

TOWN OF EDSON HOUSING STRATEGY

PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY





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1.0 Project Overview

Providing a mixture of housing types and tenures of varying levels of affordability is essential for creating a diverse, inclusive, and healthy community. To best meet the housing needs of current and future residents and understand how affordable, safe, and suitable housing options can be provided as the community evolves, the Town is preparing a Housing Strategy.

1.1 Project Approach



1.2 Engagement and Communications Overview

As part of Phase 1: Identifying Housing Needs, multiple opportunities were provided to gather feedback. The Community Session and Survey opportunities were advertised through postcards, posters, newspaper advertisement in *The Weekly Anchor*, utility bill advertisement, social media (Facebook, X, and Instagram), and through the Town's website. The external focus groups and key informant interviews were more targeted and those who participated received email invitations to provide feedback.

- **Community Survey** (October 29 to November 22): A survey was hosted on the Town's website to provide an opportunity to gather feedback from residents. **74** submissions were received.
- **Council Workshop** (November 12): A discussion was facilitated with Council members to learn what they are hearing from residents, gaps they see, and key housing priorities.
- **External Focus Groups** (November 13): Two virtual focus groups were facilitated with housing and support service providers (such as community agencies and representatives of at-risk groups), non-profit housing providers, managers, and local builders and developers. **Six** distinct organizations and groups were represented at these focus groups.
- **Community Session** (November 13): An in-person drop-in community session was held to learn about resident experiences with housing in Edson, including any specific challenges they have faced, and ideas they have to address housing needs. Approximately **25** people participated in the session by chatting with the project team and/or providing input.
- **Key Informant Interviews** (December-January): **Six** telephone (or virtual) interviews were facilitated with key housing and service providers, and people who have experienced challenges accessing and securing housing.

2.0 Phase 1 Community Engagement – Overall Key Themes

The table below details a high-level summary of key themes that emerged from feedback provided through the external focus groups, key informant interviews, the community session, and online engagement.

Key Themes	Description
Affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More affordable housing options are needed for young adults, single parents, low-income families and individuals, people experiencing homelessness, people with pets, people experiencing mental and physical disabilities, and seniors • Housing-related costs, such as utilities and taxes, are said to be too high and impacting affordability
Rental Affordability and Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More affordable rentals are needed, along with increased accountability for landlords to provide on-going maintenance and repairs
Housing Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for different types of housing options, such as single-detached homes, apartments, duplexes/semi-detached, manufactured homes/mobile homes, tiny homes, supportive housing, and transitional housing • Currently, housing options are mostly single-detached homes, many on large lots
Supports and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More services to obtain and maintain housing, such as mental health supports, emergency accommodations, assisted living, rental subsidies, etc. are needed to support vulnerable populations like youths, seniors, people with disabilities, and residents experiencing homelessness
Government Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More government support is needed to support people in becoming homeowners
Seniors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More affordable housing for seniors that supports different levels of independence and care is needed
Increased Development and Housing Supply/Availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased development is needed due to a shortage of diverse and affordable housing options, such as secondary suites, garden suites, manufactured homes, mobile homes, co-op housing, supportive housing, transitional housing, and repurposing underutilized commercial buildings into residential • Regulatory barriers to developing more diverse and affordable housing, such as zoning bylaws and permitting, are an issue
Community Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a desire for collaboration and partnerships between developers, support services, and the Town of Edson to facilitate affordable, high-density, and diverse housing solutions
Flooding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about flooding in the community impacts the perception of housing quality • Cost concerns include flooding impacting property values and the increase in costs for repairs and maintenance after a flood event

3.0 External Focus Groups

The following section provides a high-level summary of feedback gathered as part of the two external focus groups.

3.1 Key Messages & Emerging Priorities

- **Affordability Issues:** There is a growing need for affordable housing options, especially for lower-income groups, seniors, newcomers, and individuals at risk of homelessness. Rising construction costs, high rent prices, and economic fluctuations impact housing accessibility.
- **Housing Shortages for Vulnerable Populations:** Supportive and transitional housing options are notably lacking, creating instability, and limiting resources for unhoused residents and vulnerable populations.
- **Economic and Regulatory Barriers:** Economic downturns, high development costs, and some restrictive zoning regulations hinder new housing projects, particularly affordable and diverse housing types.
- **Community Partnerships and Policy Adjustments:** There is a desire for collaboration between developers, support services, and the Town to facilitate affordable, higher-density, and diverse housing solutions.

3.2 Themes from Discussions with Housing Developers, Landlords and Real Estate Agents

- **Supply and Market Conditions:** There is adequate land supply, but high building costs and slow economic activity have led to stagnant housing development. The current market has available inventory, but it's often unaffordable or not suited to low-income residents.
- **Barriers to Development:** Developers face high costs per square foot, and Land Use Bylaw regulations on minimum house sizes can restrict and complicate affordable housing projects. There's a need for smaller unit sizes and more affordable rental units. There is some sense that there is a lack of interest in being a landlord.
- **Diverse Housing Needs:** There is a gap in housing options for seniors, workforce housing, and smaller unit sizes. Challenges include long waitlists for seniors housing, social housing, and subsidized housing. A need for affordable rental housing was also emphasized.
- **Policy and Strategy Suggestions:** Suggested solutions include infill development, higher-density zoning, and supportive policies to encourage affordable housing projects close to community amenities.

3.3 Themes from Discussions with Housing and Support Service Providers

- **Housing Instability Among Vulnerable Groups:** Lower-income families, newcomers, and women fleeing domestic violence struggle to find safe, affordable housing. Overcrowded housing conditions and poor housing quality are prevalent among those unable to afford better options.

- **Lack of Supportive and Transitional Housing:** There’s a lack of supportive and transitional housing, with long waitlists for social housing. Homelessness visibility is increasing, with some residents forced to live in rough or in inadequate temporary accommodations.
- **Challenges with Access to Housing and Resources:** Support services are strained, and residents often lack knowledge about available housing assistance. The need for affordable entry-level ownership housing, affordable rental housing, and targeted support for vulnerable populations was emphasized.
- **Potential Solutions:** Recommendations include creating affordable housing (examples include tiny home communities for seniors and unhoused residents), increasing transitional and supportive housing, and ensuring safe and accessible housing options for the Town’s most vulnerable populations.

