



Help Shape the Future of Country Hills Park

Public Open House 2 and Online Survey Summary

July 2024

Prepared by LURA Consulting

Prepared for the City of Kitchener



Executive Summary

We are upgrading Country Hills Park and adding stormwater facilities. Your input will help guide the design of these upgrades so that the park better serves the neighbourhood.

Park updates will include:

- Trail upgrades
- A stormwater pond or underground stormwater feature
- Upgrades to other park features in response to the community's interests and needs

By making stormwater facility investments in Country Hills Park, we will:

- Improve water quality in Balzer Creek and the Grand River.
- Reduce the risk of flooding.
- Reduce erosion in Balzer Creek.
- Improve resilience against climate change.
- Enhance community safety.

Country Hills Park is one of many places across Kitchener that will help contribute to this goal.

The City of Kitchener and Aquafor Beech staff presented a draft site design and planting plan for Country Hills Park for public input. Staff developed the one (1) draft site design and planting plan option based in part on the feedback from the community at the open house in November and December 2023. Community members were invited to provide feedback on the site design, planting plan, and play elements from July 24, 2024, to August 23, 2024.

Community members could share feedback on the draft site design and planting plan by:

- Attending the in-person open house on July 24, 2024.
- Filling out a written survey.
- Written comments on sticky notes or event passports
- Verbal discussions with staff.
- Completing the online survey on Engage Kitchener between July 24, 2024 and August 23, 2024.
- Emailing the project team directly.

In total, 111 people attended the open house, and 11 completed the written or online survey.



What We Heard

Overall, the feedback received at the event was fairly positive. Community members appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the design, speak with staff and share perspectives.

Stormwater Management

- **Wetland Design:** Some participants loved the wetland design and its location, while others expressed concerns about potential safety risks for children, pets, and newcomers.
- **Flooding:** Several participants highlighted flooding issues in lower areas of the park, hoping that the stormwater upgrades will address this problem.
- **Erosion Control:** The design aims to reduce erosion in **Balzer Creek**, a concern echoed by the community.

Open Space

- **Native Trees and Shrubs:** Many participants appreciated the inclusion of native vegetation. There were suggestions to replace trees near community gardens and naturalize the park, while keeping as many existing trees as possible.
- **Maintenance Access Road:** Residents living along **Country Hills Drive** suggested moving the access road closer to the pond, planting a small buffer of shrubs, and eliminating the large grating rocks.
- **Invasive Species:** Participants expressed interest in removing invasive **Buckthorn** from the woodlot.

Park Amenities

- **Seating:** There was a desire for more benches and picnic tables throughout the park.
- **Playground Features:** Survey participants preferred **slides, swings, and spinners** for playground equipment, followed by **music and sensory panels**, while **climbers** were the least favored.
- **Baseball Field:** Participants mentioned the baseball field is underused and suggested repurposing or improving the space.
- **Waste Management:** Suggestions included adding more garbage bins, especially near the creek for dog waste, and creating a dedicated waste disposal area.

Safety

- **Wetland Safety Concerns:** Some participants worried that the wetland design posed risks for children and pets.
- **Accessibility:** Many participants stressed the importance of making the park accessible, particularly the trail from **Country Hill Drive**.

More information is included on the following pages.



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Introduction

Background

In 2016, the City of Kitchener Council approved a Stormwater Master Plan. This plan created a strategy to manage stormwater for the next 15 years. This plan identified that only 25% of runoff in the city is managed through stormwater facilities. This means 75% of untreated runoff from heavy rainfall and snow melt flows into storm sewers. This contributes to contamination of local creeks, erosion, and flooding.

This sewer collects stormwater runoff from a significant part of the neighbourhood (**Figure 1**). New stormwater measures would intercept and filter the runoff before it enters Balzer Creek and the Grand River. This would reduce downstream flood risks and reduce erosion. Country Hills Park is a good place to manage stormwater in the area. It meets several technical criteria that cannot be met elsewhere, including:

- The park is larger than 1 hectare.
- The park is public land.
- The park has a stormwater sewer connection greater than 450 millimetres.
- The park is not too steep.
- The park does not have large treed areas or wetlands.
- The area has the potential to meet water quality criteria.

The Master Plan identified initial concepts for projects to be installed throughout Kitchener. The City gathered feedback from the community through pop-up events in the park in July 2024 and a survey. Three design options were created, based on community input.

Community members were invited to share their thoughts at an open house and online survey in late 2023. We created one site design and planting plan option based on this input.

To help us build these projects, the City was awarded nearly \$50 million from the Government of Canada. The funding is through the Disaster Mitigation Adaptation Fund. This funding means the City can install needed stormwater measures sooner and at a reduced cost.

Event Purpose

- Provide context of the decisions and background work from the Integrated Stormwater Master Plan.
- Develop a common understanding of what has happened so far.
- Share what we heard from the late 2023 open house and online survey feedback.
- Share the draft site design and planting plan for Country Hills Park and gather feedback.
- Outline the engagement and design process ahead.



Map Legend

1 – A large purple area covers much of the map. Runoff from this area flows to Country Hills Park

2 - This area of the map shows Country Hills Park in orange. A pond here will help control downstream flooding and improve water quality.

3 – New infrastructure in the park will mean water exiting Country Hills Park will reduce downstream erosion and risks to infrastructure

Figure 1. A large volume of runoff stormwater currently passes Country Hills Park with no infrastructure to manage flooding and erosion.

