



BUDGET 2026 ENGAGEMENT REPORT

July 2025



This report was developed for the Town of Edson in July 2025 with full objectivity, free of pre-conceived notion or bias, and with the intention of supporting the Town's goals and priorities through this process.

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Executive Summary

In Spring 2025, the Town of Edson engaged Catalyst Communications to undertake a meaningful engagement process focused on Budget 2026, as well as satisfaction levels associated with current Town services, programs, and amenities. To ensure a wide variety of opinions and valuable community inputs, including a public survey, a series of open houses, and strategic focus groups.

Total participation amounted to **271 respondents**. This is considered a statistically valid population sample, exceeding minimum participation of 267 with a margin of error of $\pm 5.0\%$, at a confidence level of 90%, and based on the provincially reported Town population of 8,595. This means that if a survey result shows 60% of respondents satisfied with a Town service, the true value across Edson's full population is likely between 55.5% and 64.5%.

Confidence Level: 90% = $Z = 1.645$

Margin of Error: $\pm 5\% = e = 0.05$

Population Proportion (p): 0.5

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Yielding a sample size of 274, corrected for finite population of 8,595:

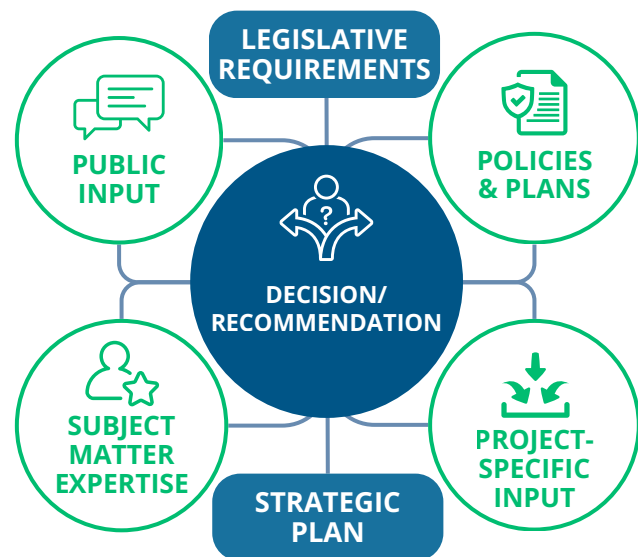
$$n_{adj} = \frac{n}{1 + \left(\frac{n-1}{N}\right)} = \frac{274}{1 + \left(\frac{273}{8,595}\right)} \approx 267$$

The participation rate of 271 exceeds the total number of participants who took part in a similar process for Budget 2025, at 267 participants. For that process, conducted in 2024, all participation was secured through public surveying; the Budget 2026 and Satisfaction Survey conducted this year secured 228 responses, with the rest taking part through

in-person engagement opportunities.

Engagement was designed in alignment with industry best practice, employing the Inform, Consult, and Involve levels of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, and the municipal-specific Engagement With Intent Framework. The latter ensures an emphasis on meaningful engagement that secures valuable results.

Resident input represents one input of many for Council's consideration, accompanied by legislative requirements, advice from Administration, studies and reports of relevance, subject matter expertise, local history and current circumstances, and more.



Strategic Plan Alignment

Effort was put into ensuring the engagement process aligned with Council's Strategic Plan, with particular focus on the pillar of, "Providing Effective Leadership and Community Engagement," including Goal 3: "Actively engage with residents and organizations in Edson," and the strategy to, "Increase opportunities for authentic resident engagement."

This process revealed trends in resident opinion and perspectives, with efforts to capture community insights in areas of local service level satisfaction and budget priorities.

Overall, residents hold a positive view of Edson as a place to live and raise children, while perceptions are more mixed on retirement, the current business climate, and public safety. Most respondents feel informed about Town activities, and customer service satisfaction exceeds 60%; both areas, however, have a high enough level of dissatisfaction that opportunities for efficiency and broader reach can be identified.

Unsurprisingly, service level satisfaction varies significantly across departments. Waste and Organics Collection, Fire Services, and Family and Community Services (FCSS) were amongst the highest-rated areas, while Public Works and Utilities, Community Enforcement, and Economic Development saw lower satisfaction scores. As satisfaction levels and service level demands are typically aligned, it is also unsurprising that Public Works saw the strongest demand for increased service levels, followed by Community Enforcement and RCMP. The most frequently cited concerns revolved around road conditions, snow removal, and public safety. Residents expressed little appetite for service reductions, preferring greater investments in areas of service which are currently perceived as providing too little value, despite prioritizing infrastructure needs over service level increases.

This latter point was revealed when exploring budget priorities, specifically, with the majority of residents showing a tolerance for a moderate tax increase specifically to address current infrastructure needs, and to increase sustainability around infrastructure moving forward. A significant majority of residents (>60%) also indicated they would support modest fee increases to reduce reliance on

Service Level Satisfaction vs. Resident Desire for Service Level Increases		
Service	Normalized Satisfaction Levels	Desire for Service Level Increase
Waste Collection	76%	20%
Public Works & Utilities	48%	63%
Parks Dept.	71%	29%
FCSS	83%	18%
Community Enforcement	42%	38%
Fire Services	84%	16%

Table 1. Comparison of respondent satisfaction levels against desired service level increases.

property taxes, or to offset potential tax increases, reflecting openness to diversified funding models.

Quantitative results were supported by qualitative input. Written feedback far exceeded that collected through surveys in previous years, with comments further supported by in-person engagement opportunities that added important depth to the findings.

These elements placed focus on issues such as downtown revitalization, public safety, and economic diversification, surrounding issues of local social supports, community collaboration, and future community needs.

Together, these insights provide Council and Administration with a balanced and representative understanding of community priorities, offering a strong foundation for informed decision-making in Budget 2026 deliberations.

What Are Your Priorities?

Take three stickers, and place them next to your **top three priorities** for municipal government in Edson

Community Safety and Preparedness

Parks and Open Spaces

Recreation and Culture

Roads Maintenance (including street sweeping and snow removal)

Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal (ie. water, sewer, facilities)

Waste and Organics Collection

SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

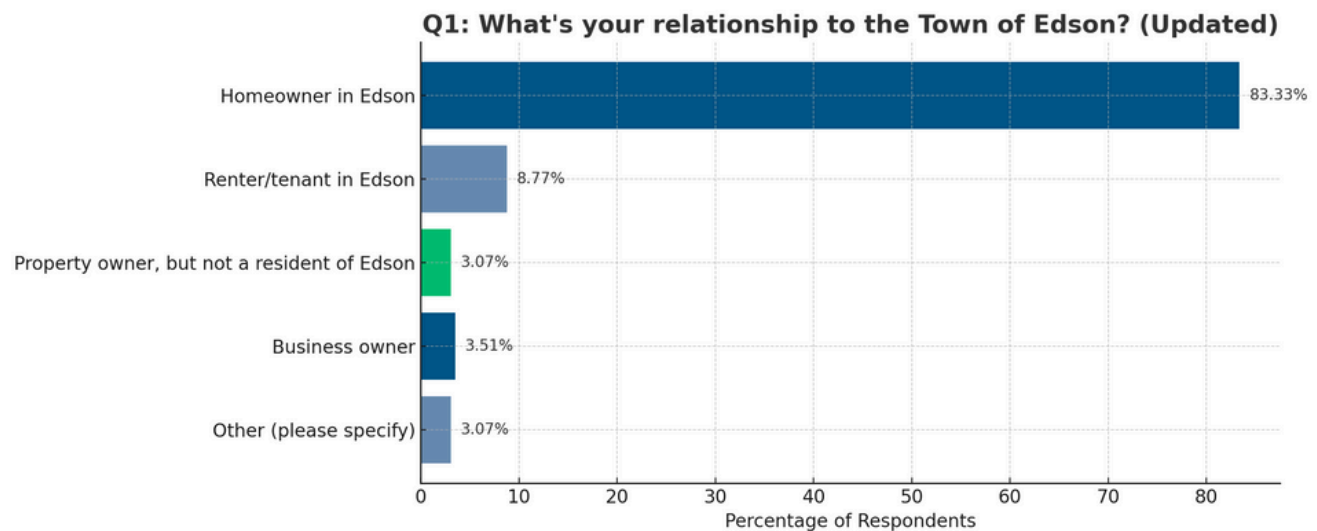


Section 1 – Demographics

This year's survey included a limited number of questions on respondent demographics, the scope of which was limited to areas of value in providing pertinent context to survey questions. As such, these questions were focused on age and living situation.

1.1 Local Connection

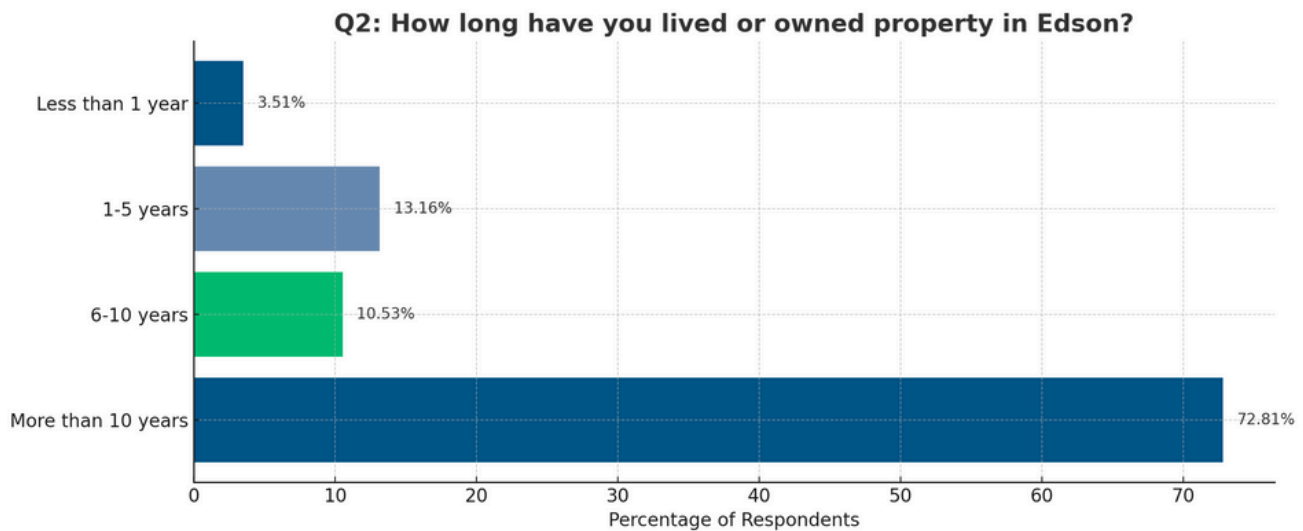
Respondents were asked to identify their relationship with the Town of Edson, selecting all areas of connection which are applicable to them.



The vast majority (83%) indicated they are a homeowner within the Town of Edson, while another 9% self-identified as renters/tenants in Edson, combining for a total of more than 90% of survey respondents residing in the Town of Edson. Another 3% noted they own property in town, but do not live locally. Just over 3.5% of respondents were business owners.

The 3% of respondents who selected "Other" were asked to specify their relationship to the Town, with all noting they are residents of Yellowhead County either working in Edson, or utilizing/accessing Town services and amenities.



