



DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE POLICY UPDATES TO INCREASE SOCIAL HOUSING

Engagement Overview

Background

The Downtown Eastside (DTES) Plan (Mar 2014) prioritises actions and strategies related to social housing, community health and well-being, and local economic development. It identifies the urgent need for self-contained social housing at affordable rents for those who are homeless. Under the Housing Vancouver Strategy: Three-year Action Plan (Nov 2017), modest increases in density and height to facilitate the delivery of more social housing were allowed in recently approved community plans.

Since the 2014 approval of the DTES Plan, an increasing number of people experience sheltered and unsheltered homelessness and an urgent demand for supportive and shelter rate homes. The continued need and support for social housing was expressed by the community at the DTES Plan Community Fair (Jun 2019), a collaborative engagement event. The proposed policy amendments were also identified as a priority action in the DTES Plan Implementation Progress Memorandum to Council (Oct 2020). The proposed amendments were also included as a quick-start action in the Vancouver Plan Phase 1 report (Oct 2021) and Vancouver Plan Phase 2 report (July 2021) as they align with long-term City housing objectives and support partnership and funding opportunities to create more social housing within the DTES.

The proposed amendments in the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District (DEOD) sub-area 2, 3, and 4, and the Thornton Park / East False Creek (FC-1) are to:

- Enable a modest increase in density and height for projects that delivery 100% social housing through changes to existing zoning;
- Enable addition density and height beyond existing zoning to be determined based on heritage considerations, context, and urban design for projects that delivery 100% social housing through the rezoning process; and,
- Enable an increase in density for heritage conservation.

Public Engagement

To help inform the review, from September 1 to 22, 2021 a virtual public engagement process was held that included bilingual notifications, a Shape Your City webpage with information and a survey, and stakeholder workshops.

This engagement process included:

- **E-mail notification** was sent to 683 individuals and organisations through the DTES list-serv and local non-profit organisation email list inviting them to learn more on the community engagement website.
- **A bilingual Shape Your City website and survey.** A broad public engagement was undertaken over a 3 week period through an online survey on the City's website with hardcopies available upon request. The information webpages were viewed 152 times with 27 completed surveys.
- **3 workshops** with 8 community organisations including representatives from the former Local Area Planning Process (LAPP), business improvement associations, government and non-profit housing providers, and DTES service providers.

Summary of Feedback

Online Survey results

An online survey was available on the Shape Your City webpage from Sept 1 to 22, 2021, which received a total of 27 responses. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposed amendments and an open ended question gave respondents the opportunity to provide more detailed feedback.

Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District (sub-areas 2, 3, and 4)

There was general agreement to the proposed amendment in the DEOD for projects that delivered 100% social housing:

- **52%** generally agreed while **42%** generally disagreed with increasing density and height under zoning.
- **55%** generally agreed while **37%** generally disagreed with determining density and height based on heritage considerations, context, and urban design through the rezoning process.

There were 15 open ended responses with mixed comments of support and non-support. Some supported more social housing noting the need for a higher percentage of units rented at welfare rate, and more housing to accommodate families, while other respondents had concerns about concentrating and adding more social housing to the DTES and straining existing resources. Other feedback included more emphasis on creating social housing outside of the DTES, rehabilitating existing buildings, and consideration of mixed income buildings and market housing development to support local business.

Thornton Park / East False Creek (FC-1)

There was general agreement to the proposed amendment in the Thornton Park / East False Creek for projects that delivered 100% social housing:

- **52%** generally agreed while **41%** generally disagreed with increasing density and height under zoning.
- **59%** generally agreed while **37%** generally disagreed with determining density and height based on heritage considerations, context, and urban design through the rezoning process.

There were 12 open ended responses with mixed comments of support and non-support for the proposed changes. Similar to the responses above; some supported more social housing higher amount of units rented at welfare rate, more housing to accommodate families, as well as increased heights to allow for more housing. Other respondents expressed concern with concentrating more height and density in the DTES, preferring social housing to be built across the city and a desire to see a greater mix of housing types for a range of incomes. Other feedback included the need for more services, housing to accommodate workers from the new St. Paul's hospital and biotech area, and lack of green space.

