



# SMITHS FALLS

RISE AT THE FALLS

## Report # 2023-088

To: Mayor and Council  
From: Karl Grenke, Senior Planner  
Date: July 20, 2023  
Committee of the Whole Date: July 24, 2023  
Title: Official Plan Update – Survey Results

For Direction  
 For Information  
 For Adoption  
 Attachments: 2 Pages

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### Recommendation:

**THAT Council receives Report # 2023- 088 “Official Plan Update – Survey Results” for information.**

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**Purpose:** To update Council on the public consultation undertaken as part of the launch of the Official Plan update, and to advise Council on the next steps of the process.

**Background:** On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, Council confirmed its intent to initiate an update to the Town’s Official Plan. The update of the Plan is necessary in order to effectively plan for future growth, incorporate and implement master plans approved by Council in the last term and also align with current provincial planning direction.

As a precursor to this update, On June 5<sup>th</sup>, Council adopted the findings of a Land Needs Study that was undertaken over the previous year by Dillon Consulting. The Land Needs Study provided population and employment projections over the next 25 years, as well as forecast residential, commercial, industrial and institutional land needs (in gross hectares) to accommodate this growth. This work was done in accordance with the in-effect Provincial Policy Statement to support a “comprehensive review” of the Official Plan. Proposed changes to the PPS remove the comprehensive review check-box exercise that needs to be completed before we can expand our “settlement area” boundaries, however the analysis and findings contained in the Land Needs Study are nonetheless essential in order to assist Council in growth planning. The Study also advised of considerations thereof to help inform next steps and which can be incorporated in the update.

That same evening, Council also hosted a special public meeting where several questions were posed for public consideration. The purpose of this exercise to generate interest at a high level about what the public is interested in and what they would like to see addressed in a new or amended Official Plan. In particular, three visioning type questions were posed to initiate the conversation:

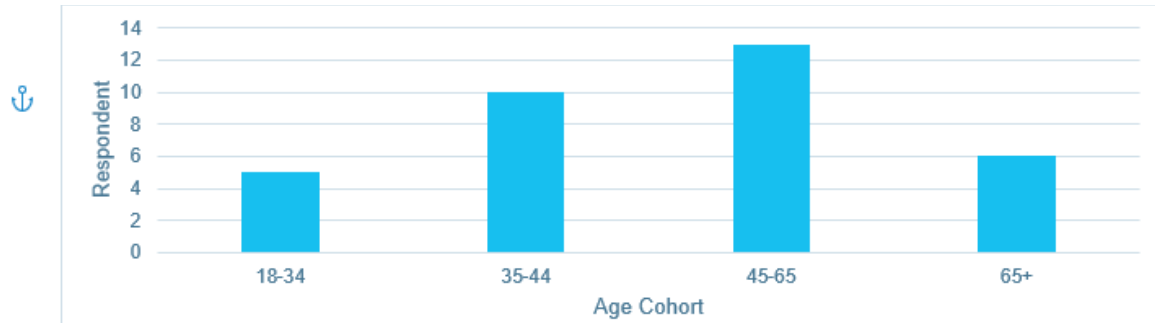
- ***Provide at least 3 words that describe your vision of the ideal Town of Smiths Falls in 25 years.***
- ***What changes do you think would improve Smiths Falls and why?***

- **What specific subjects would you like to see addressed in an Official Plan Update? (eg. Housing, downtown revitalization, climate change, etc.) Please identify up to three subjects.**