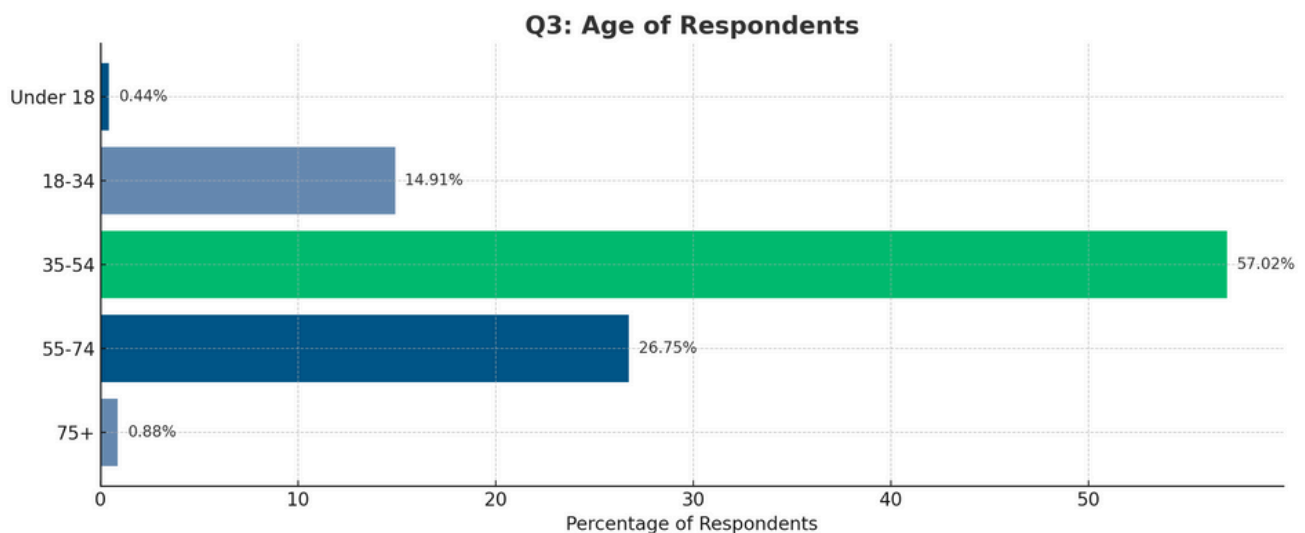


Of those living in, or who own property in, the Town of Edson, nearly 73% identified doing so for more than a decade. Another 10.5% identified themselves as local residents/property owners for between 6–10 years, with 13% between 1–5 years, and just 3.5% having lived in town for less than a year.

This shows a strong connection to the Town by survey respondents, with a significant majority having lived here for a period of more than five years. While length of local residency doesn't guarantee an informed or engaged public, it does increase the likelihood of local investment, knowledge, and context.

1.2 Age

Collecting age demographics from survey respondents provides for deeper analysis of service and program perceptions, based on potential participant needs. For example, someone in the age category of 18-34 will not have much of an opinion on programming for older adults or seniors. Additionally, as the Town works towards a consistent engagement process that allows for multi-year trending, a shift in demographics from one year to the next is also important to note, in so much that it may drive changes in other areas of questioning.



While not an apples-to-apples comparison due to changes in surveying methodology and participation levels, a year-over-year analysis was still conducted between surveys for Budget 2026 and Budget 2025, to provide additional context where appropriate. Additionally, the age demographic construction was compared to the most recent census data available through Statistics Canada.

Budget 2026 Survey Respondent Age Demographics and Comparators			
Age	Budget 2026 Survey Representation by Age	Budget 2025 Survey Representation by Age	Census Data (Statistics Canada, 2021)
Under 18	0.4%	0.0%	Combined 15–34: 26.4%
18–34	14.9%	19.0%	
35–54	57.0%	59.9%	28.0%
55–74	26.8%	21.2%	21.5%
75+	0.9%	–	5.7%

Table 2. Age demographic representation amongst respondents of Edson's Budget 2026 Engagement Survey, along with Budget 2025 survey result and census comparators.

It's not surprising to see the highest level of survey participation from amongst the age group of 35-54 year olds, as those are typically the residents most engaged by the largest cross-section of Edson services. For example, someone in this age group may be a homeowner impacted by day-to-day service delivery; a parent with young children and/or older youth accessing relevant Town amenities and programs; and children of aging parents, themselves, with insights on how service delivery and other considerations impact seniors.



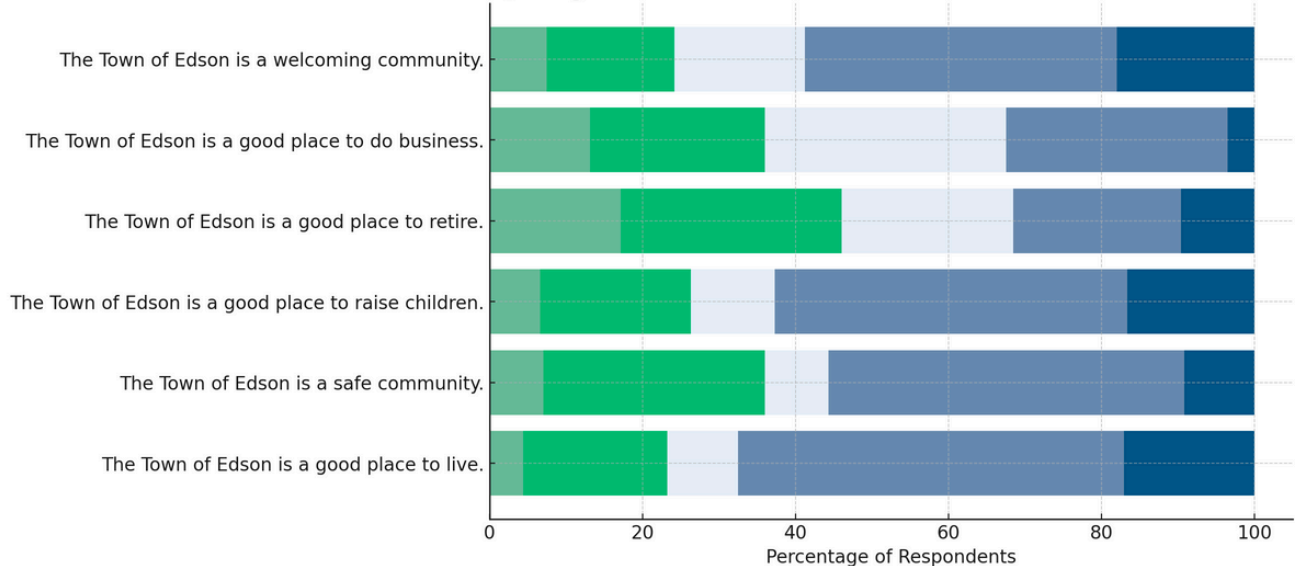
Proportional representation from one year to the next remained relatively consistent with each age group holding a generally stable share of survey respondents. This does allow for a direct comparison between later survey responses year-over-year. The aged representation is largely aligned with the broader public, as well, with the 35-54 group accounting for the greatest number of Edson residents, though not proportionally to the extent seen in survey participation.



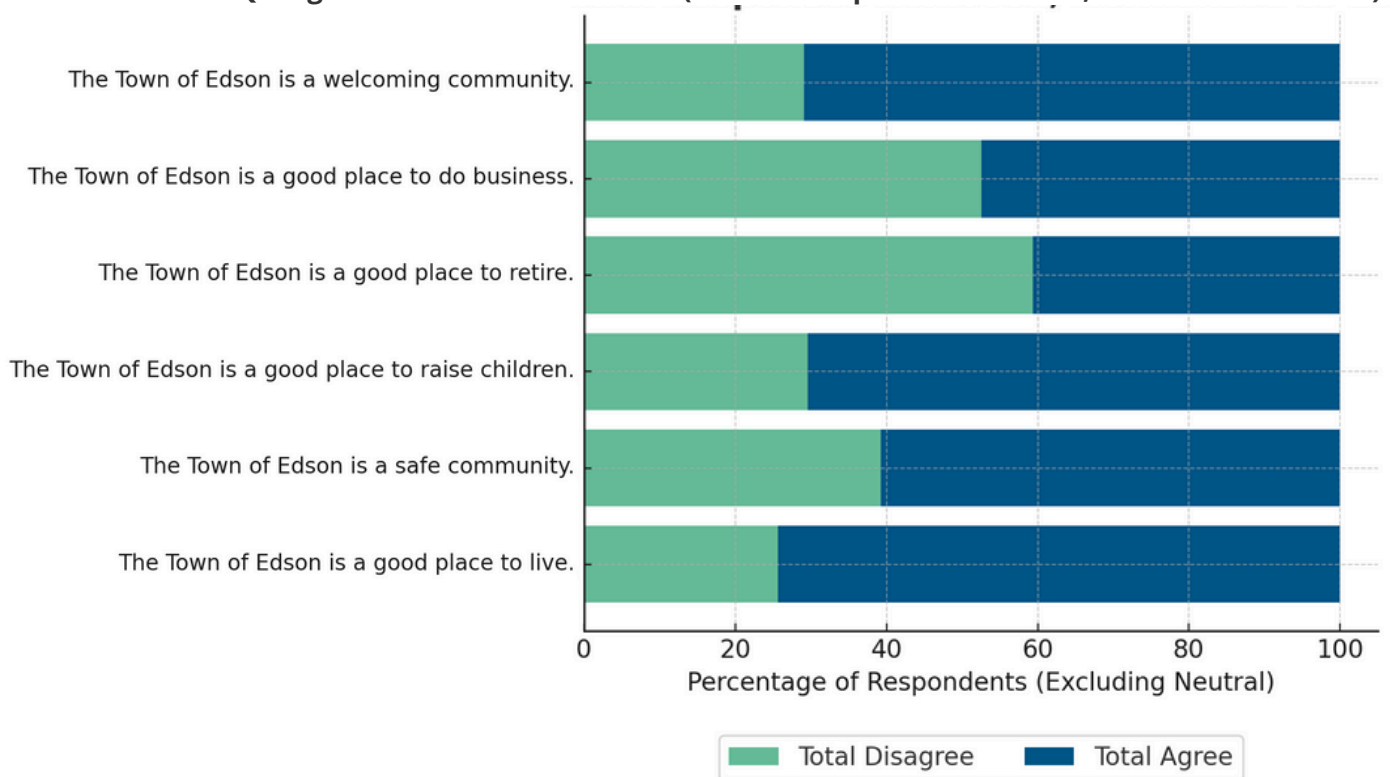
Section 2 – Community Perceptions

Looking at perceptions of the Town of Edson broadly, respondents were asked for their level of agreement associated with a series of statements tied to the local quality of life..

Q5: Agreement with Statements About the Town of Edson



Q5: Agreement with Statements (Neutral Responses Removed, Normalized to 100%)



These responses provide important insights into residents' perceptions of quality of life, safety, inclusivity, and opportunity in Edson. Overall, the data shows the community holds a generally positive view of life in the Town of Edson, and particularly as a place to live and raise a family. There are more mixed opinions, though still largely positive, around aging and owning a business in Edson.

Nearly 70% of respondents agree that Edson is a good place to live, increasing to nearly 75% when eliminating the neutral opinion. Similarly 63% agree that Edson is a good place to raise children (up to nearly 70% when looking only at agree/disagree), and 60% (65%) agree Edson is a welcoming community. The percentage of those qualifying Edson as a safe community drew 56% agreement, with lower rates of agreement qualifying Edson as a good place to retire (32%) and as a good place to do business (33%).

