



# COMMUNITY SURVEY REPORT FALHER MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

October 2015

Prepared by the Mackenzie Municipal Services Agency



## SURVEY OBJECTIVE

The Town of Falher is developing a Municipal Development Plan (MDP), which is a long-range strategic document intended to guide the growth and development of a municipality into the future. The objective of the survey is to understand the attitudes and feelings of the residents about the present and future of Falher.

## SURVEY PROCESS AND COMPONENTS

### **Consultation Reach**



MDP survey display at Honey Fest

The survey was developed in the spring of 2015 and launched to the public on June 21, 2015 at Honey Fest in the Town of Falher. Responses were accepted from June 21 to September 7, 2015.

The MDP Community survey was advertised in every issue of the Smoky River Express from June 24 until September 2, 2015. An article about the MDP and the survey was published in the Smoky River Express on June 24, 2015. The survey was mailed out with the town utility

bill to all households and was made available online through the Town's website and Facebook page. The

survey was managed by the Mackenzie Municipal Services Agency through Survey Monkey.

Information about the MDP was posted on the Town's Facebook page twice along with a link to the online survey. The post reached<sup>1</sup> 155 people on August 17 and received 9 clicks and reached 106 people on September 7 and received 18 clicks.

### **Public Survey Results**

A total of 76 surveys were completed, which represents approximately 7% of the Town's total population or 9% of the Town's adult population, based on the most recent population count of 1,075<sup>2</sup>. The surveys that were sent out with water bills had the highest response rate; 23 were completed online and the remaining 46 were completed manually and submitted to the Town office.

<sup>1</sup> Post reach is the number of people who have seen a post. A post counts as reaching someone when it's shown in their News Feed.

<sup>2</sup> Source: 2011 Stats Canada Census. Note the population numbers for men and women within the Stat Canada data are inconsistent with the total population numbers.



## SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### WHO RESPONDED

The demographic questions in the survey help determine if the responses are representative of the Town’s population. As Figure 1 shows, the survey attracted responses from all age groups except young children. The group with the highest population, seniors aged 80 and above, were considerably underrepresented while younger seniors, aged 60 to 69, had some of the highest response rates. Another high response rate was from adults aged 30-44, while adults 25-29 were underrepresented.

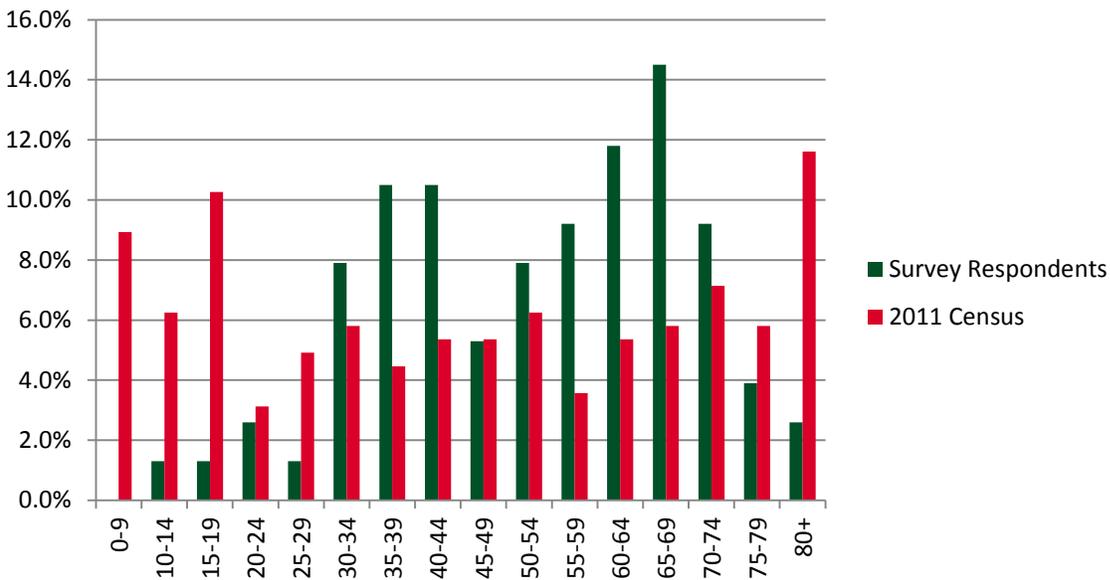


Figure 1 – Response to “what is your age?” and age distribution of town of Falher from 2011 census (76 responses, 0 skipped)

In Figure 2, the male to female ratio of respondents is compared to the gender make-up of the MD from the 2011 Census, and shows a similar gender ratio between survey respondents and Falher residents.

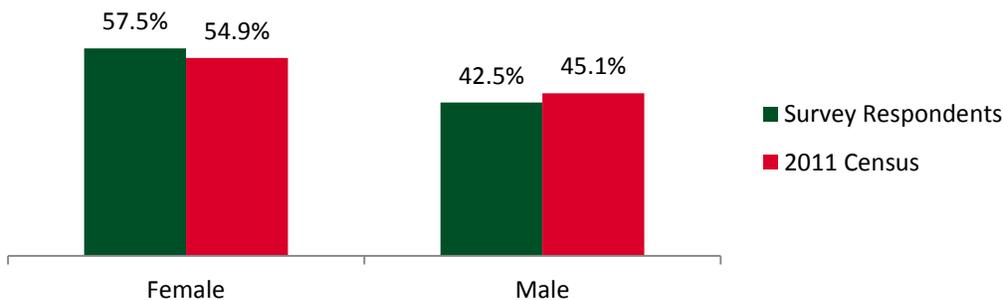


Figure 2 Comparison of gender make-up between survey respondents and 2011 Census (75 responses, 1 skipped)



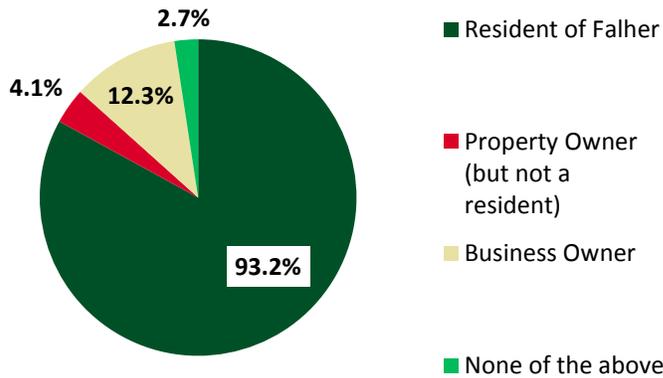


Figure 3 – Response to the question about residency of survey respondents (73 responses, 3 skipped)

Figure 3 shows that the majority of survey respondents are residents of the Town (93%). The remaining 7% of respondents are property owners who do not live in Town, business owners (9 of which are also residents) or the respondent did not specify.