What We Heard

Overall, the feedback received at the event was fairly positive. Community members appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the design, speak with staff and share perspectives. There was a mix of perspectives on the future of Country Hills Park. Feedback is organized under subheadings below.

Stormwater Management and the Stormwater Wetland

Comments received from the open house and survey about stormwater management and the stormwater wetland indicated:

- Participants shared that a lot of water collects in the community garden's low area.
- A few participants shared that they love the wetland designs and location.
- Participants suggested that the pond should capitalize on the water that is already pooling.
- Several residents along Country Hills Drive provided feedback on the City maintenance access road along the park. They advocated for pushing the access road as close to the pond as possible and leaving as much grass as possible. They suggested planting a small buffer of shrubs/vegetation in front of the access road and eliminating the large grating rocks along it.
- Participants are concerned about potential odours from the ponds when there isn't continuous water movement.
- There was a suggestion to stock ponds with fish such as Bass, Pike, Musky, and Perch.
- A participant suggested having stormwater management underground instead.
- There is a concern that the pond design does not sufficiently prevent access. A few residents shared that the vegetation is insufficient to prevent children from drowning.
- There are different opinions about fences around the ponds.
 - A few participants preferred a chain-link fence to be installed around the wetland for the safety of the children.
 - A few preferred no fencing at all.
- A few participants would like to make sure kids have access to water.
- Participants are concerned about pond maintenance. They want to know how the ponds will be cleaned to prevent mosquitoes, particularly when children are playing in the park nearby.
- A participant suggested that the pond be far from the community garden plot.
- There was a desire to add seats by the pond for the lookout to sit and observe.
- There was an interest in having the wetland visible from the street.
- A desire to have more vistas, boardwalks, and/or benches in the wetland.
- A few participants desired no pond lookouts.

Open Space

Comments received from the open house and survey about open space indicated:

- One participant felt the design covered all the community's basic needs, such as the play area, sports court, and trails.
- There is support for the open concept.
- A concern about how the proposed designs will create new views and sightlines was shared. They shared that they do not see changes to the plantings affecting sightlines.
- A few participants felt that the current design breaks up the park and removes the open field and great space.
- A few participants shared a desire to maintain privacy for homes and townhouses backing the park.
- A participant suggested there is an open space for dogs.

Shade

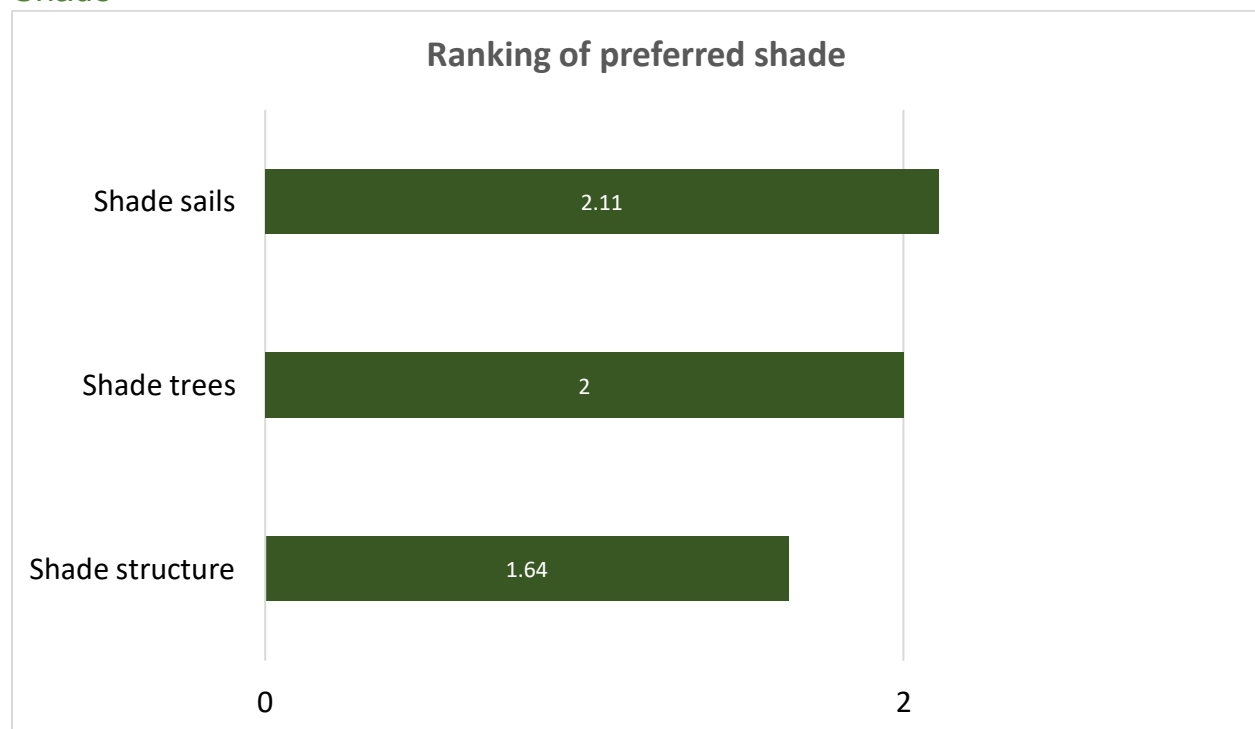


Figure 2. Responses to rank the preferred shade for Country Hills Park, where 1 is your least preferred option, and 5 is your most preferred option. (n=11)

- Across the open house and survey, there was a desire to have more shaded places and a desire to have trees for shade. Participants shared that the trees could last forever if they are maintained well.
- In the survey, participants ranked shaded trees and sails as the preferred option and shade structures as the least preferred option.
- Participants like the shade in the gathering in the park's center area

- A participant shared that shade structure is less susceptible to damage via the weather or humans and thus should last longer.
- A few participants suggested natural tree canopy shade, while others liked the shade sails. However, there is a concern that the shade sails provide fewer options.