For a full summary of the survey results, please see Appendix A: Questionnaire.

Summary of Feedback

Virtual Stakeholder Meeting results

Staff hosted three virtual Webex workshops (September 9, 14 and 15, 2021) to provide an overview of the proposed amendments, respond to questions, and seek community feedback from community organisations. Participants included representatives from the former Local Area Planning Process (LAPP), business improvement associations, government and non-profit housing providers, and DTES service provider.

The sessions were facilitated by DTES Planning and Housing staff, and provided an overview of the proposed amendments, a question period and solicited feedback. Each workshop was an hour long session with the following agenda:

- 15 minute staff presentation
- 20 minute for questions and clarification
- 20 minutes of broad discussions

The following is a summary of the three sessions.

Workshop One: Former Local Area Planning Process committee members

In general, there was support for the proposed policy changes due to the need for more social housing in the area. There were questions about the definition of social housing, along with a discussion of the importance of mixed-income buildings with more moderate-income earners to support local businesses. There were also concerns expressed about the concentration of social housing within the area, noting challenges faced by businesses, and concerns generally expressed about the state of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings in the area. There was agreement that the proposed policy changes potentially being used to replace SRO buildings with new self-contained social housing was a positive step.

It was also noted that housing is often talked about in isolation of services for low-income people or those experiencing homelessness. Many services are concentrated in the DTES and it was stated these services should be more spread out across the city, so that residents who have moved outside of the DTES do not have to travel back for services. In addition, there was a general discussion of the need for more types of housing citywide, from social housing to market rental housing, and support for policies to enable that housing.

Workshop Two: Social Housing providers

In general, there was support for enabling more height and density under current zoning for social housing within the proposed policy areas, and for a shorter development process overall. Attendees had questions on the details of the proposed changes. They also discussed the social housing definition, noting that while it helps achieve the goal of deeper affordability, it also lowers the rent mix and can have a real impact on the financial viability of projects. It was also noted that some residents of the DTES would like to move outside the neighbourhood, but housing options and services are limited. There was general support for more policies to enable social housing outside of the DTES neighbourhood.

Summary of Feedback

The general challenge of developing social housing projects was discussed as well. Often multiple funding sources are needed for projects to be viable, and these funding sources can change depending on the government in power. The uncertain and changing costs of construction have also made the financial viability of projects a continuous challenge, especially over the past year or so. There was general interest in developing more mass timber projects, though it was noted that the economics are currently challenging and a hope that cost efficiencies will improve as the industry adapts and the material use becomes more common. Overall, it was strongly agreed that any changes that make social housing development more certain and the processing of applications faster would be positive for the viability of projects.

Workshop Three: Non-profit Service providers

In general, there was support for more social housing in the DTES but not for the current definition of social housing. There was an interest in a change to the definition to require 100% shelter rate housing in order to push governments and non-profits to do more. There was concern that units renting closer to market are too expensive, and that this policy change could be a precedent for more change in other zoning districts in the area.

For a full summary of discussion notes, please see Appendix B: Stakeholder Workshop Notes.

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Question 1

For 100% social housing, the proposed increases in density and height under zoning in the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District (sub areas 2, 3, 4) would allow for a maximum of 5.5 Floor Space Ratio and 30.5 m (100 ft.) – approximately 9 storeys – without a rezoning, to speed up the delivery and increase the amount of social housing.