4.0 Key Informant Interviews

The following section provides a high-level summary of feedback gathered during the key informant interviews.

4.1 The Evergreens Foundation

The Evergreens Foundation is a not-for-profit housing management body that supports independent housing across six Albertan municipalities. They currently operate three housing developments in Edson.

Table 4.1: Evergreens Foundation Housing Breakdown, Town of Edson

Building	Number of Units	Unit Type	Number of Accessible Units
Heatherwood Manor	23	21 1-bedroom, 2 bachelor	1*
Heritage Court	32	1-bedroom	1
Parkland Lodges	105	82 Bachelor, 21 1-bedroom, and two 2-bedroom	105

**Of note, while Heatherwood Manor and Heritage Court each have one accessible unit, scooters and electric wheelchairs are not permitted.*

Wait List

Parkland Lodges maintains its own waiting list and currently has approximately 14-18 people waiting for a non-subsidized unit and about 36 people waiting for a subsidized unit. Non-subsidized units are on a first-come, first-served basis, while the subsidized units are based on need.

For Heatherwood Manor and Heritage Court, there are approximately 5-8 people waiting.

4.2 Edson Friendship Centre

The Edson Friendship Centre (EFC) is a non-profit organization that provides support and services to Edson and the surrounding community. Operating in Edson for over 30 years, it includes a drop-in centre and delivers a range of cultural programs, youth services, early learning programs, family supports, and nutrition programs.



The EFC also provides the Wayfinding program that serves individuals in the community who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. This program connects people with addiction services and income support, as well as helps people navigate other community resources. The Wayfinding program is delivered by two social workers and operates Monday to Thursday. In November 2024, the program supported about 75 unhoused individuals including approximately 20 who are youth and seniors (65+).

Challenges currently impacting individuals accessing the Wayfinding program include a lack of transitional and supportive housing, lack of rental subsidies, and the need for additional supports such as mental health supports and supports for people to help maintain their housing. Additional barriers in accessing housing include discrimination by landlords, and the eviction of lower-income tenants when demand for rental housing increases. Barriers to creating transitional and supportive housing include a lack of operational funding and NIMBYism.

4.3 SCOPE

SCOPE operates supportive housing for persons with developmental disabilities in Edson. Overall, SCOPE operates 5 supportive housing homes with a total of 23 beds and provides 24/7 support to three individuals in their own apartments (two individuals live in a two-bedroom unit, and the other individual lives in a one-bedroom apartment).

Representatives from SCOPE note that there is strong demand for more supportive housing in the area, the waiting list is maintained by Development Services Ontario. Housing affordability is the main challenge for persons with developmental disabilities trying to find housing in Edson. Representatives of SCOPE also point to the need for having the right support services in place, and ensuring appropriate accommodations for people as they age (i.e., to meet accessibility needs).

4.4 Yellowhead Shelter

The Yellowhead Emergency Shelter (YES), located in Hinton, provides short-term accommodation for women and their children fleeing violence, as well as for women in crisis from the surrounding region, including Edson. The facility comprises 10 beds across 4 bedrooms, though occupancy is not consistently at capacity. Despite this, the shelter occasionally has to turn people away, particularly individuals who are actively using drugs or who display aggression towards staff. Staffing limitations also mean only one staff member is on duty at any given time.

Approximately 10% of the shelter's residents come from Edson. However, staff report that many women in Edson choose to stay in their community to maintain connections to their jobs or local support systems. To address this, Yellowhead offers outreach services to support women in need directly in Edson.

For those who do stay at the shelter, securing housing is a significant challenge due to a lack of affordable options. Although rents in Edson are generally lower than in Hinton, they remain out of reach for individuals and families relying on income assistance. Staff highlight the need for additional rental subsidies, particularly in Edson, where some housing supply is currently available. Barriers such as a lack of references and poor credit history further complicate access to stable housing.

A proposed solution to these challenges includes establishing supportive housing in the area. This model would combine affordable housing units with on-site or connected services provided by local organizations, including YES, to support residents in achieving stability and independence.



Staff also identified a recent, concerning, trend in the local rental market where landlords are increasingly offering only short-term leases ending in May or June, and then converting properties into Airbnb rentals for the summer; this significantly reduces housing availability during those months.

4.5 Local Realtors

When speaking with local realtors in work in Edson and the surrounding area, the following topics were raised:

Housing Market: Prices in Edson are considered comparable to other communities, however, Edson offers larger lots and older homes. Generally, there is a high supply of homes but low demand, although there has been a slight increase in market activity following a recent drop in mortgage rates.

Housing Availability: There is a wide range of housing types available in Edson, but there is a significant need for seniors housing. It was noted that seniors are moving out of their homes but have limited options on places to go due to long waitlists for existing facilities.

Homelessness and Housing Supports: Providing homes alone was noted as not being sufficient as individuals experiencing homelessness may struggle with living independently. Related supports are required.

Development Challenges: Edson is perceived as an expensive place to develop due to high infrastructure costs and lack of local developers. Additionally, past experiences with Town development processes being referred to as “slow”, combined with recent labour and materials supply shortages have created additional barriers to residential development.

Infrastructure Issues: There are both negative perceptions and first-hand experiences with flooding in Edson that impact the quality of the current housing. It was noted that flooding is attributed to issues with the existing infrastructure, not poor household maintenance.

Trends and Opportunities:

- Following the Jasper wildfire in 2024, there was an influx of people who bought homes in Edson, which had an unexpected impact on the local housing market.
- Infill housing was identified as a potential opportunity to split large lots and develop higher density housing that could cater to different demographic groups.

