

## WHAT WE HEARD ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

### Introduction

The Town of Smiths Falls is embarking on an exciting journey to create a new Official Plan that will shape the future of our community for years to come. As we begin this important process, we want to ensure that the voices of residents, business owners, and community stakeholders are at the heart of our decision-making. Public input is essential to developing a plan that reflects the needs, aspirations, and priorities of everyone in Smiths Falls.

This summary highlights the feedback we've received from our recent World Café Event held on October 10, 2024. This event was focused on obtaining feedback in terms of five key themes: Community Spaces, Sustainability, Transportation, Downtown Revitalization, and Housing. Continue to the following pages to discover key insights and perspectives shared during our World Café, shaping the future of the community together.



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### Building a Greener Future: Community-Driven Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship in Smiths Falls

Residents of Smiths Falls voiced a range of concerns and aspirations regarding sustainability and environmental stewardship in their community. Key discussions centered on the need for a green waste diversion program and Town-led tree planting initiatives, reflecting a desire for proactive environmental practices. Residents suggested the Town take a leadership role in community-oriented initiatives, leading by example via initiating Town-wide grant programs and developing policies to encourage individuals to incorporate sustainable practices into new developments and retrofits. While the Town is limited in its powers to address all sustainability concerns and may be able to incorporate modest amounts of the following suggestions in the new Official Plan, these discussions reveal a strong community commitment by residents to enhancing environmental practices in Smiths Falls.

1. **Green Waste Diversion Program** – Participants expressed a strong desire for a green waste diversion program, such as a green bin initiative, viewing it as a fundamental service. Some participants had questions about the financial aspects of such a program.
2. **Tree Planting Initiatives** - Many residents believe tree planting should be a Town-led initiative, with some uncertainty about the current tree giveaway program's partnership with Lanark County. Participants expressed pride in the mini-forest initiative at Hyland-Corbett Park and called for more similar initiatives.
3. **Cultural Perspectives on Parking** - The community highlighted a divide between traditional and modern views on parking in Smiths Falls. Some residents felt that the Town should continue to plan for large amounts of required parking as it is a vehicle-reliant community, while others felt that a reduction in parking could be used to encourage the use of alternative transportation from private vehicles.
4. **Climate Change Constraints** - Homeowners face challenges related to climate change that impact the quality and condition of homes and infrastructure.
5. **Homeowner Actions Against Climate Change** - Potential actions for homeowners include energy retrofitting and the use of rain barrels to mitigate climate impacts.
6. **Sustainability Policy Areas** - Key areas for sustainability policy development include water and wastewater infrastructure, such as encouraging shared or communal services, and transportation infrastructure, e.g. prioritizing sustainable transportation modes like active transportation.
7. **Mini Forest Initiative** - One resident praised the mini-forest initiative as an unprecedented example of environmental stewardship in Smiths Falls, highlighting a historical lack of consideration for tree preservation.
8. **Hydro Power Generation** - There is interest in the Town investing in hydro power generation from the Rideau River, with residents recalling its importance during past power outages.

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9. **Rideau River Access** - A respondent called for improved policies to enhance access to the Rideau River while maintaining its ecological integrity, criticizing the current passive recreational use.
10. **Climate Lens** - The Town should adopt a climate lens to promote collaborative efforts in addressing the climate crisis. A resident discussed the potential of a biochar (a stable solid, rich in carbon, that is made from organic waste material or biomass that is partially combusted in the presence of limited oxygen) pilot program that could become self-sustaining through community partnerships.
11. **Self-Sustaining vs. Community-Oriented Initiatives** - There is a perceived divide between individual-level initiatives, like energy retrofits, and community-oriented projects, such as community gardens. Residents urged the Town to prioritize policies that foster community participation and collaboration, and suggested creating a grant program to encourage naturalized lawns, arguing that financial incentives are crucial for implementing sustainability policies in a cash-strapped community.
12. **River Stewardship** - Concerns were raised about stewardship of the Rideau Canal, with calls for stronger policy language and enforcement to protect the river, emphasizing the municipality's responsibility to ensure its stewardship for the entire community.