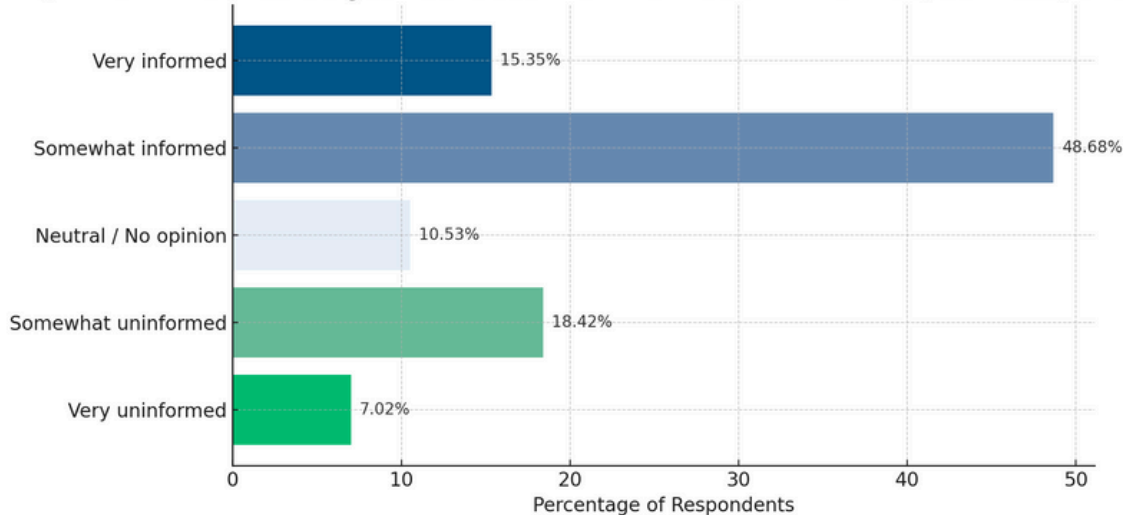




Section 3 – Communications and CX

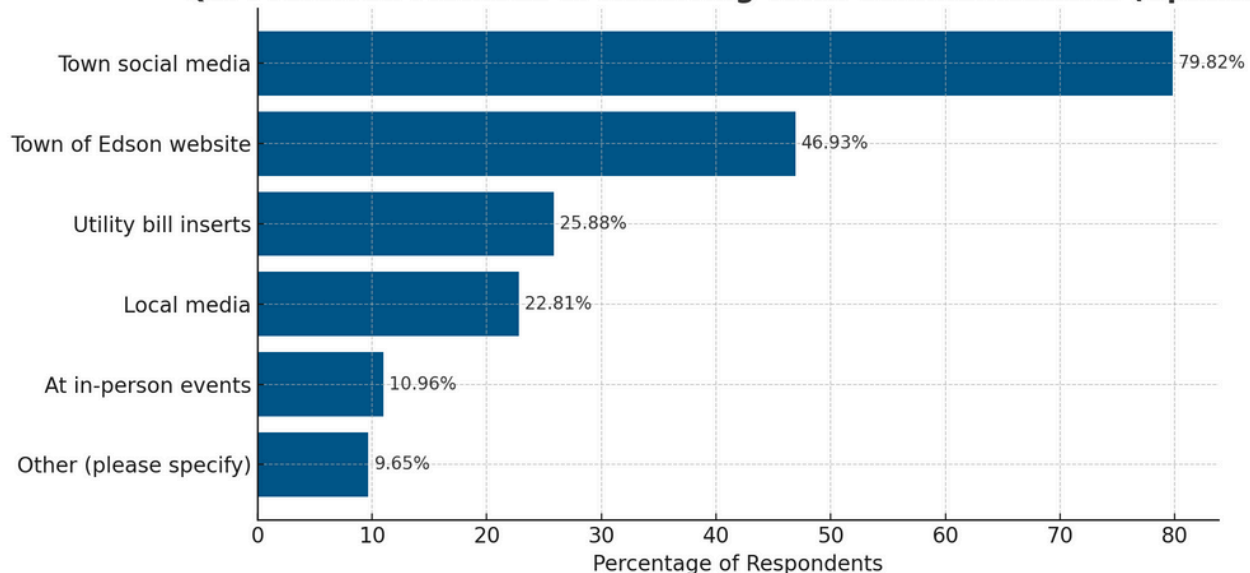
While this does not take the place of dedicated public consultation on areas of Town communications and/or engagement, nor does it act as a Communications Audit to any extent, it was important as part of this budget engagement process to set a baseline for how informed local residents feel they are, prior to asking pertinent questions tied to service delivery and municipal budgeting.

Q7: How informed do you feel about Town of Edson initiatives, services, and programs?



Perceived awareness levels are moderately positive, with a majority (64%) of respondents qualifying themselves as very or somewhat informed. At face value, this suggests the Town's communications channels are reaching a significant portion of the community. There is, however, room for improvement, with around one-quarter of residents feeling uninformed to some degree, representing a critical target audience moving forward.

Q8: Preferred Methods of Receiving Town Communications (Updated)



Importantly, those engaged were overwhelmingly digital-first in communications preference. Nearly 80% noted Town social media as their top method of receiving Town communications, with close to 50% stating they access the Town website for communications. Still, a significant number of respondents selected non-digital means of communications, including utility bill inserts (26%), local media (23%), and in-person events (11%).

Finally, around 10% of respondents selected “Other,” before being asked to specify additional types of preferred communications, which included:

- Email (21%)
- Mailouts (12.5%)
- Physical signage (12.5%)
- Town app or text messages (12.5%)
- Mayor/Council updates (4%)

Some respondents noted they’d like to see additional physical mailouts, while others expressed a preference for more physical signage. One respondent requested that direct contact (ie. phone call) be leveraged when Town work will directly affect an individual’s property.

3.1 Qualitative Communications Feedback

Respondents were asked to provide written feedback on Town communications, with a total of 58 comments received. These have been reviewed and analyzed in the aggregate, with comments themed. In addition to thematic content, comments were also analyzed for sentiment, identifying whether comments are positive, neutral, or negative.

The sentiment analysis reveals a mix of positive feedback, constructive criticism, and neutral observations.

Positive remarks accounted for 41% of comments, with many respondents expressing satisfaction with Town communications, highlighting improvements over recent years; a strong social media presence; and frequent updates. Positive comments often noted appreciation for humour and the conversational tone of communications.

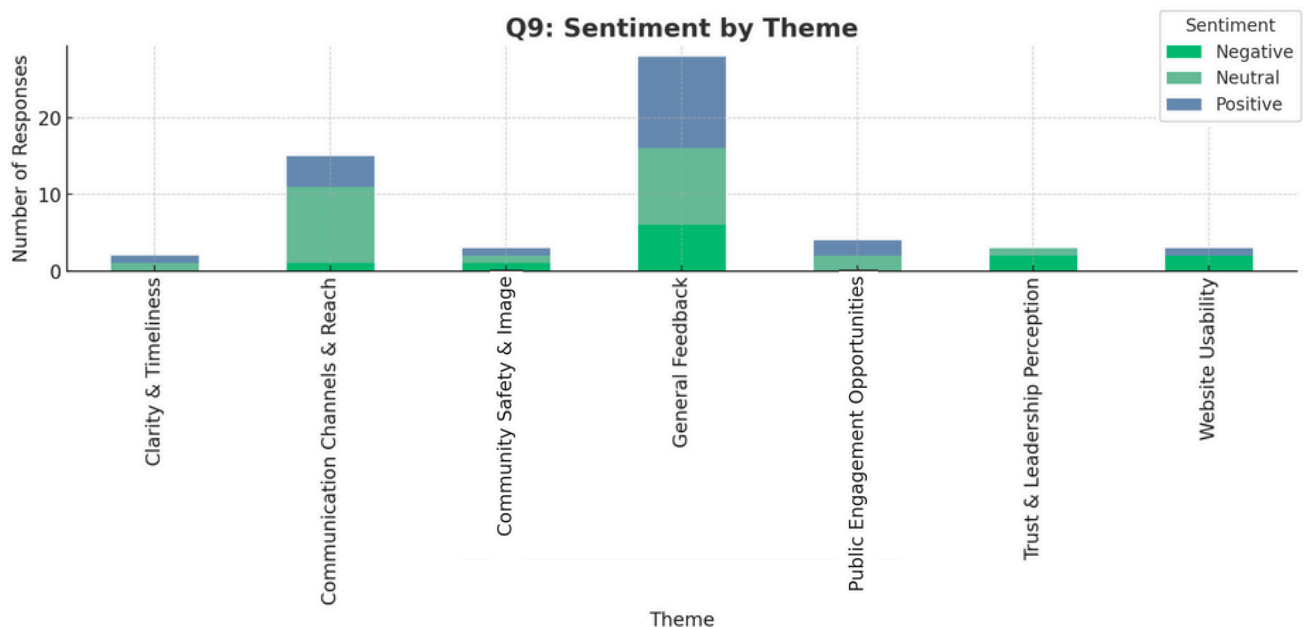
- *“I like the new email service, plus the lighthearted posts on social media.”*
- *“The Mayor does an excellent job of sharing what is happening in town on Facebook.”*
- *“Great job! Anyone who is interested in being informed has plenty of opportunities.”*
- *“Whoever is in charge of the town Facebook page, and the pound page, are killing it these days. So funny but also informative.”*
- *“TOE communications is outstanding!”*
- *“Very impressed with them honestly – quick which is nice.”*

Neutral responses accounted for 16% of all comments received on this question, including factual statements, suggestions without overtly positive or negative tones, or comments unrelated to communications performance.

- *"A town newsletter that gets emailed."*
- *"The sign coming into town was how I learned of this survey."*
- *"Mailbox inserts."*
- *"Signs coming into town cover some things but I personally rarely see them."*
- *"Rec programs are not advertised well at all."*
- *"There's more people that follow the Town page than the Mayor's. Posts should be made on the Town page or both."*

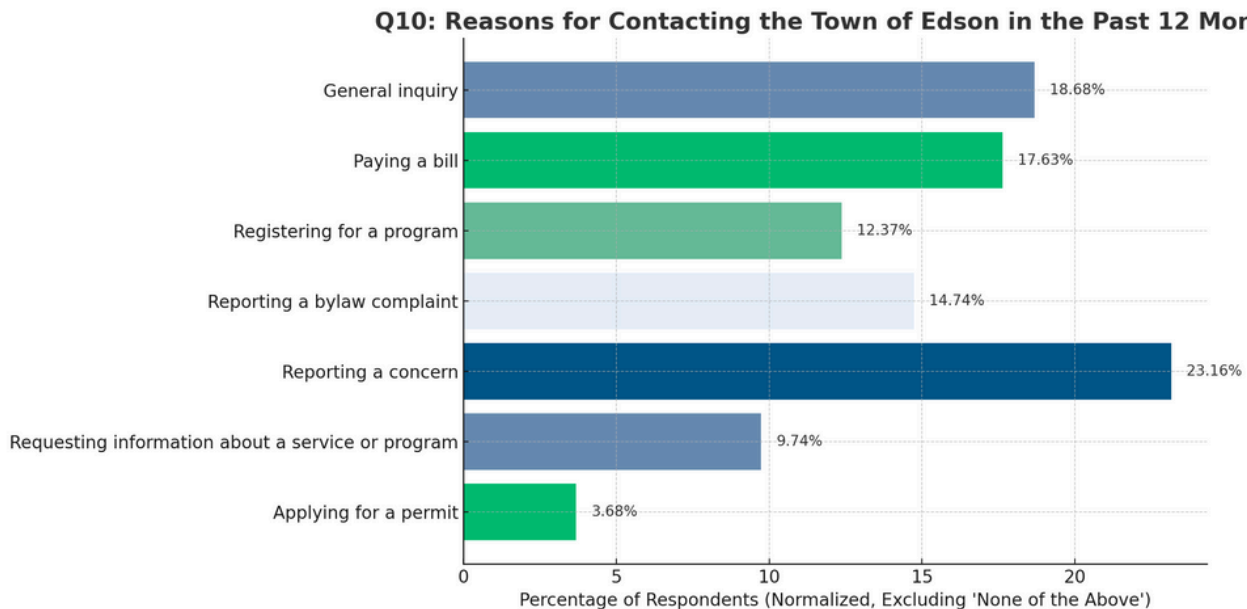
Negative responses accounted for 43% of comments. Criticism focused on over-reliance on Facebook, difficulty navigating the Town website, timeliness and clarity of updates, and the lack of outreach to those not on social media. Several of the concerns voiced were tied to frustrations with issues that are not communications specific, such as homelessness, crime, and infrastructure challenges.

