

# Virtual Consultations

Council Presentation  
May 2, 2022



# Presentation Purpose

- Advise on the work of the Virtual Consultation Staff Advisory Committee and Technical Sub-Committee
- Report on stakeholder consultation
- Provide recommendations for Council's considerations

# Virtual Consultations



- Town pivoted to virtual consultations as a response to the pandemic
- June 2020 – April 2022, the Town delivered 20 online consultation events, with almost 1,100 participants



- Significant resources required for each event
- Multiple staff from Communications required to ensure a high value production

*All consultations whether virtual or in person, are part of a larger public engagement program that includes a project page on [letstalkhaltonhills.ca](http://letstalkhaltonhills.ca)*

# Virtual Consultation Work to Date

**May 2021**

**Report to Council**

Outlines suggested protocols with recommendation to 'continue to review and assess virtual events'

**July 2021**

**Memo to Council**

Notes expectations of participants & staff (aligns with social media community guideline and supports Public Engagement Charter)

**Sep.-Oct. 2021**

**Materials drafted**

Roles & responsibilities

Virtual Consultation Event Form Checklist

**October 2021**

**SMT**

Presentation to solicit input and support for strategy

**Nov. 2021–present**

**Virtual Staff Advisory Cmte.**

Consultation & input on surveys

Technical sub-committee

Mock hybrid exercise held

**Jan. 2022–Feb.**

**Public Engagement**

4 surveys issued using letstalk platform

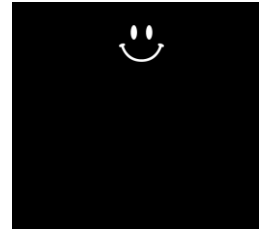
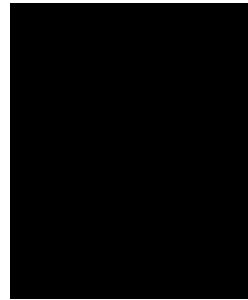
# Virtual Consultation Staff Advisory Committee

Provided input at each stage of the strategy including analyzing inputs, developing recommendations and protocols and participating in a mock hybrid consultation exercise.



