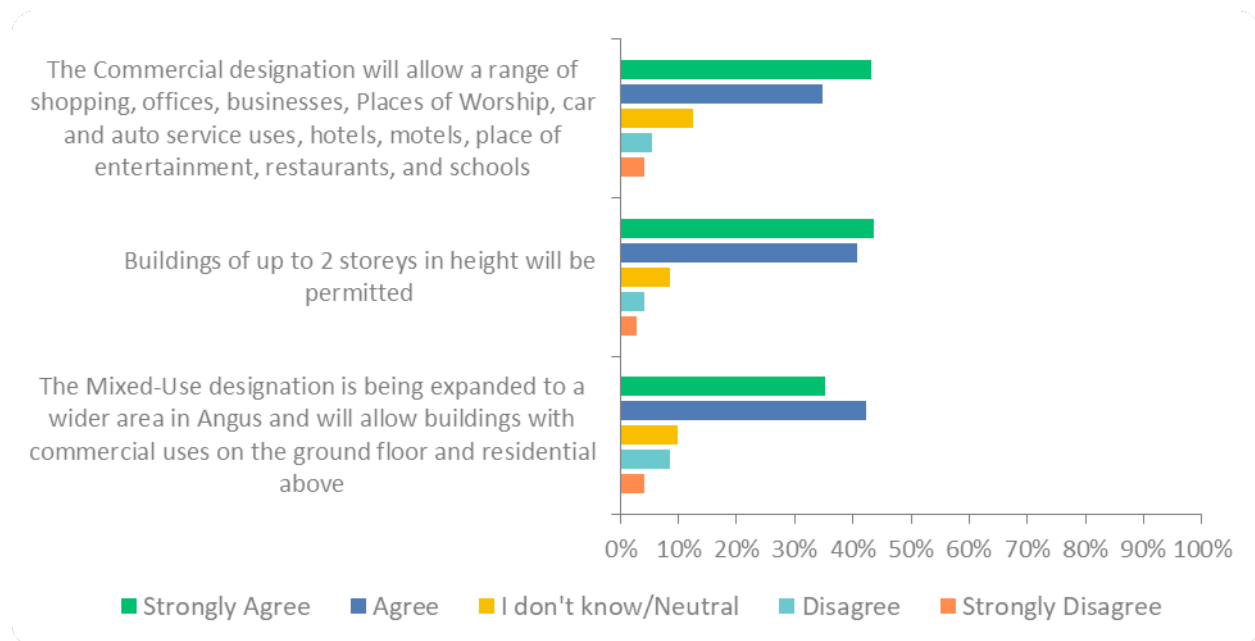


Figure 2-7 Commercial and Mixed-Use Areas - Policy Directions

There were 72 responses to this question, as shown in **Figure 2-7**. Participants were generally highly supportive of the proposed policies, with the levels of agreement summarized below.

- The Commercial designation will allow a range of shopping, offices, businesses, Places of Worship, car and auto service uses, hotels, motels, place of entertainment, restaurants, and schools (78%).
- Buildings of up to 2 storeys in height will be permitted (85%).
- The Mixed-Use designation is being expanded to a wider area in Angus and will allow buildings with commercial uses on the ground floor and residential above (77%).

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following employment areas policy directions:

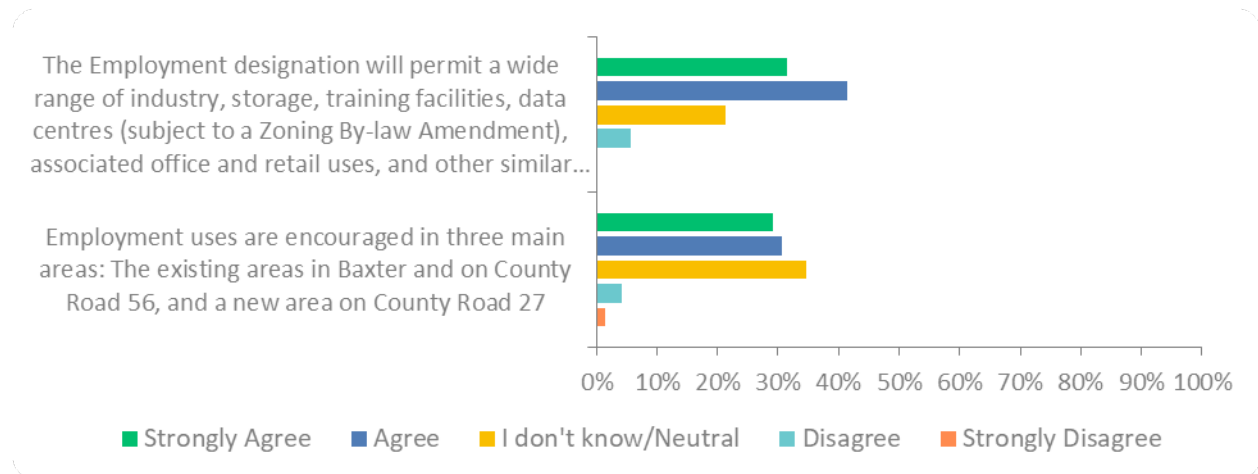


Figure 2-8 Employment Areas - Policy Directions

There were 72 responses to this question, as shown in **Figure 2-8**. Participants had a more favourable response to the policy on supporting a wide range of industry and related uses, and a more mixed response to the second policy, with over one third of participants taking a neutral stance. The levels of agreement are summarized below:

- The Employment designation will permit a wide range of industry, storage, training facilities, data centres (subject to a Zoning By-law Amendment), associated office and retail uses, and other similar uses (73%).
- Employment uses are encouraged in three main areas: The existing areas in Baxter and on County Road 56, and a new area on County Road 27 (60%).

Additional comments included:

- Suggestion that industrial areas should be surrounded by buffer zones to mitigate impact on the environment and nearby communities.
- Suggestions to promote more commercial and employment areas in the new Official Plan, including nearby areas such as Highway 90, the rail-line corridor along with County Rd 10, Thornton, Angus and Baxter to increase growth.
- A respondent who lives on County Road 56 said they would not be in favour of additional commercial uses in the area due to the terrible traffic currently existing.
- Support for local businesses that would offer jobs to local Essa residents, instead of large companies/franchise corporations
- Desire to see fewer gas stations or motels, and more department stores and places catering to the local community's daily needs.
- Suggestion for employment uses to be permitted in other areas, especially rural employment uses that operate dry industries that do not require much servicing.
- Suggestion that Zoning should be less restrictive, allowing market demand to determine commercial ground floor uses and permitting building heights greater than two storeys in commercial zones.

- Concern around the proposed housing mix and affordability targets, as the respondent does not support a high proportion of low income and a high density developments that could change the community's character.
 - Concern that municipal funds or development incentives would be used for places of worship, with a desire to see these instead be used towards infrastructure, services, and amenities that benefit all residents equally.
 - Suggestion to simplify the commercial and industrial use designations (industrial, retail, etc.) and provide a more overarching designation e.g. Mixed Use Commercial.
 - Importance of providing enough infrastructure for all developments, to avoid traffic getting worse.
 - Need for more public transit for people, particularly youth, who commute to Barrie for jobs.
- Request to not change the zoning on the two Greenwood Drive parcels that are currently zoned commercial.

Theme #3: Agricultural and Rural Areas

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following Agricultural areas policy directions:

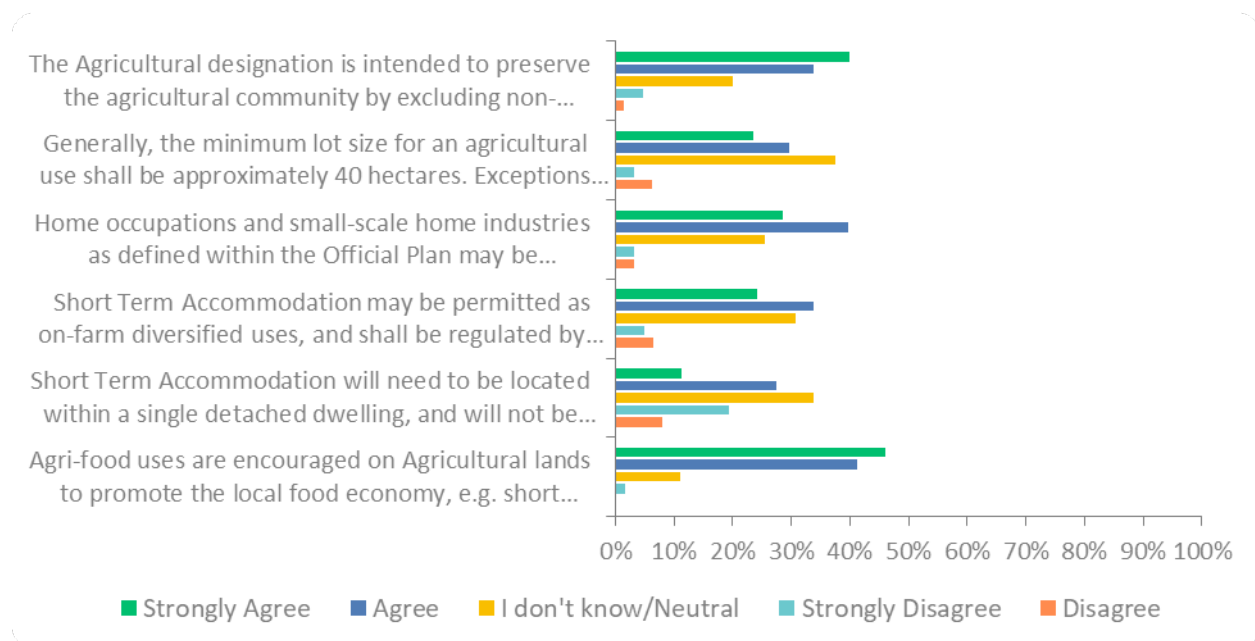


Figure 2-9 Agricultural Areas – Policy Directions

There were 65 responses to this question, as summarized on **Figure 2-9**. Participants had a range of reactions to the policies, as shown in the levels of agreement summarized below:

- Agri-food uses are encouraged on Agricultural lands to promote the local food economy, e.g. short term accommodation, educational experiences; seasonal and visitor-oriented events, festivals, and farm employee accommodations (88%).
- The Agricultural designation is intended to preserve the agricultural community by excluding non-agricultural or incompatible uses (74%).

- Home occupations and small-scale home industries as defined within the Official Plan may be permitted as on-farm diversified uses (68%).
- Short Term Accommodation may be permitted as on-farm diversified uses, and shall be regulated by the Township's Zoning By-law and licensing (58%).
- Generally, the minimum lot size for an agricultural use shall be approximately 40 hectares. Exceptions to this will require supporting studies (53%).
- Short Term Accommodation will need to be located within a single detached dwelling, and will not be allowed in an approved Additional Residential Unit (38%).

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following Rural areas policy directions:

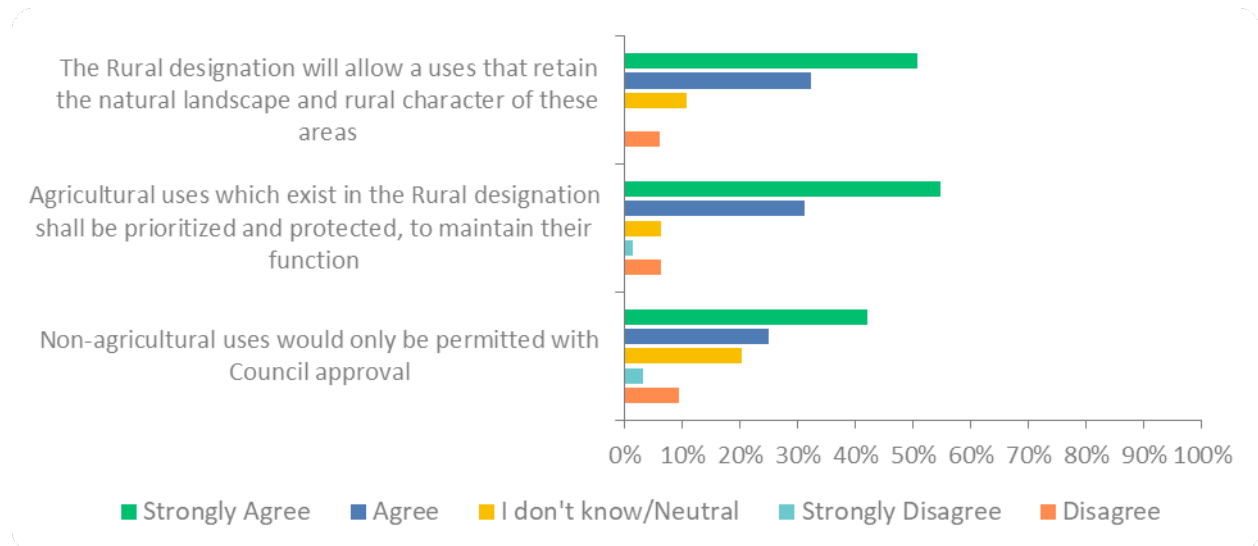


Figure 2-10 Rural Areas – Policy Directions

There were 65 responses to this question, as shown on **Figure 2-10**. Participants had an overall favourable reaction to the policies, as shown by the levels of agreement summarized below:

- The Rural designation will allow a uses that retain the natural landscape and rural character of these areas (83%).
- Agricultural uses which exist in the Rural designation shall be prioritized and protected, to maintain their function (86%).
- Non-agricultural uses would only be permitted with Council approval (67%).