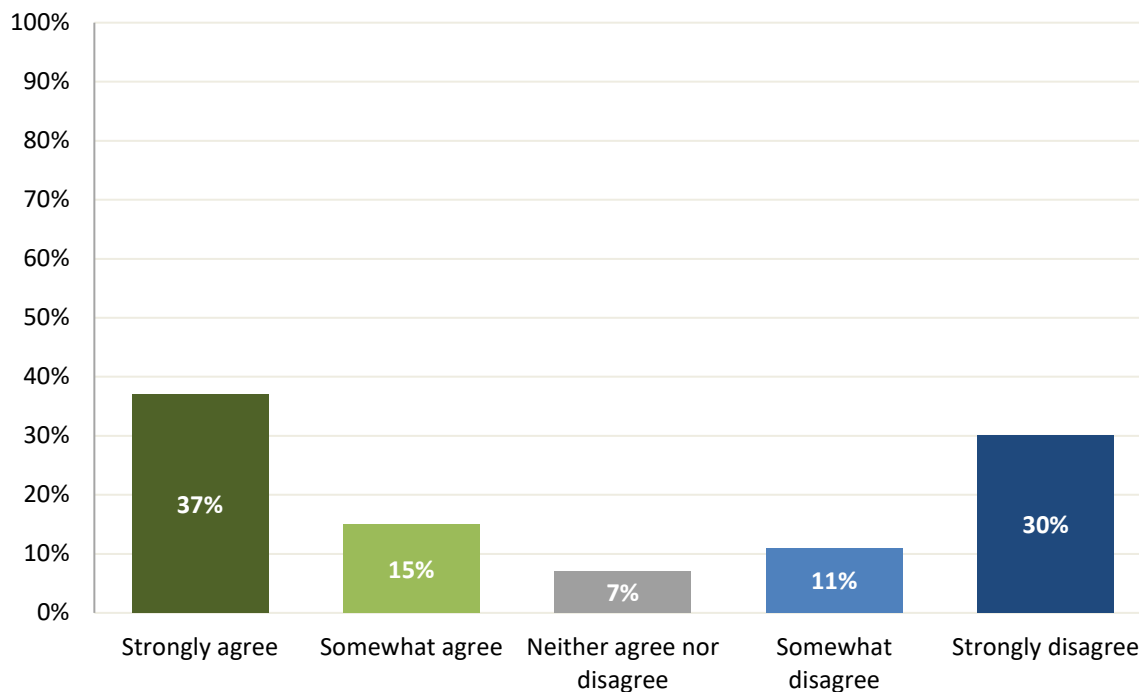
Would you agree or disagree with this change?

Snapshot

- More than half (52 percent) of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed increase in density and height under zoning in the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District, with over two fifths (42 percent) somewhat or strongly disagreeing.

Results

Total respondents (27)



Question 2

The proposed changes to the rezoning policy for the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District (sub areas 2, 3, 4) would allow additional density and height to be considered on a case-by-case basis for 100% social housing, depending on heritage considerations, site context, e.g. site size, location, adjacent buildings, neighbourhood, etc.), urban design performance, and detailed proposal review for 100% social housing.

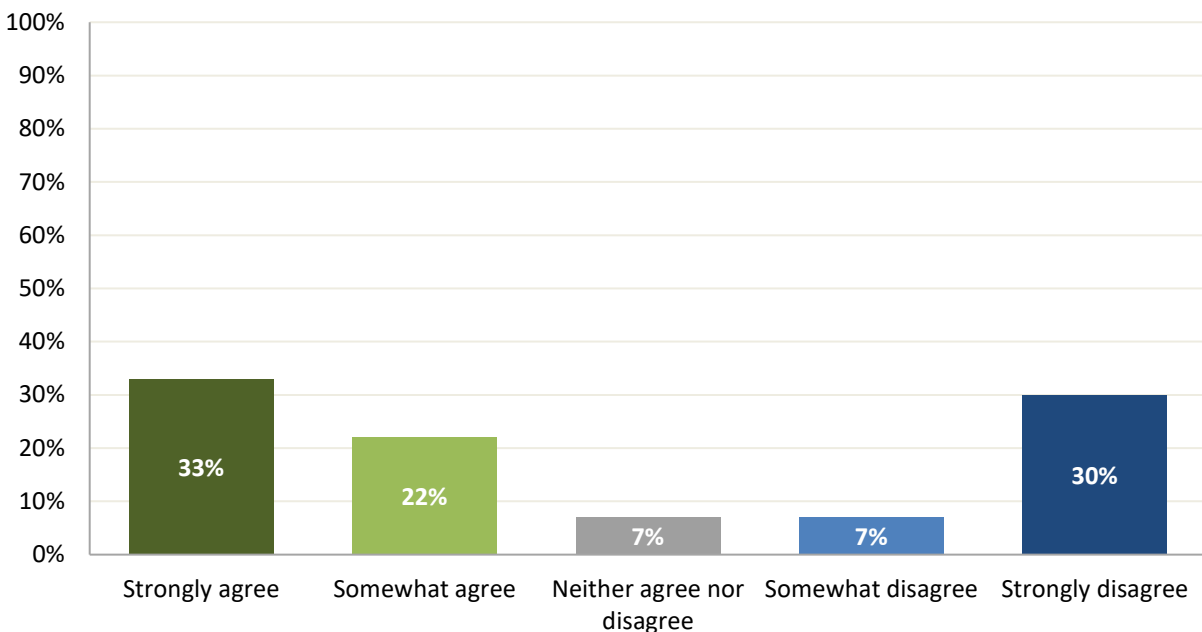
Would you agree or disagree with this change?

