

West Bedford Trailhead

Public Engagement

SUMMARY

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Overview

Purpose of Engagement

The municipality was interested in assessing how the development of a future trailhead in the rapidly growing community of West Bedford might impact how people currently enter the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes area.

An online survey was conducted over five weeks and closed March 5, 2021. The survey provided the opportunity for both informing the public about the future trailhead, and in gathering additional feedback from respondents on current use and future development. There were 256 submissions.

Participation

- 45% of respondents were women; 49% were men; 1% were non-binary and 4% preferred not to answer.
- Less than 1% of respondents were under 18; 15% of respondents were aged 19-34; 40% were aged 35-49; 30% were aged 50-64, and 15% were over 65.
- 92% of the respondents provided the first three digits of their postal code. (N=235) Three postal code designations - B4B (34%), B3M (21%), and B4A (10%) - accounted for more than 50% of the respondents. These postal code designations cover Bedford, Clayton Park, and many of the communities that are identified with Hammonds Plains Road.

Engagement Summary

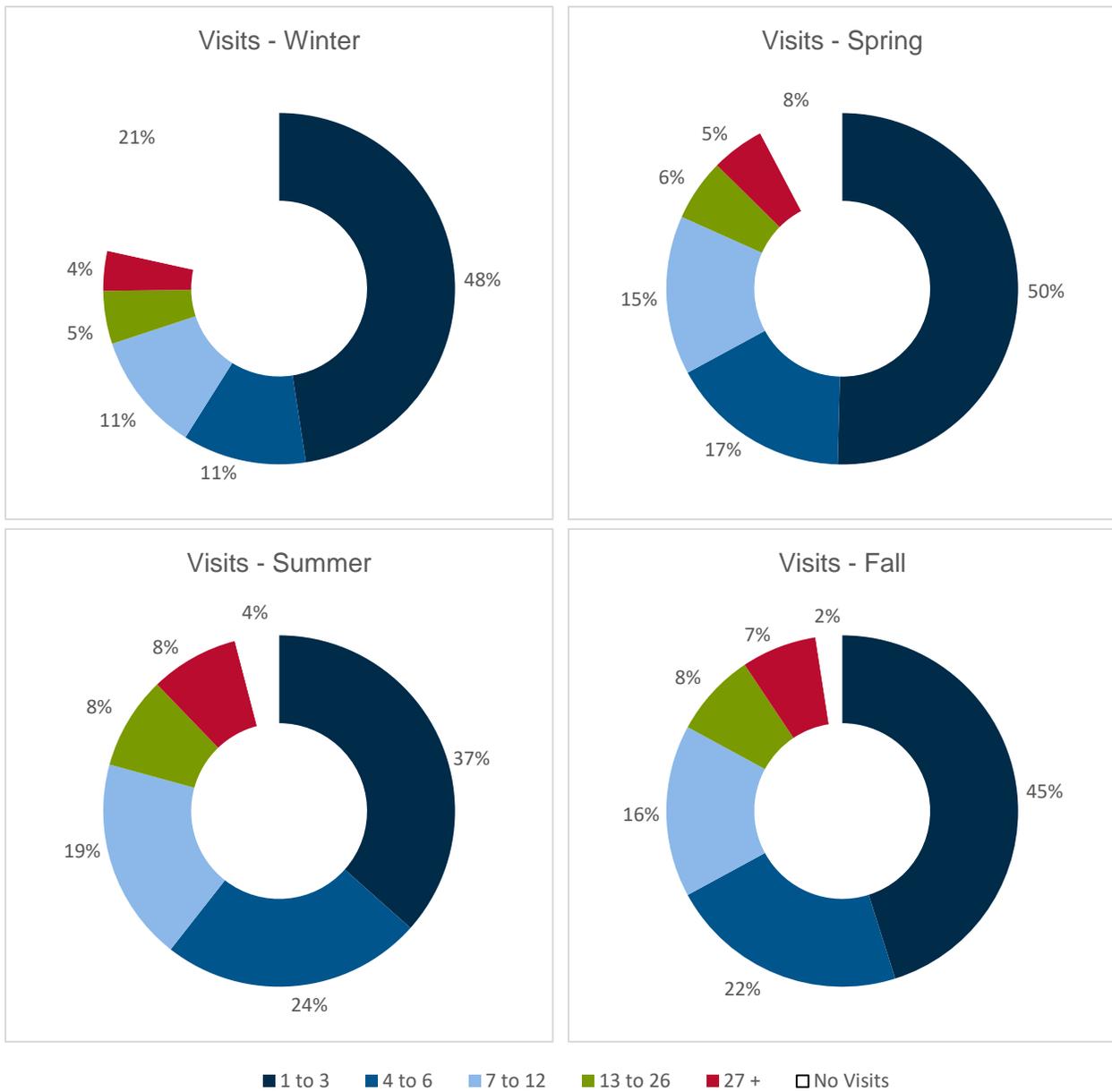
Responses from this engagement process provide the municipality with indications on current visitation habits and user perspectives regarding Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes. Noted results from this survey would include where respondents identified:

- The development of additional trailheads within the immediate area is seen as very important by the majority of respondents.
- Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes is serving as a regional destination. 74% of survey participants indicated that they rely on vehicles to travel to the area.
- During the summer and fall seasons, visitors are generally taking trips that are more than two hours in duration.
- There are expressed concerns with the lack of an overall plan for Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes. There are also concerns with the environmental impact of overuse, with the expectation that the negative impacts associated with public use will continue to increase as surrounding residential development occurs.
- Leave No Trace principles are strongly supported by the public.

