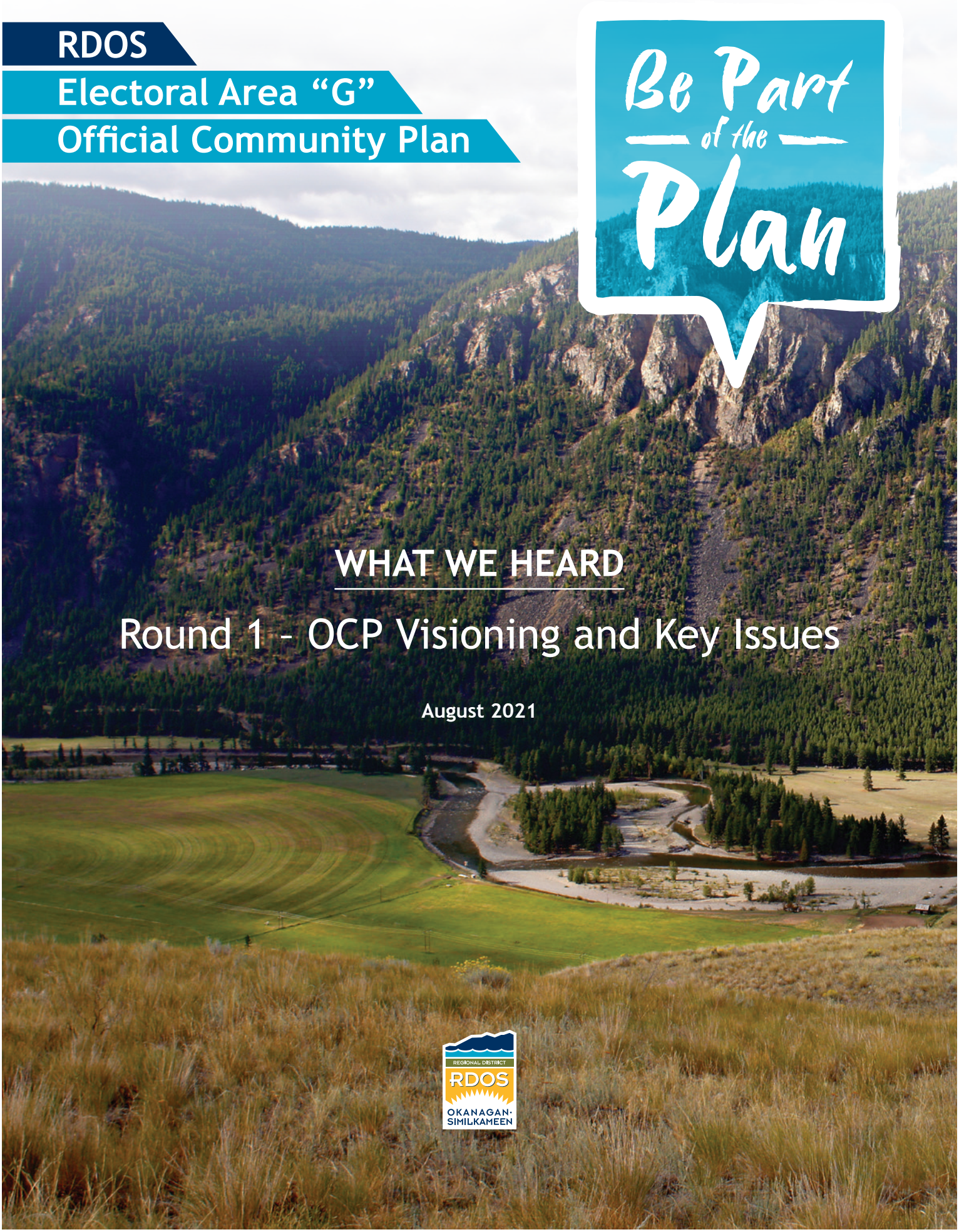
RDOS

Electoral Area "G"