Snapshot

- More than half (55 percent) of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes to the rezoning policy for the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District, with over a third (37 percent) somewhat or strongly disagreeing.

Results

Total respondents (27 responses)



Question 3

Is there anything else you want to tell us about the proposed zoning and rezoning policy changes in the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District (sub areas 2, 3, 4)?

Comments

"I would like to see more height allowed so that we could get more housing."

"The higher the building are the more ghetto will be 20 year late masses of poor destroy the building I know by being a landlord not a bureaucrat"

"I have concerns about looking at increasing density for 100% social housing only in the DTES, as such recommendations are not being made in the other parts of the city. Multiple buildings with 9 floors of subsidized housing runs the serious risk of concentrating and further entrenching poverty in the DTES, acting to divide the city and further strain the existing resources in the DTES community. There should be consideration made to ensure 100% subsidized housing is spread through the city, and actually in keeping with more modern learnings, mixed income buildings more available through the city, maybe even in the DTES."

"We spent years working on these zoning guidelines. There is a basis for the reasoning. I am not in favour of a little increase here, a little increase there. City planners and developers tie more height and higher density to Social Housing thinking that will work. The DTES Local Area Plan is quite clear about height restrictions and FSR. People are worth it."

"I think these policies should apply to all development, not just those which are 100% social housing. We need more housing. Period. Enable more development of ALL types of housing."

"It is time to focus on other neighbourhoods to allow for social housing, DEOD is doing what it can, but the burden has to be divided fairly."

"There needs to be more market housing development in the area in order to rejuvenate and support the commercial and local businesses. Do not continue to create a ghetto."

"There should be less social housing in the DTES as the city has already saturated the area and is continuing to create a ghetto."

"Why is this one area being made into Vancouver's dumping ground for the poop and drug addicted? All this plan provides is more density of crap housing."

"Social housing is not defined. If we are talking welfare rate housing I would strongly agree with questions 1 & 2."

"Before considering density and height increases, existing building stock should be refurbished and or repurposed rather than demolished. This would open a significant amount of potential social housing space and be more in harmony with the existing built environment."

"Not only 100% social housing, but also a large percentage (>50%) should be welfare rate. Further, there needs to be housing available for families, suites with 2-4 bedrooms, so that families can stay in the neighbourhood and also be properly housed."

"No more housing in DTES. You can hardly use the sidewalk on East Hastings. Clear the streets, please."

"Allow laneway homes."

"No."

Question 4

For 100% social housing, the proposed increases in density under zoning in the Thornton Park / East False Creek (FC-1) would allow for a maximum of 6.0 FSR – without a rezoning, to speed up the delivery and increase the amount of social housing.