The majority of survey respondents have lived in Falher for 21 years or more (Figure 4) which corresponds to the high number of respondents over the age of 50. Like many communities in Alberta, Falher has an aging population which will impact the type and quality of services needed in Town.

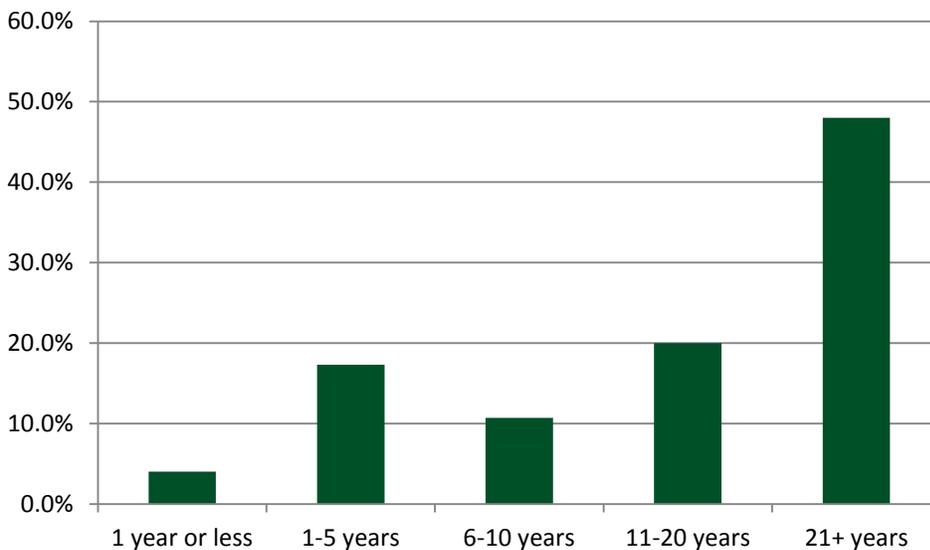


Figure 4 – Response to “how long have you lived in Falher?” (75 responses, 1 skipped)



As shown in Figure 5, the French language plays an important role in the cultural life for many residents in Falher. Although the majority of respondents identified English as their primary language, many respondents also identified either French or both in the surveys that were filled out manually (online respondents were only able to choose a single answer).

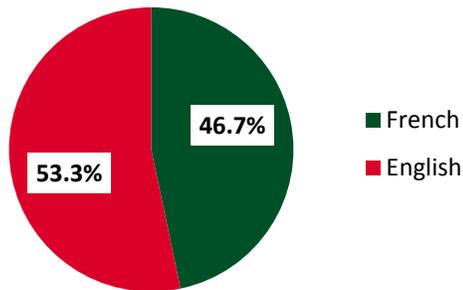


Figure 5 – Response to “what is your primary language?” (75 answered, 1 skipped)

The top three reasons respondents gave for living in Falher were employment, lifestyle and family (Figure 6). Less popular reasons were recreation opportunities, cost of living and schools and comments later in the survey support this result.

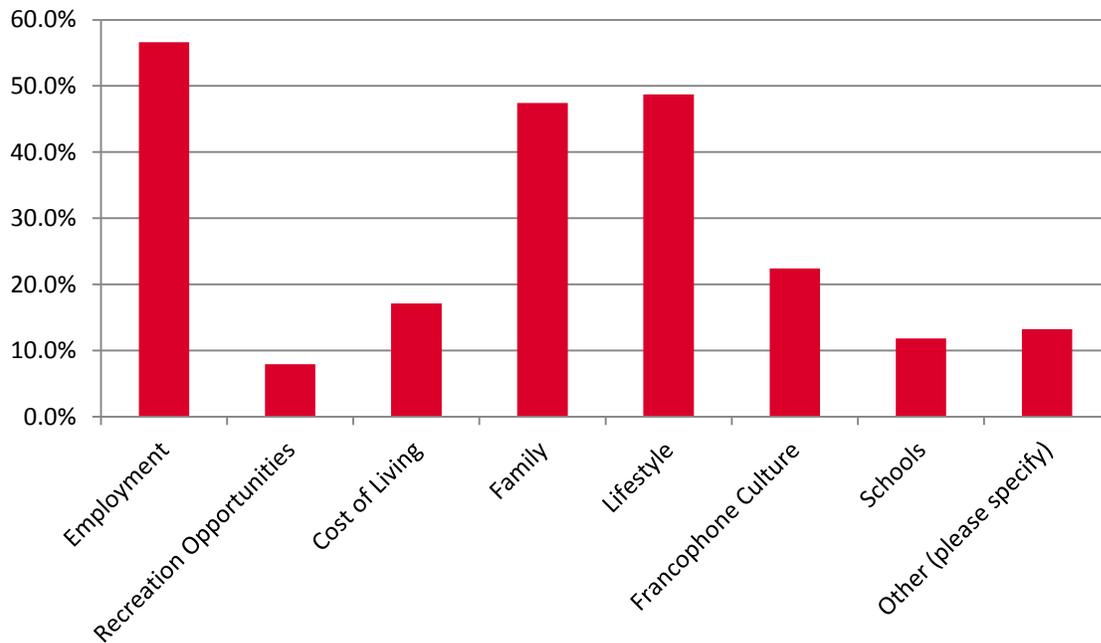


Figure 6 – Response to “why do you choose to live in Falher?” (76 responses, 0 skipped)



HOUSING

The majority of respondents own their own home (89.5%, Figure 7) and the majority of both renters and homeowners live in single detached dwellings (Figure 8).