Trails

Comments received from the open house and survey about trails indicated:

- Several participants wished to keep the trail natural. In contrast, other participants expressed a desire to have the trails paved.
- Several participants said the trail will be redone with asphalt, and maintenance will be done in the winter. In contrast, one participant suggested that the City maintain the current trail with better maintenance.
- A participant shared that the multi-trail is paved on the north and west sides of Balzer Creek (on the left side of the creek looking east from Old Country Drive). A few participants suggested there is an opportunity for the community trail on the south side of Balzer Creek, North of Old Country Rd to be connected.
- Participants like the new location of the trail considering the changes.
- Participants like the longer trail and views.
- Participants shared that the current trail by the gardens flood after the rain.
- Participants wanted to ensure the park was accessible, especially the trail coming from Country Hill Drive.
- Participants are concerned that the road crossing at Country Hill is dangerous and would like to see traffic calming measures implemented.
- Participants suggested a speed limit posted on the trail to avoid fast bikers and e-bikers.
- A participant suggested fencing the cul-de-sac section of the trail to stop cut throughs.
-

Seating and Gathering Spaces

Comments received from the open house and survey about seating and gathering spaces indicated:

- Participants like the central seating location.
- There is a desire to have more benches or picnic tables in the park.
- A participant likes the shade with the benches.
- Participants love the gathering place.
- Participants would like lighting around gathering spaces, especially in the winter.
- A desire to have gazebos and picnic tables for outdoor seating to foster social gatherings.
- Additional feedback that game tables should be considered.

Trees, Plantings and Pollinators

Comments received from the open house and survey about plantings and pollinators indicated:

- There is support for planting native plant species.
- A few people like the variety of native trees and shrubs in the design. They suggested replacing trees and naturalizing the park more with native trees.
- There were several specific recommendations for consideration, including:
 - Having single pollinators
 - Having disease-resistant apple pear trees
 - Planting paw-paw and weeping willow
 - Including Bush Honeysuckle to attract birds to the space
 - Integrating patches of wildflowers.
- There is interest in removing invasive Buckthorn in the woodlot as part of the plan to allow for native plants and trees to grow.
- A participant suggested improving the patch of flowering plants behind St. Aloysius School and Senior homes.
- Participants suggest that trees should not be located too close to housing in case of a windstorm.
- There is a desire to have larger trees to provide natural canopy shade.
- Participants living along the property lines at Country Hill Drive preferred mowed grass instead of fences.

Community Garden

Comments received from the open house and survey about the community garden indicated:

- There is a strong desire to continue supporting Country Hills community garden.
- Participants suggested working with the community garden to ensure the community is responsible for maintaining the garden fruit trees.
- Some community members desired trees around the community garden, such as fruit trees. In contrast, one participant shared that too many trees may be shading the garden.
- A participant has a security concern about the garden. They shared that many people break into the community garden.
- A participant recommended not blocking the community garden entrance access. They use it for deliveries.
- A participant shared that the shade is not a concern.

Sports Courts

Comments received from the open house and survey about the sports courts indicated:

- Many participants wish to improve the sports courts.
- Many participants suggested a new sports area that includes pickleball and tennis.
- A participant suggested a multisport court.

- There is a desire to have the following sports courts to reflect fast-growing sports in the community:
 - Basketball
 - Volleyball
 - Pickleball.
 - ½ Cricket Pitch
 - Road hockey
- A few participants wanted the tennis court to be preserved, while others supported removing the existing tennis court. One participant suggested having two (2) tennis courts and looking for other spaces where the pickleball could be.
- There was a suggestion that a multi-use sports court would bring multi-generational groups.
- A participant is concerned about the maintenance of the sports courts.
- A concern was raised that the potential sports area is in the floodplain and thus will flood.
- There is a concern about not having a sports area approved by GRCA and losing sports in the park.

Baseball Diamond

Comments received from the open house and survey about the baseball diamond indicated:

- Many participants shared that the current baseball field is not used.
 - Suggestions included having the baseball diamond:
 - Repurposed
 - Improved
 - Removed.
- A participant suggested a dog park to replace the existing baseball diamond.
- There is interest in improving the maintenance of the ball field.
- Participants shared that the baseball diamond areas can get wet. They hope that the grading will address it.
- A participant shared that the baseball diamond is used for cricket instead.
- Participants suggest maintaining the diamond and add a cricket pitch for a traditional playground with a wood fibre surface and play structure.
- A participant suggested draining the park field with the best affordable solutions. They shared that the rain makes it unusable.