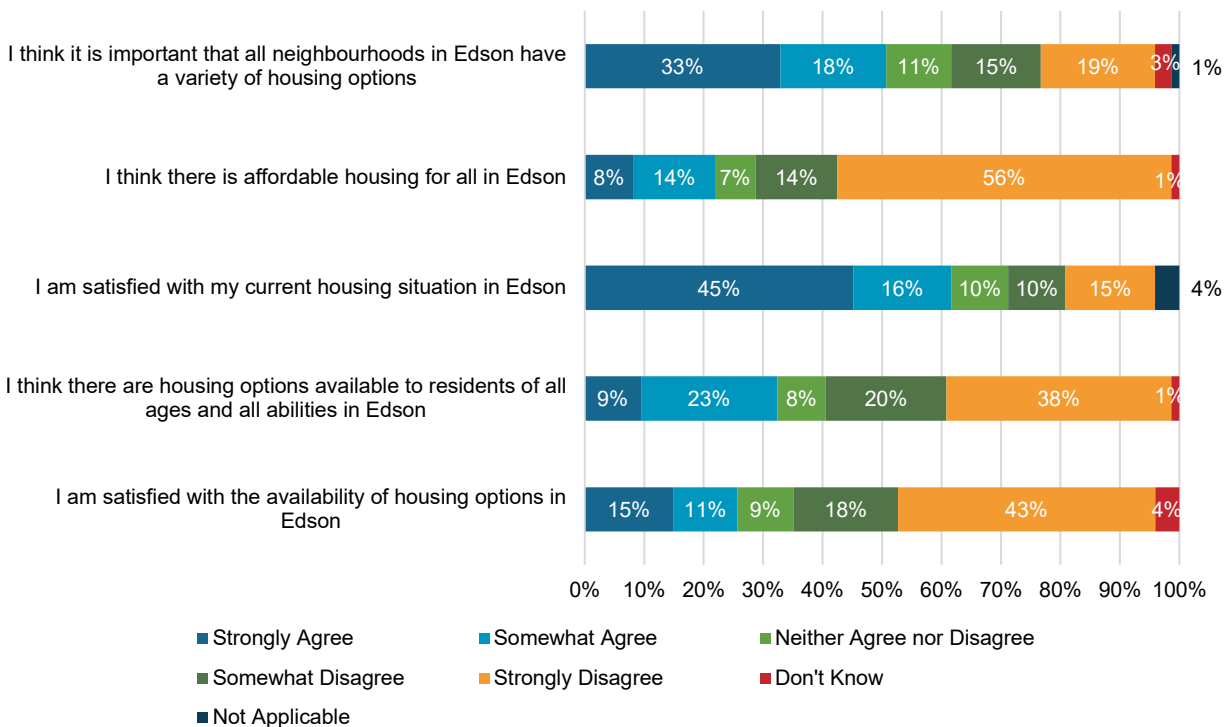
5.0 Community Session and Online Engagement

Interested and affected parties and residents were asked to provide feedback on the challenges and opportunities of ensuring safe, appropriate, and affordable housing is available for all residents in the Town of Edson. The following section provides a high-level summary of feedback received through the community session and online survey.

5.1 Current Housing Perspectives

Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements about the current housing situation in Edson.

- Slightly over half (51%) of respondents **strongly or somewhat agreed** that it is important that all neighbourhoods have a variety of housing options (74 responses).
- When asking respondents whether they thought there were affordable housing options in Edson, 70% of people **strongly or somewhat disagreed** with the statement (74 responses).
- Of those responding, 61% of people **strongly or somewhat agreed** that they were satisfied with their current housing situation in Edson (73 responses).
- 58% of respondents **strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed** that there were housing options available for all ages and all abilities in the town (73 responses).
- 61% of respondents **strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed** that they were satisfied with the availability of housing in Edson (73 responses).



Responses: 74

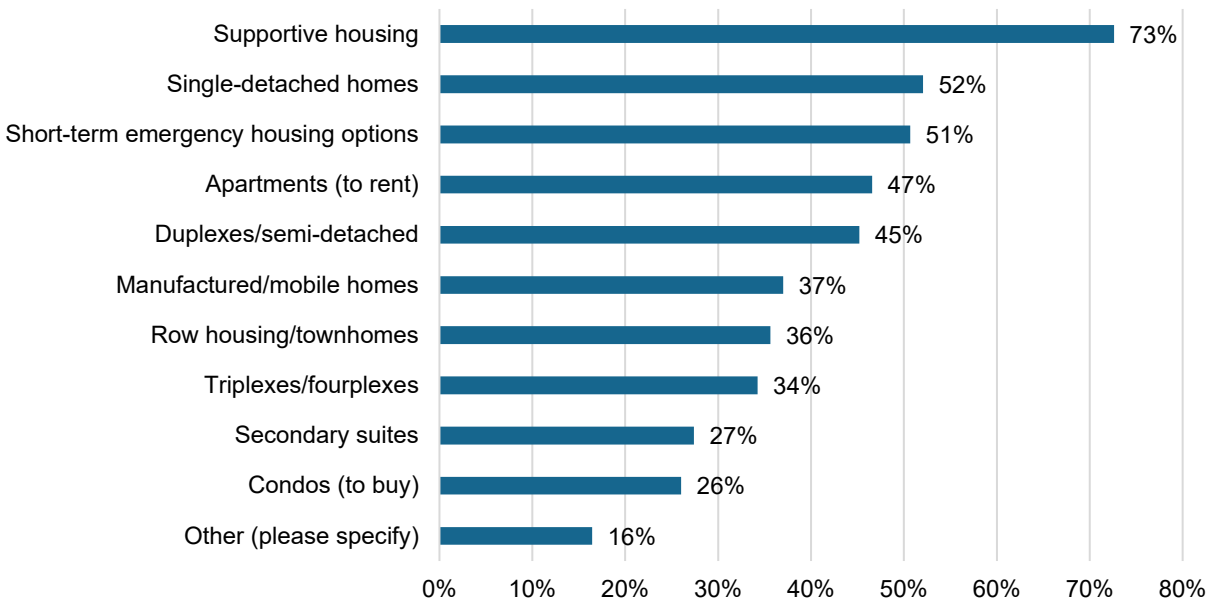
Survey participants were asked to explain their selections. The following summarizes the top themes from feedback shared:

- **High cost of housing:** Most participants shared that housing is not affordable in Edson and the cost of owning a home and land or renting were too high.
- **Affordable and diverse housing:** Some participants shared that there is not enough affordable housing and there was not enough diversity to accommodate seniors, people with disabilities, and single-income households. However, there were a few participants concerned that more diverse housing would lead to safety issues in those neighbourhoods.
- **Unhoused population:** There were a few concerns that the lack of affordable housing options is contributing to people becoming or remaining unhoused.