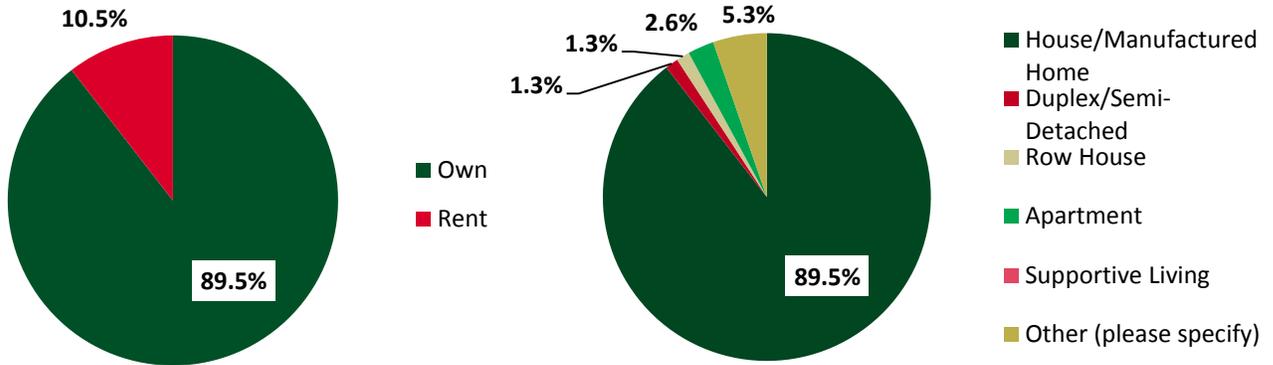


Figure 7 Response to "do you own or rent your home?"

Figure 8 Response to "what type of home do you live in today?"

Satisfaction with current dwelling conditions was compared in Figure 9 between homeowners and renters. Renters expressed less satisfaction with their housing than homeowners.

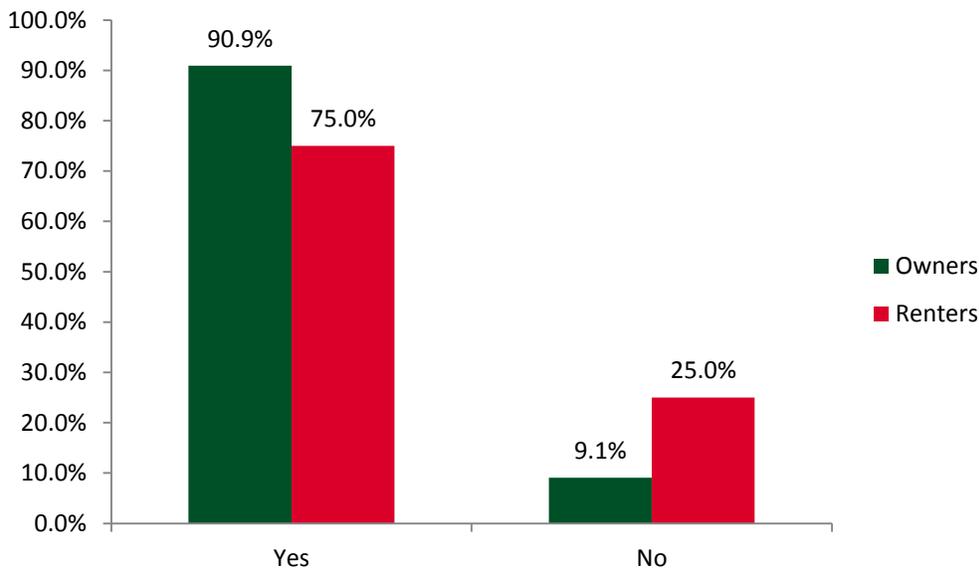


FIGURE 9 – Response to "Does Your Home Currently Meet Your Housing Needs?" Comparing renters (8 responded, 0 skipped) and homeowners (66 responded, 1 skipped)

Homeowners' current housing needs were compared with what they believe they will need in 5 years (Figure 10). While 73% of respondents indicated a single-detached dwelling would meet their future housing needs, the remaining 27% indicated a desire to downsize. The responses from the "Other"



category were split between staying in their current homes and the desire for condominium-style ownership.

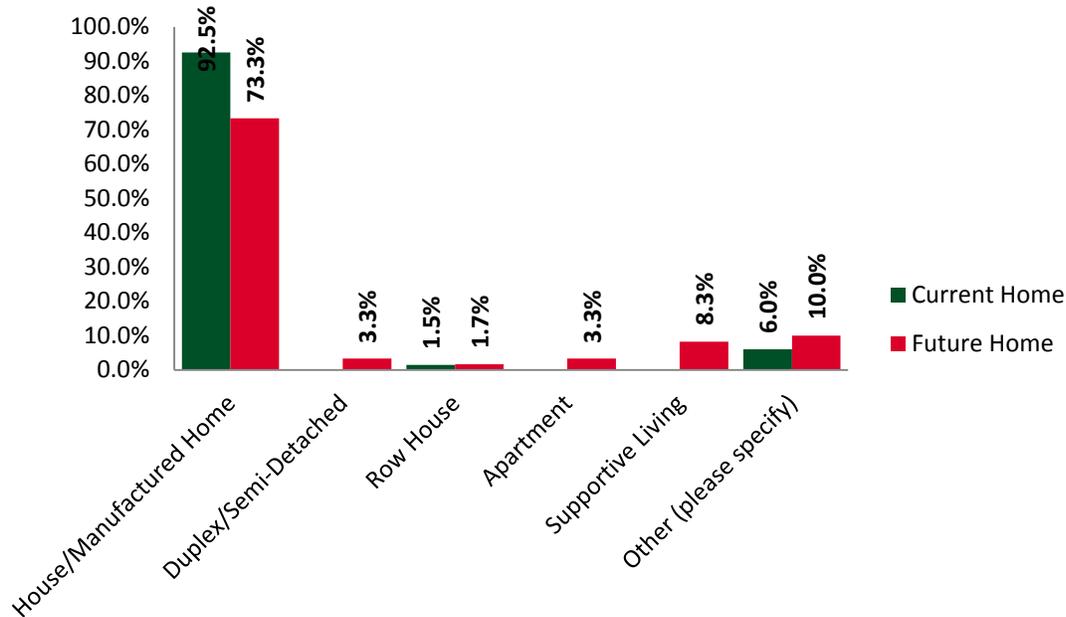


Figure 10 Homeowners response to “what type of home do you live in today?” (67 answered, 0 skipped) compared to “what type of home will meet your housing needs in 5 years?” (60 responses, 7 skipped)

The majority of respondents who were renters indicated a single detached home would meet their needs in 5 years (Figure 11). No further comment was provided in the “Other” category.