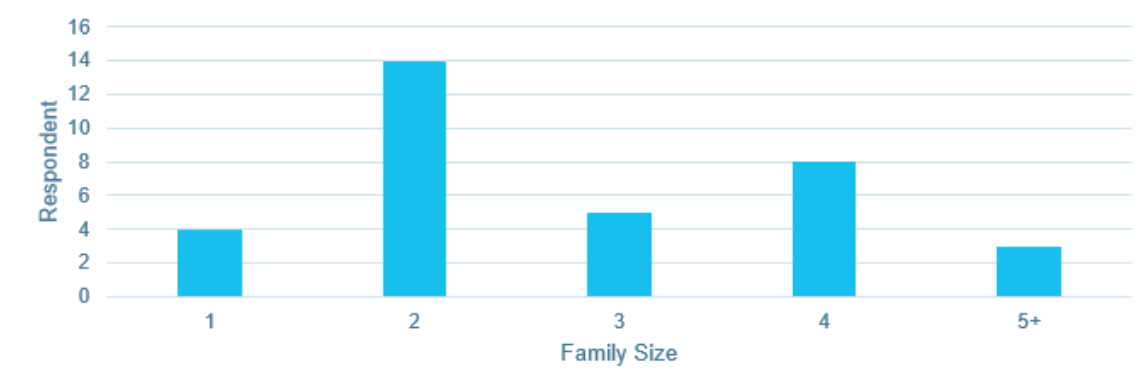
No public participated in the special public meeting, however a total of 34 survey responses were received by staff in advance of the June 19 deadline.

Based on responses, the respondents, despite the small sample size, represented a varied cross-section of Town residents and stakeholders:

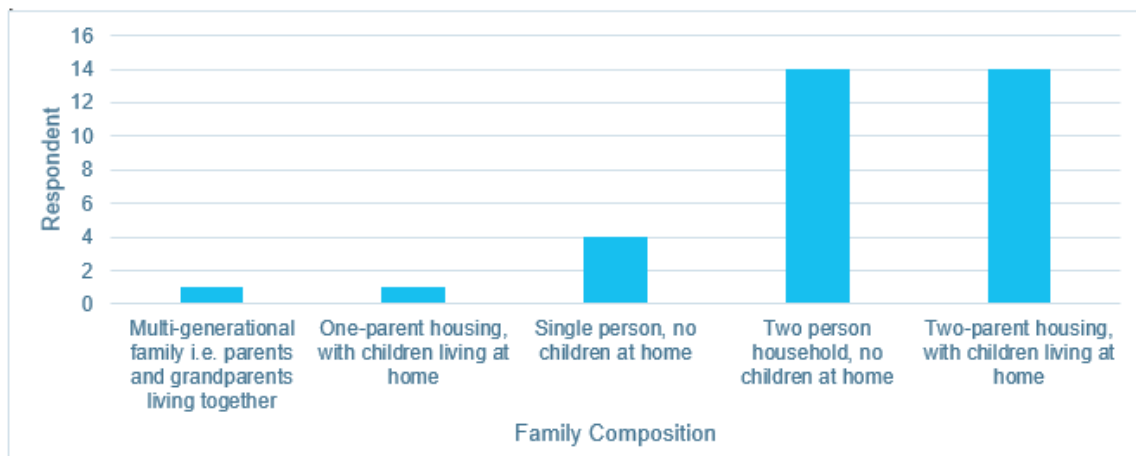
In terms of age, the responses skew slightly younger than 2021 Census data.



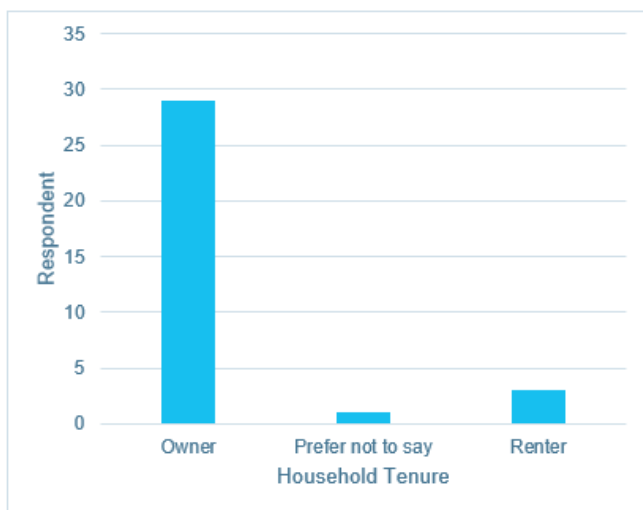
A much higher proportion of respondents were in two-person households, of any age.



Household composition showed a higher proportion of respondents living in homes with children at home, compared to Census figures.



A much higher proportion of survey respondents owned their own homes, compared to 2021 Census data, which showed that 45.3% of households rented their homes.