Responses: 46

5.2 Housing Options Needed

Residents were asked to share what types of housing they believe are most needed in Edson. The top five housing needs participants identified were supportive housing (73%), single detached homes (52%), short-term emergency housing options (51%), apartments to rent (47%) and duplexes/semi-detached homes (45%).



Responses: 73 from the survey and 10 responses from the community session (participants could select all that apply)

Other responses

- Mobile homes
- Tiny homes
- Government owned housing with rent controls
- Homes for families with big yards
- More pet-friendly options
- More housing options
- More affordable housing options



5.3 Supportive Housing Needs

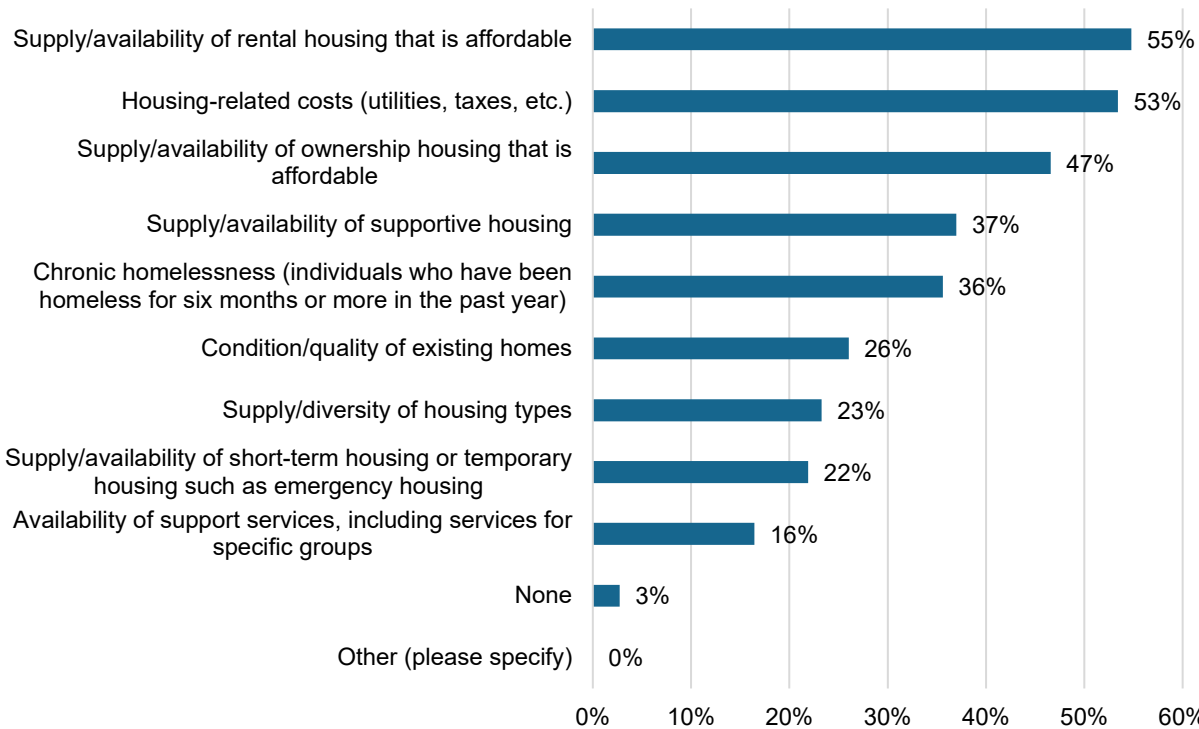
Participants were asked to further specify the types of supportive housing needed for Edson. Below is a summary of the responses:

- **Housing for seniors:** The majority of respondents specified that housing for seniors and assisted living was important for the town. Some mentioned the importance of housing that prioritizes different levels of independence and care for seniors.
- **Housing for low-income households:** Many others noted that housing is needed for lower-income households, which may include single parents and people with disabilities.
- **Diversity of housing:** A few respondents mentioned different types of housing they would like to see such as transitional housing for different community groups (seniors, people with mental health/addiction or medical challenges), tiny homes, apartments, mobile homes, home that provide assisted living and communal spaces (e.g. shared living spaces, co-op housing, community gardens, etc.), and accessible housing for seniors and people with disabilities.

Responses: 43

5.4 Pressing Housing Issues

We asked survey respondents to select the top 3 most pressing housing issues residents are currently experiencing in Edson. The top 3 issues that people thought were most important were supply/availability of affordable rental housing (55%), housing related costs like utilities, taxes, etc. (53%), and supply/availability of affordable housing that people can buy (47%).