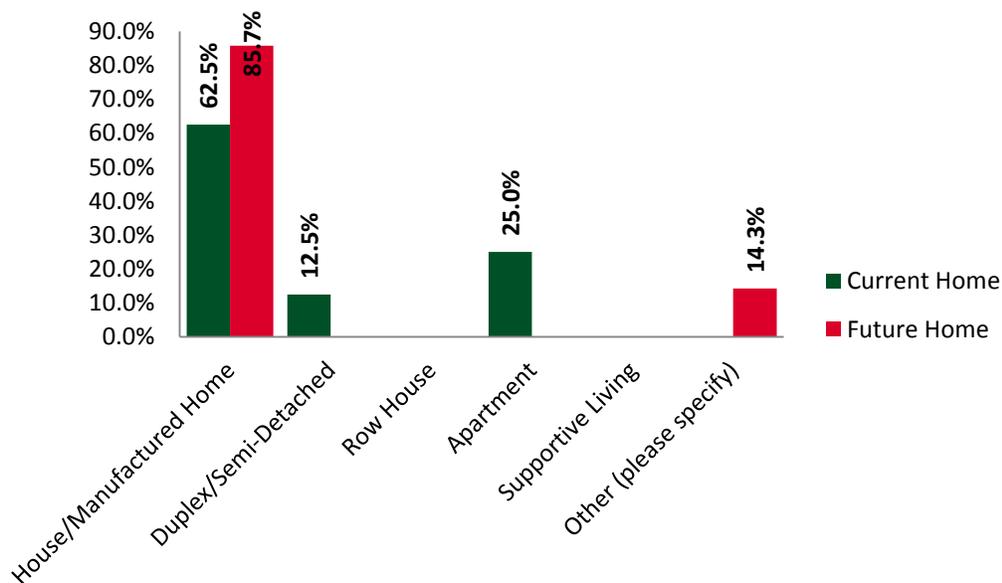
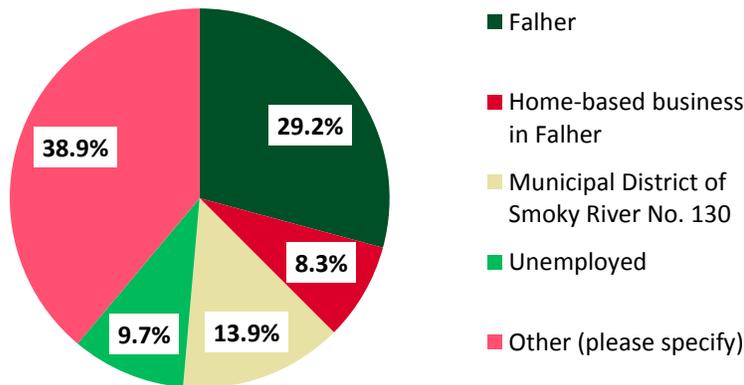


Figure 11 Renters response to “what type of home do you live in today?” (8 responses, 0 skipped) compared to “what type of home will meet your housing needs in 5 years?” (7 responses, 1 skipped)



EMPLOYMENT



93% of respondents live in Falher (Figure 3) but only 29.2% work in Town and 8.3% have a home-based business (Figure 12). A large proportion of respondents indicated “Other” as their location of work and over half of these comments indicated that the respondent was retired.

Figure 12 – Response to “where do you work?” (72 responses, 4 skipped)

LIKES AND DISLIKES

Respondents were asked to highlight their likes and dislikes about Falher. Many of the likes relate to the natural setting of the town, as well as the recreational and social opportunities available. Many of the dislikes likewise revolved around recreational opportunities, pointing to clear desire to build on the town’s existing the recreational and social opportunities.

WHAT I LIKE ABOUT FALHER...

In the Winter:

- Hockey and curling
- Outdoor activities
- Clean streets
- Going to the gym
- To go south
- The arena
- Christmas lights and decorations
- The seniors club
- No mosquitoes
- Skating
- Not much
- Cultural activities
- Pirates games
- Don’t have to travel too far to get what I need

In the Summer:

- Honey Festival
- The quiet
- The swimming pool
- The park
- Summer camps
- Relaxed atmosphere
- The river
- Winagami Lake
- Fishing
- Watersports
- Campfires
- Canada Day celebration
- Working in my garden
- Outdoors
- Walking along the canal



WHAT I **DISLIKE** ABOUT FALHER...

In the Winter:

- Lack of activities for youth
- Loud trucks
- Unplowed streets
- Cleaning snow off my car
- No indoor pool
- Lack of entertainment
- Cold, snow and ice
- Lack of shopping options
- Poor lighting on side streets

In the Summer:

- Lack of activities for youth
- Unmaintained trees and shrubs
- Vandalism and theft
- No competitive sports
- Not much to do
- Lack of shopping alternatives
- Dusty roads
- Lack of local, fresh produce
- Weeds
- Few activities for children under 5
- No walking trails
- Too hot

These likes and dislikes represent, respectively, strengths that Falher can build on, and challenges for the Town to address.



### TAX RATE

One of the questions in the survey asked respondents' opinion about the current property tax rate. 53% responded that they believed it was reasonable while 47% believed it was too high (unsurprisingly, nobody believed it was too low) (Figure 13).