Interestingly, 52% of survey respondents indicated living in Smiths Falls for less than 10 years. Census mobility data from 2021 indicated that 57% of residents did not move within the last 5 years, which is the longest interval recorded by the Census.

The feedback received and discussed in the next section will assist Council on focussing the priorities of the update and developing targeted and more specific consultation.

**Analysis and Options:** The public consultation to inform the OP update launch revealed many themes that were very similar to those that emerged through the strategic plan consultation launched earlier this year. In short, the survey responses indicated high hopes for a community that is growing, sustainable and is a good place to live.

The first visioning question asked respondents to Provide at least **3 words that describe your vision of the ideal Town of Smiths Falls in 25 years.**

Three themes emerged from the data set: “Growth and development”, “Aesthetics” and “Feel”.

1. **Growth and Development:** words chosen by residents to describe how Smiths Falls should grow in the next 25 years.
2. **Aesthetics:** words chosen by residents to describe how the Town should look.
3. **Feel:** these words were emotive adjectives that are used describe how the Town should make them feel.

Thematic Analysis		
Growth	Aesthetics	Feel
Thriving	Quaint	Safe
Sustaining	Cohesive	Welcoming
Prosperous	Picturesque	Inclusive
Growth	Clean	Friendly
Affordable	Maintained	Inviting
Active	Beautiful	Family-oriented
Booming	Attractive	Desirable
Options	Unique	Community Town
Developer friendly	Pedestrian-Friendly	Cozy
Briskness	Green	
Hub	Vibrant	
Progression	Accessible	
Prosperous	Artsy	
Fiscally stable	Communal	
Tourist destination	Nature	
Employed population	Verdant	
Stable	Cultural	
Housing ownership		

The table outlines the words that came out of the survey, divided roughly into the three themes. There may be some overlap between the three categories, as words can be used to describe an emotional state, as well as an aesthetic quality or an ideal growth and development qualifier. For example, the word “desirable” could be used in more than one category. The survey generated the largest number of words in the “growth” category, with the greatest diversity of synonyms. However, “welcoming” is the individual word that appeared the most times in the surveys, with a frequency of 9 – over one quarter of responses. “Affordable” came up five times, “safe” and “clean” four times each, “prosperous”, “vibrant”, “green” and “thriving” each came up three times. The other words shown on the table came up once or twice.

The second visioning question asked, **“what changes do you think would improve Smiths Falls and why?”**

The responses touched on a few important points that can be boiled down to one thing: a lack of options. The consensus is that there are improvements that can be made to help us achieve the positive vision outlined in the previous question. The largest focus area that has arisen is in the downtown and waterfront area. Council’s task will be to best use the new Official Plan to outline a policy-based approach to address these items. While many specific examples in the table below raised are operational items that are not usually addressed in OP policy, the feedback all highlights the public’s interest in using the OP to promote a community that works for everyone.

The table below summarizes the survey responses based on themes that have been identified:

Waterfront	Infrastructure	Liveability	Growth and Development	Housing	Sustainability
Waterfront property development	Confederation bridge restoration	Better transportation options	More employment options	Affordable Housing	Urban horticulture
Waterfront redevelopment	Accessible parks	Better policing	Occupy deserted retail	More multi-residential housing projects	Sustainable oriented Development
Tourism on the waterfront	More pedestrian pathways	Youth Group Centre downtown	Fast tracking business permits	More condominiums	Preserve mature trees on residential/commercial properties (Tree canopy)
Recreational Waterfront activities	More street trash cans	Public Pool	More attractive businesses	Low-income housing (co-op)	More green space
Waterfront revitalization	More monuments	Reduced water/tax rates	Derelict properties - Property standards	More senior-tailored housing	
Enhanced waterfront access and scenery	Road repair	More recreational opportunities	Modern restaurants		
	Cleaner parks	Downtown cleanup	Downtown core revitalization		
	Enhanced trail network	Hospital services expansion			
	Paid parking Downtown	More community involvement			
	Enhanced play structures	Events Calendar billboard			
	Recreational activities for children	Downtown parking			
	More Traffic calming measures				

*Appendix “A” to this report shows the responses to this question in full.*

The third visioning question asked “**what specific subjects would you like to see addressed in an Official Plan Update?**” Examples such as “Housing”, “Downtown Revitalization” and “Climate Change” were posed and respondents were invited to identify up to three subjects.