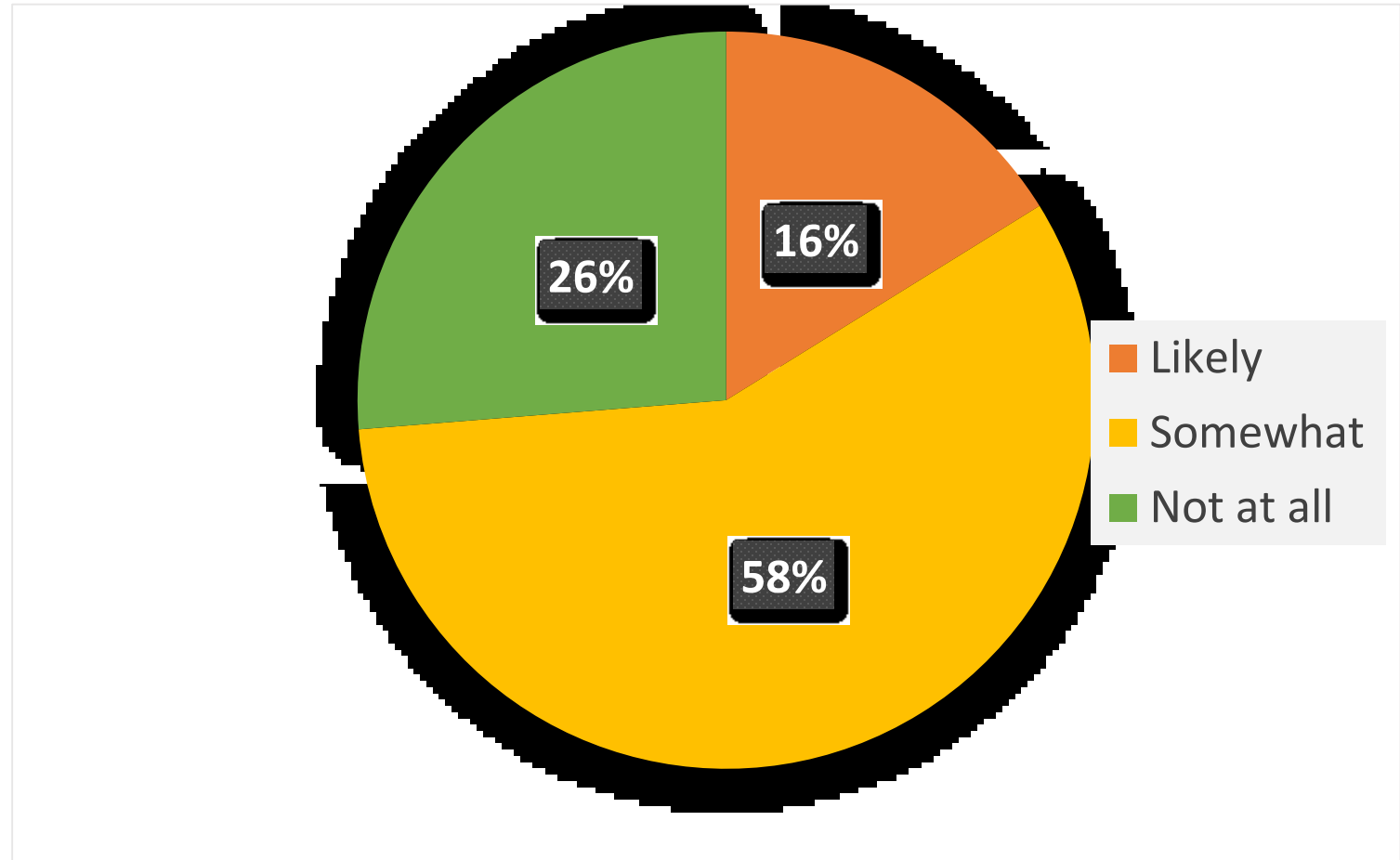
# Staff Advisory Committee

- Erin Burger, Community Development
- Mike Donnelly, Engineering
- Nancy Dunbar, Recreation
- Nancy Field, Communications
- Alex Fuller, Communications
- Norm Gilley, Information Technology
- Melissa Lawr, Clerks
- Nichole Pal, Economic Development
- Bronwyn Parker, Planning
- Kevin Okimi, Parks
- Jamie Smith, Facilities
- Maureen Van Ravens, Transportation



140 surveys	10 surveys	32 surveys	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 46% of respondents had not attended a virtual consultation</li> <li>• Many questions answered by approximately half of respondents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All virtual consultation events included attendance by Council members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys issued to staff who participated in a virtual consultation</li> <li>• Completed by staff from: CAO, Planning, Recreation &amp; Parks and Transportation &amp; Public Works</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only Burlington, Guelph and Milton responded</li> <li>• All will continue to hold virtual consultations</li> <li>• One reported virtual meetings (Zoom/Teams or Telephone Town Halls) much better attended than in person</li> </ul>

# Residents willing to attend an in person consultation events

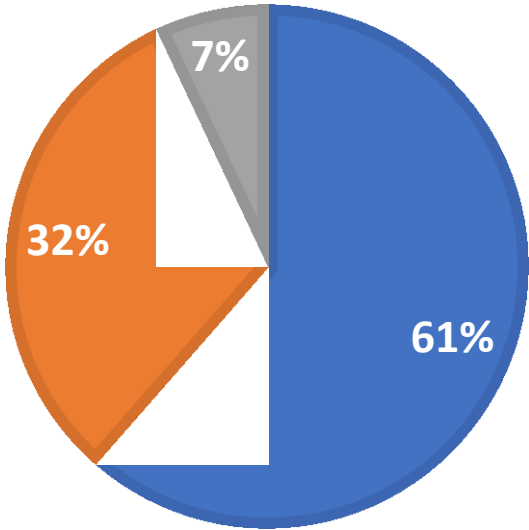




# Overall Virtual Experience

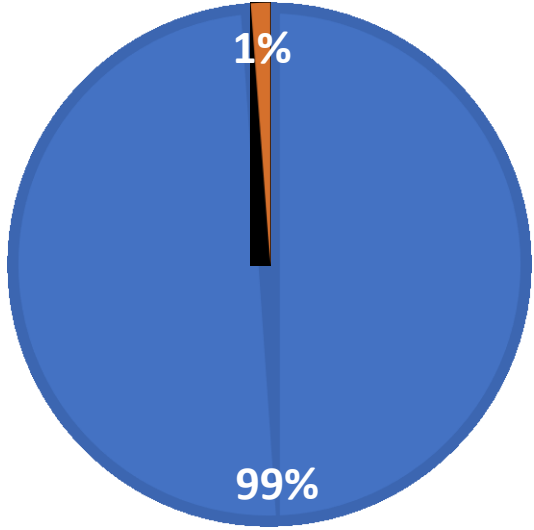
RESIDENTS

■ Happy ■ Neutral ■ Unhappy



COUNCIL

■ Happy ■ Neutral ■ Unhappy



# Overall Virtual Experience



- Found it informative
- Sitting in the comfort of my home with the ability to get up and move or leave the meeting without causing a disturbance was ideal
- Much more accessible than in person meetings
- Much easier to coordinate home life