- *"Unless you're on social media, you have no idea what's happening in this town... Our seniors are not on these platforms."*
- *"The town website is very hard to find information. Very cumbersome and a lot of old information."*
- *"Rarely if ever publicly addresses or responds to people's complaints or frustrations which just leads to more frustration."*
- *"Not much to communicate when the services are atrocious."*
- *"Publicity stunts and photo opportunities are a waste of time and money."*



3.2 Customer Experience

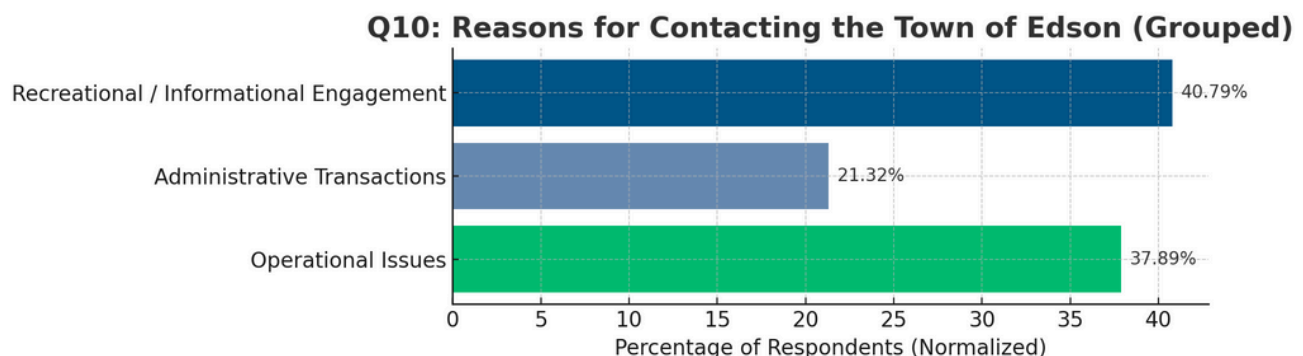
Beyond communications, this year's survey explored the ways in which residents interact with the Town, examining customer service, specifically, or Customer Experience (CX). It is becoming more commonplace that organizations develop CX Strategies, often as a function or sub-function of communications. How CX is executed is a piece of the puzzle, but those qualifications must be examined alongside the reasons for Town-resident interactions.



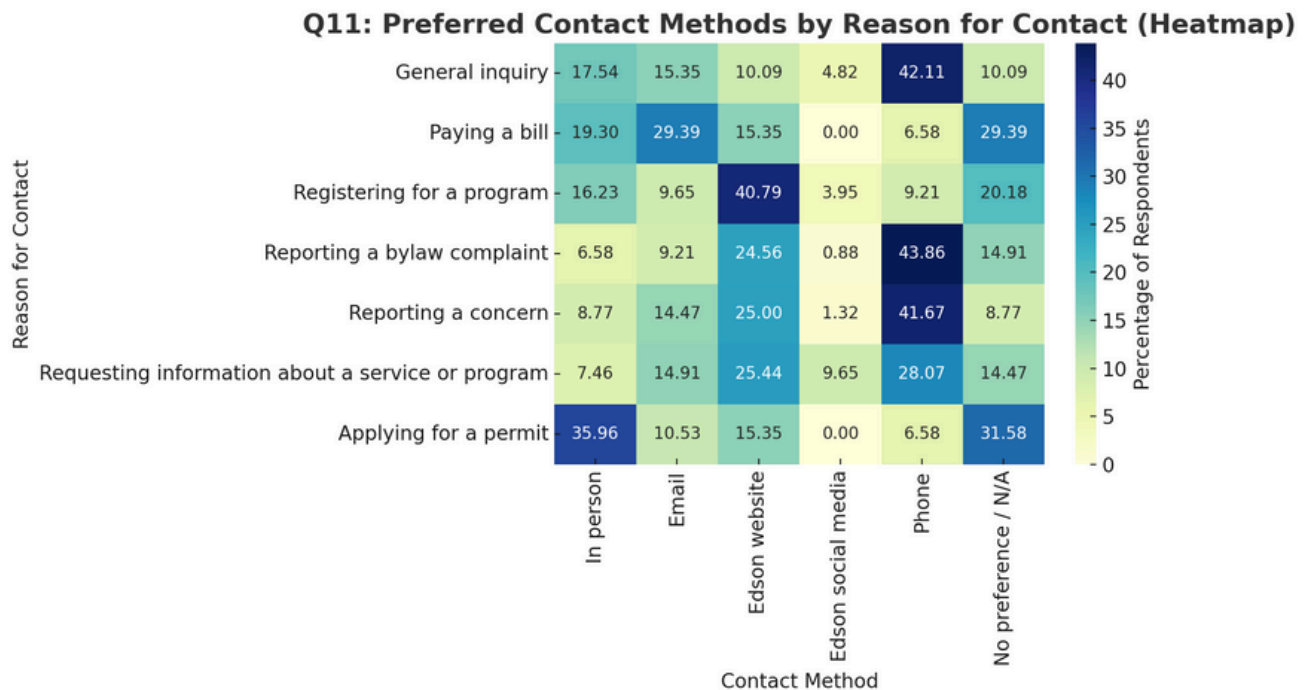
Reporting a concern was the top reason respondents stated for having contacted the Town of Edson over the past year, at nearly 25%. This broad category likely includes service issues, maintenance requests, and safety-related matters. General inquiries (19%), paying a bill (18%) and reporting a bylaw complaint (15%) rounded out the high-volume categories for initiating contact with the Town.

Moderately frequent interactions include registering for a program (13%) and requesting information about a service/program (1610), while applying for a permit (4%) was identified as a less-frequent contact reason.

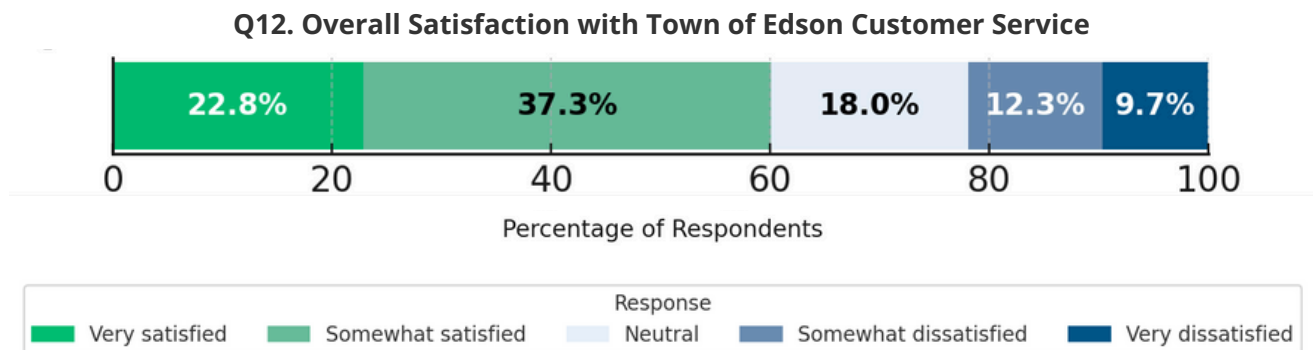
Initially, 6% of respondents selected "Other"; however, when asked to elaborate, each of the responses fit into one of the other categories, and were therefore tied into the above graph.



Respondents were asked to specify how they prefer to interact with the Town of Edson for different service or inquiry types. The results show a distinct pattern based on the nature of contact, highlighting opportunities to tailor communication and service delivery channels.



Responses show that operational issues, such as bylaw complaints or general concerns, are most often addressed via phone. Administrative processes (ie. bill payments, permits) show higher in-person and email use, with room for improved digital adoption. Finally, recreation and informational services (ie. program registration, info requests) lean more towards digital solutions, which is typical when it comes to areas such as program sign-ups.

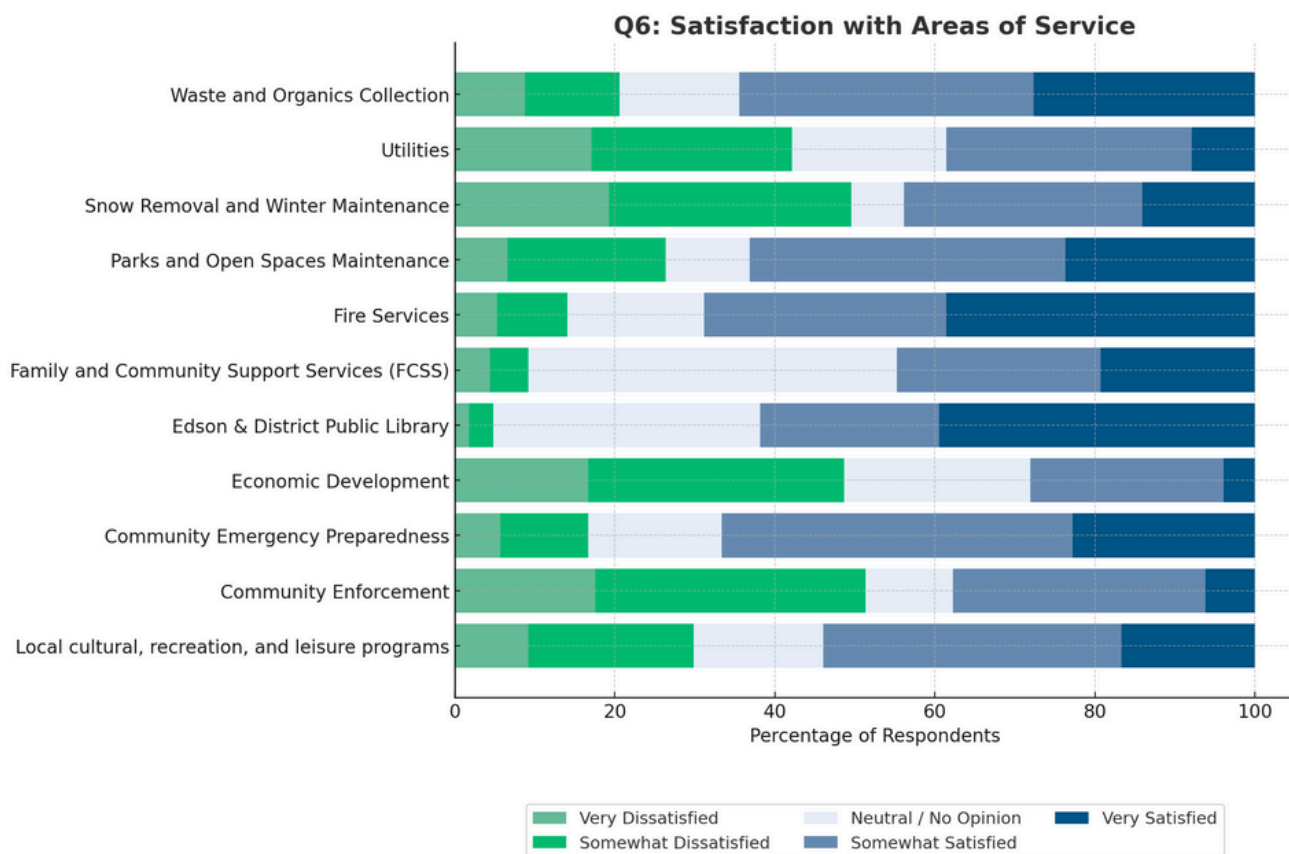


The majority satisfaction figure, exceeding 60%, provides a strong foundation, while a substantial minority of respondents (22%) voiced dissatisfaction with current CX, indicating room for improvement in the administration of customer service. At close to 20%, the neutral group of respondents is significant, representing nearly one in five residents, which presents an opportunity to convert indifference to satisfaction through targeted improvements.



Section 4 – Service Level Satisfaction

Specific to this year's budget engagement process, the Town took advantage of a combined process that included budget-specific questions, as well as questions pertaining to service level satisfaction. This approach takes advantage of economies of scale in securing public opinions. More consequentially, aligning budget feedback with public perceptions of current Town service provision provides important context, painting a more complete picture for Council ahead of budget deliberations.