## Moving Forward: Addressing Transportation Challenges and Opportunities in Smiths Falls

All participants were equally passionate about transportation considerations and concerns in the community. Among the topics discussed, five areas stood out: speeding, sidewalks and trails, transit, traffic, and other mobility-related issues. Residents expressed the need for improvements in road safety, accessible transportation, and public spaces, as well as ideas for enhancing walkability and accommodating emerging trends like micro-mobility.

1. **Speeding** - There was significant discussion around the issue of speeding, with concerns raised about the need for a speed limit reduction policy. Most arterial and collector roads were identified as having speeding issues, with Jasper Avenue, Elmsley/Queen, Cornelia Street, Brackville Road, and Lombard Street specifically mentioned. Elmsley/Queen was noted as the worst area, with no traffic control between Chamber and Old Slys. Residents expressed a strong desire for more traffic calming measures throughout the town.
2. **Sidewalks and Trails** - There was a clear need for improved lighting at crosswalks and along trails, with the canal trail between Old Slys and Beckwith which were specifically mentioned. Positive feedback was given regarding recent sidewalk infill projects on Lombard and Old Slys, with a call to continue addressing the remaining gaps in the sidewalk network. Accessibility concerns were also raised, particularly regarding curb cuts and missing links between municipal sidewalks and businesses. Additionally, residents requested more benches and rest areas along trails to enhance accessibility and comfort for users.
3. **Transit** - Transit was a major topic of discussion, noting that 20% of Smiths Falls residents do not have access to a vehicle. Many conversations centered around the aging population and mobility challenges, including suggestions for services like Handy

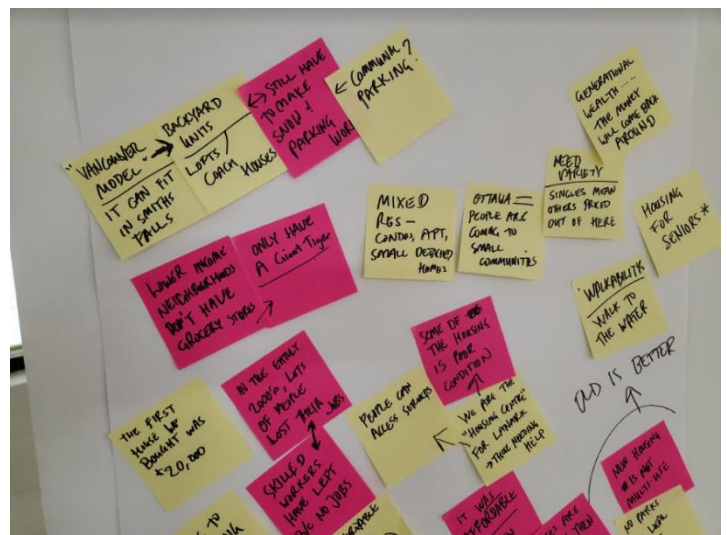
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Dial-A-Ride-Transportation Service (HandyDARTS). Residents also expressed interest in bringing back the free shuttle that used to operate in town, questioning why it was discontinued. Comparisons were made to North Grenville, which has a transit system, with residents asking why Smiths Falls doesn't have a similar service.

4. **Traffic** - Post-COVID traffic on Beckwith Street has increased, but the street's redevelopment, including improvements to signals and signal timing, has helped manage the flow. Seasonal traffic, especially on weekends, remains an issue on major routes like Highway 15, Abbott, William, and Cornelia Streets. Summer delays are also common due to boat traffic and the swing bridge. The intersection of Lombard and Abbott was identified as requiring attention to improve traffic conditions.
5. **Other** – The revitalization of Beckwith Street received many positive reviews. However, concerns were raised about parking on sidewalks, particularly on Queen Street, and parking on the grass at parks, which seems to be an accepted practice in Smiths Falls. Winter maintenance of active transportation facilities is lacking, forcing pedestrians, cyclists, and mobility device users to use the road. There is a need for bike parking on Beckwith Street and interest in installing municipal electric vehicle charging stations. Residents also expressed a desire for programming like a walking or cycling school bus. With the rise of micro-mobility options such as e-bikes and e-scooters, there were questions about how the town is preparing for these changes.

