

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

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

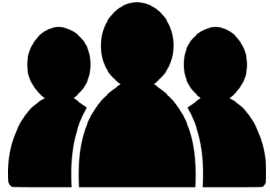
4 surveys issued using letstalk platform

Virtual Consultation Staff Advisory Committee

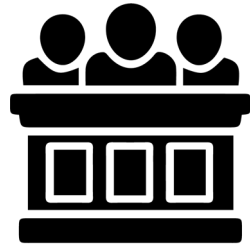
Provided input at each stage of the strategy including analyzing inputs, developing recommendations and protocols and participating in a mock hybrid consultation exercise.

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



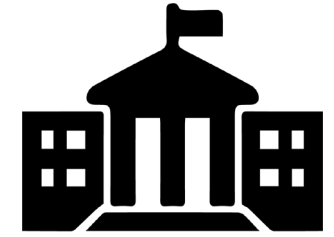
Residents



Council



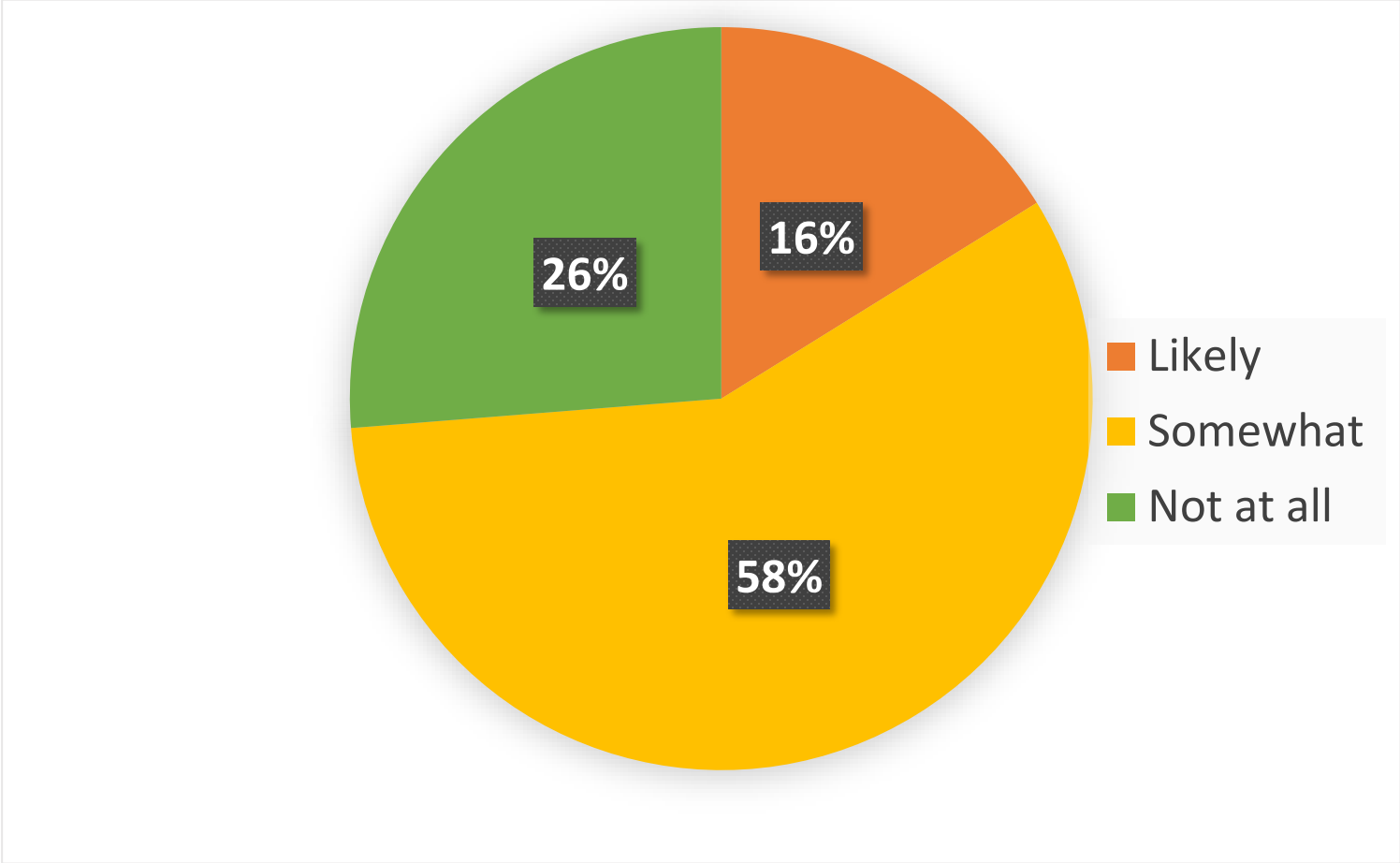
Staff



Municipalities

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

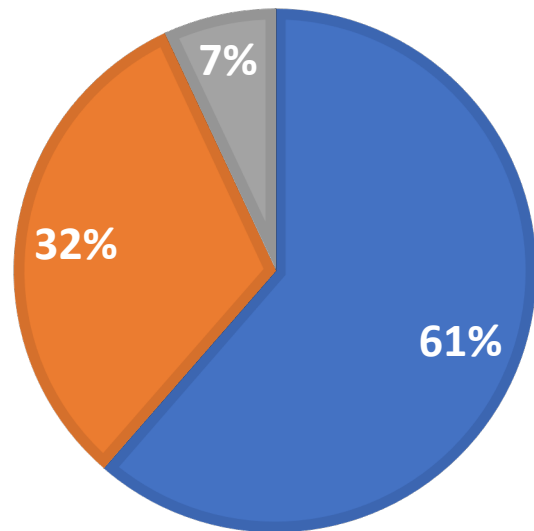