Official Community Plan

Be Part of the Plan



WHAT WE HEARD

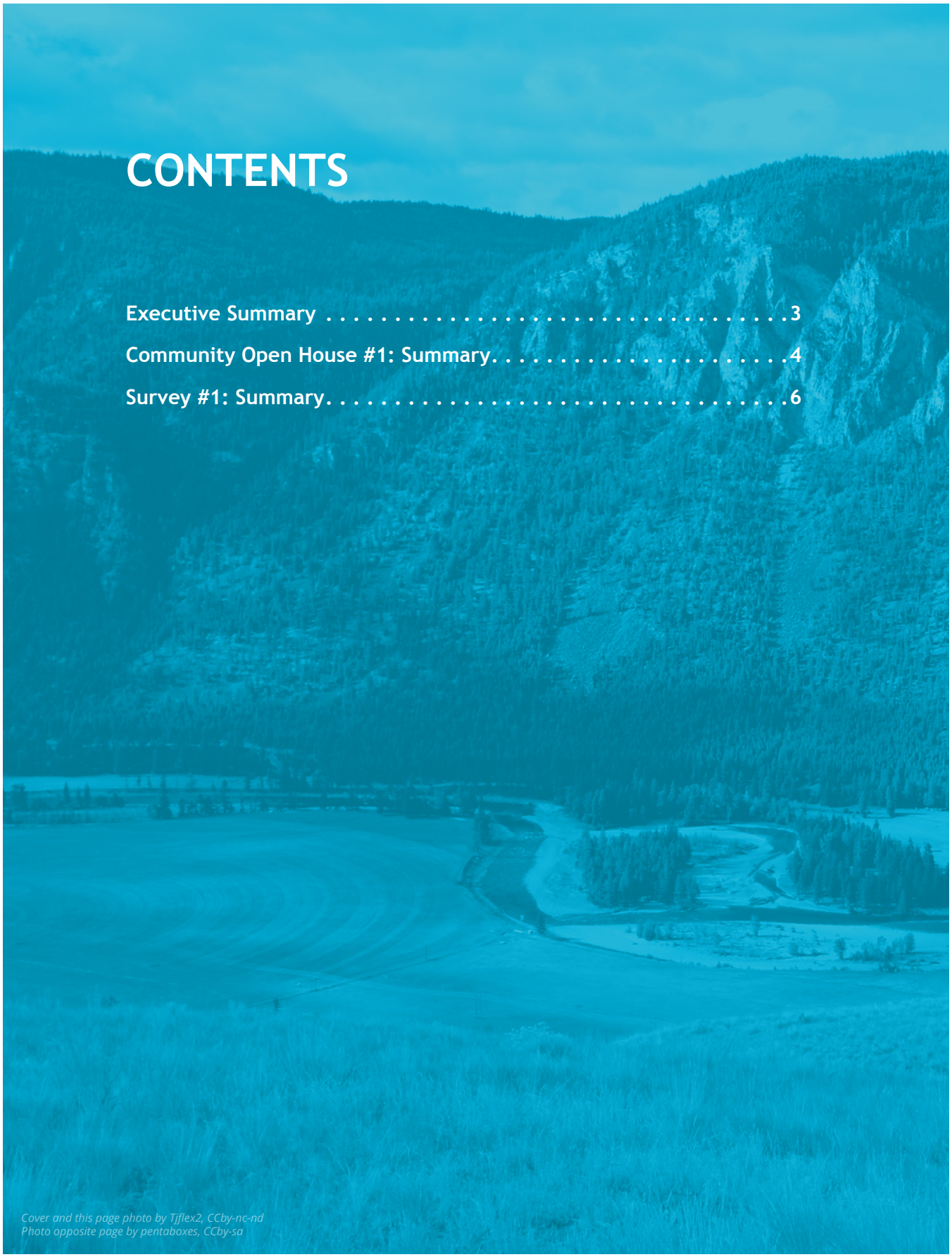
Round 1 – OCP Visioning and Key Issues

August 2021

REGIONAL DISTRICT RDOS OKANAGAN-SIMILKAMEEN

CONTENTS

Executive Summary 3
Community Open House #1: Summary. 4
Survey #1: Summary. 6



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although COVID-19 restrictions limited in-person community engagement, a Community Survey and Online Open House was conducted as part of Round 1 engagement for the Electoral Area "G" OCP. This engagement successfully heard from a wide-range of residents and stakeholders and led to the identification of common themes for the Official Community Plan (OCP).