Similar to the other questions, six themes emerged. A word count was performed on the survey responses and categorized by theme, and graphically illustrated below. Inside each circle are some of the most frequent key words that emerged out of the word count.



**Next Steps**

Planning staff are grateful for the thoughtful and meaningful feedback received through this consultation. Most of the themes addressed in the survey are already addressed in some manner in the current Official Plan. Some themes, such as housing, are addressed in current policy, however framed around a different social and economic context and as such, can be updated substantially to capture the Town’s current needs. The survey does not suggest that the directions and broad visions outlined in the current Plan need to be substantially changed.

Over the second half of the summer, and informed by the survey results, planning staff will meet individually with department heads to identify departmental interests and priorities relating to the Official Plan. A good Official Plan is a community guide that supports the operations of every department. Following this internal consultation, staff will follow up with a recommendation on 5-6 specific themes that will be workshopped with the public in the fall. The theme specific workshops will give interested residents and stakeholders the opportunity to provide feedback and support policy development in areas in which they are interested.

The next Council touchpoint on the Official Plan update will be in late August. The report will update Council on department feedback and seek Council's concurrence on the following items:

- Identify the key themes
- Confirm Council's technical direction on whether we should proceed by way of amending the current Official Plan or writing a new one that replaces the current.
- Obtain Council's direction on the integration of area-specific planning processes, including Lorne Street, Ferrara Drive and Centre Street.

The second two of those items will inform the text of a Request for Proposals that staff will release in early September that will seek a qualified consultant to facilitate the public engagement process, and work with staff, Council and the public on mapping and policy.

Staff expect to bring a recommendation to Council in late September on a recommended consultant.

**Budget/Financial Implications:** The 2023 Capital Budget has set aside \$90,000 to complete the Land Needs Study project and undertake the next steps of work on the Official Plan.

**Link to Strategic Plan:** This report addresses issues that are pertinent to each priority area in the new Strategic Plan.

**Existing Policy:**

- Current Official Plan
- Provincial Policy Statement 2020
- Ontario Planning Act

**Consultations:** Public consultation through survey; management team.

**Attachments:** **Appendix "A" – Full Survey Responses**

**Notes/Action (space for Council Member's notes):**

Respectfully Submitted:

*Original Copy Signed*

Karl Grenke RPP, MCIP  
Senior Planner

Approved for agenda by CAO:

*Original Copy Signed*

Malcolm Morris, CMO  
Chief Administrative Officer

## Appendix “A” – What Changes do You Think Would Improve Smiths Falls and Why – Full Responses

<b>Survey Responses</b>	<b>What changes do you think would improve Smiths Falls and why?</b>
	Development of waterfront property
	Better transportation options, more employment options, maintain character, make better use of waterfront as a resource
	Encourage tourism by accessibility from locks, more overnight dockage for boaters and promote accommodation
	We need to have Confederation Bridge rebuilt as it was before, with one lane for vehicular traffic and a separate lane way for pedestrian traffic. Nothing less will suffice. We also need to address the great need for affordable and accessible housing. What we have now is nowhere near adequate. I would like to see permits available for homeowners to have one or two honeybee hives in their backyards. It would require a license, but it would be so beneficial to our environment. Lastly, I would love to see an accessible park for children, including a wheelchair accessible swing, adaptive equipment, and sensory panels, so that they would be fully inclusive.
	I would like to see the town look into how they can make landlords clean up their properties and ensure they are not run down. I would like to see the town look into a tax for abandoned property so that there is a deterrent to let property get left abandoned and used for crime or arson. I think tree canopy should be looked into as we expand with new housing and commercial space, we need to ensure we are not allowing all the mature trees to be taken down. More pedestrian paths across the river.
	Occupy deserted retail
	More garbage cans on streets. More monuments. Better policing. Things for teenagers like youth groups that are in the centre of town so ALL youth can attend. A public pool in town.
	Repair the roads, stop the unnecessary "pretty" pro just and focus on repairing our failing roads. There are over 60% of the roads in Smiths Falls needing substantial proper repaving. and taxes/water rates need to be reduced substantially as that was promised by Mayor Pankow in 2018. Make the town affordable to those who have lived here their whole lives. Stop wasting money.
	Cleaner parks would improve quality of life
	There is a lack of options. Example: The availability of modern restaurants (consider Perth), The availability of "developed and maintained" recreation facilities besides hockey, The availability of trails and paths (not sidewalks) where people (families, elderly) can stroll without having cars, ATV's and snowmobiles buzz them. Places that have mature trees and nature still intact.
	It would be nice to see more pride in the store fronts in the downtown core. There are cigarette butts everywhere. It's gross. Paid parking so people can spend more than two hours doing something in the downtown area without being ticketed. More use of the areas by the river. More mid-level dining. I've never seen so much garbage fast food in my life.
	Hospital expansion or increase staffing, more multi res projects, new or additional play structures at lower reach park
	More condominiums as retired folks transition from single family homes. We are currently looking to move to Perth/Almonte in the next few years because there are more condominium options there.
	Fast tracking the briskness permit system as this is a major pain point and deterrent for businesses



