



Pickering Forward: Official Plan Review

Agriculture and Rural Areas
Engagement Summary Report

April 2025

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Executive Summary

During engagement on the Agriculture and Rural Areas component of Pickering Forward, the City of Pickering's Official Plan Review, input was gathered from over 120 residents through two Public Information Centres and an online survey. Key emerging themes included preserving the unique characteristics of Pickering's hamlets: focusing on their small and intimate rural charm, and their heritage character, , while addressing concerns about balancing growth with these valued aspects. Participants expressed a strong desire to maintain the hamlets' identity and self-sufficiency. Significant priorities include the need to protect farmland, support farmers through long-term leases and financial incentives, and accommodate on-farm diversified land uses.

Participants suggested successful strategies for integrating agriculture into local economies and promoting local food systems, with a focus on sustainability and innovation as best practices from other municipalities. Participants also identified potential economic benefits from on-farm diversified uses such as agri-tourism, creative events, and educational experiences, while firmly opposing incompatible land uses such as large-scale events and non-agricultural, industrial development.

Overall, the community expressed the importance of sustaining the rural character and agricultural viability through continued community engagement, policy tools, and learning from other best practices. This input will guide the development of the updated Official Plan, ensuring it reflects the community's vision regarding Pickering's growth.

This report was written by LURA Consulting, the independent community engagement team retained to deliver community engagement. It summarizes and reflects the community's diverse inputs for the City of Pickering's Official Plan.

Section 1: Project Overview

Project Description and Engagement Objectives

The City of Pickering is updating its Official Plan, the City's long-range, comprehensive planning document that guides land use decision-making. An Official Plan addresses issues such as:

- Where to locate new housing, industry, offices, and shops.
- What services will be needed, such as roads, water mains, sewers, parks and schools.
- How to protect what is important, such as the natural environment and cultural heritage.
- When, where, and in what order the community will grow.
- Where and how the City will invest in community improvement initiatives.

The purpose of the engagement activities was to:

- Provide a recap of the Pickering Forward process and topics.
- Identify the key elements that make up the Agricultural and Rural Areas in Pickering.
- Identify what policies are in place to enhance and protect agricultural resources.
- Identify potential impacts of anticipated urban growth on agricultural and rural settlement areas and possible mitigation measures.
- Address questions from the public and discuss items related to Agriculture and Rural Areas.

This engagement report summarizes input from the fourth community conversation, related to agriculture and rural areas, which will inform the City's Official Plan Review.



Figure 1 – Pickering Forward project logo.

Section 2: Engagement Process and Communication Methods

Engagement Methods



Figure 2 – Image of participants engaging in discussion at the in-person Public Information Centre.

In March 2025, the City of Pickering hosted an in-person Public Information Centre (PIC), a virtual PIC and an online survey to gather community input about agriculture and rural areas. One hundred and twenty-three (123) people participated in these events.

In-Person Public Information Centre

On March 25th, 2025, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., an in-person PIC was held at the Life Church in Claremont (1790 Central Street). Thirty-three (33) people attended the event. City staff delivered a brief overview of Pickering's key agricultural and rural area elements, existing policies that protect and enhance agricultural resources, and potential impacts of urban growth on agricultural uses and rural settlements. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period and small group discussions.

Appendix A includes a detailed summary of the in-person PIC.

Virtual Public Information Centre

The project team hosted a virtual PIC on March 20th, 2025, from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. Twenty (20) people attended the online event. City staff presented the same content as the in-person PIC. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period.

Appendix B includes a detailed summary of the virtual PIC's comments.

Online Survey

From March 7th, 2025, to March 31st, 2025, an online survey was available on Let's Talk Pickering. The survey questions sought input from the community at large on how the City of Pickering can better support its agricultural sector and rural communities, including questions related to matters such as:

- On-farm diversified uses
- Best agricultural practices from other municipalities
- Strategies to balance urban growth with rural preservation

Seventy-three (73) people responded to the survey. Survey respondents' demographics are provided in the **Who Participated** section below.

Appendix C includes a detailed summary of the survey responses.

Communication Methods

The City of Pickering used various methods to advertise the Official Plan review and engagement opportunities. Information was shared through the following channels:

- Via email with interested parties, registered ratepayers' groups, and Committee of Council liaisons.
- Published multiple notices on social media, including paid pushes on Facebook.
- Displayed digital message boards throughout the City.
- Posters were placed in all City library branches.
- Details were posted on the City's website and online public notices section.