Play Areas and Playground Equipment

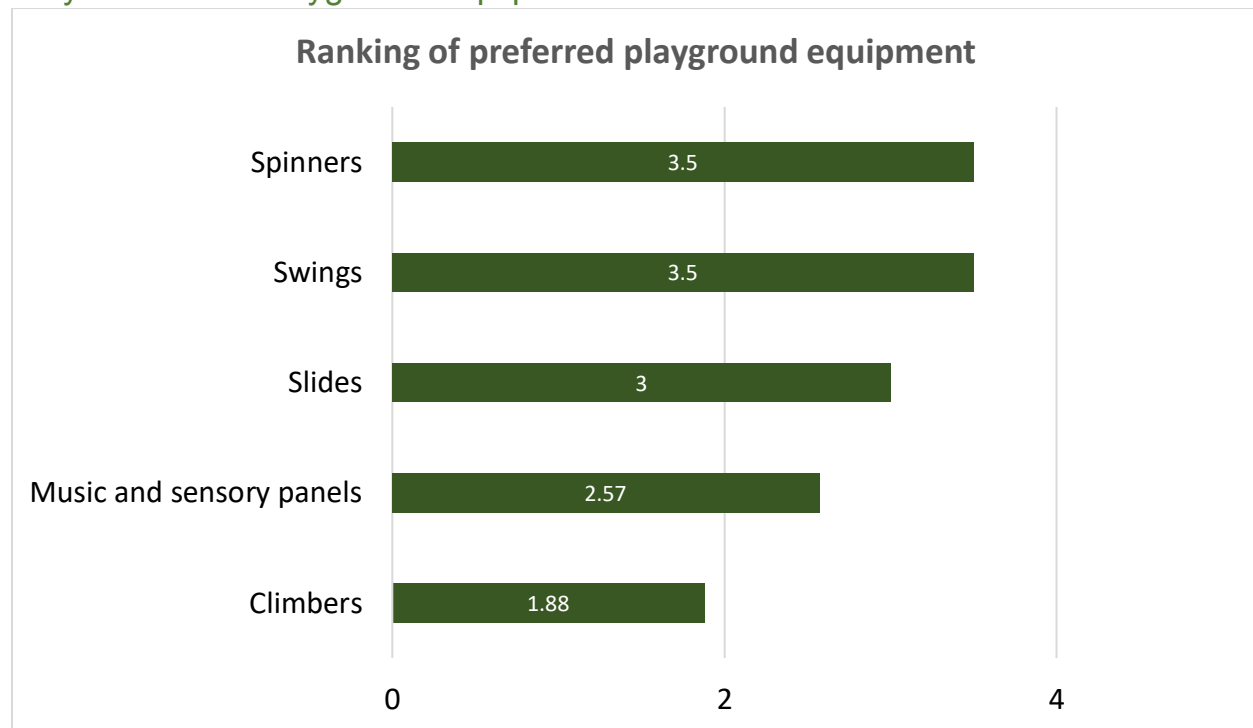


Figure 3. Responses to rank the preferred type of playground equipment for Country Hills Park, where 1 is your least preferred option, and 5 is your most preferred option. (n=8)

Comments received from the open house and survey about play areas and playground equipment indicated:

- There is a desire for age inclusive playground design: small children to teenagers.
- Many participants wanted to add more/multiple swings to the area for all ages and abilities. They shared there are currently only two (2) swings.
- One participant indicated that play structure is more important than natural areas.
- A participant suggested junior equipment around the playground equipment for ages 2-5. They shared that the community is actively getting younger.
- Participants suggested that the playground function as a "cooling center" in the morning for young families. They shared that the area should have good shade coverage.
- There is a desire to have a big playground, larger play areas and more all-ages-friendly play areas.
- Participants like the pavilion for gathering.
- There is a desire to have lots of trees in the playground.
- A participant shared that kids have more fun building in the forest.
- There is interest in integrating play areas to provide shaded areas for parents and ensure the playground is safe for children.

- Additional ideas suggested adding a splash pad, monkey bars, saucers, and a rock-climbing wall.
- A participant shared that Schlegel Park has a great play area. It has two areas for toddlers and younger children, one with a shade structure. This gives children the opportunity to be creative beyond climbers. The shade also allows parents to stay and use the park longer.
- Survey participants ranked slides, swings, and spinners as a preferred option. With music and sensory panels second, climbers are the least preferred option.

Safety

- Participants shared that the parks get dark after night. They suggested lighting around the area like the playground.
- A few participants are concerned that the pond designs pose a safety risk. They shared concerns about safety issues for children, dogs, and newcomers.
- A participant expressed a desire to have emergency lake poles.
- There is a desire to ensure children's safety around the school bus stop at the trail entrance as the kids constantly use the unmaintained trail in the park to get to the housing co-op in the winter.
- Despite the thick vegetation, there is a concern about kids' safety on the path.

Other Feedback

- Many participants suggested increasing and improving the number of garbage bins and creating a dedicated space for waste bins. They also suggested adding more garbage bins near the creek for dog waste.
- Participants wanted to ensure the accessibility to the park.
- There is a desire to keep the rock at Martin glen Crescent.
- Participants wanted traffic calming on the road outside of the park.
- There is a concern about parking. Participants want to divert parking from residential streets.
- Participants wanted signs to educate people on pet waste, and how it contaminates the water system.
- Some participants wanted a bit more attention paid to the school bus stop at the entrance to the park:
 - Safety considerations
 - Seating
 - Weather shelters
- Participants urged the City not to take down any trees during this process.
- A few participants want to be updated about the playground.
- A participant would like to keep access to parks from the yards.
- The need for enhanced security measures, such as installing security cameras, was highlighted.