Additional comments included:

- Suggestion for additional review of Agricultural lands in Baxter adjacent to existing Settlement Area boundary.
- Importance of maintaining areas protected for an agricultural or rural function, and not changing these to permit future residential developments.
- Suggestion that the new OP should consider needs of other small communities outside the main settlement areas (Angus, Thornton, and Baxter) and allocate resources to develop these communities.
- Concern about permitting short-term rental (Airbnbs), and suggestion to instead increase affordable housing where possible.

- Suggestion to limit Short Term Accommodation as on-farm diversified use through the Town's Zoning By-law for functions such as a spa, wedding/celebration barn/facility, and agri- food tourism
- Importance of rapidly expanding the definition of "on-farm diversified uses" to help support and retain small family owned farms and properties.
- Need for a set of criteria that all development applications will need to follow, to ensure standards are adhered to.

Theme #4: Natural Areas

The Natural Areas related policies were presented for information purposes, as these policies have been developed to align with County and Provincial direction and would not be subject to modification. Participants were asked to share any comments or other priorities on natural heritage to be considered in the Official Plan.

There were 15 responses to this question summarized below:

- Suggestion to restrict development along McKinnon Rd and north of No Frills plaza.
 - Emphasis on preserving green spaces and the natural ecosystem, and keep wildlife corridors safe.
 - Importance of restricting development in floodplains (particularly in Angus), Greenland, and wetlands to protect against flooding and preserve habitat.
 - Concern over reduction in well water on 5th Line.
 - Suggestion to prioritize infill development and increased density (e.g., Mill Street) over cutting down forests or using agricultural land.
 - Suggestion to prioritize the needs of current residents over developers and future residents.
 - Suggestion to allow reduced environmental buffers only if the land is used for affordable/purpose-built rental housing (apartments).
 - Increased emphasis on ensuring policies are considered and monitored during development approvals.
 - Need for proper communication and suggestion for compensation for landowners if designation changes (e.g., conservation overlay) impact land value.
 - Need for environmental buffers to be site-specific and supported by an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
 - Suggestion to create more nature reserve areas and incorporate environmental education.
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Theme #5: Community Design, Cultural Heritage and Climate Action

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following policies relating to community design and cultural heritage:

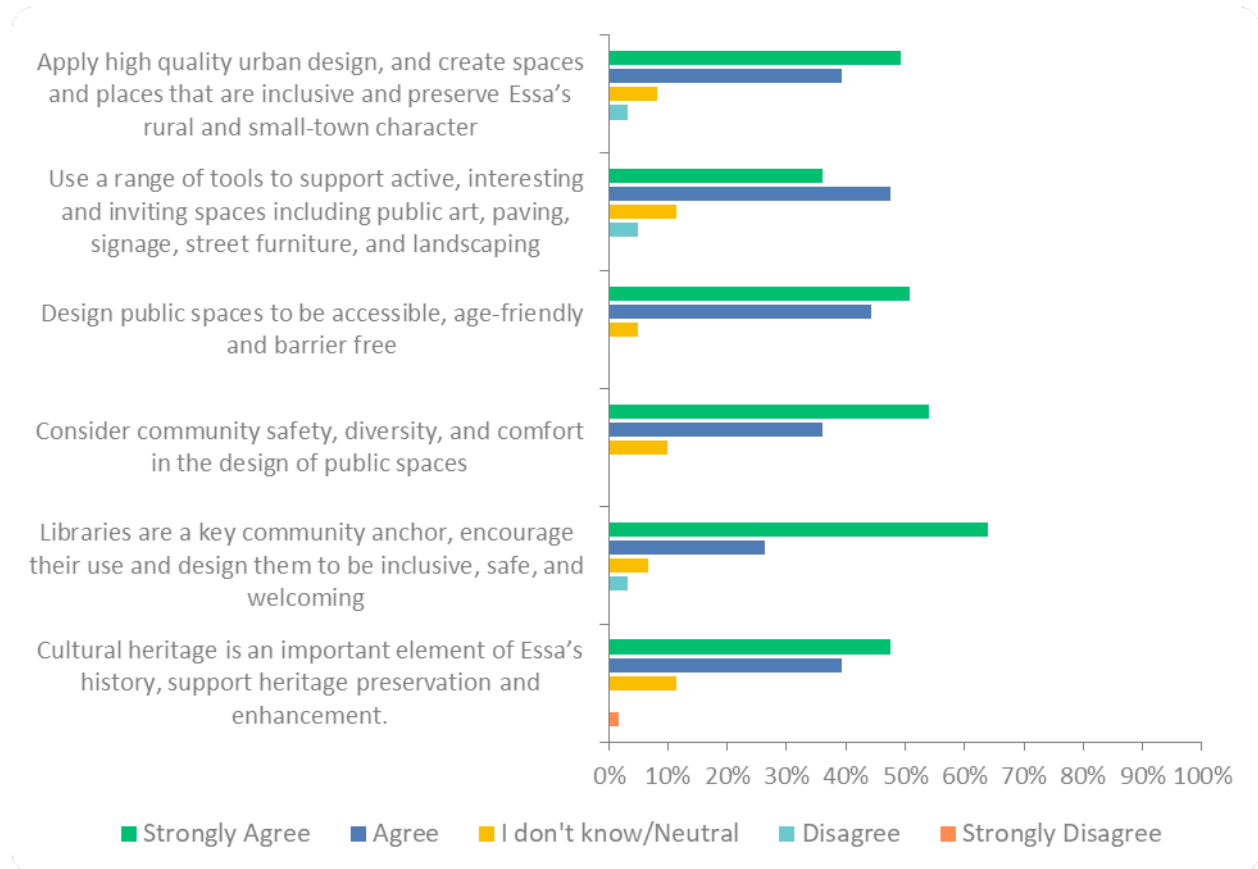


Figure 2-11 Community Design and Cultural Heritage – Policy Directions

There were 62 responses to this question, as summarized on **Figure 2-11**. Participants had an overall highly favourable reaction to the policies, with the top three policies with the highest level of agreement being:

- Design public spaces to be accessible, age-friendly and barrier free (95%).
- Consider community safety, diversity, and comfort in the design of public spaces (90%).
- Libraries are a key community anchor, encourage their use and design them to be inclusive, safe, and welcoming (90%).

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following policies relating to climate change action:

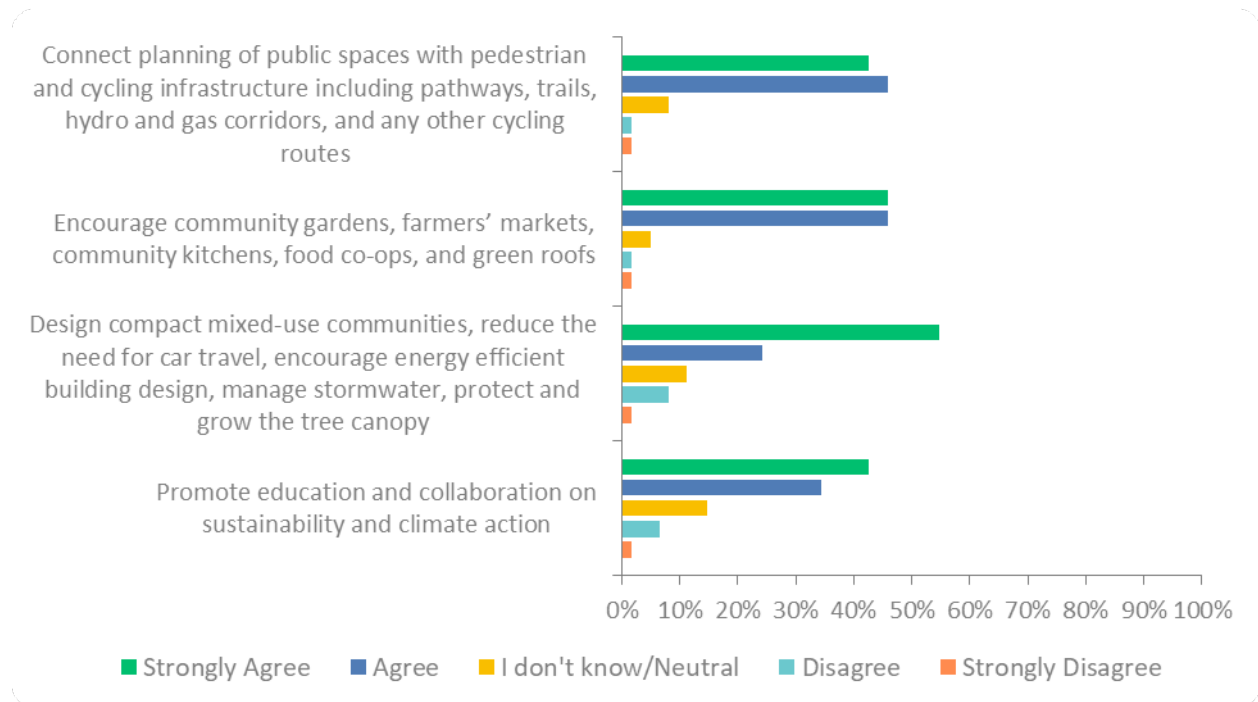


Figure 2-12 Climate Change Action – Policy Directions

There were 62 responses to this question, as summarized on **Figure 2-12**. Participants had an overall highly favourable reaction to the policies, as shown in the levels of agreement summarized below:

- Connect planning of public spaces with pedestrian and cycling infrastructure including pathways, trails, hydro and gas corridors, and any other cycling routes (89%).
- Encourage community gardens, farmers' markets, community kitchens, food co-ops, and green roofs (92%).
- Design compact mixed-use communities, reduce the need for car travel, encourage energy efficient building design, manage stormwater, protect and grow the tree canopy (79%).
- Promote education and collaboration on sustainability and climate action (77%).

Additional comments included:

- Importance of including a focus on current residents, not developers or future residents.
- Importance of preserving green spaces, wildlife corridors, and the natural ecosystem.
- Suggestion to allow all small electric vehicle use within the town of limits of Angus, including electric bikes, golf carts, enclosed accessibility vehicles.
- Importance of design standards not negatively impacting the ability to provide affordable housing.
- Support for policies that help build Essa be a resilient and adaptable community.
- Suggestion to consider turning Zion Presbyterian Church into a heritage site/museum.

Theme #6: Transportation, Infrastructure and Servicing

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following policies relating to transportation connections:

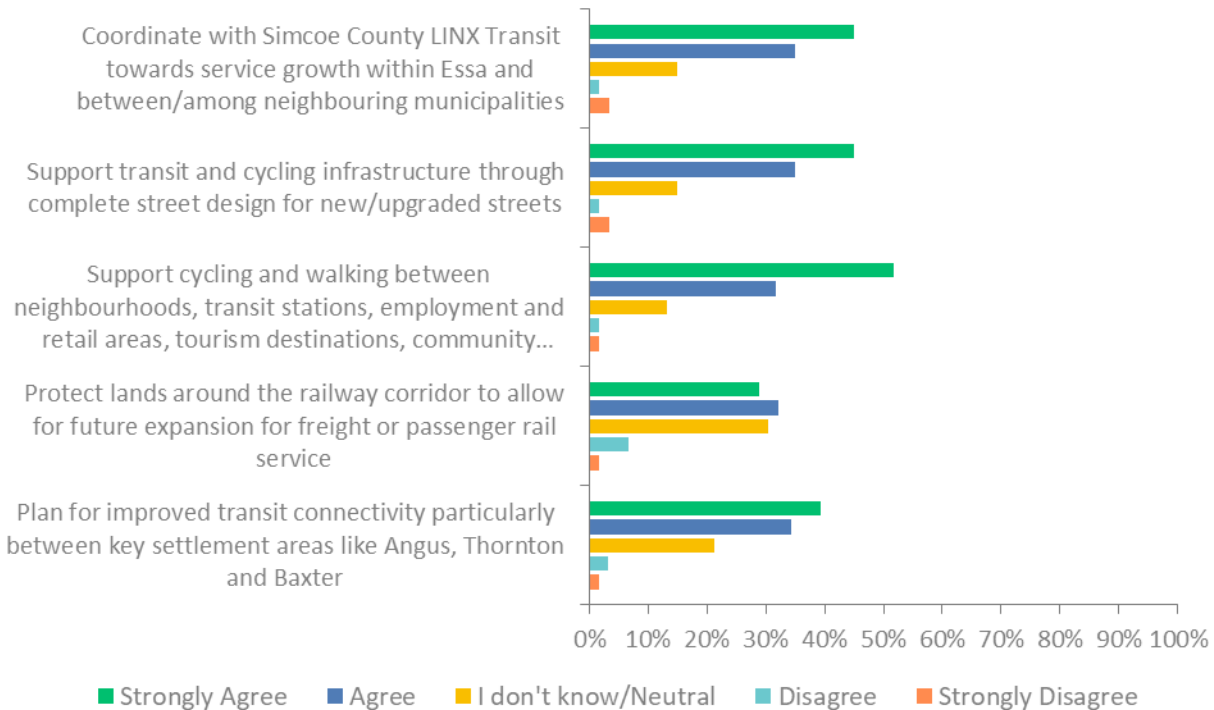


Figure 2-13 Community Design, Cultural Heritage, and Climate Change Action – Policy Direction