Responses: 73 from survey (participants could select all that apply)

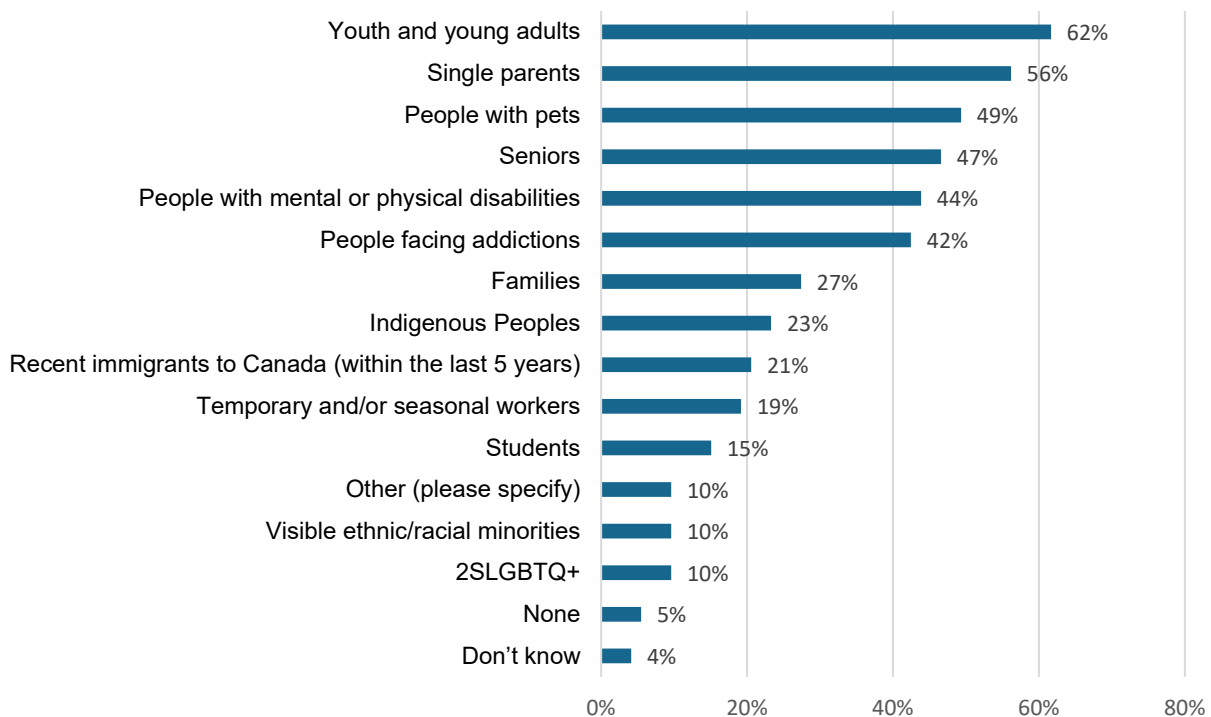
Additional details on the top 3 issues shared by survey respondents:

- There were some concerns that housing-related costs (utilities, taxes, etc.) were becoming too high and people wanted to see the town finding ways to cut costs. This included better preventative maintenance of utility infrastructure to reduce future repair costs.
- Affordability is top of mind for participants and a few suggested a need for controls and caps on rentals and housing prices.
- Although some people recognized the importance of housing for low-income populations and housing for the unhoused population, a few people expressed concerns for these housing types but did not specify why. Others shared feedback on the complexities and systemic barriers related to homelessness.
- A few people further emphasized the need for supportive housing that is accommodating to all ages and abilities in Edson.
- A few people are sharing the systemic issues and complexities of providing housing for people experiencing homelessness and addictions.

Responses: 26

5.5 Groups Who Might Experience Challenges

We asked survey respondents to identify groups who might experience more challenges in finding adequate housing in Edson. Respondents indicated that youth and young adults (62%), single parents (56%), people with pets (49%), seniors (47%), and people with mental/physical disabilities (44%) might experience challenges when finding housing that best meets their needs.



Responses: 73 (participants could select all that apply)

Other responses

- People with single income
- People with low income or working minimum wage jobs
- People in the service industry
- Families
- Residents should have priority over immigrants

5.6 Housing Challenges in the Next 5-10 Years

We asked survey respondents and people at the community session to share housing challenges that Edson will face over the next 5-10 years. The following are key themes related to future housing challenges:

- **Increasing costs:** People consistently stated that the cost of homeownership, renting, taxes, and utilities will remain a challenge in the coming years. There were also a few people concerned that the town is spending tax dollars to lead residential development, which could mean increased costs passed onto residents.
- **Availability of housing options:** Some people noted other challenges like the availability of housing for families, seniors, supportive housing options, and housing for people with pets.
- **Aging housing infrastructures:** A few people commented on challenges relating to aging homes and increasing maintenance and repair costs to older homes.
- **Increasing number of people becoming unhoused:** A few people shared concerns for the growing unhoused population, stating that more support is needed. There were also safety concerns related to unhoused residents.
- **Attracting people to live and invest in Edson:** Some people shared that there will be challenges in retaining current residents and attracting future residents due to the lack of affordable housing. Others were concerned about current zoning bylaws limiting housing diversity within certain neighbourhoods. It was noted that these bylaws are making it difficult for developers, builders, and investors to develop housing in Edson.
- **Regulatory barriers:** A couple of people also noted the administrative barriers of development, including studies and assessments requirements and off-site levies prior to development.
- **Flooding:** A few people noted concerns about extreme weather events and natural disasters like flooding, which could impact homes and property values.
- **External concerns:** Some people point to broader challenges beyond Edson, such as the federal government's role in housing, the current Canadian economy, population decline, immigration, and the mismatch in wages relative to housing costs.

Responses: 59 through the survey and 25 responses at the community session.

5.7 Innovative Housing Options

To best meet the housing needs of residents of all ages and abilities, we asked survey respondents and people at the community session to share innovative housing options that would be suitable in Edson.

- **Diverse housing types:** People mentioned numerous different types of housing options, with apartments and tiny homes being the most popular among respondents. Other housing types mentioned include secondary suites, garden suites, group housing, low-income housing, mixed-use developments that combine residential/commercial/recreational spaces, seniors housing, townhomes/condos, cooperative housing options, shelters, and housing for seasonal workers.
- **Lowering housing-related costs:** Some people commented that finding ways to lower taxes and utility costs are important but did not mention how that can be done.
- **Regulations:** Many people talked about limiting rental prices and implementing rent controls. A few others shared that government support is needed in terms of tax rebates for renovations, government loans for housing, and the removal of barriers for building different housing types like secondary suites and mobile homes. For example, people frequently refer to land development in Hillendale that can be facilitated by updating the land use plans and zoning bylaws to allow for more diverse housing types.
- Only a couple of people did not think Edson needed innovative housing solutions and one respondent was unsure.