## Building Homes and Community: Expanding Housing Options and Connectivity in Smiths Falls

Housing is a key issue as Smiths Falls develops its new Official Plan. With more people moving from larger cities like Ottawa, demand for affordable and diverse housing options is growing. While Smiths Falls is the 'housing centre' for Lanark County, challenges like poor housing conditions, high costs, and disconnected neighbourhoods persist. This summary highlights key observations and needs, including the demand for more housing variety, senior housing, and better connectivity to the Rideau Canal. Barriers such as infrastructure challenges and accessibility gaps were noted, alongside aspirations to adopt models like the 'Vancouver Model' and create mixed-use neighborhoods where residents can live, work, and age in place.



1. **Observations** - More people from larger areas like Ottawa are moving to smaller communities, including Smiths Falls. However, not all housing is in good condition, with many areas experiencing poor housing quality. While there is recognition that Smiths

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Falls serves as the ‘housing centre’ for Lanark County, more resources are needed to meet the growing demand. Additionally, rent and housing prices, particularly for single-detached homes, remain high.

2. **Needs** - There is a clear need for a greater variety of housing stock and more affordable options in Smiths Falls, including housing for seniors. Residents expressed a desire to leverage the waterfront to create a more connected community. Additionally, there is an interest in finding a balance between suburban and urban lifestyles. Exploring cost-sharing options for infrastructure development was also identified as a potential avenue to address housing needs.
3. **Barriers** - While there is a desire for innovative housing stock that broadens the range of options, changing climate conditions mean that new development is still challenged to address space for snow removal and stormwater management. Lower-income neighborhoods lack sufficient retail options which, if provided, could enhance their quality of life. Smiths Falls has seen successful with new suburban development but the “main street lifestyle” of living near to main street and frequenting those shops/services hasn’t fully come to fruition. Furthermore, accessible/ barrier-free is not always a primary consideration in current housing developments.
4. **Aspirations** – Some residents aspire to adopt the ‘Vancouver Model,’ which emphasizes the development of backyard units, lofts, and coach houses to diversify the housing stock in Smiths Falls, potentially including communal parking. There is also a desire for mixed-use developments that feature thoughtful commercial, retail and services on the main floor of buildings enabling residents to live, work, play, and age in place. Utilizing town-owned land for housing and creating a variety of connected neighborhoods were viewed as opportunities. Additionally, the community seeks guidance on the design and implementation of additional residential units (e.g., backyard units, basement apartments, etc.).

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### Spaces for All: Creating Inclusive, Safe, and Vibrant Community Hubs in Smiths Falls

As Smiths Falls aims to enhance residents' quality of life, key themes have emerged from community discussions, highlighting both challenges and aspirations. These themes address accessibility, community spaces, safety, cultural events, environmental considerations, sports, and retail development. By focusing on these areas, residents seek to create a more inclusive and vibrant community that fosters engagement and meets diverse needs. The following summaries outline the primary concerns and desires expressed by the community, serving as a foundation for future planning and development initiatives in Smiths Falls.



1. **Accessibility and Connectivity** - Access from downtown to the canal is inadequate, and there is a pressing need for more safe crossings and crosswalks throughout the town. Residents have expressed concerns about the lack of active transportation infrastructure, which hampers connectivity between neighborhoods. There is a strong desire for a town-wide walking path, along with increased walking trails, to enhance accessibility and promote pedestrian movement within Smiths Falls.
2. **Community Spaces and Amenities** - The promotion of community spaces does not adequately reflect the diversity of the town, leading to feelings of exclusion among some residents. Additionally, there is a shortage of park spaces and recreational amenities, with requests for expanding the beach, creating new boat docks, and adding winter activities. Residents are also advocating for more recreational facilities, such as indoor sports centers, a public pool, and community gardens, as well as the establishment of mini forests in vacant lots to enrich the town's green spaces.
3. **Safety and Infrastructure** - Safety is a significant concern, particularly regarding inadequate lighting in areas and poorly lit parking lots, which residents deem dangerous. Unsafe cycling paths further exacerbate these safety issues. Additionally, there is a call for more consistent winter maintenance of public spaces to ensure accessibility year-round. Residents have also highlighted the need for improved wayfinding signage throughout the town to help navigate community amenities more easily.
4. **Cultural and Recreational Events** - There is a strong desire for spaces that can host cultural events, particularly those that engage newcomers and foster community connections. Suggestions include creating outdoor venues such as a covered pavilion for farmers' markets and utilizing stage spaces for various events. Furthermore,

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residents have expressed interest in developing recreational facilities, such as a roller-skating rink and a healing circle, to promote community wellness and engagement.