Engagement and Reach

Table 1 below shows the reach of engagement throughout the engagement period.

Table 1: Summary of engagement activities.

Engagement Activity	Date	Location or Format	Attendance or Response Count
In-Person Public Information Centre	March 19 th , 2025 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.	In-person at the Life Church in Claremont	33
Virtual Public Information Centre	March 20 th , 2025, 7:00 – 8:00 p.m.	Online via Teams Webinar	17
Online Survey	March 7 th , 2025 – March 31 st , 2025	Online via Let's Talk Pickering	73
TOTAL			123

Data Analysis Methodology

Input was gathered through in-person and virtual PICs, and an online survey. Where responses were received to a quantitative question, results have been quantified. All qualitative responses are analyzed thematically. This involves summarizing and categorizing qualitative data to capture important concepts within the data set.

Section 3: What We Heard

This section summarizes the key themes heard on Agriculture and Rural Areas.

In-Person Public Information Centre

Below are highlights of the in-person PIC findings. Discussions from each table, regarding rural settlements as well as agriculture and on-farm diversified uses, are captured thematically.

Rural Settlements

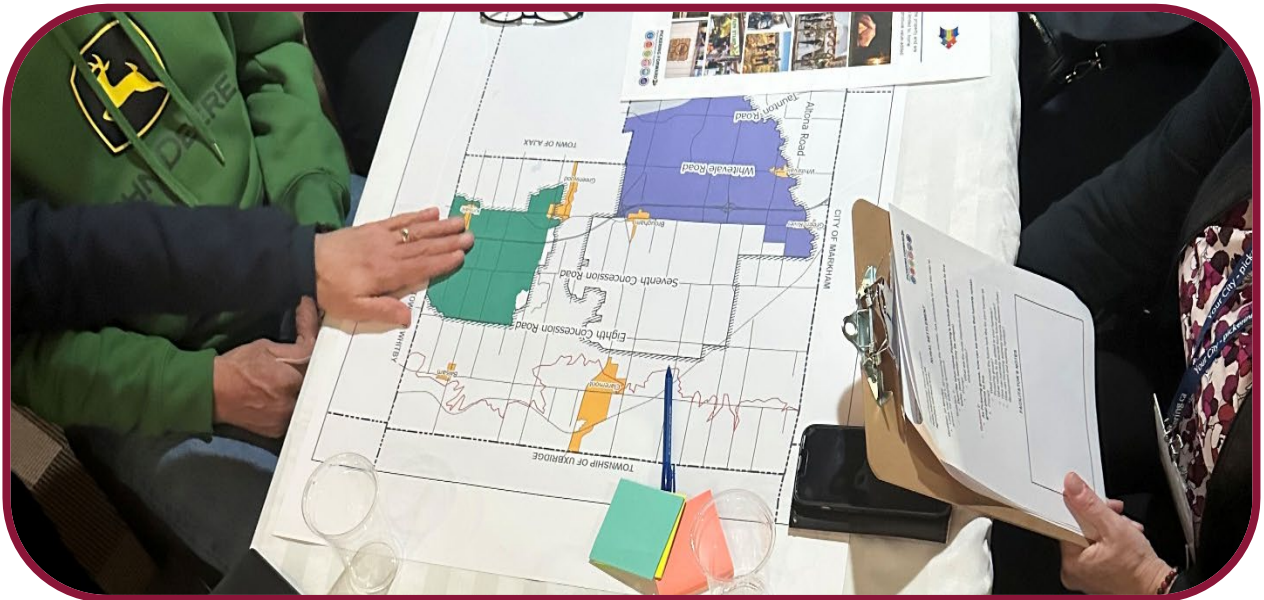


Figure 3 - Image of one of the tables discussing topics pertaining to rural settlements.