A high-level summary of themes is presented below. Although concerns and priorities varied by location, common threads for all of Electoral Area "G" can be seen. Detailed reporting on the Open House and Community Survey can be found in the next sections of this report. A full record of the Open House and the Community Survey responses (with identifying information removed) are presented as an appendix to this report and available from the RDOS upon request.

WHAT WE HEARD:

- **Exposure to Natural Hazards such as wildfires and flooding** are an item of concern for many residents. Many stakeholders wish to see the OCP include objectives and policies aimed at reducing risk from these hazards.
- **Unkept properties, unsafe buildings, and illegal dumping** concern some residents. Issues around limited enforcement and reporting were raised.
- **The natural beauty and access to parks and recreation** is highly valued by residents. Some wish to see further protection of natural areas and the expansion of trail infrastructure.
- **The freedom from regulation and culture of independence** of the area is highly valued by residents. Some residents identified potential tensions between the desire to see limited regulation and the need to address unsafe buildings, unkept properties, bylaw enforcement, etc.
- **Economic development and diversification** was identified as being important to the future of Electoral Area "G".
- **Social issues such as drug-use and crime** are visible in some locations and are concerning to some residents.
- **Lack of services and utilities** including safe drinking water in locations such as Hedley were a high priority for some residents living in affected areas.
- **Many residents do not want to see rapid changes to Electoral Area "G"** and envision the community looking similar in the future to how it looks now.

COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE #1: SUMMARY

A Community Open House event was held online on June 24, 2021. The Open House provided a chance for residents to learn about the project, ask questions, and provide initial feedback on emerging directions and considerations.

A recording of the presentation portion of the Open House can be found here (https://rdosregionalconnections.ca/area-g-ocp/widgets/79493/videos/7580).



FIGURE: *Online Community Open House screen capture.*

The focus of the Community Open House was to provide an opportunity for residents, local business owners, and other stakeholders to learn about the OCP in detail. A presentation was delivered that covered:

- What is an OCP?
- Why Electoral Area "G" is creating an OCP
- How the OCP might impact residents and business owners
- How public input is being incorporated into the OCP
- Electoral Area "G" community profile
- Results from the Round 1 Community Survey
- Emerging priorities

Residents and community members provided feedback that included:

- **Desire to attract younger families:** Participants discussed the relative lack of younger families moving into the area, and the desire to see more people of all ages living in Electoral Area "G". Discussion touched on the perception that more younger families had recently moved to the area, and the strengths of the area (beauty, affordability) that could draw in younger families able to tele-work.
- **Accommodating growth:** Participants had questions around how growth might be accommodated and noted that there are infill opportunities within Hedley that should be considered.
- **Desire for a stronger, more diverse economy:** Several participants noted that the economic base of Electoral Area "G" is rooted in agriculture. Although agriculture was strongly supported, it was also noted that few other economic opportunities exist. Discussion was had on other potential economic sectors, such as the tourism industry, that could be supported by the OCP.
- **Questions over non-conforming land uses:** Residents brought up questions over whether the development of an OCP would result in some current land uses becoming non-conforming.
- **Need for "Age Friendly" planning:** Participants agreed with the emerging priority around the importance of housing options and facilities that can accommodate an ageing population.
- **Local culture of independence:** Participants noted that many residents of Electoral Area "G" chose to live in the area because of the freedom and independence the area provides. They noted that some of this feeling comes from the relative the lack of regulation in the area. It was noted that some people in the community may be resistant to the OCP on the basis of it being a regulatory document. The need to communicate with these community members about the benefits of the OCP, and to be clear about the impacts it may have on the community, was noted.
- **Strong Community Attachment:** Many participants noted a strong sense of community attachment with residents looking out for each other. The community attachment was also reflected in comments about the physical features of the area and its history.