Community Engagement Process

Participants generally indicated they were satisfied with the community engagement process. They indicated they were mostly satisfied with the format of the engagement event, the ways they could provide feedback, and the convenient and accessible meeting time.

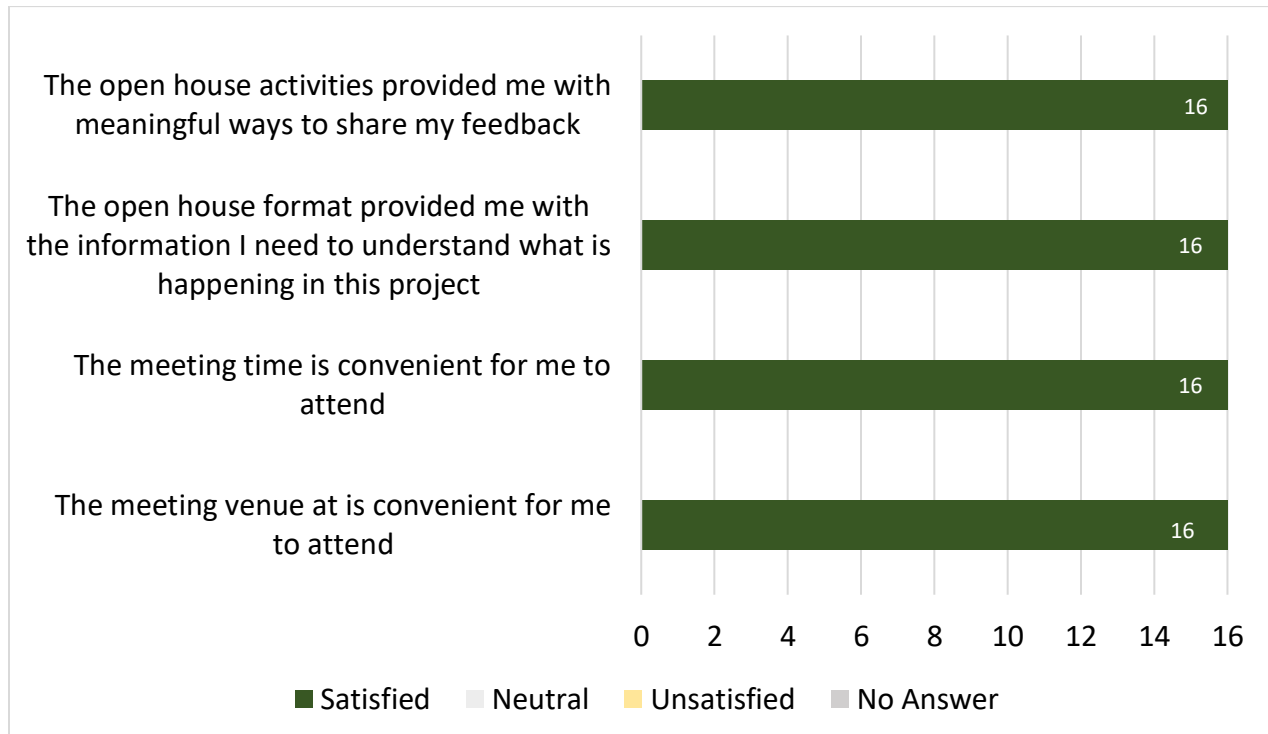


Figure 4. Responses to Open House Passport questions about the open house experience. (n=16)

Participants offered additional feedback on the community engagement process:

- A participant wanted more transparency about decision-making.
- Participants appreciated having two (2) project managers come to the backyard to explain the project.
- A participant shared that the project looks amazing.
- A participant shared that they are happy to live in front of the park.
- A participant asked where we can see examples of proposed design elements.
- Many participants expressed gratitude for the helpful information and knowledgeable staff.
- A few participants liked the different layout options as they enhanced the park, while a few felt their previous feedback was not heard.

Engagement Opportunity Details

Public Open House

City of Kitchener staff and their consultants Aquafor Beech hosted an in-person open house on July 24, 2024. The open house was from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. and was held at Country Hills Park. Community members could review information about the site design, planting plan, and safety concepts. City and consultant team staff were available to answer questions and listen to feedback.

Throughout the open house, attendees could provide feedback by:

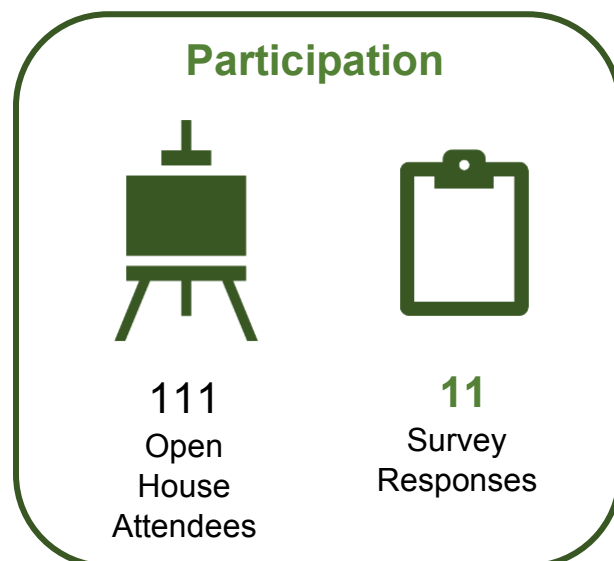
- Placing sticky notes with comments and questions on display boards.
- Completing the Country Hills Park Passport Activity
- Completing a written survey.
- Speaking to project team staff one-on-one.