Frequency

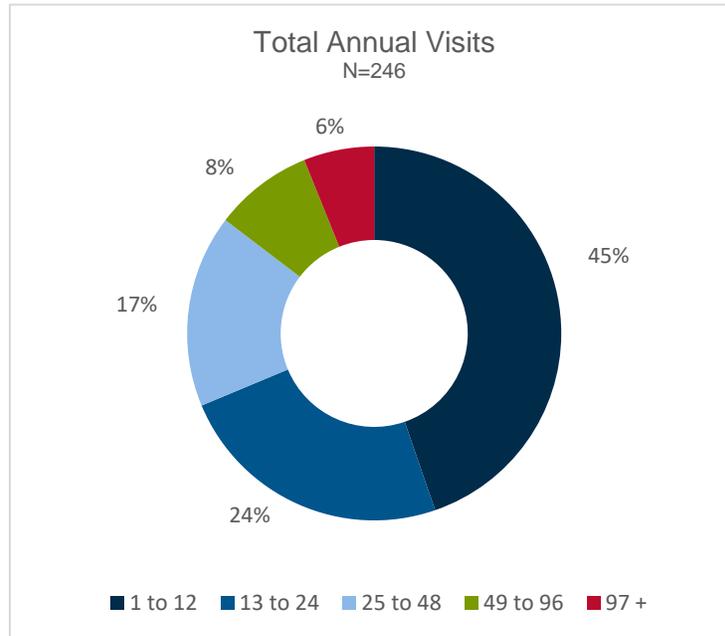
When asked how frequent they visit Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes by season, respondents indicated they were taking more trips in the summer and the fall. Within all four seasons, a small cohort identified that they visit very frequently, making more than 26 trips within a single season. Such a response equals two visits or more per week, on average. The percentage of respondents who were “very frequent” visitors increased marginally in the summer and fall seasons.

Q1. What is the typical number of visits you make to the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes area, by season. N=246



When adding the seasonal totals of respondents:

- 45% indicated that they visit 1-12 times per year.
- 41% of the respondents who are visiting less than 12 times per year do not visit in the winter.



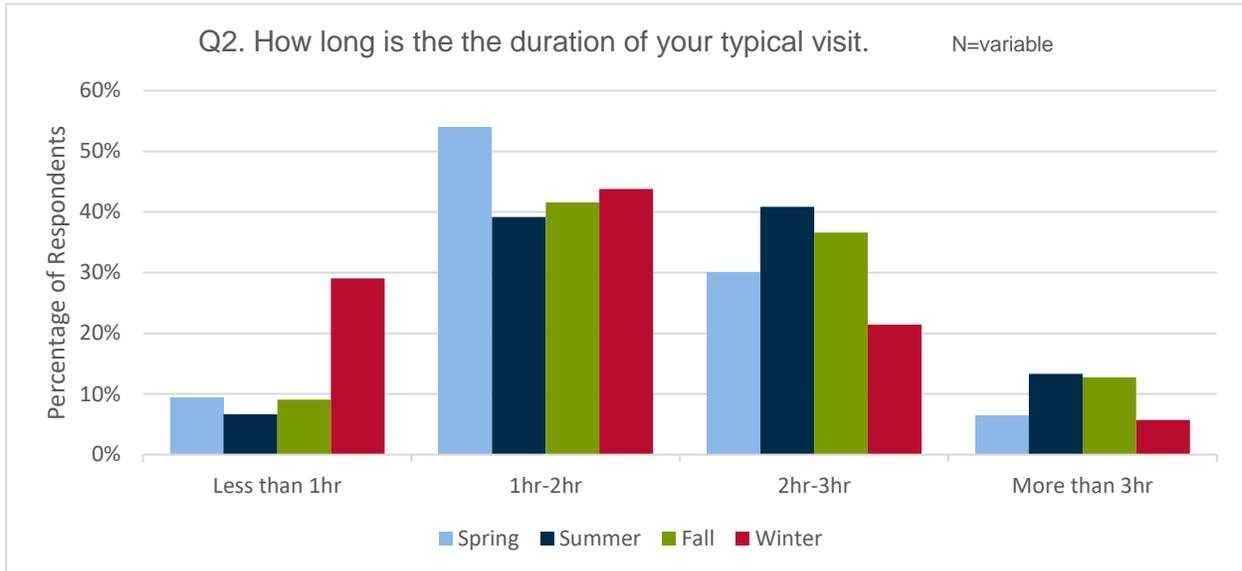
Survey respondents who can be categorized as “very frequent” users (more than 96 visits per year) did not identify as much of a variance between the number of visits they undertake per season.

While recognizing this cohort is considered a very small sample size, it is noted where “very frequent” users did show a variance in their responses to other survey questions, when compared to other respondents, including:

- more likely to include dog-walking as an activity;
- the future trailhead off Brookline Drive is not as likely to impact their preferred choice of access;
- a preference in developing fewer, large-sized trailheads (although still not a majority).

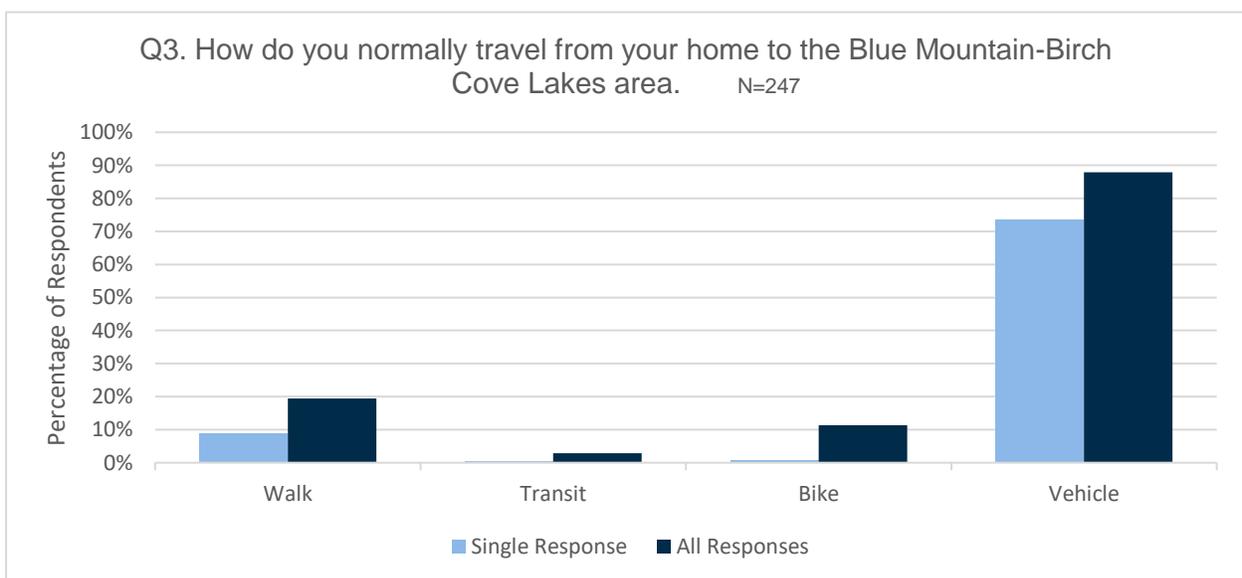
Duration

More than 50% of respondents indicated that their typical visit was more than 2 hours during the summer, with the responses provided for fall being generally comparable. For winter and spring, there was a shift to shorter visits. Duration impacts on both the user's experience and on the question of trailhead capacity, notably when many people are travelling by vehicle.