Residents willing to attend an in person consultation events



Overall Virtual Experience

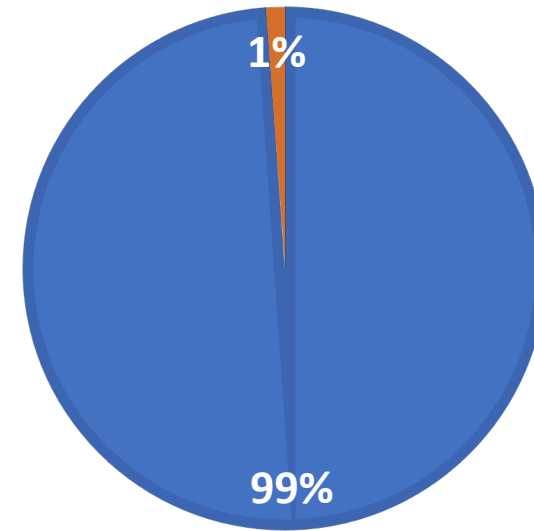
RESIDENTS

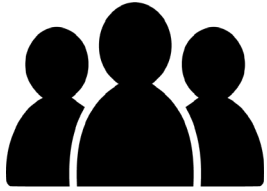
■ Happy ■ Neutral ■ Unhappy



COUNCIL

■ Happy ■ Neutral ■ Unhappy





Residents

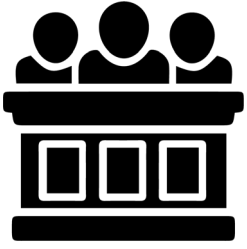
Overall Virtual Experience



- 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



Council

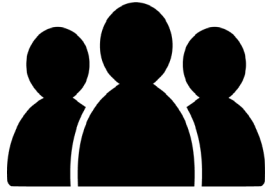
Overall Virtual Experience



- 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.



Residents

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



Staff

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.



Staff

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.