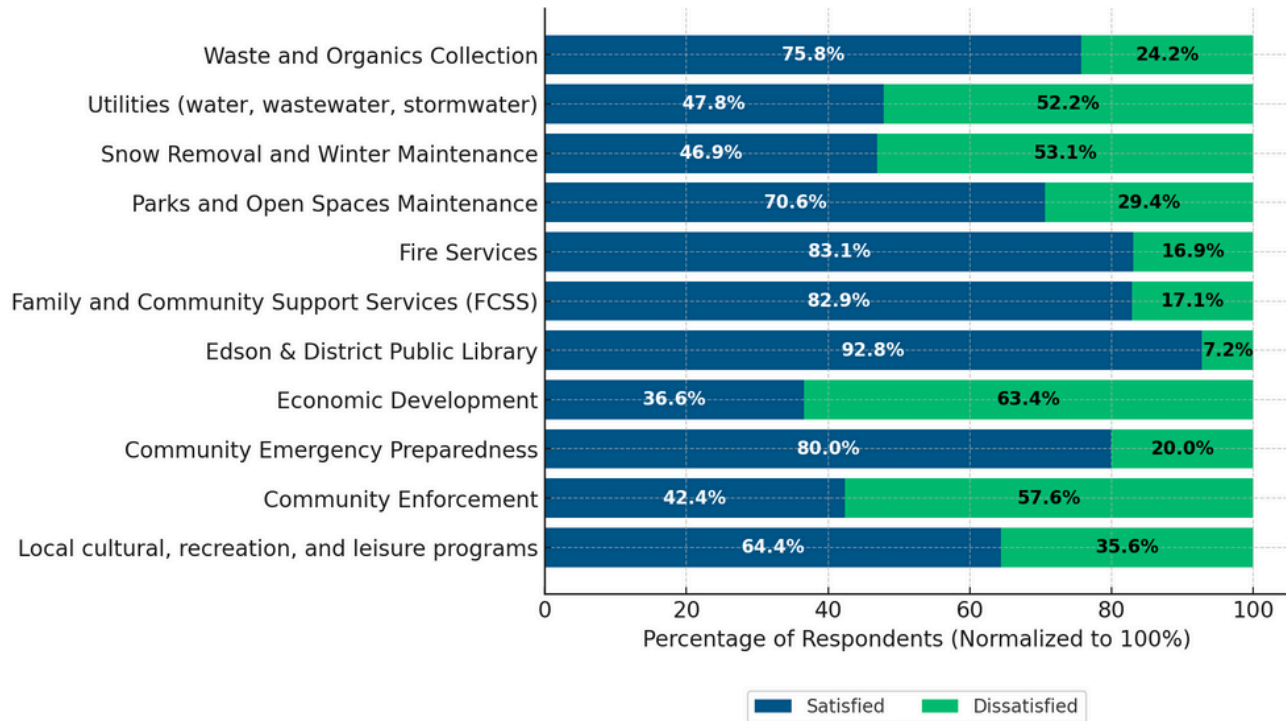


Across all services, satisfaction levels vary widely. Services related to emergency response and public safety (ie. Fire Services, Emergency Preparedness) received strong satisfaction ratings, while seasonal maintenance and enforcement functions saw much higher dissatisfaction rates, along with areas such as economic development.

Neutral opinions tell an important story. For example, where the Edson and District Public Library saw high satisfaction levels, one-third of respondents voiced a neutral opinion, suggesting mitigated user rates and a high level of support amongst those who do use the Library.

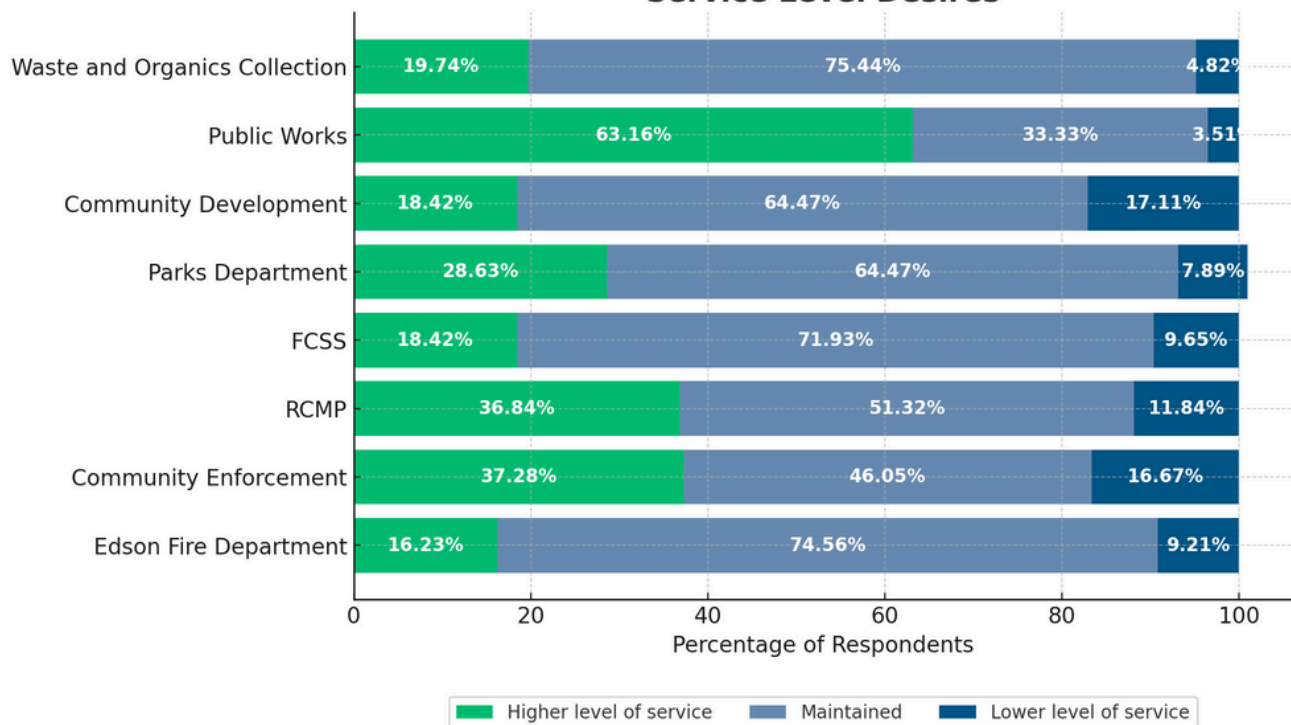
The lowest satisfaction levels are largely unsurprising based on what's anecdotally seen in other comparable communities, including snow removal and winter road maintenance, community enforcement, and economic development. The low satisfaction level associated with Utilities (28%) is considered outside the norm.

Q6: Satisfaction vs Dissatisfaction (Neutral Removed, Normalized)



The survey asked respondents to identify whether they'd like to see increased, maintained, or decreased levels of service across various areas of operations, aggregated in the chart below. Placed alongside satisfaction levels, there are clear lines drawn, where high-satisfaction areas (ie. Waste and Organics Collection) overwhelmingly draw a desire for maintained services, while lower-satisfaction areas see associated desires for increased service levels (ie. Utilities and Public Works).

Service Level Desires



Public Works is the clear leader amongst residents seeking increased service levels, at 63%, and just 3.5% advocating for a service level decrease, reflecting perceived gaps in utilities, infrastructure, roadwork, and/or seasonal maintenance. Both Community Enforcement and RCMP, meanwhile, show notable demand for enhanced service levels (37% each), indicating current concerns over enforcement visibility, responsiveness, and public safety considerations.

As noted, maintained service levels stood out most in areas of high satisfaction, such as Waste and Organics Collection, the Edson Fire Department, and FCSS.

Generally, residents are not seeking service level decreases, though the highest areas in which this was the case stood out for Community Development and Community Enforcement, each at 17% of respondents. It is not unusual that areas of lower satisfaction see high demand for both increased and decreased service levels, as is the case with Community Enforcement; while these come across as contradictory, it often tells a broader story of general dissatisfaction and desired change.

4.1 Qualitative Analysis

In addition to the quantitative evaluation of current satisfaction levels, survey respondents were asked to share their thoughts specific to different departments and areas of service delivery by the Town. These comments were reviewed, and analyzed in the aggregate, with thematic overviews for each area.

4.1.1 Edson Fire Department

A review of the 84 written responses on the Edson Fire Department resulted in feedback clusters with several recurring themes, the top one being a sense of pride and gratitude for firefighters' service. Respondents praised firefighters' dedication, professionalism, and community involvement. Several comments highlighted the department's positive presence at community events, and in engaging youth. Some comments spoke highly of wildfire response efforts, specifically.

"They are wonderful men and women who spend hours away from family to train and respond!"

In line with desires for service level changes, many respondents advocated for more full-time firefighters, improved training, and increased equipment investment. Suggestions included adding a fire safety inspector, increasing staffing for daytime coverage, and ensuring personnel are trained at a higher level; this ties back to a series of comments expressing anxieties over increased wildfire risk.

"With the increased fires everywhere, it might be a good idea to have more firefighters ready."

The main areas of concerns addressed through comments surrounded potential duplication of service with Yellowhead County—with many calling for merging departments or increased resource sharing—and polarized debate around the ladder truck. While supporters argue the truck is a necessary safety investment that could save lives and property, detractors voiced concerns over cost.

"There are two big fire departments within 2 km of each other—this is ridiculous."

4.1.2 Community Enforcement

A more negative tone emerged when reviewing the 86 written responses on Community Enforcement, with many focused on constructive criticism rather than complaints.

The first of these themes was the most prevalent by a significant margin, with respondents calling for an increased officer presence. Many respondents specifically requested more visible patrols, with specific mention of residential areas, trails, and during evenings and weekends. Requests for 24/7 coverage, or at least expanded hours of operations, were common, with frustration over limited enforcement outside regular business hours. Some linked increased presence to a desire for greater public safety and increased criminal deterrence, along with faster response times. Many called for additional staffing and resource capacity to meet service needs.

"They could use more boots on the ground, and more presence in public."

Several respondents spoke to a desire for a broader scope of enforcement, sharing a sentiment that too much focus is placed on traffic violations at the potential expense of other areas of enforcement. Desired priorities are most prominently associated with Edson's Community Standards Bylaw (ie. property maintenance, overgrown vegetation snow and ice clearing, noise complaints), while others alluded to animal control. Additional areas revolved around concerns with Edson's houseless population, as well as litter control, noise complaints, and RV/trailer parking.

"Start holding people accountable for maintaining their property instead of traffic violations and dog barking tickets."

A large subset of comments focused specifically on broader issues of crime and social disorder, including drug use, theft, vandalism, and encampments. Some suggested that Community Enforcement should work more closely with RCMP on these issues.

"The homeless, drug use, theft and encampments are an issue in this town. Put the money there and actually remove these dangers."

Additional areas referenced specific to Community Enforcement included a perceived misalignment between enforcement efforts and community needs, and animal control issues. On the latter topic, respondents spoke to issues such as loose dogs and cats, a lack of follow-up on animal control complaints, disagreement over cat licensing requirements, and a call for stricter penalties for "irresponsible" pet ownership.

4.1.3 RCMP

With context of the Town of Edson as a partial funder of local RCMP, a total of 77 written responses focused on key areas similar to those outlined for Community Enforcement, including a desire for increased visibility and patrols; frustration over theft, vandalism, drug use/dealing, and encampments; concerns with staffing and resourcing; and alignment between RCMP priorities and community needs.

"Rarely see them. Would like to see them out and about on patrols more often."

A small but notable group of respondents pointed to a desired structure shift, with some suggesting that the Town should explore policing options outside the RCMP, and others stating that the Town should advocate for more support for RCMP from other orders of government.

4.1.4 FCSS

Through 77 written responses, community sentiment on FCSS appears polarized, with a large segment voicing strong support, and another portion questioning its value or funding model. The split opinions revealed a fair number of key themes.