The rural settlements discussion focused on identifying the valued characteristics and elements of Pickering's hamlets today and strategies to ensure they remain great places to live in the future. Participants emphasized that they deeply cherished them for their close communities, rich heritage, small-town charm, and connection to nature. Residents noted that they value the peaceful atmosphere, historic buildings, and strong neighbourly ties that define hamlet living. Concerns included the loss of these special characteristics as urban development continues to expand nearby. There is a strong desire to preserve the unique identity, and heritage of these hamlets - while ensuring infrastructure like schools and community facilities can keep pace with surrounding growth. Additional feedback received is highlighted below:

- **Community Character**
 - There is a strong sense of community, friendliness, and local spirit.
 - Hamlets are great for families due to safety, spaciousness, and peacefulness.
 - Neighbours actively participate in community events.
- **Environmental and Rural Interface**
 - There is an appreciation for surrounding farmland, creeks, and wildlife corridors.
 - City planning should prioritize natural buffers to protect the interface between urban areas and natural systems.

- **Engagement and Communication**
 - Participants appreciated in-person events held in hamlets.
 - There was a request for youth engagement events and ongoing communication and involvement.

Agriculture and On-Farm Diversified Uses



Figure 4 - Image of one of the tables discussing agriculture and on-farm diversified uses.

The agriculture and on-farm diversified uses discussions focused on identifying current strengths and suggestions for growth of the farming community and agricultural sector. There was a strong emphasis on the importance of preserving Pickering's farmland, supporting long-term viability for farmers, and encouraging diversification through creative land uses (e.g., micro-breweries, herb farms, filming opportunities, organic agriculture, etc.). Concerns included short-term leases and urban development due to their pressures on agricultural continuity, particularly in northeast Pickering. Residents suggested stronger planning tools, longer lease terms, financial incentives, and infrastructure upgrades to support the farming community further. Additional feedback received is highlighted below.

- **Funding and Support Programs**
 - Requests for more federal, provincial, and municipal funding to support agriculture.
 - Desire for financial incentive programs and grants (e.g., for heritage or environmental value).
 - Support for community-based programs that connect people with farming.
- **Traffic and Connections**
 - Protection for transportation connections, especially for farm equipment.
 - Improve transportation access to Northeast Pickering.
 - More trails to connect farms to the broader community.

Online Survey

Below are highlights of the online survey findings. Each multiple-choice question includes a graph showing responses and themes emerging from ideas respondents provided under 'Other' in the list of survey answers. Open-ended questions are summarized thematically.

Agricultural Support

Participants were asked to identify how Pickering has effectively supported the agricultural sector.

The majority of respondents felt the City had not effectively supported the agricultural sector or farmlands. Several respondents recommended that input be sought directly from the farming and agricultural community to provide the best guidance on land use policy direction for agricultural land uses. Participants shared the following concerns and suggestions on how to best support the agricultural community:

- **Agricultural Loss and Development Pressure**
 - Concern about loss of farmland to urban sprawl.
 - Concern regarding stormwater run-off, and lawn irrigation waste.
- **Road and Infrastructure Maintenance**
 - Suggestion to improve rural road conditions (e.g., Whitevale Road, Greenwood Road, Sideline 4) to favor the agricultural and rural communities and their activities.
 - Suggestion to create safer road conditions for cyclists and farm machinery vehicles (e.g., maintenance, potholes, shoulder erosion, and traffic speeds).
- **Farmer Support and Engagement**
 - Establish a direct line of communication with farmers to include them meaningfully in planning.
 - Establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee reporting to Council.
 - Host annual agricultural roundtables with farmers and planners.
- **Policy Tools & Planning**
 - Implement buffers around natural features (e.g., creeks) and effective stormwater management.
 - Support food-producing or sustainable agriculture over cash-cropping and leasing practices to encourage farmland investment and innovation.

Participants were asked to suggest how Pickering can continue to support farmers and agriculture production.

The following feedback was received:

- **Tax and Financial Incentives**
 - Offer tax breaks, grants, and subsidies to support farm viability.
 - Offer support for greenhouses and year-round agriculture through incentives.
 - Offer longer leases or allow land repurchases by farmers.
- **Infrastructure and Services**

- Upgrade rural infrastructure (better roads and drinking water).
- Ensure farmers can access services (e.g., machinery dealers, feed stores, grain elevators).
- **Local Market Promotion and Support**
 - Expand farmers markets (more venues, move to weekends).
 - Promote Pickering-grown products and advertise local produce.
 - Increase market access and support local food systems.
- **Innovation and Sustainability**
 - Support sustainable practices (e.g., vertical farming, hydroponics, smart irrigation).
 - Work with provincial/federal governments and colleges to fund and pilot agri-tech initiatives.
 - Promote crop diversity.