One hundred and eleven (111) people signed into the open house.

Online Survey

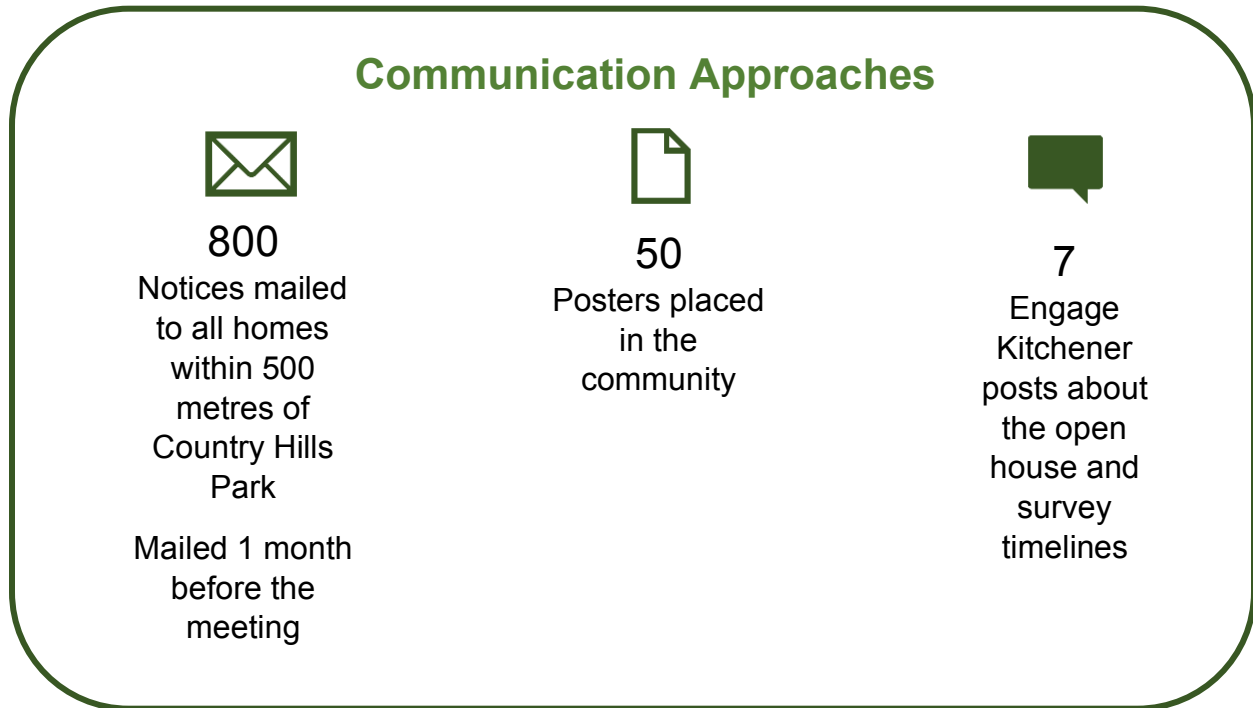
Following the open house, the City published an online survey on the [Your Country Hills Park, Engagement Kitchener page](#). The survey was available from July 24, 2024, to August 23, 2024.

The survey included seventeen (17) questions to gather feedback and questions about the design concept, planting plan, and play elements in Country Hills Park. This included six (3) questions about the site plan, two (2) on planting plan, two (2) on play equipment, two (2) on shade, one (1) on seating and gathering, one (1) on sport courts, and one (1) on the consultation process and four (4) optional demographic questions. In total, 11 people completed the survey.



Communication

City of Kitchener staff communicated these engagement opportunities using the following methods.



Next Steps

City staff and their consultants will review the feedback contained in this summary report to prepare the final design. The final design will incorporate considerations from the community and technical requirements.