Overwhelmingly, the most frequent statements made were tied to a strong appreciation for FCSS, including positive sentiments around programming, events, and community involvement. Several noted FCSS' positive role in supporting vulnerable residents and contributing to quality of life.

"They provide an excellent service to Edson."

Second most frequently, respondents called for expanded FCSS services and funding, with suggestions for more age-specific programs, and some advocating for increased staffing and resources. This latter request was accompanied by comments referencing higher perceived social needs in Edson compared to other similar communities, and a request for greater accessibility outside of business hours.

"I would like to see increased support for vulnerable seniors."

Finally, there is a lack of awareness and visibility surrounding FCSS, with several respondents noted they were unaware of the role FCSS plays or the services it provides, while others expressed difficulty finding information about FCSS and a lack of promotional visibility in the community. These sentiments were accompanied by some residents questioning the necessity of municipal funding for social services, and others expressing concerns around funding transparency.

"Total waste of money. The town should be concentrating on infrastructure."

4.1.5 Parks Department

Feedback on the Parks Department was made up of 77 comments, and heavily focused on maintenance, with Vision Park and sports field conditions emerging as the most consistent and specific concerns. There was a call for more consistent upkeep, improved trail maintenance and overall aesthetics, and efficient resource allocation.

Many respondents expressed concerns over what they perceive as declining parks spaces and trails, with frequent concerns surrounding weed control, pavement upkeep, and amenity cleanliness.

"Public trails haven't been maintained or upgraded at all since installed."

While some expressed a desire for improved staff efficiency, many praised staff for doing a “great job,” and some pointed to key successes.

“Excellent trail snow removal in winter.”

4.1.6 Community Development

Just 43 respondents chose to submit a comment on Community Development, with the majority being positive in nature. Many respondents expressed appreciation for Town-run events, while others focused on the friendliness of staff, family-oriented programming, and community spirit generated by these efforts.

“Love the community events they put on. It’s nice to live in a town where community involvement is so big.”

Some respondents called for broader inclusivity in programming, with some noting the perception of events primarily catering to families with small children, and a desire for more activities for adults, teens, and seniors. Additionally, several respondents noted difficulty finding event information online, stating they often learn about programs or events only after they’ve happened.

“Always seem to hear about events after the fact—advertise them more prior to the event.”

Finally, some respondents did question the cost of programs, including events, and suggested including greater sponsorships and partnerships to the equation. A small number of respondents questioned whether municipal government should be involved in culture.

“Consider partnerships and sponsorships to cut down on staff time and expenses.”

4.1.7 Public Works

Public Works drew the highest number of qualitative responses, with 103 respondents providing predominantly negative comments, focused on road conditions, snow removal practices, and perceived operational inefficiencies. Many respondents perceive a lack of long-term planning, inadequate resource allocation, and insufficient accountability. While a small group acknowledged recent improvements, particularly in snow removal, the majority stated a desire for increased infrastructure investment.

Overwhelmingly, the top concern shared centered around the poor condition of roads in Edson, citing potholes, uneven surfaces, and repeated short-term patch jobs. Many called for long-term repaving plans instead of temporary fixes. Notably, it was largely unclear whether the conditions alluded to pertain to the highway, which is the responsibility of the Government of Alberta, or local roadways that fall under the Town’s umbrella.

“Whole avenues need to be repaved, rather than patched.”

The second-highest level of concern was expressed around snow clearing, with respondents expressing dissatisfaction over perceived inconsistent service and inefficiencies, along with questions around priority route strategies, citing delays for residential streets and cul-de-sacs. Some did note improvements in recent years.

"Snow removal is disgraceful."

Concerns extended beyond roads to what respondents perceive as poorly maintained sidewalks and hazardous walking trails, with some respondents specifically citing the need for handicap curb improvements.

"90% of all residential sidewalks are a safety hazard."

Many respondents believe there are opportunities for increased efficiencies in how Public Works operates, with perceptions around poor coordination of resources, unclear and/or outdated signage for maintenance and snow removal schedules, and frustration over difficulty reaching the Public Works Department.

"Trying to deal with snow removal or sewer problems is the most painful thing."

4.1.8 Waste and Organics Collection

An area with a notably high level of resident satisfaction, a total of 70 respondents provided written comments, with strong support for certain elements (ie. organics program) and dissatisfaction with areas including a lack of curbside recycling.

Most prominent was a strong demand for a shift from bi-weekly to weekly garbage pickup, year-round. Many cited that one bin collected every two weeks is insufficient for families, leading to overfilled bins, trash being scattered around the street, and illegal dumping.

"Biweekly is not efficient for an average family."

A large number of respondents also voiced a desire for blue bin recycling, or some form of curbside recycling collection. Several noted previous experience with curbside recycling, and said it encouraged greater participation in recycling programs, while other suggested it could be an optional program, paid for by those who use it. Many asked for more service flexibility, as well, including individual requests such as larger organic bins, back alley pickup, and access to disposal for those without trucks. Suggestions were made for additional community clean-ups in the spring and fall, as well.

"Would like to see a blue bin service for recycling."

"Better in-town access for branches and wood removal for people who can't get to the dump."

Some respondents voiced concerns over fees being too high for the service level provided, referencing price increases despite reduced frequency. Additionally, concerns were raised around inconsistent pickup times, late collections, and irregular schedule adherence, with some calling for accountability by the contractor managing collection.

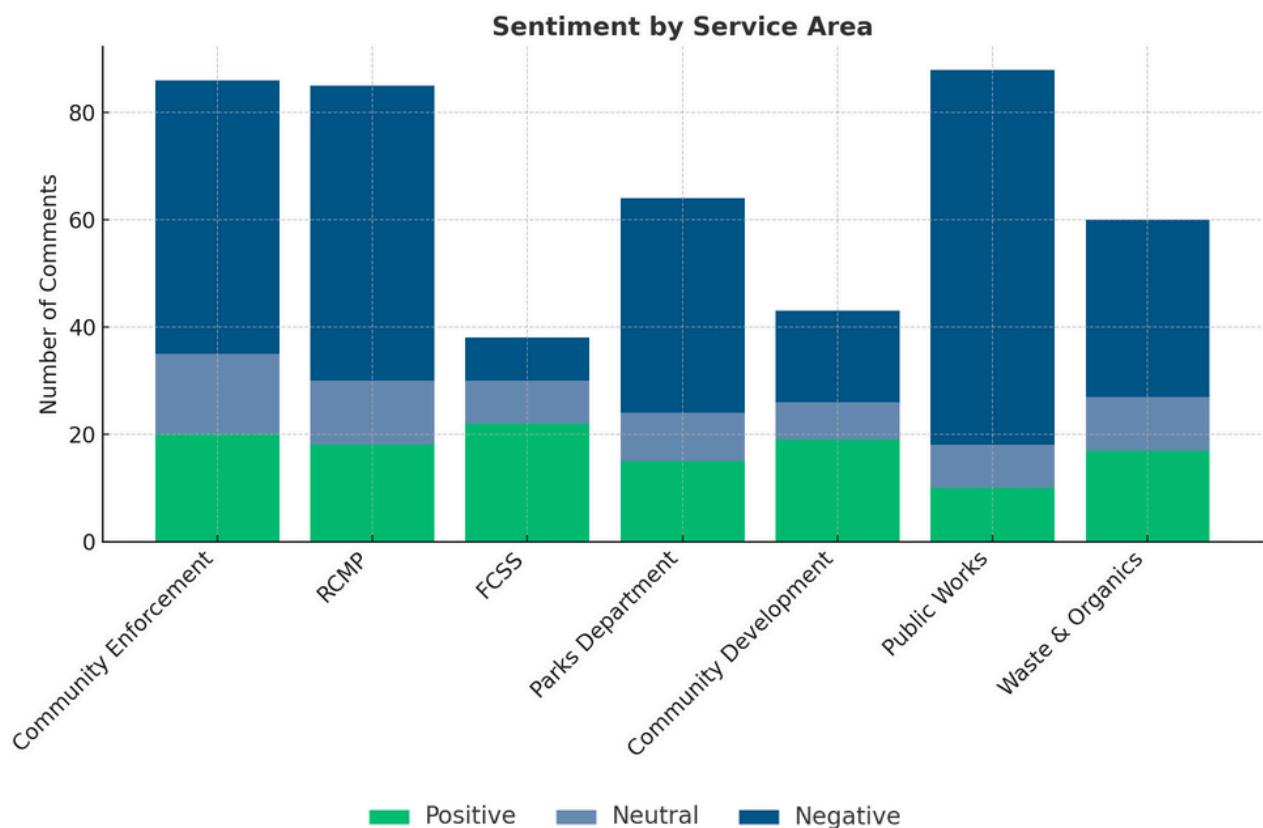
"Would be nice if pickup was at remotely the same time."

On a positive note, many residents support the organics collection program, while others still feel it's underutilized. Winter organics pickup occurring every two weeks was noted as a good cost-saving measure.

"One of the best things this town did."

4.2 Cross-service Sentiment Comparison

Looking across all inputs accounted for to this point allows for a comparative sentiment analysis across various areas of service delivery.



The most positive or balanced sentiment came in areas which are community-focused, such as FCSS and Community Development, while the highest negative sentiment associated with Public Works and RCMP. More moderate sentiment was identified in areas such as Community Enforcement, the Parks Department, and Waste and Organics Collection. These trends are not surprising, as positive sentiment is often tied directly to visible, high-quality, and consistent service delivery, where negative sentiment is often linked to perceptions around service reliability and inefficiencies.

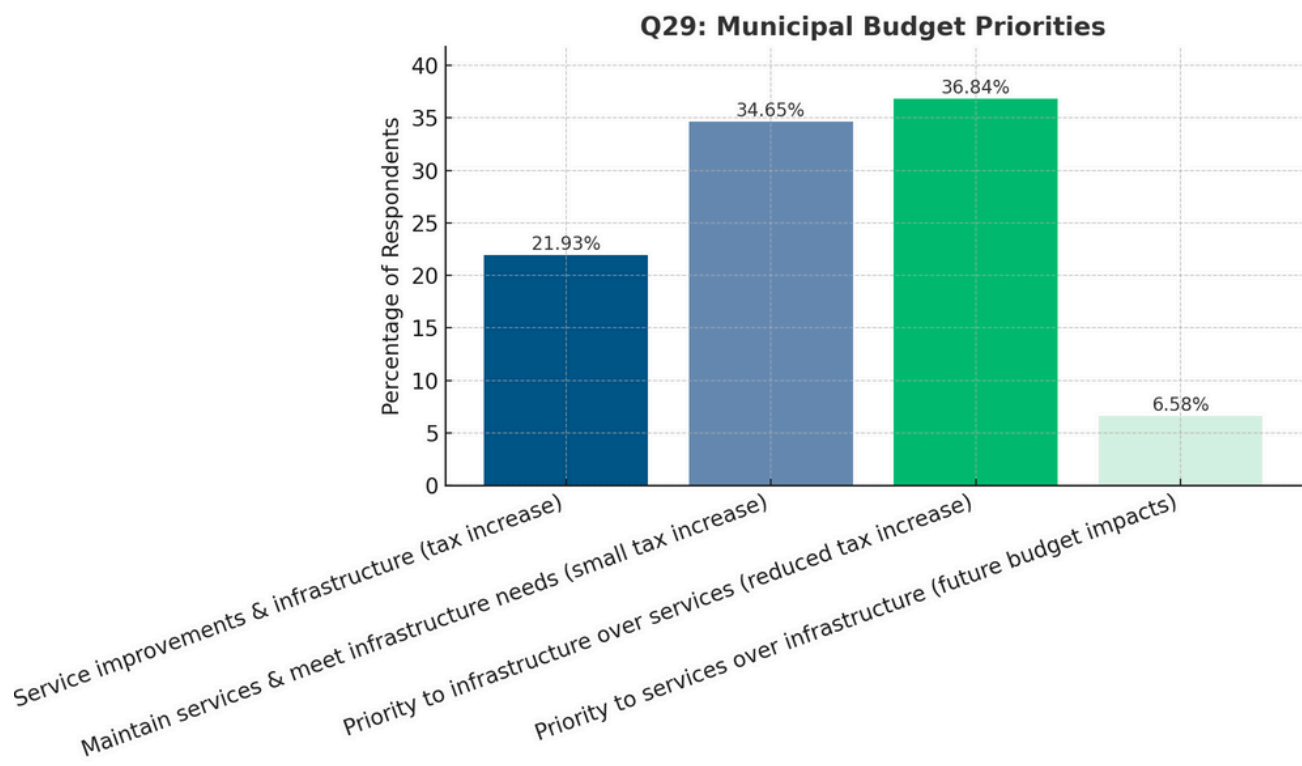


Section 5 – Town Budget

The last portion of the survey focused specifically on Edson's Budget 2026. One of the goals in designing this year's survey was to ensure appropriate contextual reality in seeking resident feedback on various municipal finance questions. When thinking of Budget 2026, for example, residents were provided a series of scenarios to choose from, and were asked to select that which most closely aligns with their opinion:

- I would like to see service improvements and appropriate infrastructure funding. I understand this would require a tax increase.
- I would like to see service levels maintained and immediate infrastructure needs met. I understand this will require a small tax increase.
- I would like to see priority given to infrastructure needs over service delivery. I understand this could reduce a potential tax increase, but could result in service decreases.
- I would like to see priority given to service delivery over infrastructure needs. I understand this could reduce the short-term tax increase, but would likely have future budget implications.