Participants were asked to provide suggestions for best practices from other municipalities that Pickering can follow to better support agriculture.

The following feedback was received:

- **Place-Based Suggestions**
 - North Perth (Listowel), Minto (Harriston/Palmerston), and Waterloo Region, ON
 - Agricultural powerhouses successful in revitalizing agriculture.
 - Halton Region, ON
 - Rural Agricultural Strategy integrates farming into economic development.
 - Ottawa, ON
 - Hosts a successful extended farmers market.
 - Prince Edward County, Niagara-on-the-Lake, and St. Jacobs, ON
 - Known for farm-based experiences, local branding, and preserving rural character.
 - Brooklin (Whitby), ON
 - Hosts the Brooklin Spring Fair – a community-based celebration of agriculture.
 - Mirabel, QC
 - 87% of land is protected for agriculture - seen as a gold standard in farmland preservation.
- **General Recommendations**
 - Support Urban Agriculture by:
 - Establishing rooftop farms, indoor farming, and community gardens.
 - Providing funding and technical support for urban growers.
 - Exploring productive green spaces to fight heat and enhance food security.

On-Farm Diversified Uses

Participants were asked which on-farm diversified uses can provide economic benefits for farmers while still ensuring that farming is the main use on the property.

The following feedback was received:

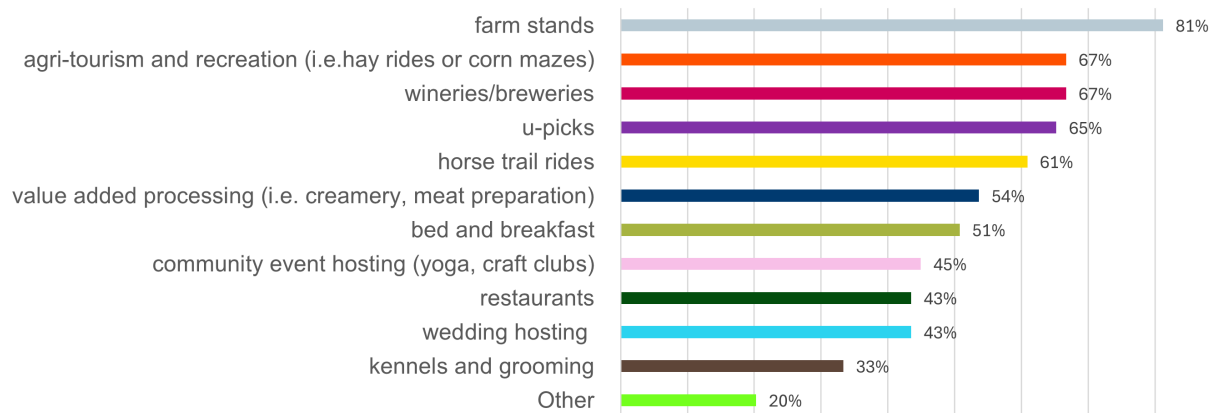


Figure 5 - Summary of on-farm diversified uses participants selected that can provide economic benefits for farmers
N = 69

Figure 5 shows that most respondents selected “farm stands” (81%), followed by “agri-tourism and recreation” (67%), “wineries/breweries” (67%), and “u-picks” (65%).

Some participants expanded on their choices. Their explanations are summarized below:

- **Educational Experiences**
 - Tours and on-site learning experiences.
 - Jam-making, cooking, and baking classes using farm-grown ingredients.
 - Cultural and arts-based events that are affordable and community-focused.
- **Agri-Tourism & Recreation**
 - Pick-your-own farms (e.g., strawberries, apples, pumpkins, sunflowers, etc.).
 - Small animal attractions (e.g., petting zoos).
 - Seasonal markets.
- **Creative and Entertainment Uses**
 - Film production rentals - leveraging scenic farmland for movies and commercials.
 - Music or arts festivals.
 - Horse boarding, training, and equine therapy services.
 - Camping and eco-tourism, particularly on land stewarded by local associations.
 - Wellness-based farm attractions (e.g., goat and puppy yoga).
- **Community-Integrated Models**
 - Pay-as-you-grow, small-scale growing allotments for urban residents.
 - Multi-family housing within the homestead portion of farms, without increasing land footprint.
- **Additional Priorities**
 - Recommendation that the City engage farmers directly to gather best insight.

Participants were asked if any uses were not appropriate as on-farm diversified uses.