- Internet not good enough for an enjoyable uninterrupted experience
- I have decided I do not enjoy online meetings of any kind

# Overall Virtual Experience



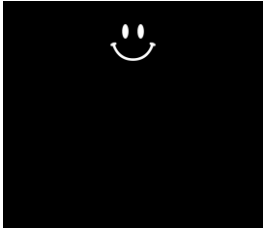
- Well organized and well run
- Appeared to work well
- I think people find this less intimidating and less infringement on their time; meetings can still be held and people can attend during crappy weather
- Some events tiring but there was information to be gleaned

- In my situation, the only way to improve the shortcomings is a better connection but that is my problem, not the Town.



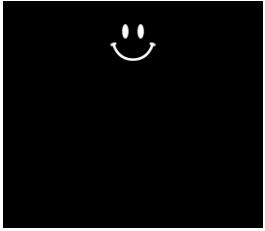
# Information & Participation

- **82%** of residents said they found the information they were looking for by attending the event
- **68%** of residents felt comfortable asking questions in a virtual environment



# Information & Participation

- **28%** More engaged as compared to an in-person event.
- **50%** Same level of engagement as compared to an in-person event.
- **22%** Less engaged as compared to an in-person event.
- **90%** felt quality of input good to excellent.



# Information & Participation



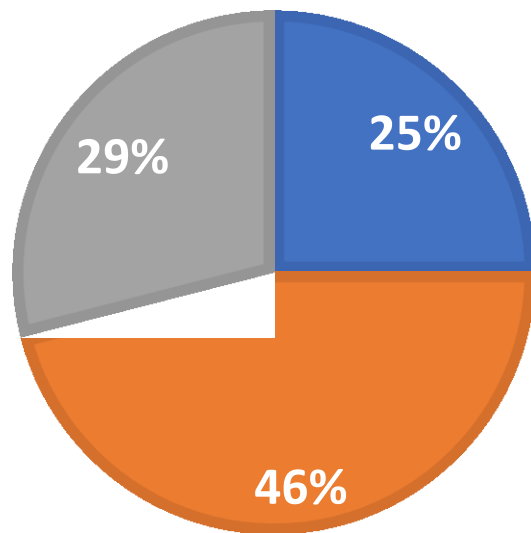
- Residents may feel more comfortable typing questions, people will keep posting questions in the chat.
- I've seen more participation because people don't need to drive to the event, stand/sit in a large room and speak in front of a crowd.
- People feel less on the spot when they have the option to speak without video. It makes conversation flow easier and makes for a safe, controlled, and open space for discussion.

- Some of the public has become too comfortable and want to dominate the discussion. The level of respect is diminishing.
- Our work and consultation is related to design. People need time to review, touch, feel etc. Harder for all participants to vocalize - one talks at a time, whereas before you could have a few conversations with other co-hosts.
- Less engaged in that participants do not get to interact with other participants in an adhoc manner.

# Consultation approach breakout rooms: Virtual vs. In person

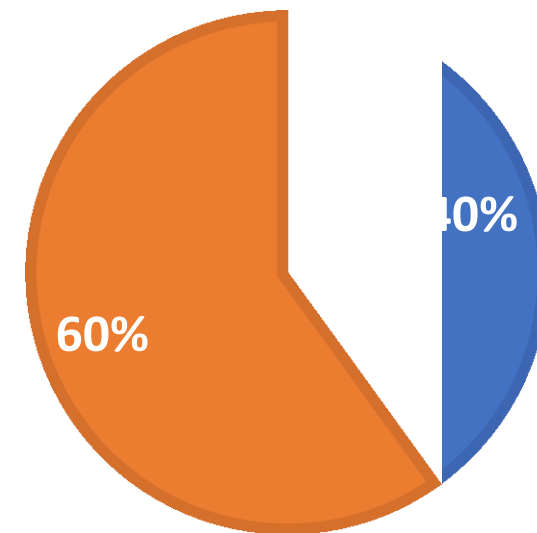
RESIDENTS

■ No significant difference ■ Significant difference



COUNCIL

■ No significant difference ■ Significant difference



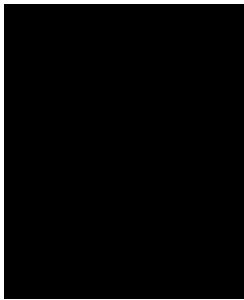
# Breakout Room Experience



- ✓ Presenters were well prepared and knowledgeable. When we broke into groups it worked well sharing the floor
- ✓ Individuals can interact and exchange ideas more quickly and arrive at answers.
- ✓ It is a far superior method you do not have to leave your home to attend. Rules can be enforced and people not following the rules can be muted.
- ✗ Generally easier and smoother to have a face-to-face conversation without technical delay
- ✗ It is hard to read the room virtually
- ✗ Not enough time was delegated for breakout rooms



# Breakout Room Experience



- ✔ It seemed easier for people to voice their opinions.
- ✘ In person allows for greater conversation from a whole room...
- ✘ In person provides many ways to interact.
- ✘ Occasionally losing the internet connection made the virtual connection incredibly frustrating.