There were 61 responses to this question, as summarized on **Figure 2-13**. Participants had an overall highly favourable reaction to the policies related to transit and active transportation, as shown in the levels of agreement summarized below:

- Coordinate with Simcoe County LINX Transit towards service growth within Essa and between/among neighbouring municipalities (80%).
- Support transit and cycling infrastructure through complete street design for new/upgraded streets (80%).
- Support cycling and walking between neighbourhoods, transit stations, employment and retail areas, tourism destinations, community services, and County connections (83%).
- Plan for improved transit connectivity particularly between key settlement areas like Angus, Thornton and Baxter (73%).

The policy to protect lands around the railway corridor to allow for future expansion for freight or passenger rail service had a more mixed response, with agreement from 61% of participants, indicating some uncertainty about future rail planning compared to other transportation connectivity policies.

Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following policies relating to infrastructure and servicing:

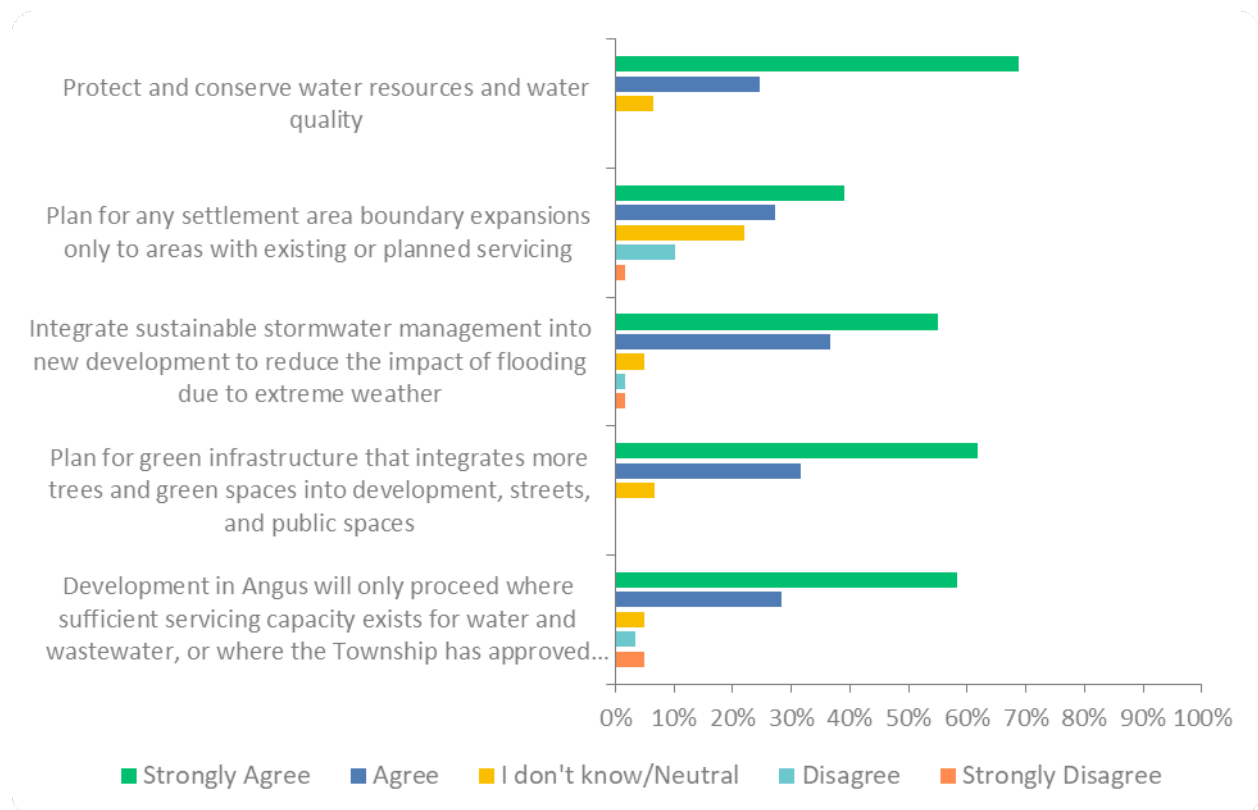


Figure 2-14 Infrastructure and Servicing – Policy Direction

There were 61 responses to this question, as summarized on **Figure 2-14**. Participants had an overall highly favourable reaction to most of the policies, as shown in the levels of agreement summarized below:

- Protect and conserve water resources and water quality (93%).
- Integrate sustainable stormwater management into new development to reduce the impact of flooding due to extreme weather (91%).
- Plan for green infrastructure that integrates more trees and green spaces into development, streets, and public spaces (93%).
- Development in Angus will only proceed where sufficient servicing capacity exists for water and wastewater, or where the Township has approved an agreement for a developer to fund or construct servicing (86%).

The policy to plan for any settlement area boundary expansions only to areas with existing or planned servicing had a more mixed response, with agreement from 66% of participants.

Additional comments included:

- Importance of considering stormwater management in any new development, and restricting development in high flood risk areas.

- Suggestion to think outside the box of how to address servicing capacity constraints facing the Township, as Baxter is seen as having the potential to grow to meet housing needs associated with Honda plant expansion in Alliston.
- Suggestion to provide small bus for seniors, students, and the public to get around.
- Importance of prioritizing current residents and the environment.
- Importance of seeing the 'larger picture' in considering the long-term growth plan for Essa and not only building where servicing currently exists.
- Suggestion that the goal of development should not just be to grow but also to inspire and educate.
- Desire to see more diversity in commercial uses, and not more fast food places and cannabis shops.

3.6 General Comments

Do you have any additional question or comments about the New Draft Official Plan policies?

- Suggestion to integrate commercial development into residential areas to create walkable communities.
- Suggestion for any house within the Township's boundary to have access to town water, sewage and gas.
- Desire to see more route access and transportation connections to main roads for those commuting to Barrie.
- A question as to why public safety was not a consideration specific to the plan.

3.7 Correspondence

A number of residents shared their input on the Official Plan and settlement area boundary expansion via email to the Township. These comments and lands proposed to be brought into the settlement area in Essa were tabulated for consideration and evaluation as part of the next step in the process, to be conducted over fall 2025.

4.0 Next Steps

The results of the engagement as presented in this report are being used to inform the development of the Draft Official Plan and preliminary selection of lands to be brought into the settlement boundary. The Updated Draft of the Official Plan will be brought forward for community feedback in the winter of 2026, through a Statutory Open House. A final Public Meeting will then be held as part of the Council adoption process.

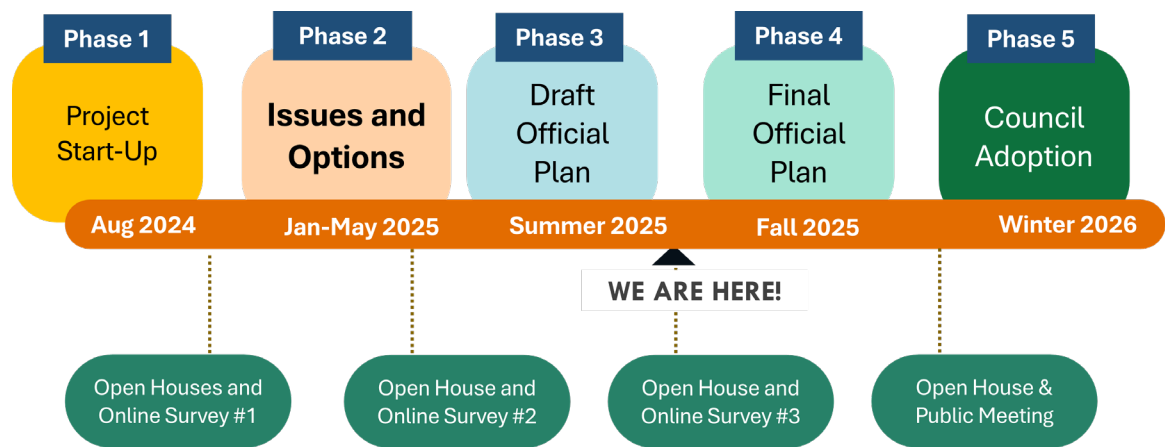


Figure 2-15 Project Timeline and Next Steps