Responses: 53 through the survey and 13 responses at the community session.

5.8 Identifying Priority Action

We asked survey respondents and people at the community session to identify one action that they think will have a positive impact on housing in Edson. The top priority actions noted by respondents include:

- Implementing rent controls and lowering rental costs
- Increasing the availability of affordable housing options
- Removing barriers to and attracting investors and builders
- Implementing manufactured homes and pre-approved housing plans to reduce costs
- Adjusting land use plans and zoning regulations to facilitate certain housing types to be built in Edson
- Lowering taxes and utility costs
- Implementing preventative maintenance measures on housing and utility infrastructure so as to reduce future repair costs
- Meeting with key groups to better understand barriers (groups noted by respondents include social service agencies, home builders and developers)
- Finding a solution for the unhoused population and working with current social service agencies already doing the work

Responses: 45 through the survey and 2 responses at the community session.

5.9 Additional Housing Considerations

We asked survey respondents if there was anything else people wanted to share about housing in Edson. 29 responses were received for this question. Many of the responses were similar to the previous

sections, with affordability and the high cost of owning, renting, taxes, utilities, and maintenance being the main themes. Some additions that were not mentioned previously include:

- Some people noted the complexities of developing a housing strategy and commented that Edson needs a housing strategy that creates a more resilient community for all.
- A few people were concerned about the addition of infills, more modern and unaffordable luxury homes, and the removal of character homes in Edson.

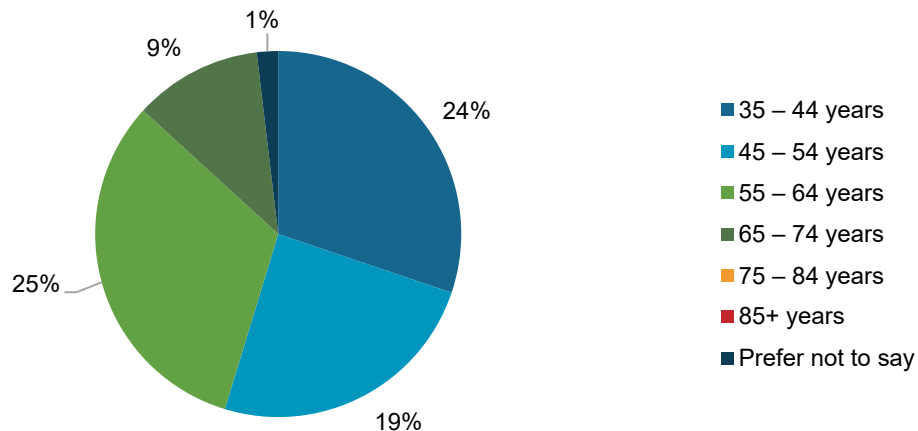
Responses: 29

5.10 Survey Demographics

The following section provides a summary of survey participant demographics, which were captured to better understand the diversity of people we were hearing from. Respondents were asked to only answer questions if they felt comfortable in doing so.

Age

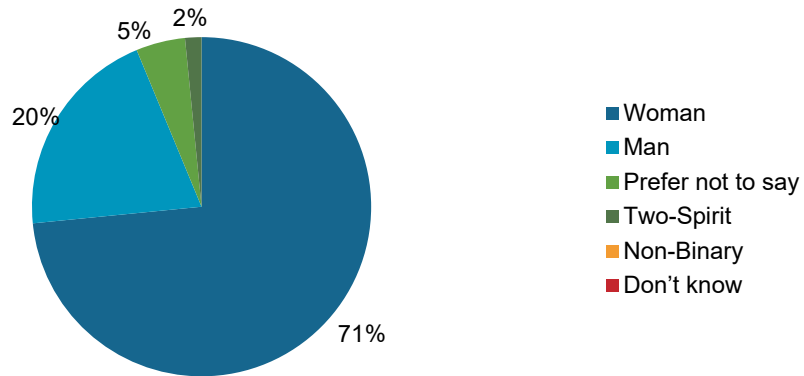
Most survey respondents (87%) who responded were between the ages of 25-64. The survey did not receive any responses from people 17 years or younger or people above 75 years of age.



Responses: 67

Gender

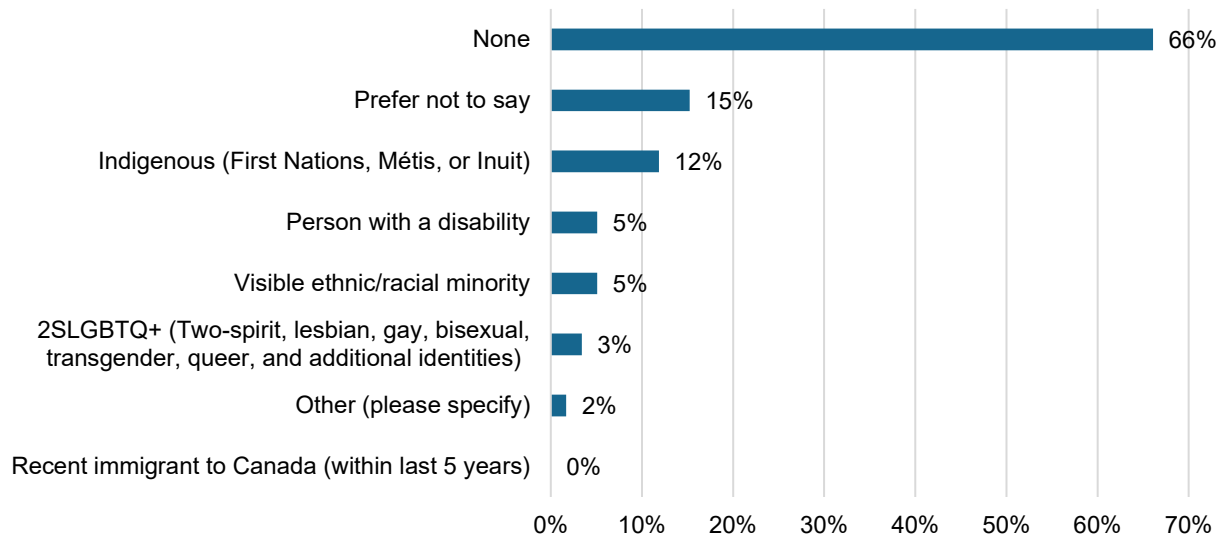
Survey respondents were primarily women (71%).