This provides a realistic understanding of current financial challenges, while looking at opportunities for prioritization.



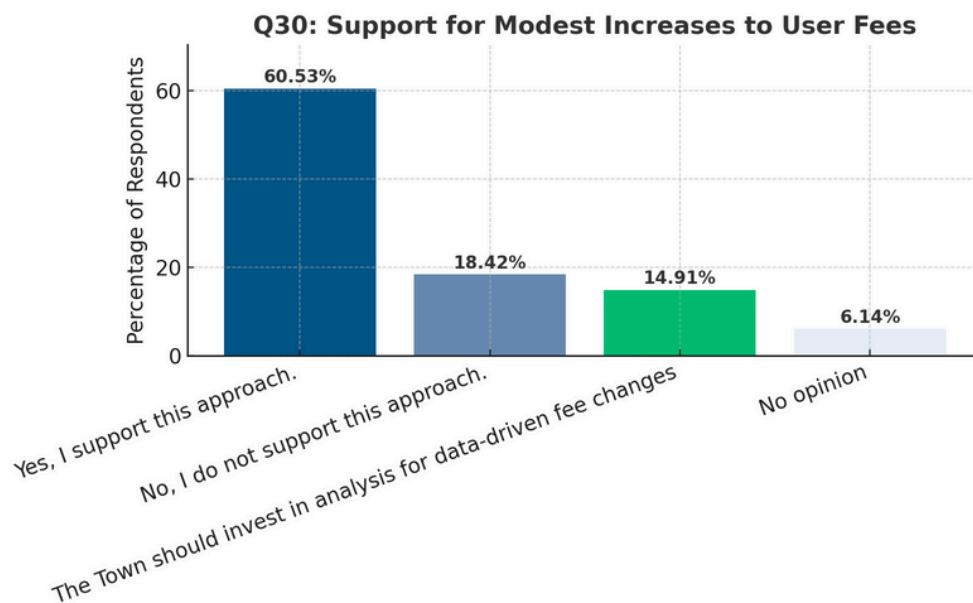
The largest share of respondents (37%) prioritized infrastructure over services, with the potential for this approach resulting in a tax increase, albeit to a lesser degree than if service improvements or maintenance were prioritized.

The second-highest proportion of respondents (35%) favoured maintaining existing service levels while meeting immediate infrastructure needs, even if it means a relatively small tax increase. This is more of a short-term solution, recognizing that if only immediate needs are met now, future infrastructure needs may grow based on a lack of proactive measures taken today.

A smaller segment (22%) supported service improvements and infrastructure investment, funded by a larger tax increase. This reflects a portion of the community with two-pronged priorities that increase quality of life while aiming at municipal sustainability, over cost containment.

Finally, just 7% of respondents prioritized services over infrastructure, doing so with the knowledge this approach could have significant future budget impacts to address infrastructure needs. While the most fiscally constrained in terms of current taxation, the low uptake for this option shows a community with a balanced approach to current and future demands. This is true beyond the scope of just this one question, with infrastructure proving a common theme throughout qualitative survey responses.

Looking at options to achieve community priorities with a realistic understanding of taxation, respondents were asked whether they would support a modest increase to user fees if it were to reduce reliance on property taxes, or offset a potential tax increase, with the overwhelming majority in favour.



Nearly 61% of respondents indicated support for this approach, reflecting a willingness amongst residents to consider targeted, user-based funding models for certain municipal services, particularly where the benefit is direct to the user. Conversely, 18% do not support increasing user fees, while 15% favoured investing in further analysis to guide any changes to Town fees. This indicates that a fair number of respondents are not opposed to the idea in principle, but that they want the decision—should it move forward—to be clearly grounded in a cost-benefit analysis before implementation.

Welcome!

Budget 2026 Public Engagement

Sunday, June 8 - 1 to 4 p.m. | Monday, June 9 - 4 to 7 p.m.
Galloway Station Museum (223-55 Street)



← scan me!

www.edson.ca/engage



OPEN HOUSES AND FOCUS GROUPS





Section 6 – Open House Sessions

Open Houses were hosted at the Galloway Station Museum in early-June, with scheduling intentionally undertaken to ensure variety, with a weekend and weekday session, and at different times (afternoon/evening). This is one method of reducing barriers to access. Additionally, the first of the two sessions was hosted outdoors, in an attempt to capture opinions from those walking by in the park, while the second session was hosted indoors, providing a comfortable setting for those intentionally coming to engage.

While attendance was not overly high, with only 22 participants over the two days. This was assessed to have occurred for a few reasons, the first of which was the unfortunate timing of public engagement alongside the Edmonton Oilers' run in the NHL Stanley Cup Finals. Additionally, the location of the Open House sessions proved ineffective; while there were many people stopping by unprovoked, many of them were passing through town on their way to or from the mountains. As they were not residents of Edson, their participation was not included in the count. However, their insights were still collected on experiences in Edson, the great majority of which described a friendly and welcoming community, and consistent stop on people's recurring trips.

Feedback obtained from residents were reviewed and trended, with key inputs as follows:

- **Feedback included** that residents are concerned about the state of road maintenance in Edson, though many stated their concerns were mainly with the highway that passes through town, and which falls under provincial jurisdiction.
- **Feedback included** concerns around duplication of services between the Town of Edson Fire Department and that of Yellowhead County, with many participants voicing a desire for greater efficiency between the two departments, and confusion around why they have not yet amalgamated. Others specifically shared that they do not want to see the two departments combined.
- **Feedback included** concerns over public safety, particularly as it relates to encampments and a perceived uptick in criminal activity.
- **Feedback included** that residents are largely comfortable with a potential tax increase, as long as they see the value for their investment into the Town.
- **Feedback included** that there's a desire for more opportunities for face-to-face interaction with the Town.





Section 7 – Focus Group Sessions

A series of three focus groups were also held in early June, allowing for specific insights tied to both budget and service delivery, from groups including youth, non-profit leaders, and business owners from throughout the community. The three focus groups accounted for 21 participants, all of whom were asked about service delivery, programs, and budgeting specifically within the scope of their group, as well as more broadly as residents of the community (the latter comments were incorporated into more general findings).

That feedback was recorded, reviewed, and analyzed for trends, as outlined below.

7.1 Business Owners

Participants representing the local business community represented a variety of industries, including retail, hospitality, real estate, professional services, and industrial contracting, with presence as well by the local Chamber of Commerce. This session provided insights into the experiences, challenges, and priorities of the business community. The most prevalent areas of focus mentioned throughout the business focus group centered around business retention and support, followed by downtown revitalization, economic development practices, and community safety.

7.1.1 Business Retention and Support

Participants noted a strong working relationship with the Town, and specifically acknowledged improvements in working with Planning and Development, and Economic Development. The increase in business visitations and support for grant applications was appreciated. However, capacity constraints and turnover at the Town were voiced as concerns, along with a desire for more consistent follow-up with businesses.

There was a sense that business owners are expected to know how to navigate various functions, such as permitting and the granting process, where additional supports (ie. checklists, one-on-one calls, etc.) would prove valuable in ensuring compliance.

- *“They’re very receptive to answering questions and trying to come up with workable solutions—not that we always like the answer, but they’re willing to work with you.”*
- *“The grand opening site visit was lovely. They took photos, posted them online, and I had people calling and booking appointments.”*
- *“Capacity is the issue. One person doing business licensing, rural renewal, development permits, and more.”*

7.1.2 Downtown Revitalization

A significant amount of discussion was had around the need for increased downtown revitalization efforts. Business owners noted that it can be difficult to survive downtown for a number of reasons, including references to encampments and crime, along with the visual state of downtown. Aging

infrastructure played a large part of this, with some noting specifically that it's difficult to invest in the area when building around you are not properly maintained or cared for.

Parking issues downtown were also noted. Business owners expressed a desire for those passing through Edson to be able to stop and shop locally or eat at local restaurants, for example, but noted that it can be difficult for many to do so. As they pull trailers through on their way to the mountains, for instance, there are few areas where it's acceptable to park downtown, meaning those people simply choose not to stop in town. Large vehicles and industrial traffic were also noted as facing particular challenges accessing the downtown core.

- *"If you're coming in with a trailer, there's nowhere to park."*
- *"This Town was built a long time ago. The infrastructure isn't accommodating for what we need now."*
- *"If you want people to stop, they need somewhere to park."*

7.1.3 Economic Development

There are perceptions that more can be done to attract a wider variety of businesses to create a vibrant economy in Edson, whereas local business owners have concerns about the high number of franchises being set up. Additionally, some participants referenced businesses that, even if they are locally led, are owned by those from outside the community. This was a point of contention for those in attendance, who expressed frustration that they feel invested in their community, while anecdotally, there has been reduced community investment from non-local operators. Others, still, emphasized adapting to a changing business demographic, and voiced a desire for more support by the Town for 'mom n' pop' style shops.

Notably, some local business owners pointed to a difficult competitive field due to recent business investment in the community. Using restaurants as an example, Victoria, BC, has 46 restaurants per 10,000 people, while Edson has over 40 dining options for a population below 9,000.

- *"Franchisees are hiring family members and they're not from here, they don't live here."*
- *"If you're going to open a business here, you should be buying a home here."*
- *"Our demographic is changing in Edson, and businesses that change with it will thrive."*

7.1.4 Safety Concerns

The presence of homeless individuals, and particularly those with addictions, in the downtown core was cited as a major safety and economic concern. Business owners reported vandalism, theft, and reduced property values, and advocated for relocation of social support services away from the core. Some owners shared stories of potential customers being deterred from entering their businesses, as a result of safety concerns.

- *"You kill the market value on Main Street when [social support] services are in the downtown core."*
- *Main Street is dying."*
- *"If you want to develop the downtown core, move the [social support] services to a safer location for everyone, including the people you're trying to help."*



7.1.5 Additional Concerns

Additional issues raised included:

- **Permits:** Calls for streamlined permitting processes, with better information retention, and reduced costs for developers.
- **Employment:** Discussion was had around a perceived industrial slowdown, and difficulty in attracting long-term workers who stay in, and are invested in, the community.
- **Waste Collection:** Limited flexibility was noted for excess waste for residents, leading to illegal dumping in commercial bins.

The business community in Edson is navigating what focus group participants noted as a period of transition. Shifts in demographics and economic conditions are reshaping the local business landscape. While there is optimism about working with the Town, and its staff, participants stressed the need for strategic action in key areas:

- Supporting existing businesses alongside attracting new investment;
- Maintaining safe, clean public spaces;
- Revitalizing and adapting downtown to meet modern needs; and,
- Balancing economic development with an eye on local diversification opportunities.