The following feedback was received:

- **Inappropriate or Harmful Uses**
 - *Consistently noted as unsuitable for farmland:*
 - Waste disposal or sewage dumping.
 - Storage facilities.
 - Casinos and bingo halls.
 - Amusement parks.
 - Large-scale events (e.g. concerts).
 - Highways.
 - Industrial-scale development (e.g., warehouses and garages).
 - ATV tracks and hunting grounds.
 - Dirt bike or car racing tracks.
- **Conditional or Context-Dependent Uses**
 - *Could be acceptable depending on scale, infrastructure, or respect for farming:*
 - Weddings.
 - Restaurants.
 - Community events.
 - Bed & Breakfasts.
 - Housing.
 - Equestrian and kennel operations.
 - Value-added processing (e.g., wineries, markets).
- **Planning Considerations**
 - Avoid uses that require new roads, sewage, or water infrastructure.
 - Respect existing zoning and built boundaries — locate certain venues within areas that are not active farmland.
 - Ensure that farmers lead these decisions, as they know what is viable and sustainable.

Participants were asked what impacts on-farm diversified uses may have on the surrounding area that must be mitigated.

The following feedback was received:

- **Traffic and Noise Implications**
 - Expand road connections, widen streets, and create turning lanes to accommodate increased visitor traffic volume.
 - Provide designated on-site parking spaces.
 - Increase police and traffic patrols.
- **Environmental Impacts**
 - Ensuring that any development is proportionate to the size of the farmland.
 - Implement buffer zones to protect the rural atmosphere.
 - Enforce proper waste disposal, toilet-use, and service facilities.
- **Economic Support**
 - Ensure that diversified uses support local producers and enhance the local economy.

On-Farm Diversified Use Size

Participants were asked if there should be a minimum farm size to permit on-farm diversified uses to ensure they are occurring as a secondary use on a farm.

The following feedback was received:

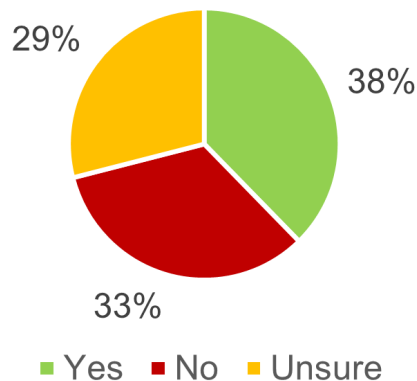


Figure 6 - Summary of should be a minimum farm size to permit on-farm diversified uses to ensure they are occurring as a secondary use on a farm.
N = 69

Figure 6 shows that participants' responses regarding whether there should be a minimum farm size were split among "Yes" (38%), "No" (33%), and "Unsure" (29%).

Participants were asked if there should be a maximum size permitted for on-farm diversified uses to ensure they operate as a secondary use on a farm.

The following feedback was received:

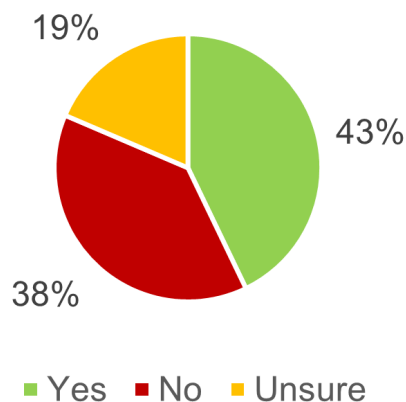


Figure 7 - Summary of should be a maximum size permitted for on-farm diversified uses to ensure they operate as a secondary use on a farm
N = 69

Figure 7 shows that participants' responses regarding whether there should be a maximum size permitted for on-farm diversified uses were split among "Yes" (43%), "No" (38%), with 19% selecting "Unsure".

Hamlets and Rural Settlement Areas

Participants were asked how Pickering can reduce conflicts between urban and rural areas as Pickering continues to grow.

The following feedback was received:

- **Architecture and Land Use**
 - Build up rather than out.
 - Expand green spaces, tree lines, and nature corridors.
 - Create a clear separation between urban development and rural lands (e.g. sound walls and fencing).
- **Roads and Traffic**
 - Keep roads narrow.
 - Reduce speed limits.
 - Add turning lanes, traffic lights, ring roads, and alternate routes.
 - Increase public transit availability.