SURVEY #1: SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) has initiated planning and preparation of the first Official Community Plan (OCP) for Electoral Area "G".

SURVEY

A community survey was conducted as part of Phase 2 of the OCP process. The objective was to better understand resident and communities' interests within Electoral Area "G" and help identify key priorities for the OCP.

SURVEY OUTREACH AND DISTRIBUTION

The survey was open from March 29 - April 30, 2021. The survey was advertised through the following means:

Online & Email Networks

- Online through social media and CivicReady
- RDOS Regional Connections website
- Shared via Citizens Committee and their networks

Direct to Residents & in the Community

- Direct mail post card (including a link to the survey) sent to all residents in Electoral Area "G"
- Community posters at key locations in Hedley, Olalla, and Rural Keremeos

Traditional Media

- Newspaper ads: Similkameen Spotlight (April 7 and 14, 2021) and Keremeos Review (April 8 and 15, 2021)

A workbook/paper survey was also made available at the following pick up and drop off locations within Electoral Area "G":

- RDOS office
- Town of Keremeos Office
- Hedley General Store
- Olalla Community Boards, next to the mailboxes in Olalla

SUMMARY OF RESPONSE

In total, 124 responses were received. 115 were received online and 9 on paper.

DEMOGRAPHICS

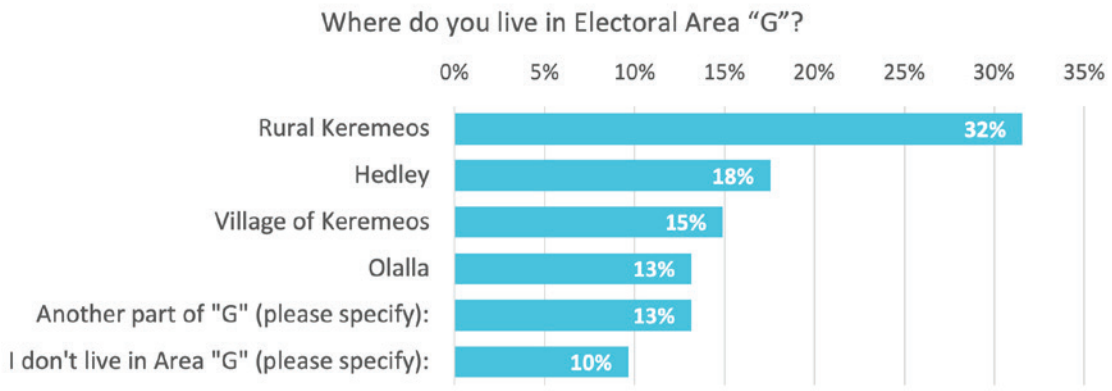


FIGURE 1: *Where survey respondents live in Electoral Area "G".*

Over one third of survey respondents live in Rural Keremeos. Nearly 20% live in Hedley and 13% live in Olalla. Another 15% of respondents said they live in the Village of Keremeos. Of the 13% who responded that they live in another part of Electoral Area “G”, half mentioned parts of rural Hedley, an RV park, and Ashnola, while the other half mentions communities in other electoral areas (B, I, and H). Most of the 10% who said they did not live in Electoral Area “G” live in Cawston, as well as Electoral Area “D” and Abbotsford.