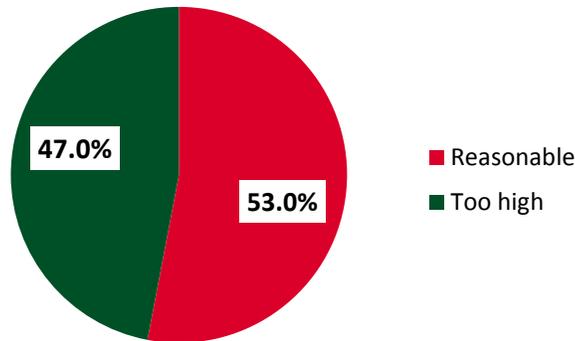


Figure 13 Response to "Do you believe the current property tax rate is too low, reasonable or too high?" (66 responses, 8 skipped)

A follow-up question asked respondents if they would support an increase in the tax rate to support local government services and infrastructure. While the majority of respondents responded "No," 21.5% indicated they would support an increase up to \$500 and 4.6% indicated they would support an increase greater than \$500 to support an increase in municipal services and infrastructure (Figure 14). Respondents were asked to describe what improvements they would like to see with a property tax increase and responses identified a range of issues to be addressed.

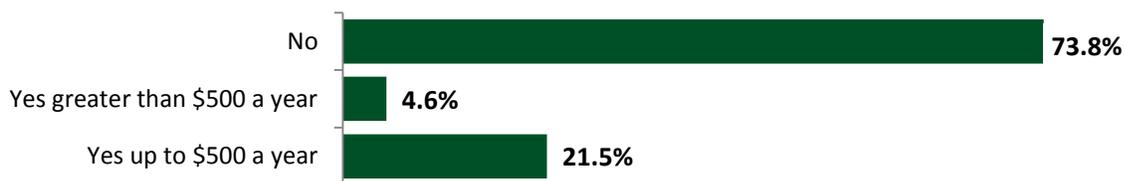


Figure 14 Response to "would you be willing to have an increase in your property taxes to support an improvement to local government services and infrastructure?" (65 responses, 9 skipped)

Almost half of the comments identified the need for **expanded recreation options** like walking trails, parks and an indoor pool. Several suggestions specifically identified improvements to the arena including adding a sign, installing a kitchen and bleachers, adding washrooms, and paving the parking lot. **Sidewalk improvements** were identified several times, both in terms of the need to add more supply and repair the existing infrastructure. Crime reduction and beautification measures along **Main Street** were identified as an area that could use improvement. Better **landscaping** practices such as weed



control was also addressed as a way to improve the look of the community. Respondents identified a number of services that could be improved or added such as temporary accommodation, access to local medical services and more business diversity.

### THOUGHTS ON FALHER

This section of the survey gave respondents the opportunity to give their opinion about a variety of topics related to the Town.

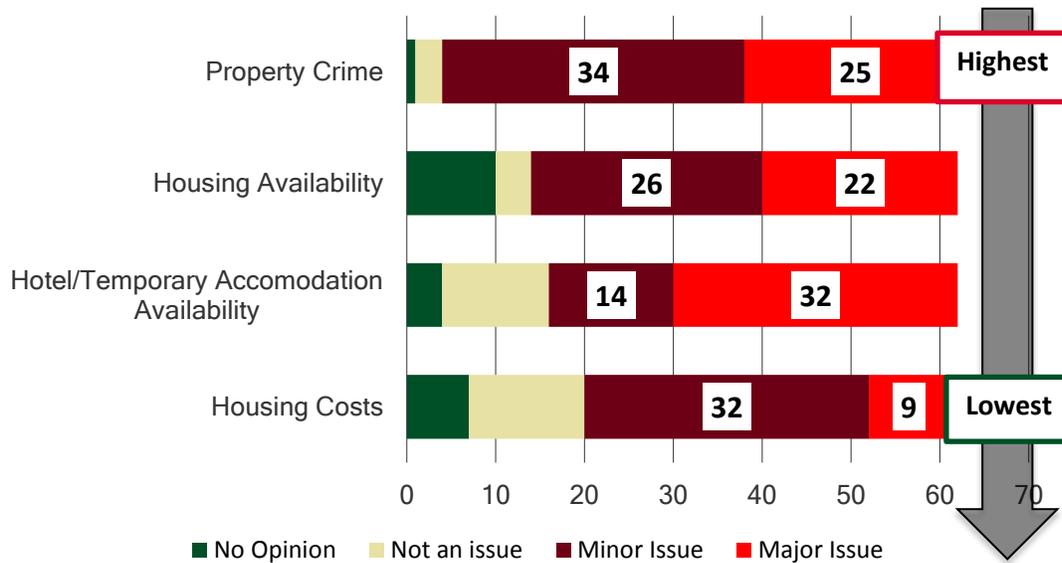


Figure 15 Response to "Do you think any of the following are an issue in Falher?" (69 responses, 5 skipped)

Question 17 asked whether specific aspects of the town were an issue (Figure 15). These topics were identified by the MDP Steering Committee as key areas for community feedback. All four aspects were rated predominantly as either a major or a minor issue. In terms of issue significance, property crime rated the highest and housing costs rated the lowest with housing availability and temporary accommodation almost equal.

The next four questions in the survey asked respondents to rate different aspects of municipal administration, community development, community services and recreation opportunities with a rating system with five options: Excellent, Good, Average, Poor and No Opinion. If respondents rated a service as "Poor", they were asked to elaborate on their opinion. The following graphs present an overall picture of responses while the comments are summarized.





Figure 16 Response to “What is your opinion about the following aspects of municipal administration in Falher?” (69 responses, 5 skipped)

The administrative category with the most “Poor” ratings and comments was Bylaw Enforcement. Almost half of the comments addressed some aspect of enforcement. The main concern was that bylaws are not enforced, as well as concerns with respect to other types of law enforcement, such as the RCMP. Town Communications and Access to Local Government were also mentioned several times in the comments. Respondents expressed a desire to know more about projects, issues and events related to the Town.