Participants were asked what elements and characteristics of our hamlets are most important to maintain in the midst of change.

The following feedback was received:

- **Rural Character**
 - Maintain historical building scale, designs, and architecture.
 - Preserve the small-town feel (low-density housing and local amenities).
 - Maintain the distinctive main street identity.
 - Integrate heritage into new developments.
- **Infrastructure**
 - Create a small-scale, walkable community.
 - Expand active transportation options.
- **Environmental Protection**
 - Protect the rural landscape, agricultural lands, and wildlife habitats.
 - Reduce sound and light pollution.

Participants were asked what the biggest challenges are for hamlets to continue to be vibrant communities as change occurs.

The following feedback was received:

- **Loss of Character**
 - Maintaining their vibrancy and unique character amid change.
 - Bridging disconnection between new residents and existing community values.
- **Infrastructure**
 - Being equipped with sustainable infrastructure amid growing populations (roads, water, healthcare, schools, etc.).
 - Having inadequate public services (community centres, groceries, gas, etc.).
- **Traffic, Noise, and Safety**
 - Maintaining speed limits.
 - Having adequate enforcement.

- **Environmental Concerns**
 - Deforestation and illegal dumping.
 - Inadequate parkland and natural ecosystem preservation.

Who Participated

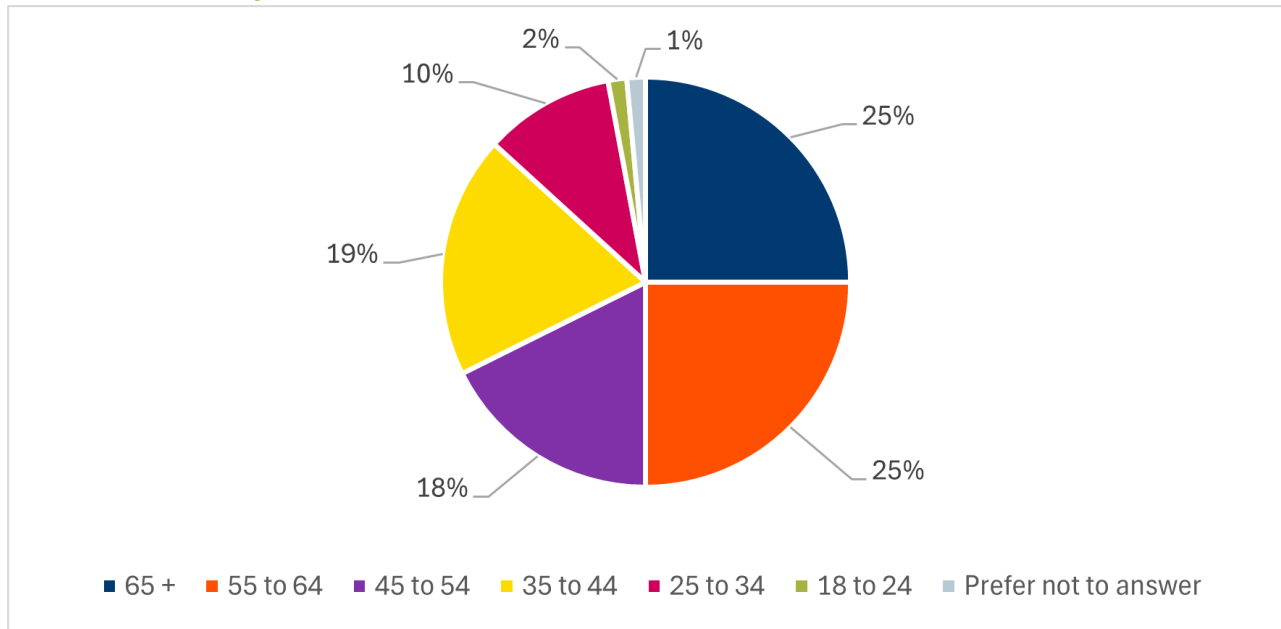


Figure 8 - Summary of participant ages.

N = 68

Figure 8 shows most survey respondents were between the ages of 55 and 65+ with:

- 25% being 65+.
- 25% between 55 and 64.
- 18% between 45 and 54.
- 19% between 35 and 44.
- 10% between 25 and 34.
- 2% between 18 and 24.
- 1% prefer not to answer.