Mode of Travel

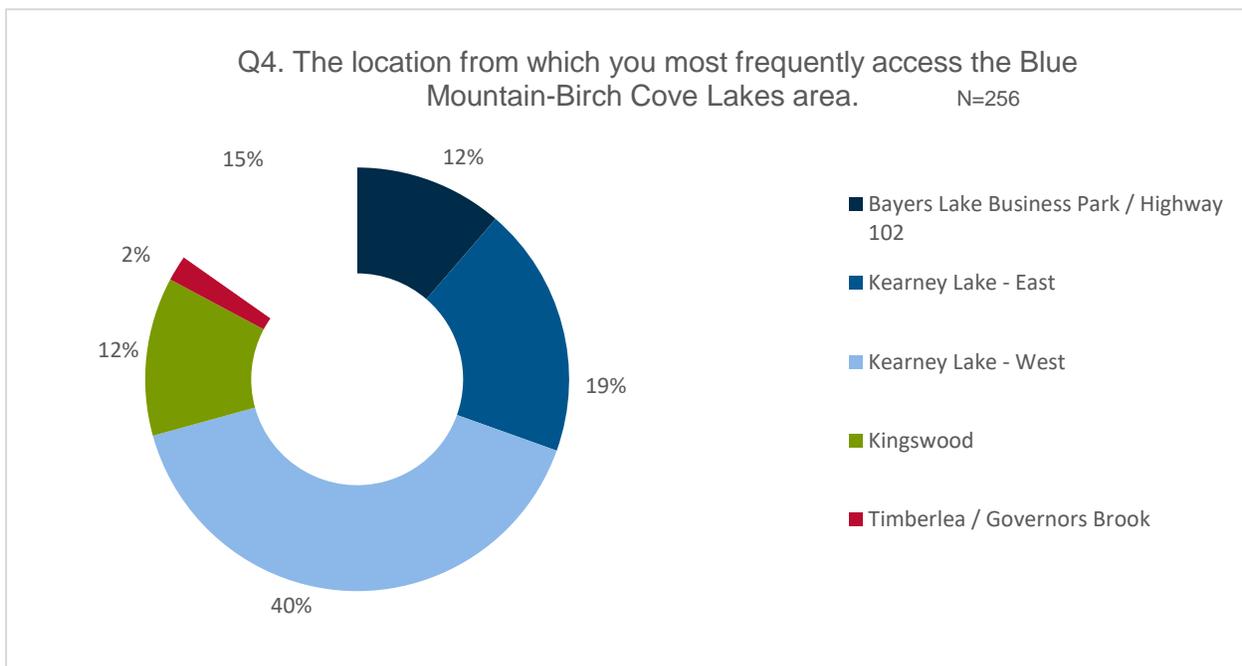
88% of respondents travel by vehicle when visiting the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes area. 74% identified it as being their one method of travel. As neighbourhoods adjacent to the proposed Park are developed further, there are concerns where the number of visitors choosing particular points of access are significantly more than what can be accommodated.



Preferred / Current points of access

Participants were asked to identify the location from which they most frequently access the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes area through a survey mapping function. 85% of respondents (N=217) provided a location, the remainder either chose not to answer, or their input was unable to be as easily categorized, per the groupings below. Individual responses were clustered to fit with five geographic areas, to differentiate the preferred access points on a broader level:

- Various points near or in Bayers Lake Business Park, or locations proximate to the Highway 102 exit to Lacewood Drive;
- South of Kearney Lake, towards the eastern end of the lake, to include the Maskwa parking lot, and other locations near or along Saskatoon Drive;
- South of Kearney Lake, towards the western end of the lake, to include Colins Road, and locations near Black Duck Brook;
- Various points found in the Kingswood area, located west of Blue Mountain, along or at the end of identified public roads within that subdivision;
- Near to the community of Timberlea, between Frasers Lake and Governor Lake.



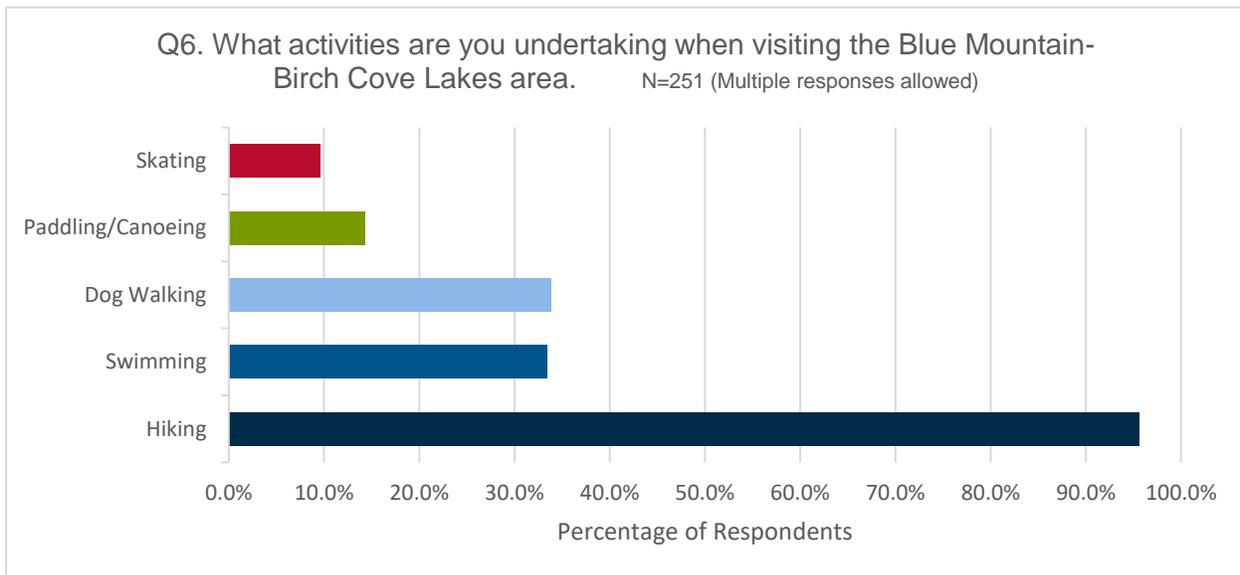
The majority of respondents (59%) identified a current preference for access points near Kearney Lake. The development of a new trailhead at Brookline Drive may reduce some of the existing volumes identified with these nearby locations, but such an outcome is not a certainty.