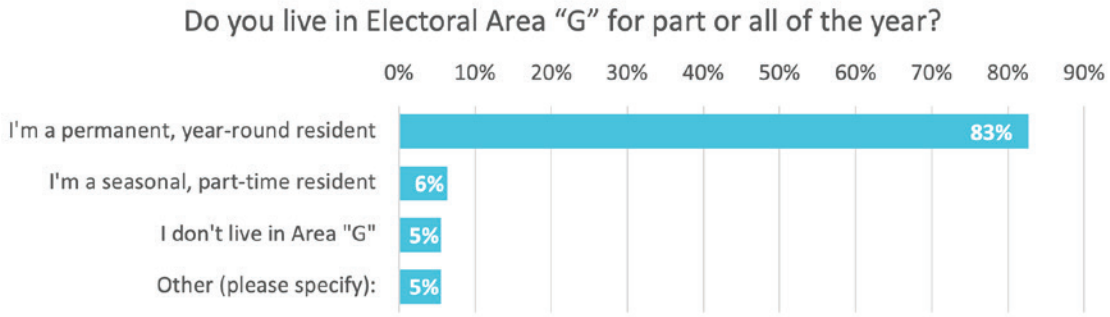


FIGURE 2: *What part of the survey respondents live in Electoral Area “G”.*

Nearly 90% of survey respondents are residents of Electoral Area “G”; 83% are permanent, year-round residents and a further 6% are seasonal, part-time residents. Five percent said they do not live in Electoral Area “G”. Half of respondents who selected “other” said they live in nearby communities in other electoral areas, while the other half own businesses in Electoral Area “G” (e.g., mobile home park, vineyard).

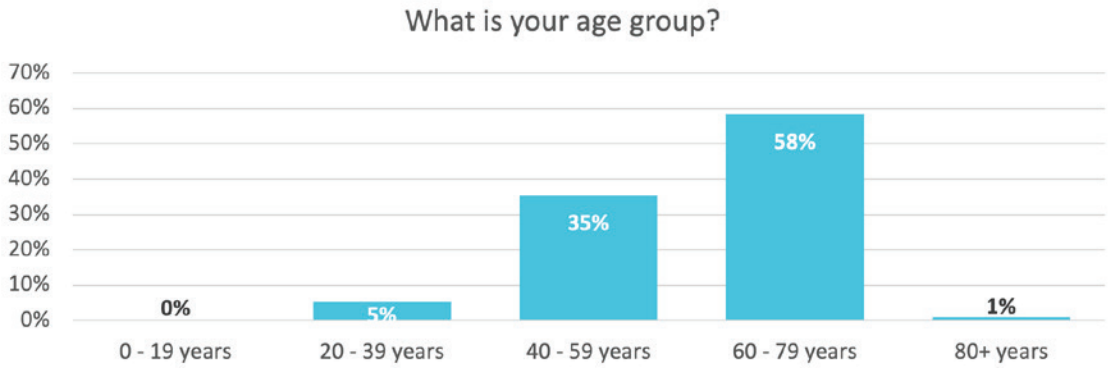


FIGURE 3: *Survey respondents’ ages.*

Over half (58%) of survey respondents are in the 60 to 79 age cohort. Another 35% are between 40 and 59. No respondents were under 20 years or age and only one percent were over 80.

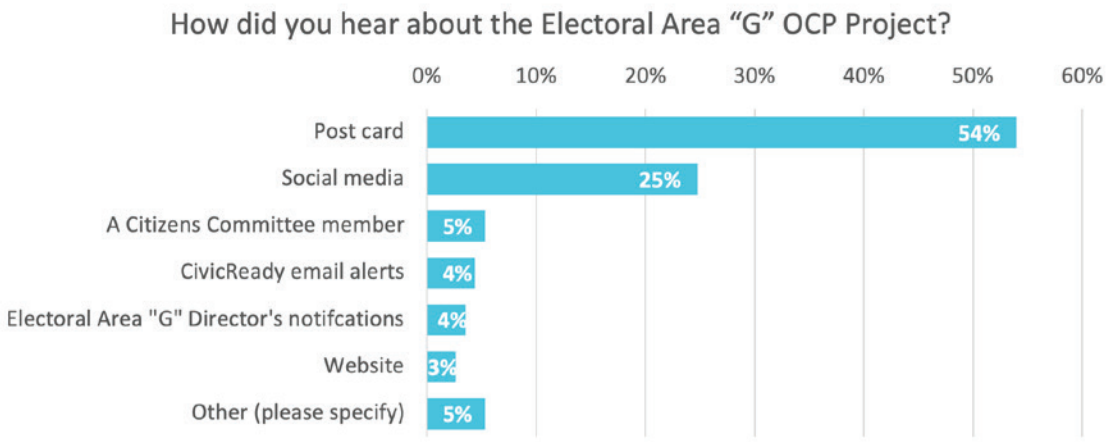


FIGURE 4: *How survey respondents heard about the Electoral Area "G" OCP project.*