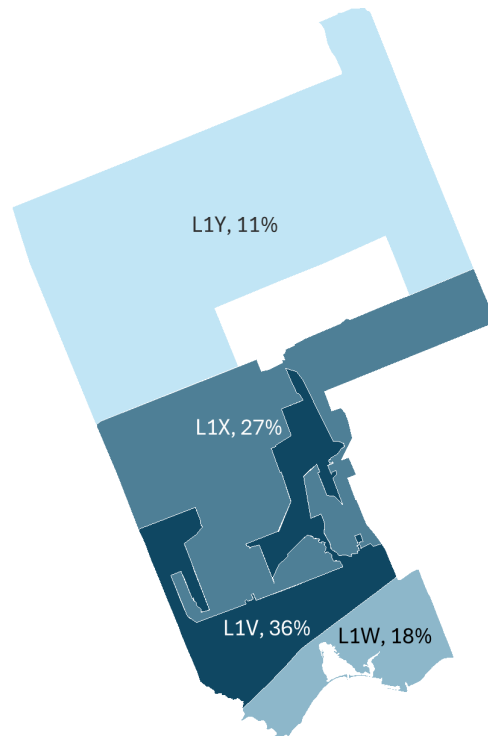


Figure 9 - Summary of participant postal codes.

N = 66

Figure 9 shows the location of survey respondents. Thirty-six percent (36%) live in the L1V postal code area, 27% live in the L1X postal code area, 18% live in the L1W postal code area, and 11% live in the L1Y postal code area. The remaining 8% were respondents from other postal code areas.

Section 4: Next Steps

Input from this engagement will inform the Official Plan about Agricultural and Rural Areas.

The next PIC will be in May 2025 to discuss *Community Elements and Infrastructure*, addressing key elements related to transportation, parks and recreational spaces, and cultural heritage.

The PICs provide an opportunity for more detailed conversations on how legislative changes, Pickering initiatives, and best practices will impact each listed topic. Further details on timelines are included below in Figure 10.

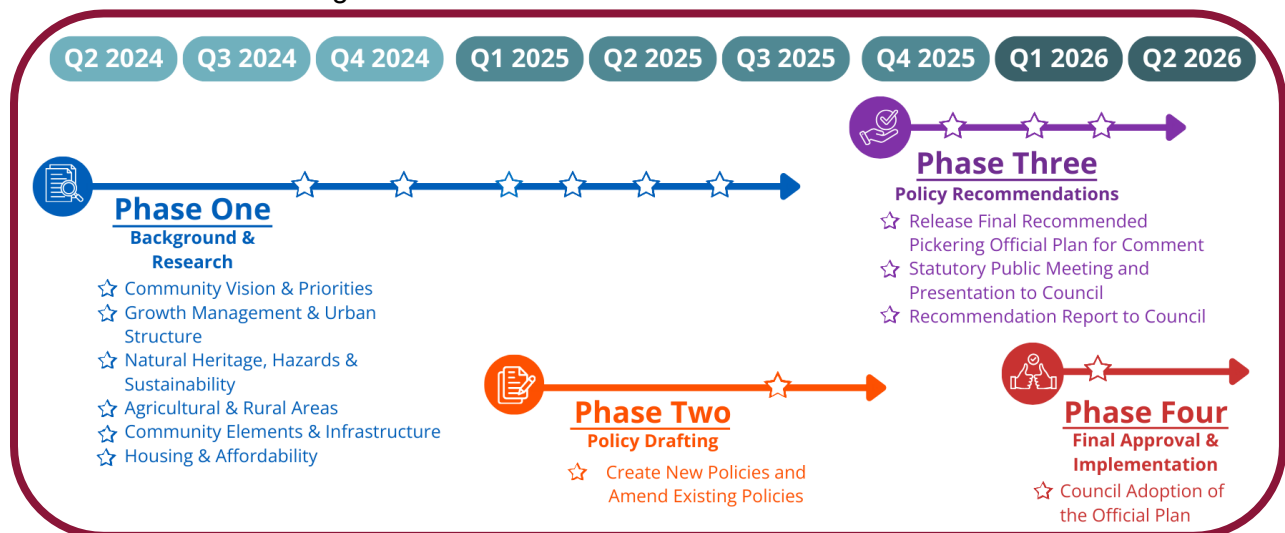


Figure 10 - Illustration of the Pickering Forward phases and breakdown.