Business owners were united in their desire to see Edson grow in a way that retains local character, improves quality of life, and fosters a sustainable, community-invested economy.



7.2 Non-profit Leaders

During the focus group with local non-profit leaders, a similar trend emerged to that seen with business owners, wherein participants were happy with the support provided by the Town, but are experiencing rapidly evolving challenges with few options. Gathering perspectives on community needs, service delivery challenges, and opportunities for collaboration brought out representation from a range of organizations, including cultural, educational, food security, recreation, and social support services.

7.2.1 Increased Demand for Services

Nearly across the Board for the six groups represented, non-profit organizations reported a sustained, and in some cases accelerating, demand for service. This is particularly true in areas of social support, where the rising cost of living, housing challenges, and limited access to preventative supports were cited as key drivers. While there is a deep appreciation for the support provided by the Town already, there is a desire for bolstered collaboration moving forward, in an effort to address some of the more systemic problems driving the increased demands.

Additionally, some NPO leaders voiced concerns about the Town's updated policy on granting, which no longer allows repeat funding for the same initiative scope from one year to the next. Some leaders have cited sustainability concerns without the renewed funding, in the face of continuously rising demands.

- *"Every month, our numbers are climbing—regular clients, new Canadians, and people coming back after years of not having seen them."*
- *"We don't want to get bigger. We want people to need [our services] less."*
- *"If people had support earlier on, we might see fewer clients."*

This area of conversation extended beyond service delivery, and to program and space limitations, including those currently using Town facilities (for which they remain grateful).

- *"There are so many open retail spots along Main Street. Could any be converted?"*
- *"We don't have the [funds] to pay for additional space."*
- *"The Town has been responsive on facility issues, but predictability funding would help."*

7.2.2 Funding Volatility

Participants described funding challenges, including the sometimes unpredictable timing of Town grants, shifting provincial priorities (including the elimination of some funding streams), reduced private/corporate donations, and restrictions on repeat programming for local funding. While some grants are easy to apply for and report on, NPO leaders voiced concerns that the 'one-and-done' approach to program funding may hinder long-term impact.

- *"We're seeing fewer private donations. What was once 3,000 pounds of food donations is now 1,500 pounds."*
- *"How much new [programs] can you bring in year over year? Even in a small town, you can't possible service everybody in one session."*
- *"We need some legacy funding."*

7.2.3 Transportation Barriers

Transportation was cited as a major obstacle for those looking to access local services. Emphasis was placed on those from Yellowhead County looking to access Edson-based non-profit services, as well as individuals without a driver's license. Some noted the sentiment that the absence of a public transit system creates inequities in service access, with a smaller group pointing to the "Move Edson" bus as having been an important program. Organizations expressed interest in collaborative grant applications between the Town and the County to address transportation needs.

- *"Public transportation would be great... Clients were so grateful when we had the bus."*
- *"Some people are here on a spousal [agreement] and don't have a driver's license."*
- *"We need to collaborate more with the County to solve transportation barriers."*

7.2.4 Increased Collaboration

There is a strong interest amongst non-profit leaders for improved cross-sector coordination, both amongst non-profits, as well as between NPOs and the Town of Edson. Leaders noted that the monthly interagency meetings hosted by the FCSS are a valuable asset, but some voiced a desire for the program to be expanded even further. Additionally, participants voiced a desire for a "Community Navigator" with FCSS, whose role it would be to help residents connect with programs and services, particularly those facing language or literacy barriers.

- *"It's one thing to have the list of services, but it's another to have someone help people figure out where they need to be."*
- *"We could work together more, even if we can't take on more."*
- *"It would be nice if the Town had someone to support navigating services."*



7.3 Youth

A third focus group was held with members of the Town of Edson Youth Council to better understand youth priorities, perceptions, and ideas for community improvement. Participants ranged from first- to fourth-term members, bringing perspectives on quality of life, recreation, safety, local government, and the future of Edson through a youth lens.

7.3.1 Valued Community Amenities

Participants voiced a strong connection to community, and noted that they feel there are a lot of opportunities to stay active in Edson. Youth consistently highlighted parks, trails, and recreation amenities as the most impactful services in Edson. Facilities including the skate park, Kinsmen Park, and public sports fields and courts were noted as being widely used and appreciated. Cycling trails and walking paths were also seen as important for both recreation and community connection.

- *"The skate park's a big one."*
- *"We can walk everywhere... it still feels safe here."*
- *"The volleyball court is used a lot."*

Youth raised concerns about accessible routes to parks and other community facilities, recommending improvements to road and path accessibility for those using wheelchairs and mobility aids.

7.3.2 Future Outlook

Most youth envisioned pursuing post-secondary education in larger centres, including in Edmonton, Calgary, and in other provinces. Several expressed uncertainty about returning to Edson afterward, or outright said they have no interest in doing so. While some cited a desire for new experiences and greater opportunities, others said they would consider returning if the right career paths were available locally.

- *"I don't know, once I'm done school, if I would come back to Edson or not."*
- *"For the professions I want, you can't really do them in a rural community."*
- *"If I could be a nurse here, then I'd be caring for people I know and supporting my community."*

Additionally, there was a desire expressed for increased amenities comparable to what would be found in larger urban centres, driving some of the sentiments for leaving town after high school. This included expanded retail options, coffee shops, and a more vibrant downtown. The idea of combining small-town safety and familiarity, with larger-centre amenities was appealing to session participants.

Finally, there were a number of concerns raised around limited youth employment opportunities, including that getting a stable job sometimes meant having to leave the community. A significant portion of session participants voiced a desire for some sort of post-secondary campus in or near Edson, which would help fuel local youth career prospects.

- *"Lots of people talk about wanting to have a mall or a Starbucks."*
- *"Small-town vibe with a big-city atmosphere."*
- *"There's a huge issue with teenagers not being able to find jobs."*

7.3.3 Community Safety

Youth generally felt safe in Edson and appreciated the community's familiarity, RCMP responsiveness, and relatively low crime levels. Some noted safety concerns specifically on the trails, and the presence of unhoused people downtown, though there was also a high level of empathy expressed towards those experiencing homelessness and mental health struggles. Some participants noted their parents no longer let them walk the trails on their own, for safety reasons, where that did not used to be a thing.

- *"You still feel safe here... It's rare to have people getting stabbed or shot."*
- *"My opinion started changing once I learned more about the encampments."*
- *"We see the same people walking around, and we can help them."*

7.3.4 Youth Engagement and Community Involvement

Volunteering was described as highly rewarding, with Youth Council members wanting to encourage wider participation amongst their peers. They valued school-community collaboration for volunteer opportunities and the bursary program. Youth also expressed interest in expanding Youth Council's career exploration role by hosting professional speakers and offering shadowing opportunities.

- *"We all got addicted to volunteering."*
- *"Keep advertising the bursary. It's a good selection process."*
- *"We want to learn about careers at so many places."*

Youth had mixed awareness of Town services and local government functions, and in the role they play within that scope. There was some uncertainty about role clarity amongst orders of government. Participants suggested improved outreach tailored to youth, including broader use of social media platforms that connect directly with a younger audience (ie. Instagram), and creative approaches like involving the Mayor in video content. Specifically, youth referenced the positive community-building effect that the Mayor's videos had throughout the 2023 wildfires.

- *"I wouldn't have known about [a Town service] if it weren't for my dad."*
- *"Advertise youth services, including what they are and how to access them—make it more known to youth."*
- *"I feel like everyone would watch the Mayor on TikTok."*

7.3.5 Additional Input

Additional areas of conversation included a concern that private activities currently available to youth won't be around for much longer if the community doesn't see growth and economic investment. One example provided was the movie theatre.

Youth also expressed a desire to see more community buy-in to making the Town of Edson a vibrant, welcoming place to live, expressing interest in increased community clean-up activities, and the hope that people living in Edson will be part of the solution instead of relying on government to take the lead. Session participants noted they had the feeling of full community togetherness around the time of the 2023 wildfires, which fostered a sense of community connection.

7.4 Cross-session Themes

Through focus groups with business owners, non-profit leaders, and youth, each group offered unique perspectives on the community's strengths, challenges, and opportunities, often specifically tied to their lived experiences and role in the community. There were, however, a number of recurring themes that emerged across all three groups.

Theme	Commonalities Across Groups	Differences in Perspective
Downtown Vitality	All groups noted vacant lots, business closures, and a need for revitalization to improve vibrancy and economic health.	Businesses focused on lost property value and tax revenue; youth emphasized social engagement and "date night" options; non-profits saw potential for repurposing vacant spaces for community use.
Amenities and Recreation	All valued existing recreation amenities and wanted more facilities and programs.	Youth prioritized skate park, courts, trails, and more "big city" amenities; businesses called for infrastructure upgrades to support downtown use; non-profits wanted accessible, affordable spaces for programming.
Economic Opportunities	Desire to attract and retain both businesses and workers.	Businesses highlighted franchise vs. local ownership concerns; youth noted limited jobs for teens; non-profits linked economic challenges to increased service demand.
Safety and Homelessness	Shared concerns about downtown safety, particularly regarding the unhoused population.	Businesses emphasized impact on commerce and property values; youth expressed empathy alongside safety concerns; non-profits tied homelessness to systemic needs like transitional housing.
Engagement and Communication	All groups appreciate current Town communications efforts, but see opportunity for bolstered communications and engagement between the Town and residents.	Youth recommended social media strategies; businesses wanted more predictable follow-up and consistent engagement; non-profits saw value in a "community navigator" role.
Funding and Sustainability	All groups cited resource challenges.	Businesses noted rising operational costs and high permitting expenses; non-profits described grant volatility; youth linked limited jobs and amenities to young residents looking to leave the community.



Conclusion

The Budget 2026 Engagement, focused both on Town budgeting and service level satisfaction, reflects a clear and representative picture of the priorities, concerns, and aspirations of the Edson community. Through a statistically valid survey, open houses, and targeted focus groups, this process has gathered a breadth of community perspectives, balancing quantitative data with qualitative insights that provide the necessary context for interpreting results.

Residents have consistently demonstrated that they value both the quality of life and essential services the Town provides, while also recognizing the need for responsible, forward-looking investment in infrastructure. To that end, infrastructure emerged as a unifying theme across nearly every area of discussion, whether tied to road and sidewalk maintenance, snow removal practices, downtown revitalization, or public facilities.

At the same time, the community's call for increased public safety, particularly in areas where encampments have become more prominent, is notable. These two overarching themes are reflected clearly in the community's call for increased service levels in areas such as Public Works and Community Enforcement, tied with relatively lower levels of satisfaction. This points to a broader desire for visible, responsive service delivery that supports both safety and livability.

Financially, engagement participants demonstrated a relatively pragmatic outlook. While there is an understanding that certain priorities will require additional funding, there is also an expectation that these investments will deliver clear, measurable value to the community. The willingness of a majority to support modest user fee increases signals openness to a dynamic funding approach, and reflects a similar sentiment obtained through Budget 2025 surveying.

Beyond service levels and budget priorities, the process revealed important insights into how residents interact with, and perceive, the Town of Edson. Communication was widely appreciated as being effective, with further notes that comms have improved in recent years. Similarly, customer service satisfaction provides a solid backbone to the relationship between the Town and its residents, but opportunities exist to improve the customer experience through consistent, personalized, and solution-focused service provision.

As Council moves into budget deliberations, this report offers a balanced, evidence-based foundation for decision-making, incorporating resident insights and feedback appropriately, as one of many inputs to consider. The findings of this process underscore a community that is both realistic and forward-looking, prepared to make investments that sustain essential services, strengthen infrastructure, and enhance the local quality of life, while being prudent in dealing with current fiscal challenges. Each choice made in Budget 2026, and in future Town priority-setting, bears the potential of influencing community vitality, cohesion, growth, and quality of life.