Postcards were the main engagement stream through which more than half of survey respondents heard about the Electoral Area "G" OCP Project. Next, 25% said they heard about the project through social media. Fewer survey respondents heard about the new OCP through a Citizens Committee member, CivicReady email alerts, Electoral Area "G" Director's emails, or the project website. Other ways they heard about the project include the Keremeos Review and other residents.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Electoral Area "G" has three defined communities where people live (Olalla, Hedley, and rural Keremeos) in addition to smaller, yet distinct, mobile home communities. Survey respondents were asked questions to help increase understanding of what makes each of these communities special.

What do you not like about your community?

The top three aspects that survey respondents do not like about their communities are unkept properties, a lack services and utilities (e.g., unreliable telecommunications, poor water infrastructure, businesses closing, lack of art and culture venues), and safety concerns (e.g., speed limits, building code, and lack of law enforcement). Crime, growing health issues and social understanding were also a key concern for several respondents, particularly related to illicit drug sales, property theft targeting older community members, and racism and xenophobia. Other factors that respondents dislike about their communities include a lack of preparedness for natural hazards (flooding and wildfire), and absence of public transit or alternative methods to travel within the community. These concerns were voiced across communities in Electoral Area "G".

There were some concerns that are unique to Hedley and Rural Keremeos. For residents of Hedley, improved water infrastructure and quality is a key issue. In Rural Keremeos, there is a greater desire to connect to municipal infrastructure in the Village of Keremeos (e.g., natural gas, sewerage, paved roads). Several Rural Keremeos residents do not like the lack of BC Building Code enforcement. Others are concerned that their community does not have a business-friendly environment, noting that new businesses may face financial barriers. Similarly, they are concerned that Rural Keremeos does not have enough opportunities for youth and young adults.

TABLE 1: Survey respondent's ideas of what is needed to fix the aspects of their communities that they do not like.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO FIX WHAT YOU DON'T LIKE?	
Unkept properties	· Tidy bins brought into town to clean up junk · An initiative for people to take pride in their property · Community clean-up events · Pet waste stations for both bags and deposit to be cleaned regularly · Fines for unkept properties, or financial incentives to clean properties
Lack of services and utilities	· Maintain existing homes · Natural gas · Attract new businesses · Review role and responsibilities of Hedley Improvement District (HID) · Improve and expand trails (e.g., rail trail from Hedley to Keremeos) for pedestrians and small motorized vehicles · Pave roads · Upgrade water treatment · Improve cellular towers · Establish neighbourhood parks · Build a pool, ice rink, and recreation centre · A bank
Safety Concerns	· Establish speed limits and no-passing zones · BC Building Code checks or enforcement · Improve or support accessibility · A land use plan with residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural zones and bylaws · Bylaws that promote more environmental protection and less development on properties located in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) · Clean yard bylaws or programs to help those get rid of junk or illegal dumping · Environmental stewardship initiatives · A bylaw enforcement officer
Crime	· Greater RCMP presence · Enforcement for thieves and vandals · Diversity and inclusion awareness and initiatives (e.g., discrimination -free zone declaration, rainbow sidewalk, incorporating Indigenous land acknowledgements)
Lack of preparedness for natural hazards	· More funding for natural hazard prevention (i.e. fire, flooding) · A diking system · Publicly available flood mapping (actual and 100-year) · Fire hydrants and fire department · A FireSmart program
Lack of options to get around the community	· Bus service between Keremeos and Penticton · Improve BC transit frequency and timing · Have service on weekends and holidays

What changes have you noticed in your community over the past ten years?

The biggest change survey respondents observed in their communities over the past ten years was in housing. In general, most witnessed an increasing lack of housing, particularly rentals. New dwellings built tended to be larger and more expensive.