Appendix A: Survey Demographics

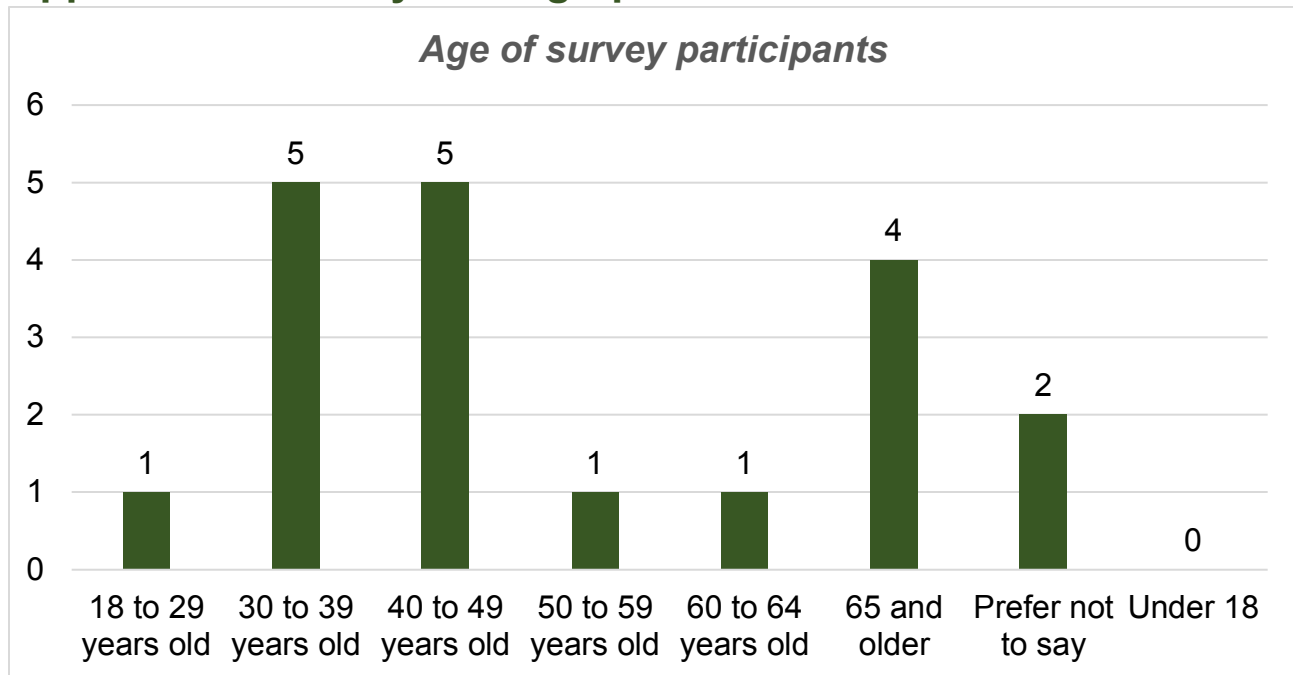


Figure 5. Age of survey participants (n=11)

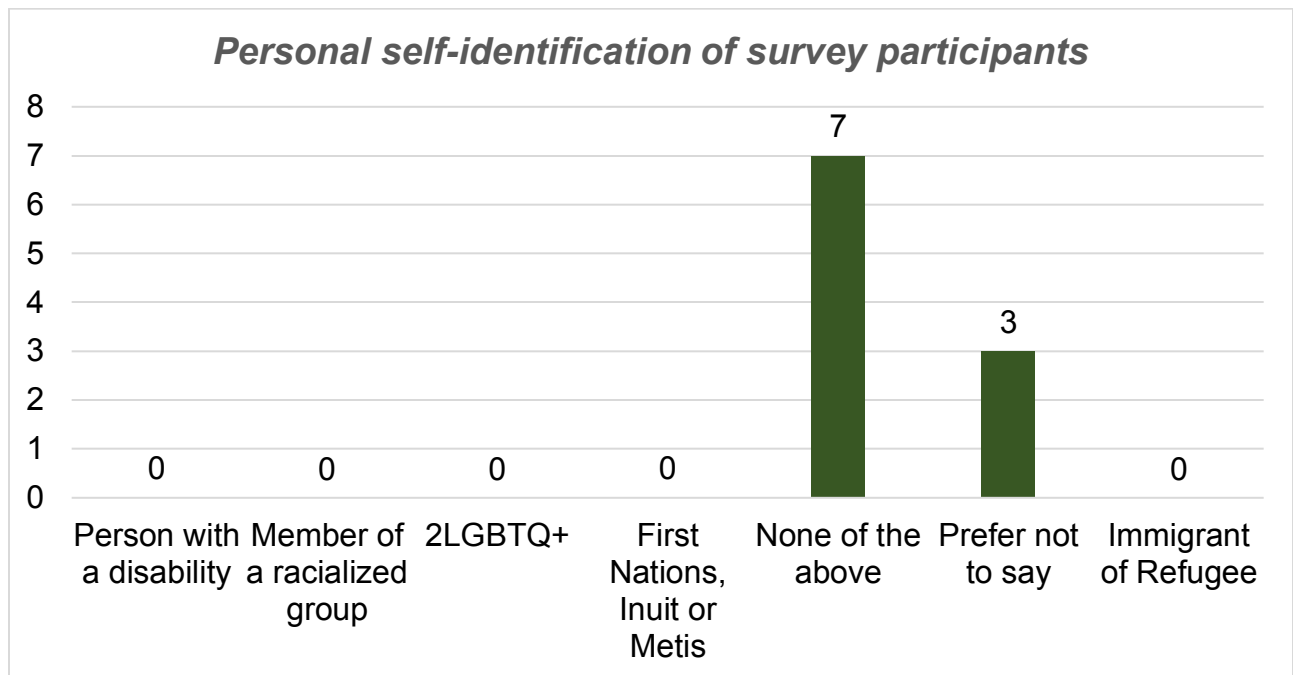


Figure 6. Personal self-identification of survey participants (n=11)