The results from this question are consistent with additional written comments submitted by respondents, where there were stated concerns with overuse in particular parts of Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, and conflicts associated with adjacent residential uses.

Activities

Participants were asked what type of activities they pursued, allowing for multiple responses. Nearly all survey respondents (96%) visit for hiking purposes. The next most popular activities were swimming and dog walking, with 33% of respondents identified with each of these.

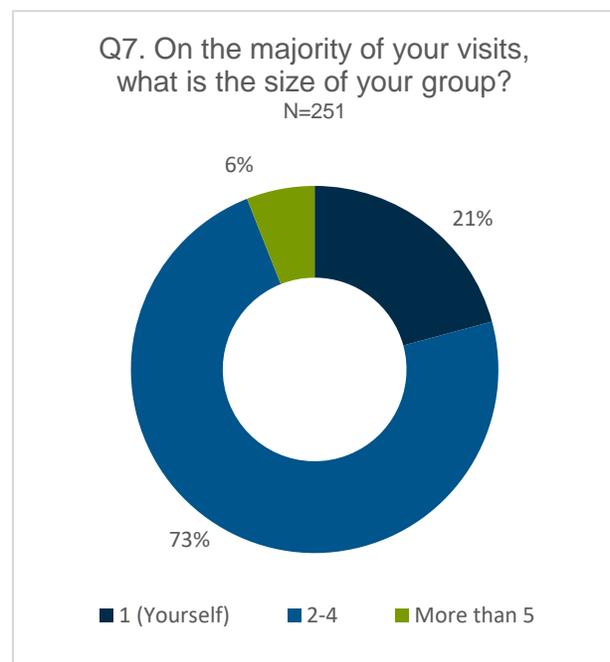
13% of respondents provided an additional write-in response. These responses included fishing, birding, mountain biking, and trail-running (all at less than 3% of respondents). Several write-in responses can be categorized collectively as nature appreciation / stewardship (also identified at less than 3% of respondents), indicating there is a strong attachment in some users with protecting current environmental conditions.



Group Size

Approximately one fifth (21%) of respondents indicated they visit the area by themselves. The duration of a visit, irrespective of season, was marginally longer for people who identified that they usually visit by themselves.

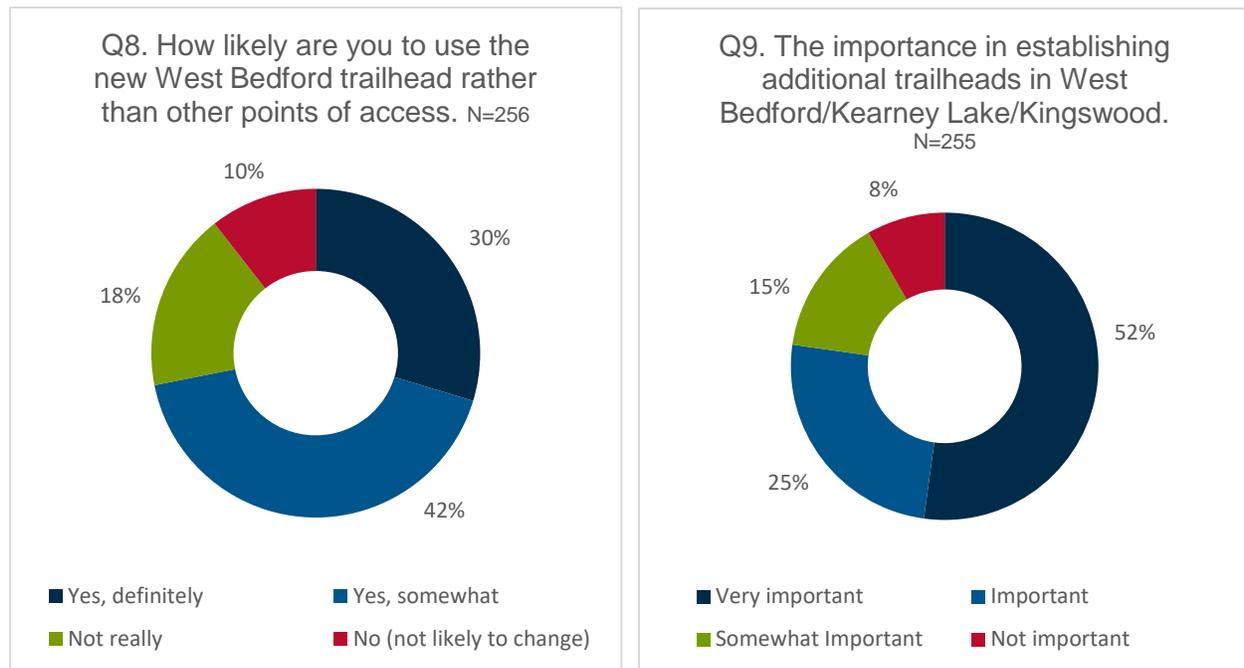
Within the small cohort of respondents who indicated that they visit “very frequently” (96+ visits per year), the percentage who indicated they typically visit alone increased to 40%.



Feedback on Trailhead Development

30% of respondents identified where a future trailhead off Brookline Drive would potentially replace their current point of access. An additional 42% identified this trailhead's development would serve as an option, but not necessarily as a replacement. Approximately 10% indicated that the trailhead's development would not likely change their current choices.