With this, many respondents experienced an increase in the population, particularly families. Hedley respondents note a shift from seasonal to more permanent residents. Some survey respondents felt the increased population was positive because new residents bring new ideas, while others felt this led to increased regulation and disruption of the rural lifestyle.

Some respondents also noticed more businesses closing. Along with this, they noted a loss of jobs and deterioration of entertainment opportunities (e.g., recreational centers, bowling alley, swimming pool). Respondents from Rural Keremeos noted an absence of young adults in their community, as youth tend to leave for more career or entertainment opportunities and return either to raise a family or retire.

Several respondents noted an increase in natural hazards. Wildfires have increased on all communities in Electoral Area "G" over the past 10 years. Some respondents from Rural Keremeos were also affected by pine beetle infestations are concerned about increasing impacts of climate change.

In general, multiple respondents witnessed an improvement in agriculture throughout Electoral Area "G". Several said there are more fruit stands and wine today than ten years ago. Some respondents noted that many farms and orchards have amalgamated into larger farms with big warehouses over the past 10 years, particularly in Rural Keremeos.

What do you like about your community now? What kinds of things make it special?
Two qualities respondents like most about their communities in Electoral Area "G" are the rural lifestyle and the residents. They like the lifestyle because it is quiet, slow paced, relaxed, and minimally regulated, which some respondents suggested lead to greater creativity in the community. Respondents like the close-knit community and that they know other residents. Respondents also like that there are many community members who take initiative and volunteer to take action to make the community a great place to be.

Respondents frequently mentioned that they enjoy being close to nature and the clean water and air, outdoor recreation, and beautiful landscapes the environment provides. Another aspect of Electoral Area "G" that respondents are proud of is the heritage of the region, with several mentioning liking the Mill Heritage site. Many survey respondents also like the role that agriculture plays in Electoral Area "G", both by contributing to the unique character of the area and by providing access to fresh local produce.

Respondents from Hedley and Rural Keremeos mentioned that some of the existing businesses (e.g., general stores) play an important role in their communities. They hope to preserve these businesses. Others in Rural Keremeos also mentioned that they like living in proximity to larger centres where there are more services and healthcare options.

TABLE 2: *Survey respondent's ideas of what is needed to maintain the things they like about their communities over the next 20 years.*

WHAT IS NEEDED TO KEEP THESE KINDS OF THINGS AROUND FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS?	
Rural lifestyle	· Manage development (e.g., slow growth, no large developments) · Protect the ALR · Community involvement and volunteer opportunities
Residents	· Small business support · Community infrastructure and services (e.g., water system, sewerage system, sidewalks, streetlights, neighbourhood parks, health and dental options) · Invest in the library · Law enforcement · Affordable housing · Reconciliation
Nature and environment	· Protect nature · Trails for bikes and walking · Protect and monitor freshwater water sources · Community composting · Parks
Heritage	· Protect historic sites · Prepare for and mitigate natural hazards (e.g., wooden historic sites are especially vulnerable to wildfire) · Maintain the museum

In 2019, the RDOS conducted a campaign called "Let's Talk Land Use". This campaign asked residents if they wanted a say in future land use decisions within their area. As part of this campaign, we heard the following key areas needed attention in Electoral Area "G". How do you evaluate the importance of incorporating these issues into the Electoral Area "G" OCP?

TABLE 3: Survey respondents' ranking of how important it is to include key issues in the Electoral Area "G" OCP. The darker the green, the more survey respondents selected that ranking for each land use decision area.

AREAS NEEDING ATTENTION IN ELECTORAL AREA "G"	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	NEUTRAL	LESS IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
Defining and planning areas for future growth	56%	20%	10%	6%	8%
Maintaining ALR land primarily for farming and food production only	57%	22%	15%	0%	6%
Ensuring new development is outside hazard areas such as floodplains, geotechnical hazardous areas, or high fire risk areas	49%	27%	17%	2%	5%
Protecting sensitive ecosystems such as grasslands, riparian areas, forests, wetlands and shallow soiled rock outcrops	52%	23%	13%	8%	5%
Protecting community watersheds for water quality and quantity	75%	17%	5%	1%	2%
Improving access and transportation corridors	30%	36%	13%	15%	7%