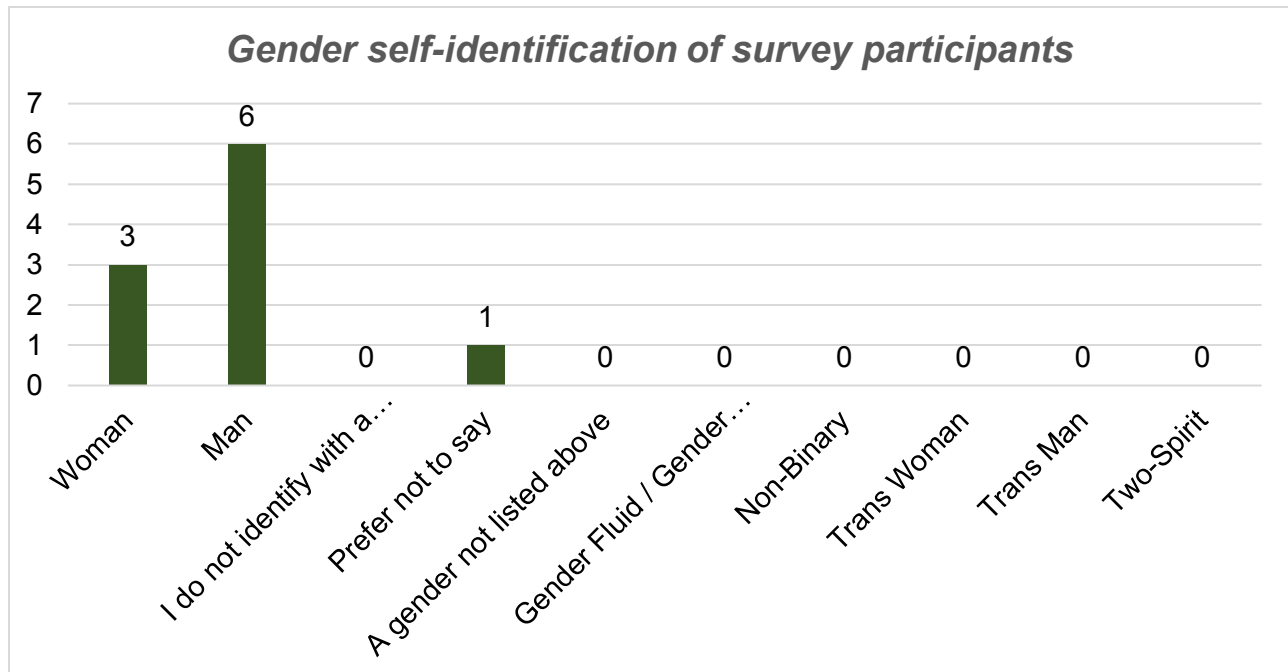


Figure 7. Gender self-identification of survey participants (n=11)

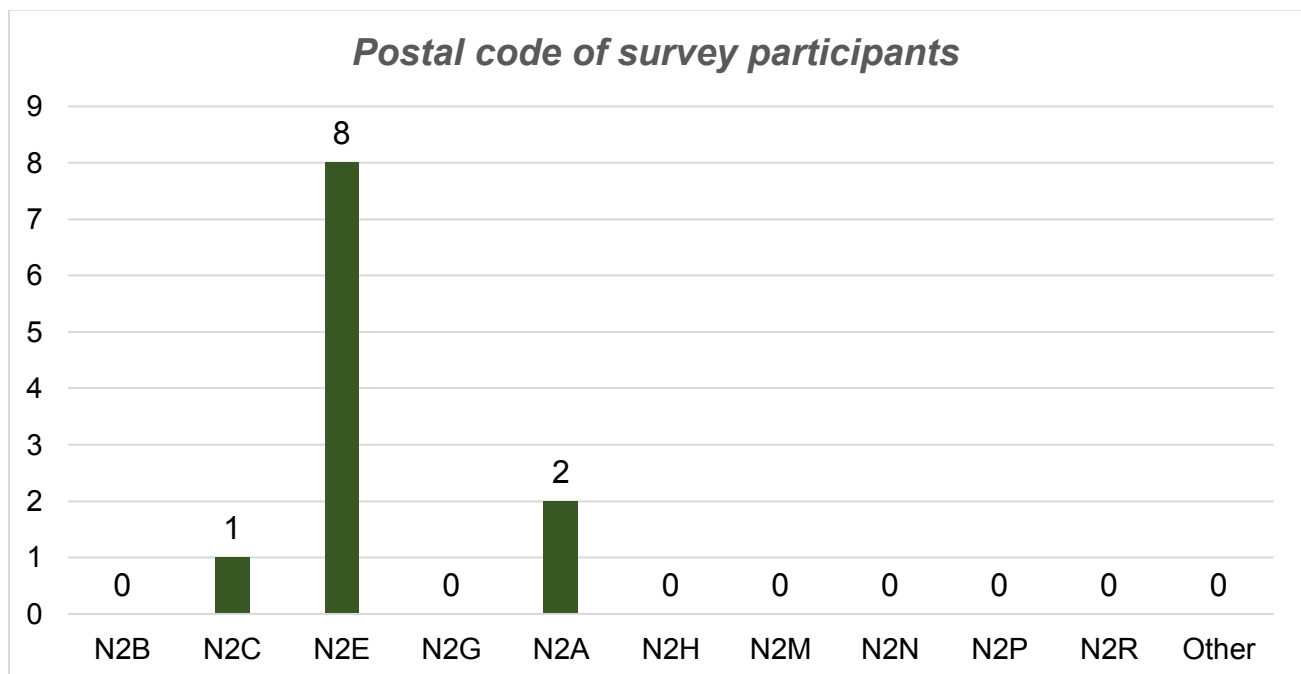


Figure 8. Postal code of survey participants (n=11)