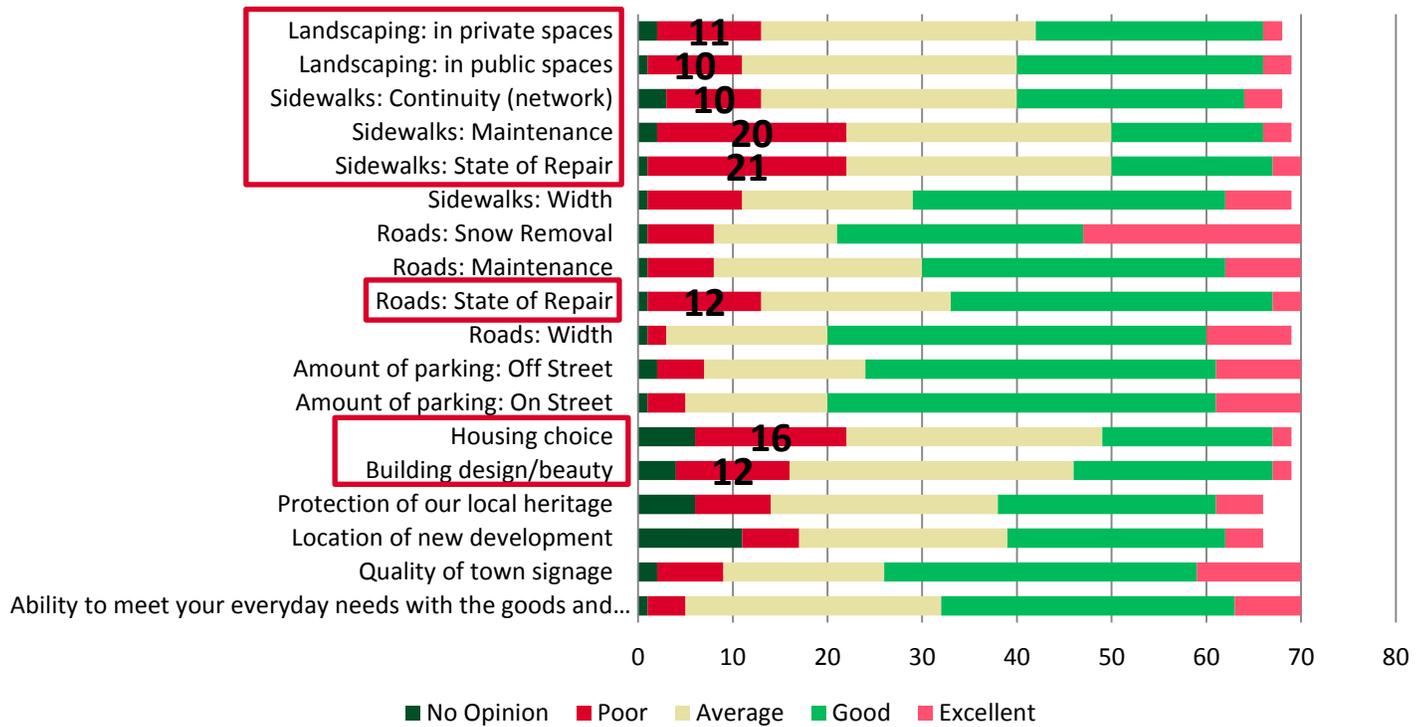


Figure 17 Response to “What is your opinion about the following aspects of development in Falher?” (70 responses, 4 skipped)

Within the development category, parking, roads, heritage, signage, and “ability to meet every day needs” were rated highly, particularly snow removal on roads. Where an item received 10 or more “Poor” ratings it was usually mentioned frequently in the comments, though not always. Building design/beauty received 12 “Poor” ratings but no comments were made. On the flip side, parking issues were mentioned a few times but the overall rating was “Good”. Sidewalks received the most comments and the most “Poor” ratings in terms of their continuity (more sidewalks needed), maintenance (better snow removal in the winter) and state of repair (many have deteriorated and are in need of repair). Housing choice and affordability, in particular the need for rental units was identified as an issue in the comments. Landscaping, the lack of and the poor quality, in both public and private spaces were identified as an issue.



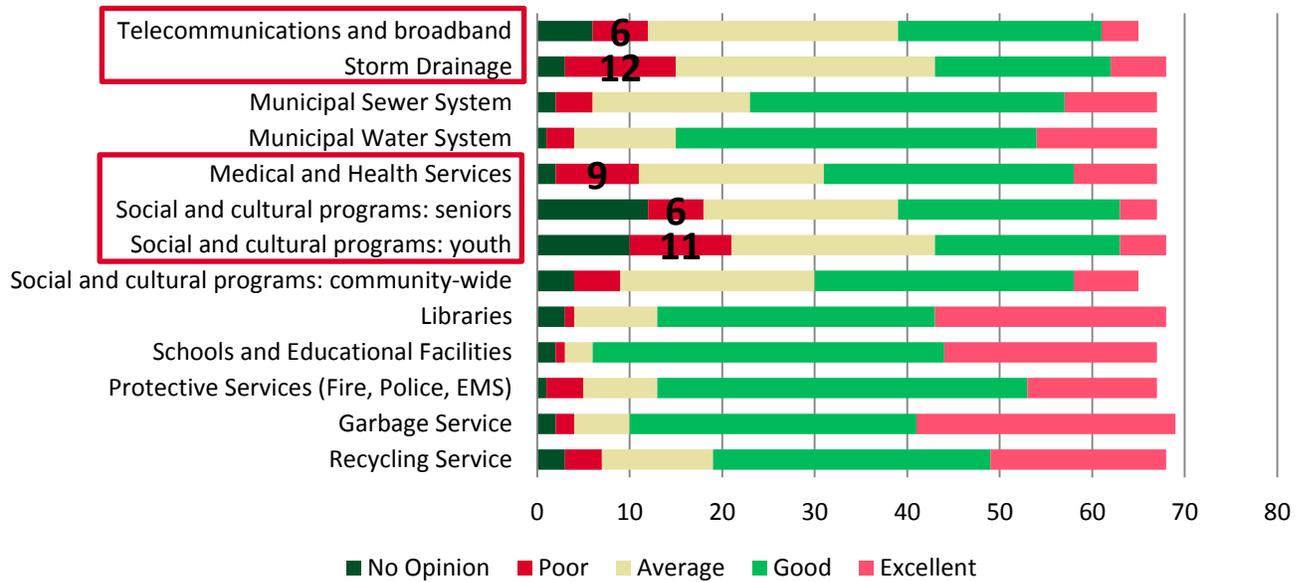


Figure 18 Response to “what is your opinion about the following services in falher?” (69 responses, 5 skipped)

The municipal services category with the most “Poor” ratings, Storm Drainage, also received the most comments with respondents identifying issues with flooding in buildings and on streets. Youth Programs also received a high “Poor” rating, with comments correlating the lack of activities for youth with incidents of vandalism. Medical and Health Services (high turnover of doctors and limited medical services due to small population) and Telecommunications and Broadband (slow internet connections and limited options for providers) were rated poorly and mentioned frequently in the comments. Libraries, Education, Protective Services, Garbage and Recycling Services and Municipal Sewer and Water Services all received high positive ratings.