Overall, the majority of survey respondents evaluated all the areas needing attention as important to incorporate into the Electoral Area "G" OCP. With the exception of "improving access and transportation corridors," the majority of survey respondents responded that these issues are very important. 75% of respondents ranked "protecting community watersheds for water quality and quantity" as very important, followed by "maintaining ALR land primarily for farming and food production only" and "defining planning areas for future growth". By location, the greatest proportion of respondents who live in Hedley and Olalla ranked "protecting community watersheds for water quality and quantity" as the very important, while the greatest proportion of those who live in Rural Keremeos ranked "defining planning areas for future growth" as the most important.

Are there other priorities of which the OCP should address?

Survey respondents expressed a wide variety of priorities that the OCP should address. The most frequently mentioned priority was protecting ALR land for agricultural purposes, as well as economic development through tourism, small businesses, and outdoor recreation. This was especially prominent in Rural Keremeos, where respondents want to see more ways to build more, denser housing in the Village of Keremeos in order to protect the ALR and support its productivity.

Next, environmental protection was a top priority, such as reducing pesticide use, limited burning, establishing wildlife corridors and increasing land use monitoring. A third priority was ensuring housing availability for seasonal workers, permanent families, and low-income residents. According to survey respondents, other priorities that should be addressed in the OCP include natural hazards, property upkeep and clean water provision.

Some priorities mentioned are unique to different communities in Electoral Area "G". Hedley residents would like to see more social services and planning for economic development. Some respondents from Olalla are concerned about the location of Cannabis growing operations being too close to their homes. Respondents who live in Rural Keremeos are particularly focused on maintaining access to outdoor recreation.

What does your community look like 20 years from now?
Nearly a third of survey respondents noted that in many ways, they hope their communities look similar to how they are today. For most, having more small local businesses, particularly related to agri- and eco-tourism, is a top priority for their communities over the next 20 years. With this, they hope to see a thriving agriculture industry with a mixture of vegetables, chickens, fruit, and vineyards.

Several also noted that in 20 years, they envision that their communities are green, and that the environment is well managed and protected, with many options to enjoy outdoor recreation activities. Properties are clean. The population is composed mainly of many retirees with some new families and youth. There are seniors' services in all communities in Electoral Area "G". There are more housing options near the community centres, not encroaching on ALR land, with options for seasonal workers, families, and low-income households. Communities in Electoral Area "G" are safe from crime and natural hazards. Other changes a few survey respondents envision include more services and amenities, a stronger sense of community, improved infrastructure, and taking steps towards reconciliation as a community.

In general, protecting a balance of residential, environmental, and agricultural uses was a key theme throughout responses from Rural Keremeos. Some respondents would also like to see more local health services, particularly for families and seniors.

A key priority for respondents from Olalla is to preserve the quiet rural lifestyle they enjoy today, with improvements in safety and property upkeep.

A small number from Hedley felt if nothing was done to prevent wildfire, protect affordability and promote economic development, their communities would no longer exist in 20 years.

What does the whole area (Similkameen Valley) look like 20 years from now?
Similar to their perspective of their own communities, around 25% of survey respondents think the Similkameen Valley will look similar 20 years from now. Many anticipate that there will more jobs, particularly related to argi- and eco-tourism, since the Valley is a short distance from Vancouver for urban residents looking to escape the city. Many also hope to see that the environment is well managed, with a balance of conservation and recreation, and that the Similkameen is a leader in environmental stewardship. Respondents anticipate that the Valley will still have a thriving agriculture industry. Many also expect that the Valley will be cleaner and safer. Several noted that the population will likely increase, as people move out of the city, which may eventually increase the cost of living in the Similkameen Valley. These visions were generally shared across communities in Electoral Area "G".

Some respondents from Hedley noted the possibility for more fires over the next 20 years. Survey respondents from Olalla expect to see more dense housing in the Similkameen Valley. Rural Keremeos emphasized the likely increase in seniors and associated need for more health care.