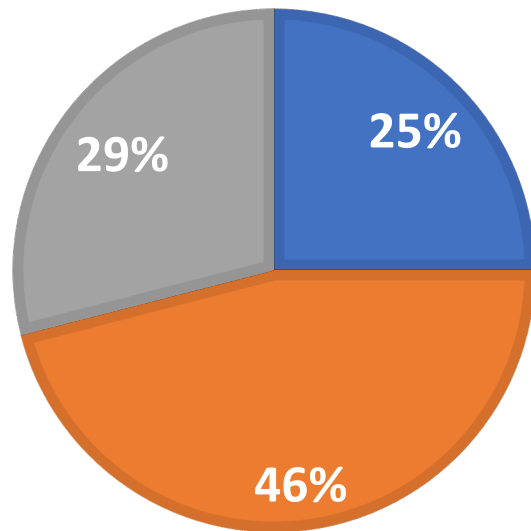


- Some of the public has become too comfortable and want to dominate the discussion. The level of respect is diminishing.
- Our work and consultation is related to design. People need time to review, touch, feel etc. Harder for all participants to vocalize - one talks at a time, whereas before you could 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

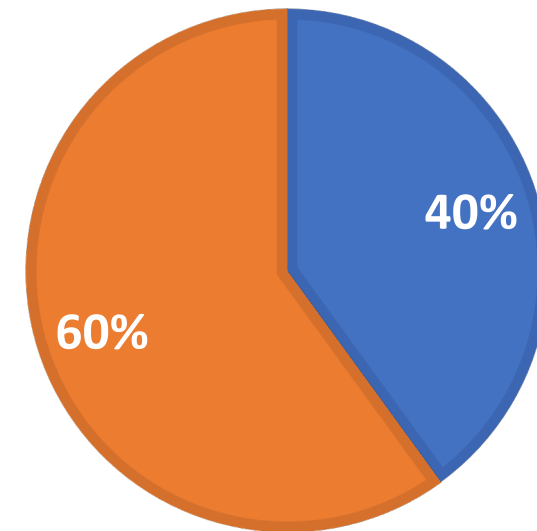
RESIDENTS

■ No significant difference ■ Significant difference

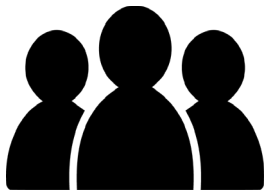


COUNCIL

■ No significant difference ■ Significant difference



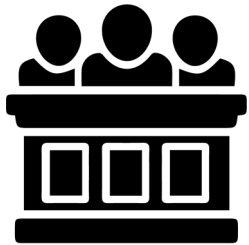
Breakout Room Experience



Residents

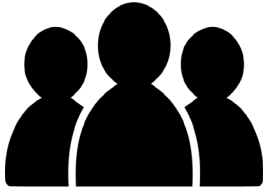
- ✓ Presenters were well prepared and knowledgeable. When we broke into groups it worked well sharing the floor
- ✓ Individuals can interact and exchange ideas more quickly and arrive at answers.
- ✓ It is a far superior method you do not have to leave your home to attend. Rules can be enforced and people 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



Council

- ✓ 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.



Residents

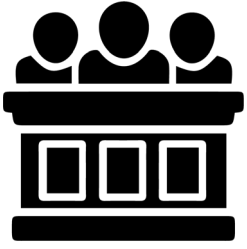
- People may not be so self conscious during a virtual meeting and may have more to say.
- It's a different experience emotionally. It is not better or worse and does have advantages.
- Individual can interact and exchange ideas more quickly and arrive at 'answers' for the breakout.
- I would like to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



General Comments

- 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.





Council

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



Staff

General Comments



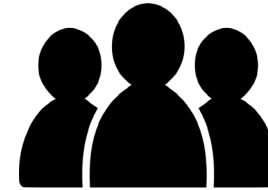
- Being virtual creates better opportunities for taking turns and active listening. In person, there can be more tangents and interruptions.
- I think people are more comfortable online and in the comfort of their own home.
- Less intimidating, more structured. Easier to 'raise a hand'.



- 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...

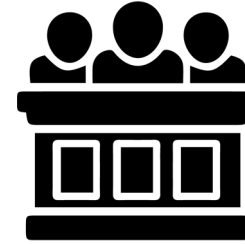
The Bottom Line

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



Residents

82%



Council

90%



Staff

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