The responses identified with the importance of establishing additional trailheads in the West Bedford / Kearney Lake / Kingswood area were consistent with the feedback above, where 77% of respondents identified the matter as important or very important.



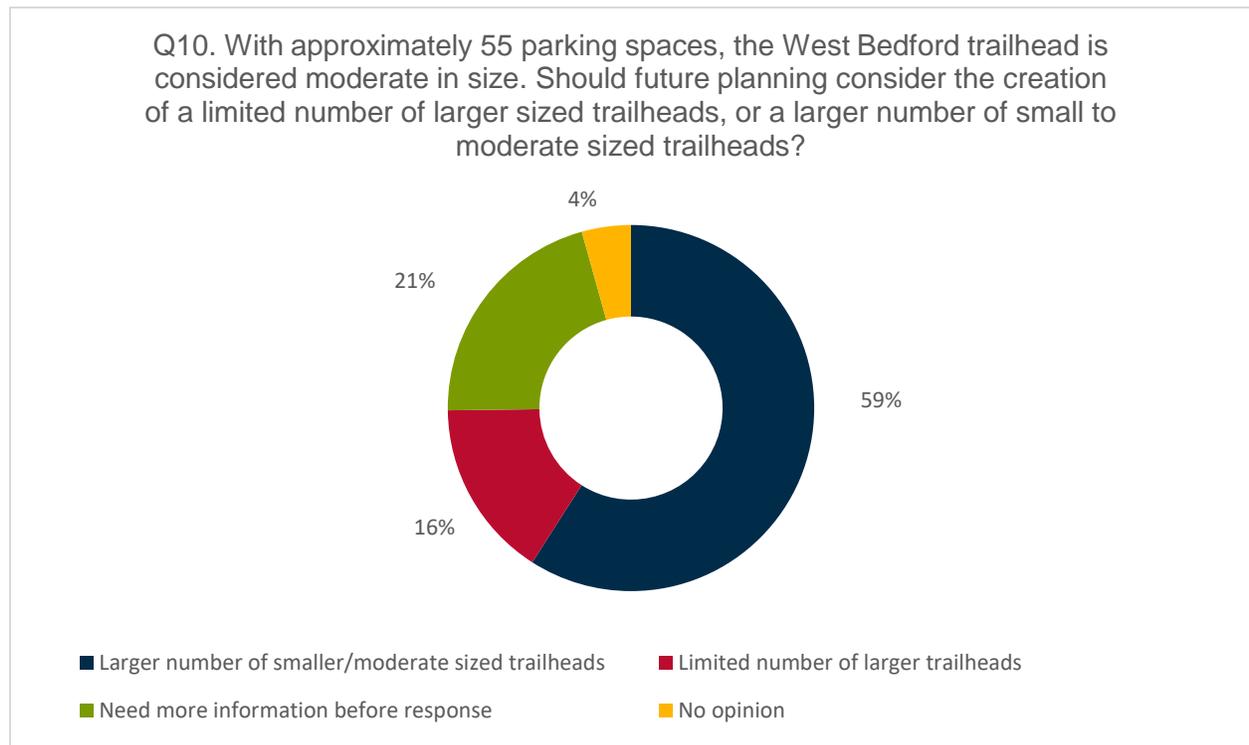
Respondents who identified that they walk into Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, were more likely to rank establishing additional trailheads as “very important” (65%) than those who travel by vehicle only (50%).

With this area's continuing rapid residential development, staff considers there is a priority need in both realizing the completion of the proposed trailhead off Brookline Drive, and that the conditions associated with other existing access points within the immediate area be monitored further by the municipality, following the trailhead's development.

Survey respondents also provided input on the broader question of the suitability of trailhead size within existing or emerging neighbourhoods that surround the proposed Park. While the trailhead development off Brookline Drive was established in an agreement well before this survey's initiation, additional public feedback on this consideration can be useful in informing future development decisions.

The majority of respondents identified having a greater number of smaller-sized trailheads was preferable to having fewer, larger trailheads. However, a sizeable cohort (21%) of respondents considered more information was needed. These responses correspond with written comments that identified where the municipality should be undertaking a broader planning exercise to review critical issues, to include public access points.

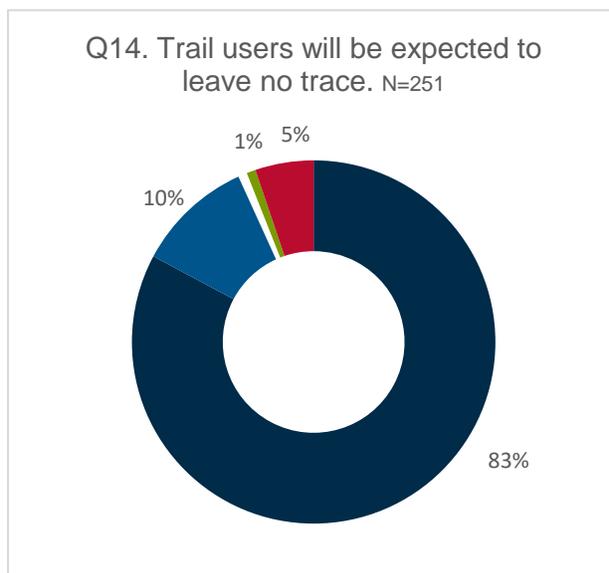
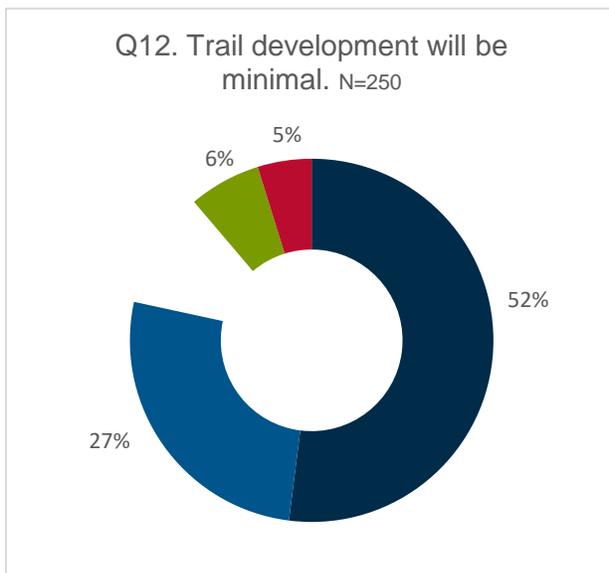
A determination on the number, size, and specific location of trailheads would consider both overall plans for the proposed Park's development, and the immediate impacts associated with local neighbourhoods, as they are developed. Public feedback on this question suggests that while there is recognized preference for having smaller but more numerous points of access, there are stated concerns if the municipality does not proceed towards this preferred outcome from an established plan.