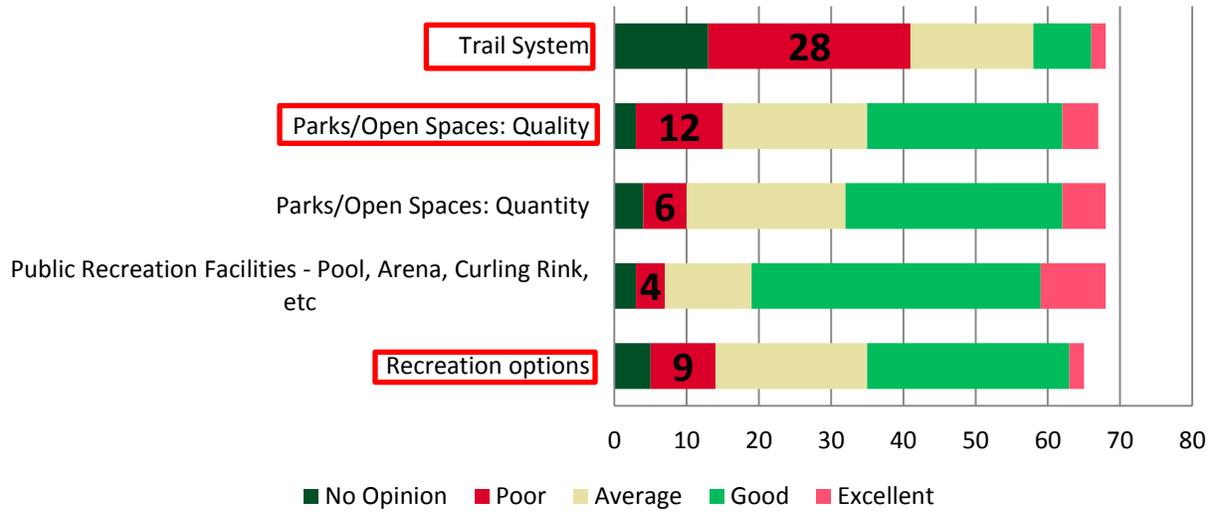


Figure 19 Response to “what is your opinion about recreation in falher?” (68 responses, 6 skipped)

The Trail System received the highest amount of “Poor” ratings, in large part because many respondents noted that they were not aware of a trail system in Town but almost half of those identified the need for one to encourage exercise and outdoor activities.

Parks/Open Spaces were discussed frequently in the comments in terms of their quality and quantity as respondents identified a need for more high quality public open spaces for all ages.



## THEMES IN THE FEEDBACK

Some of the questions at the end of the survey invited additional feedback to round out some of the multiple choice answers that were offered. Question 25 asked “What are the specific challenges placing pressure on Falher (if any)?” (40 responses, 36 skipped) and question 26 “What changes would you like to see in the Town?” (50 responses, 26 skipped) elicited a number of open ended responses. Figure 20 shows that the majority of respondents would like to see Falher grow slowly or moderately.

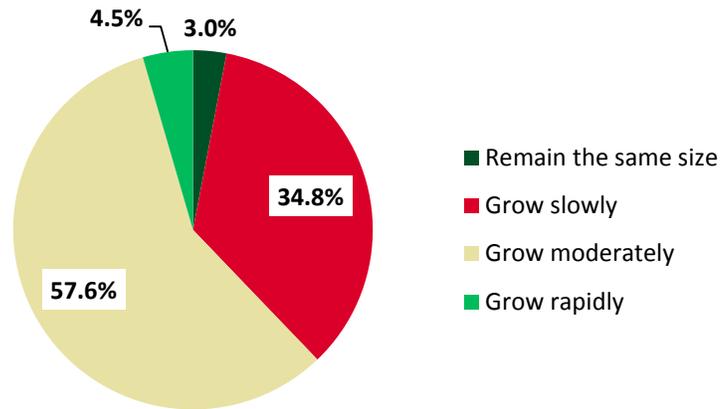


Figure 20 Response to "In the future, would you like to see Falher...?"  
(66 responses, 8 skipped)

A few themes emerged from these responses that highlight the concerns and desires of the respondents regarding the Town. These themes are common municipal issues and can be addressed both directly and indirectly within the Municipal Development Plan.

### 1. Aging population and youth exodus

A significant portion of the survey respondents (42%) are aged 60 and over which closely correlates to the 2011 census where 35% of residents are over the age of 60 in Falher. An aging population was specifically mentioned by respondents as a challenge for the Town with suggested changes including adding and improving sidewalks and trails, providing more places to sit, and more subsidized and independent housing options for seniors.

Many concerns were raised about the loss of young people from the community due to lack of employment and recreation opportunities.

### 2. Housing

The majority of respondents, both renters and homeowners, live in single-detached dwellings and believe it will continue to meet their housing needs in the future. However, senior respondents aged 65 and older identified the need for smaller independent and supportive living options while those in multi-unit rental housing indicated they would like to live in single-detached dwellings in the near future.

The lack of temporary accommodation (hotel/motel) available in Town was repeatedly mentioned throughout the survey as an impediment to growth. For example the Town



is limited in its ability host cultural events and sports competitions that require overnight accommodation for visitors.

### 3. Employment Opportunities

Many respondents noted that employment opportunities are currently limited due to the slow-down of the oil industry and the region's dependence on oil and gas as the main economic driver.

### 4. Business Diversity and Competition

The desire for more businesses was the most frequent comment from respondents, not just for the convenience of having a better selection of goods and services nearby, but because it represents a vibrant and thriving community that is self-sustaining.