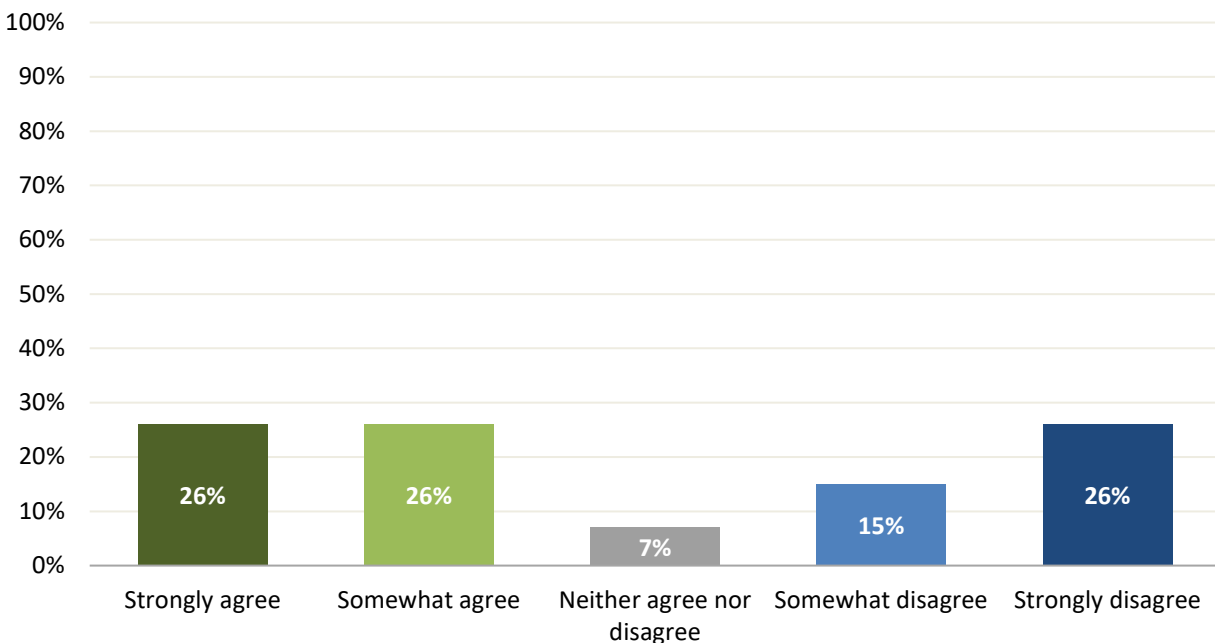
Would you agree or disagree with this change?

Snapshot

- More than half (52 percent) of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed increase in density and height under zoning in the Thornton Park / East False Creek (FC-1) with over two fifths (41 percent) somewhat or strongly disagreeing.

Results

Total respondents (27 responses)



Question 5

The new rezoning policy in the Thornton Park / East False Creek District (FC-1), would allow additional height and density based on heritage considerations, context and urban design performance to accommodate more social housing.

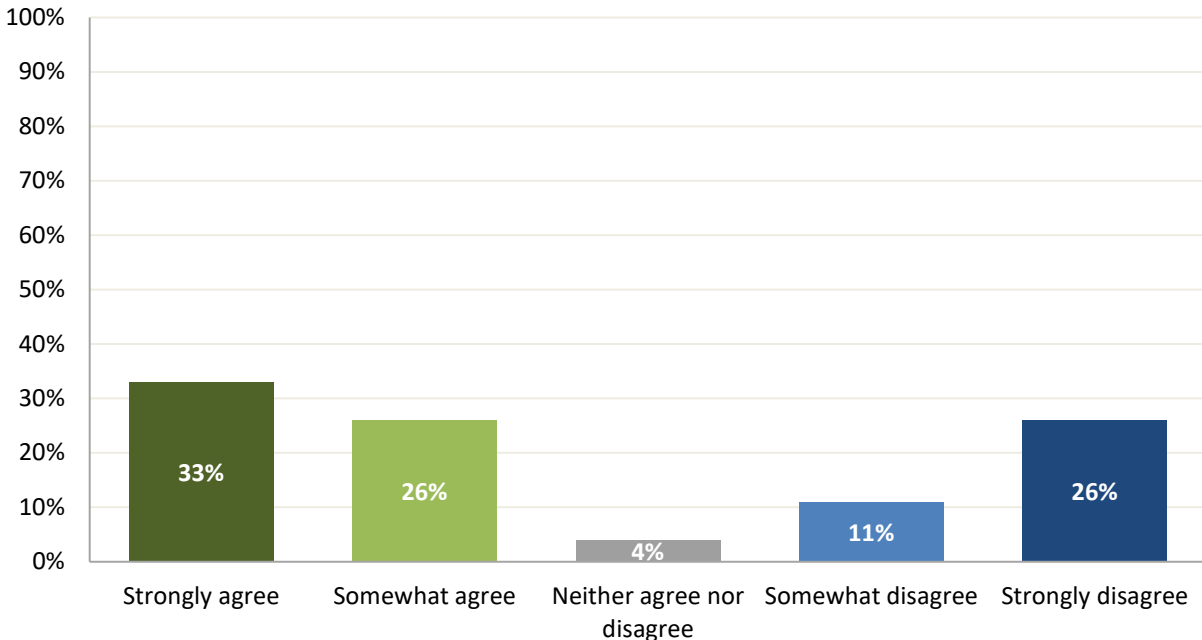
Would you agree or disagree with this change?