Expectations on Trail Conditions

When asked about their expectations on future trail conditions, the majority of respondents were supportive of minimal trail development, which is generally identified with natural surfaces (as opposed to the development of gravelled surfaces), narrower trail widths, and an allowance for steeper grades. Respondents were equally predisposed to advancing user responsibility and awareness, where Park users would take necessary precautions for their own personal safety. The municipality can support a culture of “user responsibility” through effective communications.

Survey respondents were overwhelming supportive of Leave No Trace (LNT) principles in trail use, with 93% agreeing or strongly agreeing. The municipality’s role in fostering LNT includes proper signage and effective waste management at identified trailheads. There were some expressed concerns whether municipal actions would be sufficient in achieving the desired LNT outcomes. The municipality may consider working with community interest groups invested in environmental stewardship, as one means to impact on “user responsibility.”



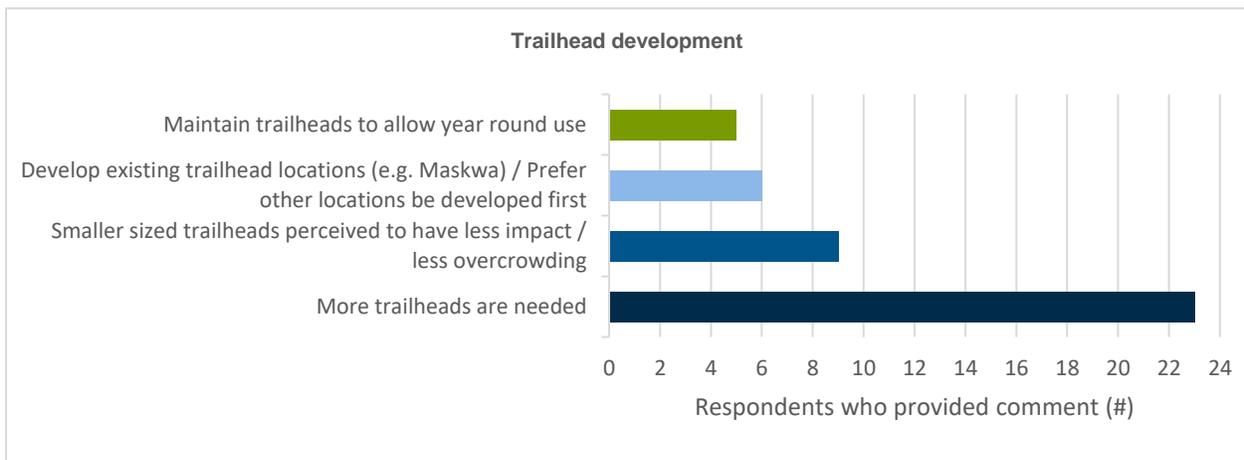
Written Comments

The survey provided multiple opportunities for respondents to write in their comments. Two sections offered respondents space to outline their additional thoughts on trailhead development and proposed trail conditions. Separate sections asked for feedback on Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park, and on municipal parks in general.

61% of respondents included at least one write-in comment. Comments can be grouped into 8 major categories. The following charts highlight where, within each of these 8 categories, there was a common theme expressed or identified from 5 or more respondents.

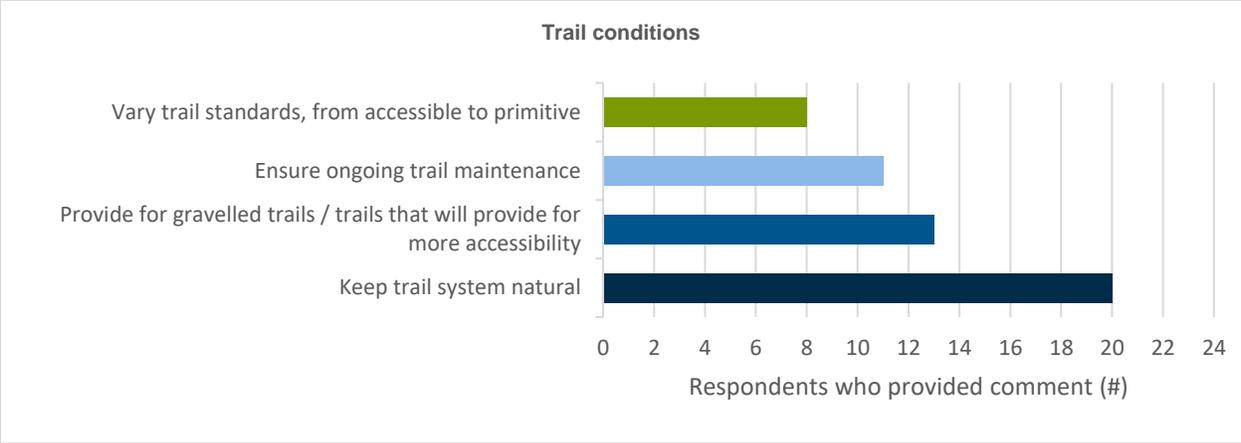
Trailhead development:

The most popular write-in comment was that more trailheads were needed. Where some respondents identified a preference for smaller-sized trailheads, this consideration was supplemented by a written comment that having a network of (small-scaled) locations would potentially result in less impact and less overcrowding at each of the potential trailhead sites. Some respondents noted their preference for seeing to the development of existing access points, or where other locations were considered as more of a priority than the West Bedford trailhead, based on current use. Commentators also identified where the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes area serves as a year-round destination, and where the municipality may consider developing trailheads that would accommodate for year-round use.