# General Comments



- People may not be so self conscious during a virtual meeting and may have more to say.
- It's a different experience emotionally. It is not better or worse and does have advantages.
- Individual can interact and exchange ideas more quickly and arrive at 'answers' for the breakout.
- I would like to see them continue.
- Town is doing very well - better than some larger municipalities.

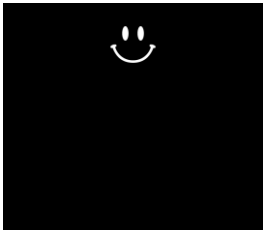
- You get a better sense of general attitude of the people attending when it is a live audience.
- In person events you are able to watch the persons faces to comments etc.
- Generally easier and smoother to have a face-to-face conversation without technical delay.
- Do not get facial expression or body language of people in the room.
- Eye contact is what is lacking when trying to connect with a group virtually.

# General Comments



- Town staff is doing a great job of organizing the flow of meetings.
- Virtual meetings appear to work well, particularly when there is a formal flow to the meetings/workshops.
- I found the public seemed more engaged with the virtual format.

- There is an 'isolated' feeling of virtual.
- I believe in person events are better attended



# General Comments



- Being virtual creates better opportunities for taking turns and active listening. In person, there can be more tangents and interruptions.
- I think people are more comfortable online and in the comfort of their own home.
- Less intimidating, more structured. Easier to 'raise a hand'.

- In-person allows for more interaction and feeling of the group, people responding to one another....
- Hard to make a connection, not as fluid/dynamic.
- Having people around a table sharing perspectives leads to more free-flowing organic dialogue...

# The Bottom Line

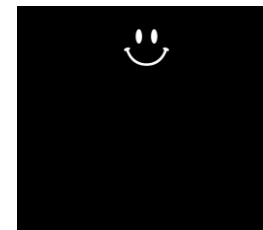
***Respondents strongly support a hybrid approach to consultation, holding some events in-person and some events in a virtual format.***



82%



90%



75%

# Mock Concurrent Hybrid Exercise

- Committee members role played holding a concurrent hybrid public consultation to test staff and technology using the Council Chambers.
- The exercise included a fake scenario, with in person and virtual presentations and 'residents' attending both in person and virtually.
- Take-away: concurrent events can be effective, but demand significant resources, may require dedicated A/V support and should not be used if break out groups are required

# Technical Sub-Committee

## Committee Scope

- Review software.
- Review possible meeting sites.
- Gather equipment and technology requirements for hosting concurrent hybrid meetings.

## Committee Findings

Recommended sites for hosting hybrid or in person consultations:

- Acton Arena and Community Centre – Multi Use Hall
- Mold-Masters SportsPlex/  
Gellert Kinsmen Hall - Gordon Alcott Heritage
- Town Hall – Council Chambers
- John Elliott Theatre
  
- In-house A/V expertise N/A

## Recommendations

- Continue with Zoom for now to align with Council meetings.
- Numerous municipal sites would benefit from A/V to expand consultation opps.
- Utilize external expertise to determine A/V costs.

# General Take-aways

- Overwhelming support for continuing with virtual consultations
- Variety of considerations to determine approach: subject matter, community interest, political environment, resources; using criteria will help guide the decision
- Concurrent hybrid consultations are possible in the Council Chambers but should be restricted to simple presentations without breakout groups



# Recommendations

- That the Town continue to offer public consultation in a virtual or in person format, as determined by the project manager in consultation with Communications staff, using criteria as a guide.
- That the consultation approach for significant projects be included in the Terms of Reference which will be approved by Council.
- That Communications create a Staff Guide to Public Consultation Events.
- That concurrent hybrid consultation (simultaneous virtual and in person events) be selectively used for topics not requiring break out groups, recognizing resource requirements, site and technology restrictions.
- That staff review the costs of equipping rooms with the technology to enhance the virtual consultation experience.
- That Communications and project staff continue to track the time required to host virtual consultation events and review resource requirements for consideration in the 2023 budget.

# Questions