Improving our access and scenery around the water, like beaches and parks - right now they are covered in poop and look outdated and forget
Low-income housing(co-op), more activities for children ages 10 and up, keeping the park clean for movies under the stars (quite nasty trying to watch movies and snack around geese poop!) Fixing up the splash pad.
Keep doing projects like degrading Daniel St. Develop based on sustainability and anticipated effects of climate change
Don't overbuild without adequate social events. Do not want Smiths Falls to be just a bedroom community for Ottawa.
More attractive businesses (business grants, official reviews of new business plans to ensure business is successful). More community involvement, more advertisement, encouraging younger spenders to buy a home here.
More green space. We are losing too much green space & natural habitats. Fix what we have or tear it down.
Painted parking lines on the main drag, extended lights turning onto 43 at Cornelia Street, red light cameras. Would hold people accountable and bring money back to the community, upgraded trails, more recreational things to do such as YMCA- with Smiths falls rapidly growing it would be nice to not rely on going to the city so often. Better variety of commercial restaurants/take out. Flashing yellow lights at major intersection during overnight hours/red light for the opposite traffic. Decrease the congestion between Walmart and Abbot St. Impossible to get out of KFC/A&W parking lots at times.
More garbage cans on side streets, parks for families and a youth group more centred in town.
provide pedestrian crossing at Strathcona and Abbott, Emsley and Russell, tree canopy replacement policy, sidewalk improvements, incorporate old water treatment plant/existing water tower into parklands, events calendar billboard in downtown/tourist areas, tax/fine owners of vacant derelict buildings (e.g. George St. row houses), more outdoor skating rinks, sliding hill, more parkettes in new development areas e.g. Ferrara Meadows area, more senior specific housing options e.g. co-op living, remove angled parking near corner of Main and Beckwith
Lower taxes
Affordable housing. Regular working class can't even move because rent is overpriced.
Emphasis in revitalizing the downtown core.
We desperately need more downtown parking. My customers are constantly complaining that there are no spots available when they try to come to my office.
More green space. Additional housing and increased population require more space for children to safely play.
THE BRIDGE! A major factor in my decision to move here and it has been closed and an eyesore for years, better control over abandoned properties like the four-plex at George and Main another eyesore, more signage and a community events 'billboard' (or several) to direct those us who do not Facebook to know what's on or even better what's coming!
Better maintained and more youth facility infrastructure. Sports fields and facilities as well as social environments.
Homeowner, landlord standards. Better traffic measures especially implementing safety immediately in new subdivisions. Being more transparent about new subs
affordable housing
Better Bylaw enforcement especially to vacant properties allowed to deteriorate like at the corner of George and Main. A disgrace! Garbage overflow that collects and exposed bins at corner of Beckwith and Russell, directly opposite our showcase mural on Shoppers. Really?
Beautification of parks, Enhancing the waterfront