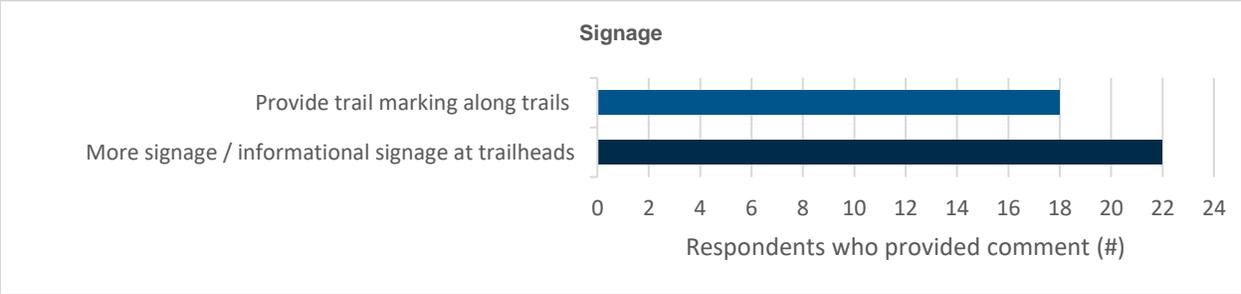
Trail conditions & development:

Comments on trail conditions presented a wide diversity of viewpoints. A subset of comments identified where the municipality should consider the provision of regularly maintained gravelled trails, to make the experience more accessible to all parties. A larger subset provided comments that identified the opposite preference / perspective to this, in that future trail developments should be kept to a minimum, and/or that any trail be done as naturally as possible.



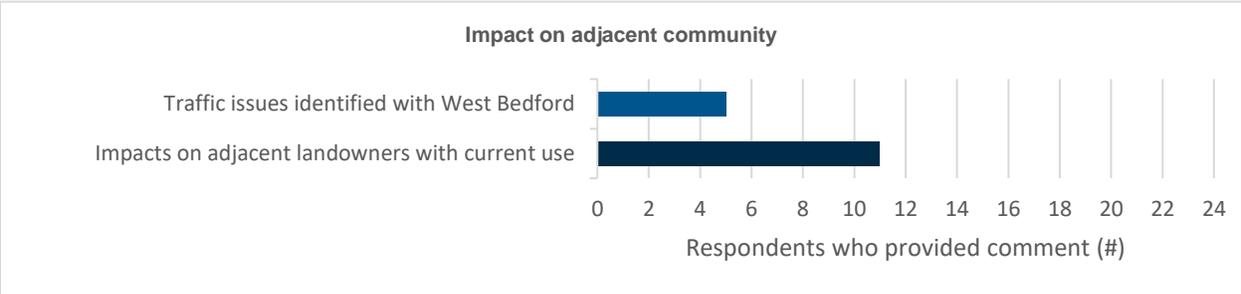
Signage:

There are expressed concerns with the lack of informational signage posted at trailheads or existing access points. The lack of management in trail marking / wayfinding, both for public safety and in reducing the environmental impacts from current users travelling across lands in whatever fashion they wished, was also identified. It was recommended that the municipality undertake a signage program that communicates accurate information, related interpretation, and safety measures, at minimum, at the beginning of any identified trails.



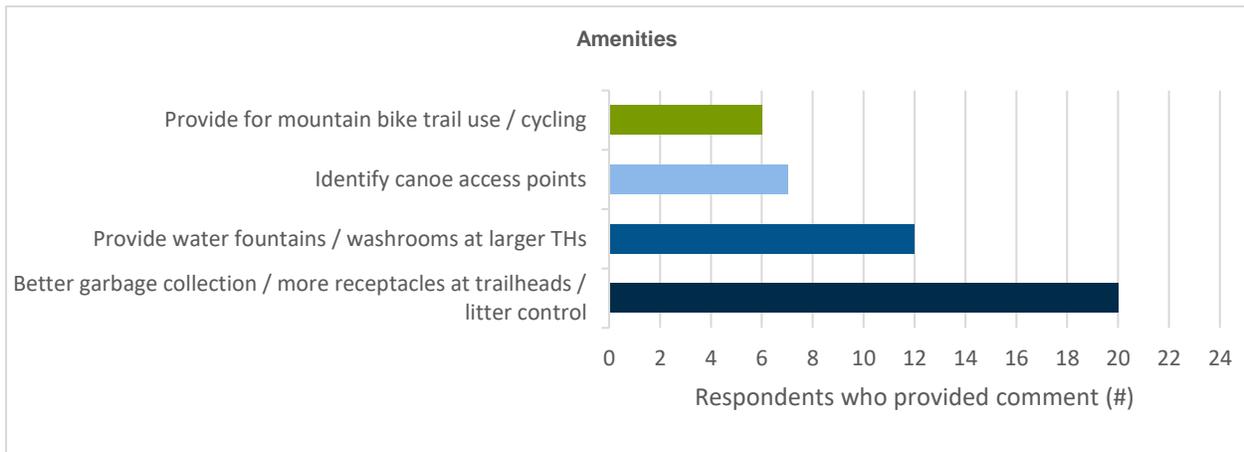
Impact on adjacent community:

Several commentators identified the negative impacts associated with the perceived overuse of current access points within West Bedford, and that the municipality should address these matters more quickly, to include having proper signage and enforcement at specified locations (e.g. at the end of Colins Road).



Amenities & Maintenance:

Regular garbage collection at trailheads / general litter control was identified as an area for improvement. Respondents also noted where proposed trailheads expected to serve many users required additional amenity, to include bike storage racks and water fountains. A few commentators saw the need for the municipality to identify canoe access points, or to provide for trails associated with mountain bikes.