5. **Sports and Recreation** - The growing population of Smiths Falls has highlighted the need for improved sports facilities, with residents advocating for amenities such as lawn bowling and ski trails. There is a strong interest in creating a multi-purpose path that connects existing recreational spaces, such as the skate park, tennis courts, and arena, to the railway and museum, facilitating easier access to these areas.
6. **Retail and Economic Development** - There is a clear demand for increased retail options in Smiths Falls to better serve the community's needs. Residents believe that expanding retail offerings will enhance the town's economic vitality and improve access to goods and services, contributing to a more vibrant and connected community.

## Strengthening the Heart of Smiths Falls: Building a Thriving and Unified Downtown

As Smiths Falls aims to revitalize its downtown area, a range of key themes has emerged from this tables' discussions that highlight both challenges and opportunities. Residents express a strong desire for incentives and design guidelines to enhance the aesthetic consistency and accessibility of the downtown, as well as a focus on leveraging the waterfront and promoting local businesses. This summary outlines the primary concerns and aspirations of the community, providing valuable insights that will inform future planning and development initiatives aimed at creating a vibrant and interconnected downtown through the Official Plan process.

1. **Revitalization and Incentives** - Residents believe that providing incentives for the revitalization of downtown buildings, along with reduced tax rates for improvement projects, would significantly benefit the area. There is also support for tax credits and incentives for local businesses to encourage their growth and sustainability.
2. **Aesthetic Consistency** - The current state of the downtown area is perceived as disconnected, with only a few appealing streets amid a mix of unattractive facades. Many community members have noted the need for more consistent aesthetics similar to Beckwith on other downtown streets like Main and Russell, as these streets represent the downtown. Establishing design guidelines that prioritize character and create a cohesive look throughout the commercial district is considered vital.
3. **Heritage and Accessibility** - While heritage preservation is important, there is a call for heritage design guidelines that focus more on encouraging appropriate renovations rather than strictly enforcing a heritage district. Residents emphasize the need to balance preserving heritage buildings while ensuring accessibility, as current provisions hinder reconstruction efforts for accessibility improvements.
4. **Streetscape and Placemaking** - There is a strong desire for enhanced streetscape design and placemaking efforts in downtown Smiths Falls, which would include wayfinding signage to help residents and visitors navigate the area. Wider sidewalks and dedicated bike lanes are also recommended to improve pedestrian and cyclist experiences, making the entire downtown more welcoming and accessible to all.

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5. **Waterfront and Branding** - The waterfront is seen as an underutilized asset, with calls to leverage its potential to enhance downtown vibrancy. Residents advocate for more branding of Smiths Falls throughout the downtown core to foster a sense of identity and community pride. Additionally, creating interconnected trails that link the downtown with surrounding neighborhoods was shared for promoting active transportation.
6. **Community Events and Density** - The community expresses a desire to incorporate festivals and events that bring people together, further energizing the downtown. Residents are also open to increasing building height and density, provided it is tasteful and aligns with the overall character of the area. Some residents shared examples from downtown Burlington, where buildings feature thoughtful first-floor retail and services that cater to residents living above, serve as a model for what could be achieved in Smiths Falls.
7. **Addressing Commercial Vacancy** - With the current commercial vacancy rate, residents are concerned about how to address this issue effectively. They seek thoughtful commercial development that aligns with the needs of local residents, emphasizing that the downtown should not become saturated with chain businesses. By fostering unique, community-oriented commercial spaces, Smiths Falls can cultivate a vibrant and diverse downtown atmosphere.

## Conclusion

Your input will continue to shape the vision and strategic directions for Smiths Falls, ensuring that our Official Plan reflects a shared vision for the future. **Thank you** for your participation and for helping to build a stronger, more vibrant Smiths Falls.

Have more to say?

Visit [smithsfalls.ca/opupdates](https://smithsfalls.ca/opupdates) to find out more information about the New Official Plan and ways you can get involved. You can also connect with us at: [opupdate@smithsfalls.ca](mailto:opupdate@smithsfalls.ca)