Responses: 66

Group Self-Identification

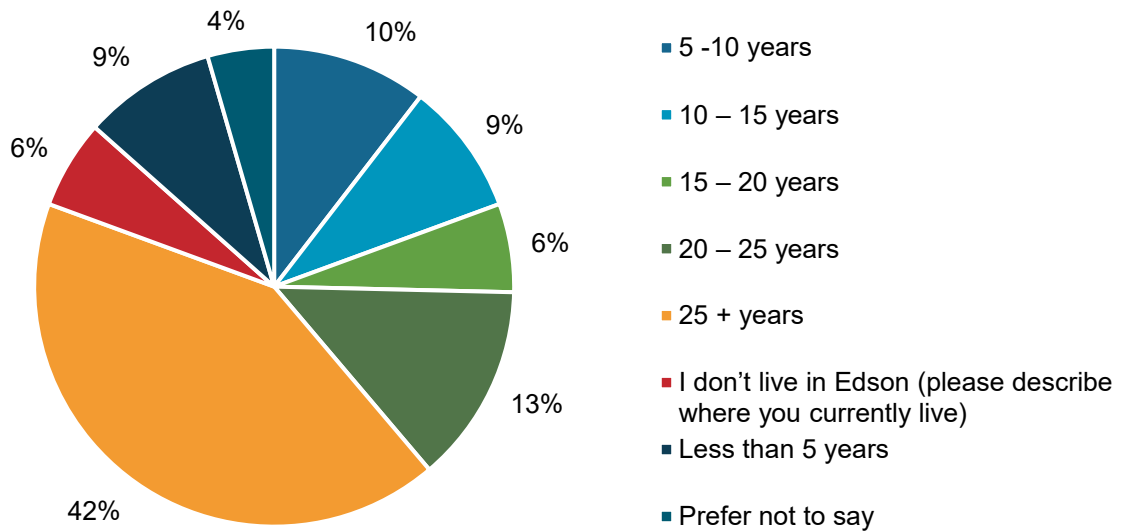
The majority of survey respondents (66%) did not fall into one of following groups or preferred not to say (15%). 12% of people we heard from identified as being Indigenous.



Responses: 59 (participants could select all that apply)

Length of Time Living in Edson

Most survey respondents (42%) we heard from have lived in Edson for 25+ years.



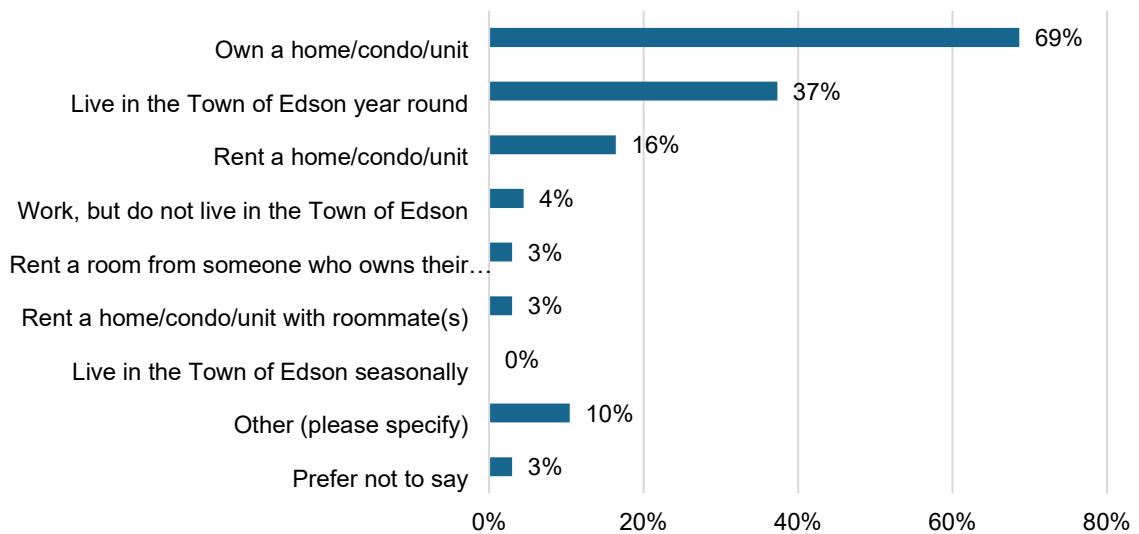
Responses: 67

Other responses

- Residents of Yellowhead County
- Resident of Niton Junction

Current Housing Situation

Most survey respondents (69%) own their home/condo. 37% live in the town year-round and 16% rent their home.