Park Planning:

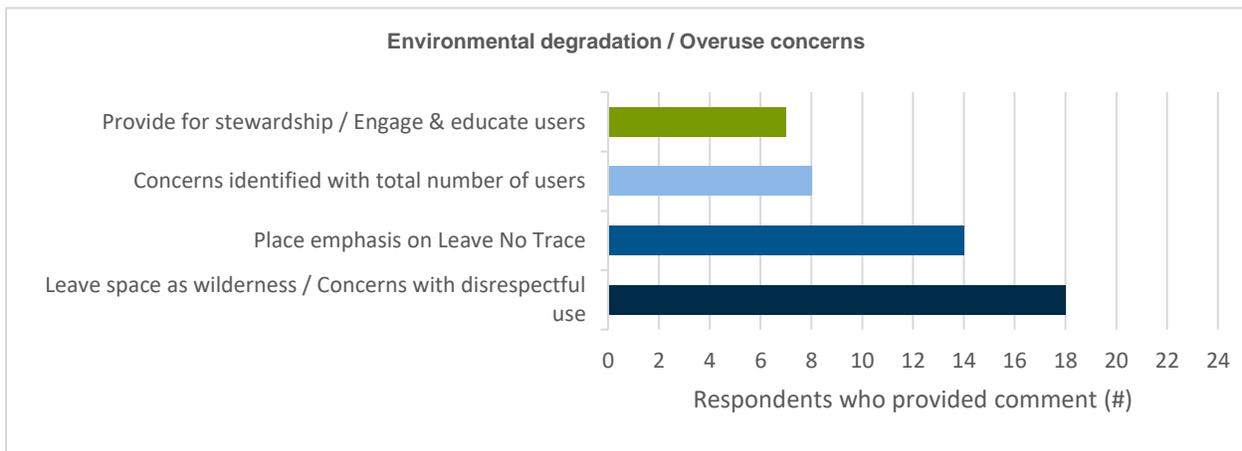
Concerns were expressed in that the municipality was proceeding without having an overall Plan in place for the proposed Regional Park. Other respondents commented where they wanted the municipality to “get on with it” and have the park’s development occur at a quicker pace. Some commentators cited the environmental impacts associated with the lack of planning, or that there was a need for more lands to be protected / be identified with the proposed park. In general: park planning comments were concerned with the municipality’s focus being insufficient and where this park’s planning and development required prioritization.



Environmental Degradation / Overuse:

There was expressed concern with how the municipality can protect the proposed Park from perceived overuse by the public. Comments focused on environmental protection ranged from “leave the area as wilderness” (including suggestions there be a more restrictive approach to public access) to “have more public involvement through environmental stewardship.”

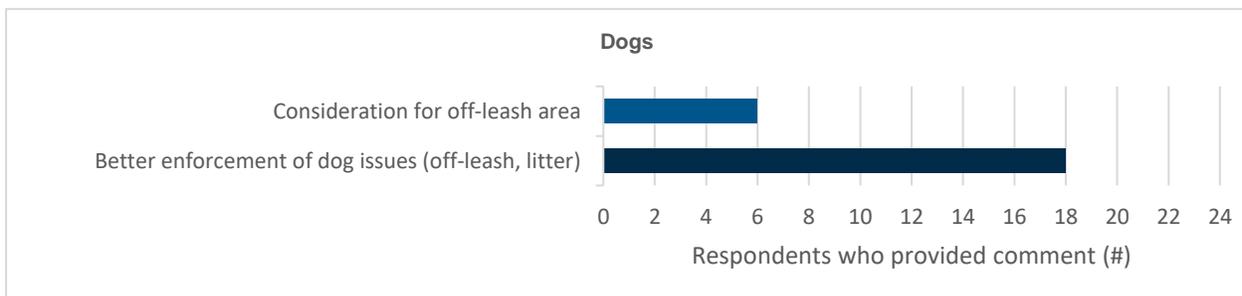
The municipality may consider how to best inform and involve the public on addressing any environmental concerns from the impacts associated with public use.



Dogs:

The topic of dogs generated conflicting perspectives. Many respondents made note of the issue of the number of dogs that were off leash, the environmental impacts associated with the number of dogs, and the lack of signage or municipal enforcement. A smaller subset of comments identified where they considered it was important for the municipality to provide a space for off leash use within the area.

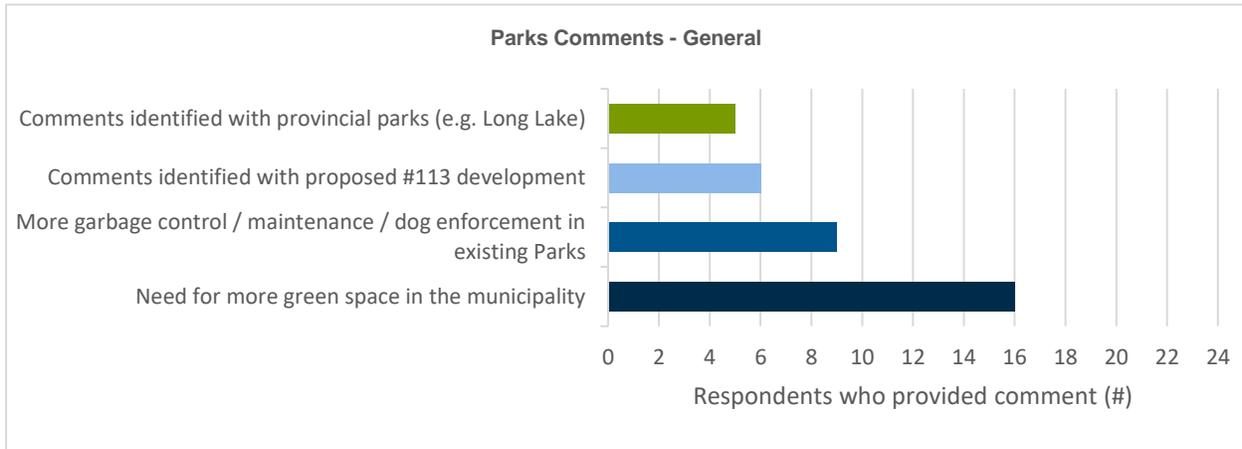
A significant percentage of respondents identified dog-walking as an activity they are already undertaking. Any provision for any future off leash use area cannot include provincial lands. While there are recognizable challenges given the geographic size identified with the public space found in the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes area, the municipality will need to consider how it can properly address the cited concerns pertaining to both dog numbers and impact.



General Comments:

Additional comments identified with the delivery of parks throughout the municipality or on matters beyond the scope of the West Bedford trailhead / Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes:

- More resources and attention focused on the operational needs of existing parks;
- More parkland than what is currently found within the municipality.



The municipality want to thank all citizens who provided their input through this engagement. In particular, the municipality appreciates where the Friends of Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes (<https://www.bluemountainfriends.ca>) encouraged citizen participation through posts on both their webpage and via Facebook.