### 5. Recreation and Culture

Recreation was frequently mentioned in terms of needing more options as a way to appeal to all age groups. Recreation was cited as a way to attract and keep young families in Town, encourage a healthy lifestyle, and provide more opportunities for social interaction. Specific suggestions include paved trails with places to sit along the way, a community garden, an off-leash dog park, and another playground for children with a sheltered seating area for protection from sun and rain.

The final question, "Please describe how you would like Falher to look in 10 to 20 years" (43 responses, 33 skipped), elaborated on the themes described above. The main ideas are captured in the word cloud below.



## APPENDIX 1: FALHER COMMUNITY SURVEY QUESTIONS

### **ABOUT YOU**

**1. Are you a (check all that apply):**

- Resident of Falher                       Business Owner                       Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Property Owner (but not resident)                       None of the above

**2. How long have you lived in Falher?**

- 1 year or less     11-20 years  
 1-5 years     21+ years  
 6-10 years

**3. How old are you?**

- 0-9                       25-29                       45-49                       65-69  
 10-14                       30-34                       50-54                       70-74  
 15-19                       35-39                       55-59                       75-79  
 20-24                       40-44                       60-64                       80 +

**4. What is your gender?**

- Male     Female     Other \_\_\_\_\_

**5. What is your primary language?**

- French     English     Other \_\_\_\_\_

**6. How many people live in your household? (please respond with a number)**

\_\_\_\_\_Adults    \_\_\_\_\_Children (17 and Under)

**7. Why do you choose to live in Falher? (check all that apply)**

- Employment     Cost of living     Francophone Culture  
 Recreation Opportunities     Family Lifestyle     Schools  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**8. What type of home do you live in today?**

- House/Manufactured Home     Duplex/ Semi-Detached Row House     Apartment Supportive Living Other \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Do you own or rent your home?**

- Own  Rent

**10. Does your home currently meet your housing needs?**

- Yes  No

a. If no, please explain.

**11. What type of home do you believe will meet your housing needs in 5 years?**

- House/  
Manufactured Home  Duplex/ Semi-  
Detached  Apartment  
 Row House  Supportive Living  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Has your home been impacted by overland flooding?**

- Yes  No

**13. Where do you work?**

- Falher  Unemployed  
 Municipal District of Smoky River  Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home-based business in Falher

**14. Do you expect to be living in Falher 5 years from now?**

- Yes  No

a. If no, what do you expect will prompt your move?

**15. What do you enjoy about living in Falher?**

a. In summer?

b. In winter?

**16. What do you dislike about living in Falher?**

a. In summer?

b. In winter?

**YOUR THOUGHTS ON FALHER:**

**17. Do you think any of the following are an issue in Falher?**

	Major issue	Minor issue	Not an issue	No Opinion
a. Housing Costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Housing Availability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Hotel/Temporary Accommodation Availability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Petty/Property Crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**18. What's your opinion of the following aspects of Municipal Administration in Falher?**

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	No Opinion
a. Town Administration	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Planning and Development Services	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Access to local government	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. Town communications	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Bylaw Enforcement	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**If you rated any elements of the Town as Poor, please indicate why.**

**19. What is your opinion about the following aspects of development in Falher?**

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	No Opinion
a. Ability to meet your everyday needs with the goods and services available in Town	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Quality of Town Signage	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Location of new development	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. Protection of our local heritage	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Building design/beauty	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. Housing choice	<input type="checkbox"/>				
g. Amount of parking: On street	<input type="checkbox"/>				
h. Amount of parking: Off street	<input type="checkbox"/>				
i. Roads: Width	<input type="checkbox"/>				
j. Roads: State of repair	<input type="checkbox"/>				
k. Roads: Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>				
l. Roads: Snow Removal	<input type="checkbox"/>				
m. Sidewalks: Width	<input type="checkbox"/>				
n. Sidewalks: State of repair	<input type="checkbox"/>				
o. Sidewalks: Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>				
p. Sidewalks: Continuity (network)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
q. Landscaping: In public spaces	<input type="checkbox"/>				
r. Landscaping: In private spaces	<input type="checkbox"/>				

If you rated any elements of the Town as Poor, please indicate why.

**20. What is your opinion about the following services in Falher?**

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	No Opinion
a. Recycling Service	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Garbage Service	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Protection Services (Fire, Police, EMS)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. Schools and Educational facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Social and cultural programs: Community-wide	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. Social and cultural programs: Youth	<input type="checkbox"/>				
g. Social and cultural programs: Seniors	<input type="checkbox"/>				
h. Libraries	<input type="checkbox"/>				
i. Medical and Health Services	<input type="checkbox"/>				
j. Municipal Water System	<input type="checkbox"/>				
k. Municipal Sewer System	<input type="checkbox"/>				
l. Storm Drainage	<input type="checkbox"/>				
m. Telecommunications and broadband	<input type="checkbox"/>				

If you rated any elements of the Town as Poor, please indicate why.

**21. What is your opinion about recreation in Falher?**

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	No Opinion
a. Recreation options	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Public Recreation Facilities – Pool, Arena, Curling Rink, etc	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Parks/Open Spaces: Quantity	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. Parks/ Open Spaces: Quality	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Trail system	<input type="checkbox"/>				

If you rated any elements of the Town as Poor, please indicate why.

**22. Do you believe the current property tax rate is**

- Too low                                       Reasonable                                       Too high

**23. Would you be willing to have an increase in your property taxes to support an improvement in local government services and infrastructure? *There is NO proposal to increase property taxes associated with the Municipal Development Plan. This question is hypothetical only!***

- Yes up to \$500 a year                       Yes greater than \$500 a year                       No

If yes, what improvements would you like to see?

## ***The Future***

**24. In the future, would you like to see Falher (choose 1):**

- |                      |                          |              |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| Remain the same size | <input type="checkbox"/> | Grow slowly  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Grow moderately      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Grow rapidly | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**25. What are the specific challenges placing pressure on Falher (if any)?**

**26. What changes would you like to see in the Town?**

**27. Please describe how you would like Falher to look in 10-20 years.**

**Please provide any additional feedback you have:**