Responses: 67 (participants could select all that apply)

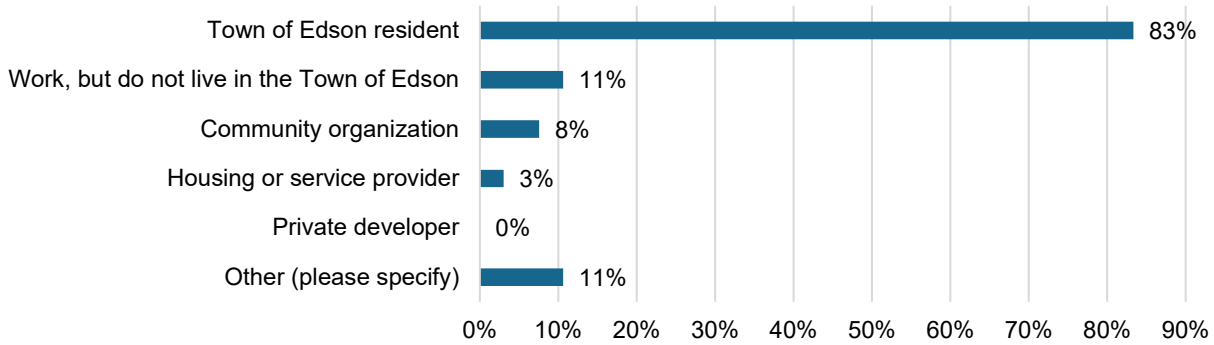


Other responses

- Residents of Yellowhead County
- Someone wanting to move to Edson
- Someone who owns numerous rentals in Edson

What Best Describes You and Your Perspective

Most survey respondents we heard from (83%) were residents of the Town of Edson.



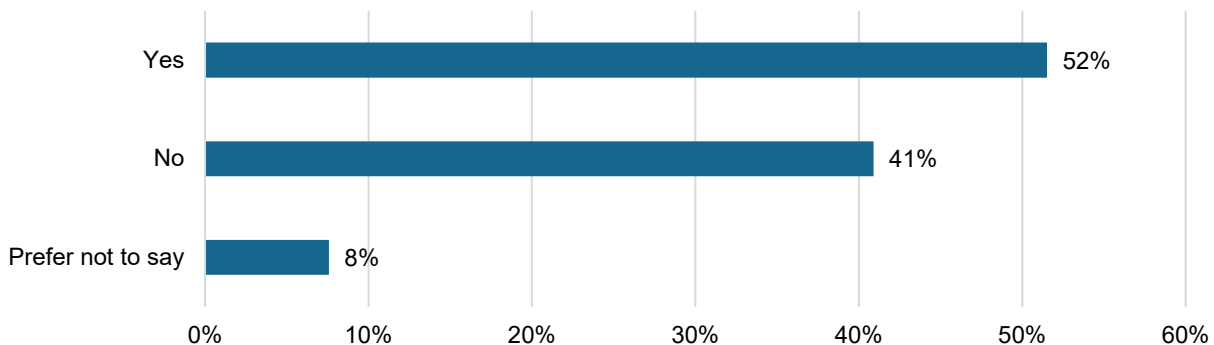
Responses: 66 (participants could select all that apply)

Other responses

- Residents of Yellowhead County
- Someone wanting to move to Edson
- Someone wanting to leave Edson

Challenges Finding and/or Maintaining Housing

We asked survey respondents if they have ever experienced challenges in finding and/or maintaining housing in Edson that fully met their needs. 52% said yes, they have experienced challenges, whereas 41% said no.



Responses: 66

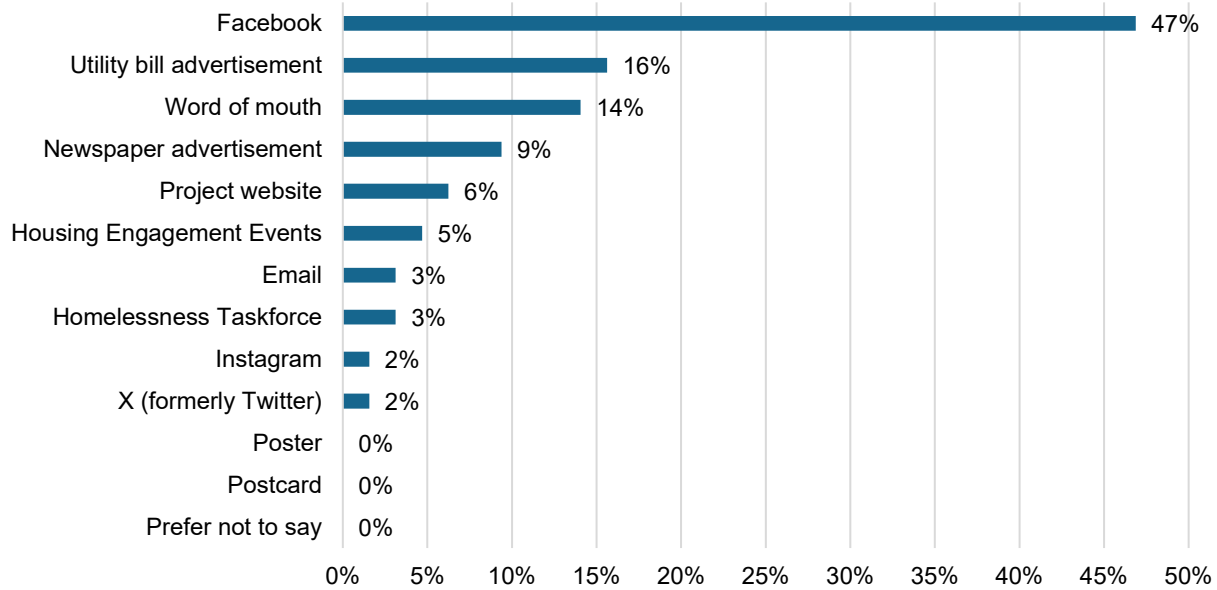
For those who said yes, challenges noted by 33 survey respondents included affordability, such as finding suitable housing within their budget and life circumstances. A few people noted the difficulties in finding



pet-friendly housing. A few others commented that the cost of utilities and taxes have made housing unaffordable. A couple of people shared the difficulties of being a landlord.

Survey Communications

Over half of the people responding to the survey (51%) heard about the survey through social media (Facebook, Instagram and X). 16% also heard through the utility bill advertisement and 13% through word of mouth.



Responses: 64

6.0 Next Steps

Feedback provided through the first phase of engagement will help inform the preparation of a housing needs assessment. Feedback, along with best practices, review of background information, and demographic, economic, and housing data, will be used to support the development of key priorities and actions of the Housing Strategy. More information on the project can be found at www.edson.ca/housing