Snapshot

- Almost two thirds (59 percent) of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes to the rezoning policy in the Thornton Park / East False Creek District (FC-1), with more than a third (37 percent) somewhat or strongly disagreeing.

Results

Total respondents (27 responses)



Question 6

Is there anything else you want to tell us about the proposed zoning and rezoning policy changes in the Thornton Park / East False Creek District (FC-1)?

Comments

“Not only 100% social housing, but also a large percentage (>50%) should be welfare rate. Further, there needs to be housing available for families, suites with 2-4 bedrooms, so that families can stay in the neighbourhood and also be properly housed.”

“Social housing is not defined. If we are talking welfare rate housing I would strongly agree with questions 5 & 6.”

“I would like to see more height allowed so that we could get more housing.”

“There is already too much height and density in this area. Spread it around the lower mainland.”

“This zoning is right next to the new St. Paul's. Why pack Station Street with building after building of 100% social housing when St. Paul's is going to be such an opportunity to attract knowledge workers and world-class biotech to the city and the land that will eventually be cleared from the viaduct blocks will be attractive places to be? The new offices to be built around the hospital will not be as attractive if, on the adjacent block, you are maintaining the challenges of a concentrated amount of adults that have mental health, addiction, and trauma needs and rely on government programs and the informal economy to make it month by month. Think about Baltimore and John's Hopkins, where staff only agree to drive into the hospital and after 5 request escorts to their car.

My issue is not having some 100% social housing units. The family housing mid-block of Station seems like it has the potential to be a positive thing for the community. I DO take a big issue with setting the stage for ALL OF THE BLOCK to be social housing.

To be clear, Portland HS is NOT a positive thing for others living in the community and it is so broken as to be irretrievable. As someone who lives here today, I feel very miffed that I pay thousands in property taxes, having seen a 23% increase in a year where I think the average increase in the city was 7%, and yet I have to deal with walking past blatant drug deals almost every day, men who mutter insults at me, seeing men women and children who are in serious need of more resources and help, and having had a resident's bodyguard dog go after my dog. This plus then on top there is feeling let down by the city due to the persistent squatting issues.

Concentrating poverty does not work. I am all for SOME social housing. I am EVEN MORE for mixing that with the middle-income housing that you have in the plan, though that seems to be going to "better" parts of town. The right answer is to spread the adults that need social support throughout the city in a less concentrated way. In this way, we all have a chance to thrive and feel like we can sit out in our local park in the sun and read without looking over our back, and they have outs from a lot of the problems that come from living in concentrated poverty.”

“Concerned that there would end up being a wall of the tallest towers. How do we regulate this if it's 'case-by-case'? Is that height too high for our emergency response capability?”

“I would like your proposal to limit the FSRs dedicated to 100% social housing on each block. If some society got their first, well, there are MANY OTHER BLOCKS IN THIS CITY that can share the pain of encouraging people to heal and live fulfilling lives. Just something to think about.”

“I think these policies should apply to all development, not just those which are 100% social housing. We need more housing. Period. Enable more development of ALL types of housing.”

“Similar to above reasons. Additionally, there is a need to ensure more green space to be factored into both these areas, as there is disproportionately less green space available for children and families to access, which in turn are impacting their health.”

“I’ll await the design proposals before taking a position on density increases.”

“because is a flood area and water is going to raise but developers do like new orleans sell swamp and walk away bribe the politicians in power easily”

“No.”

Demographic Question 1

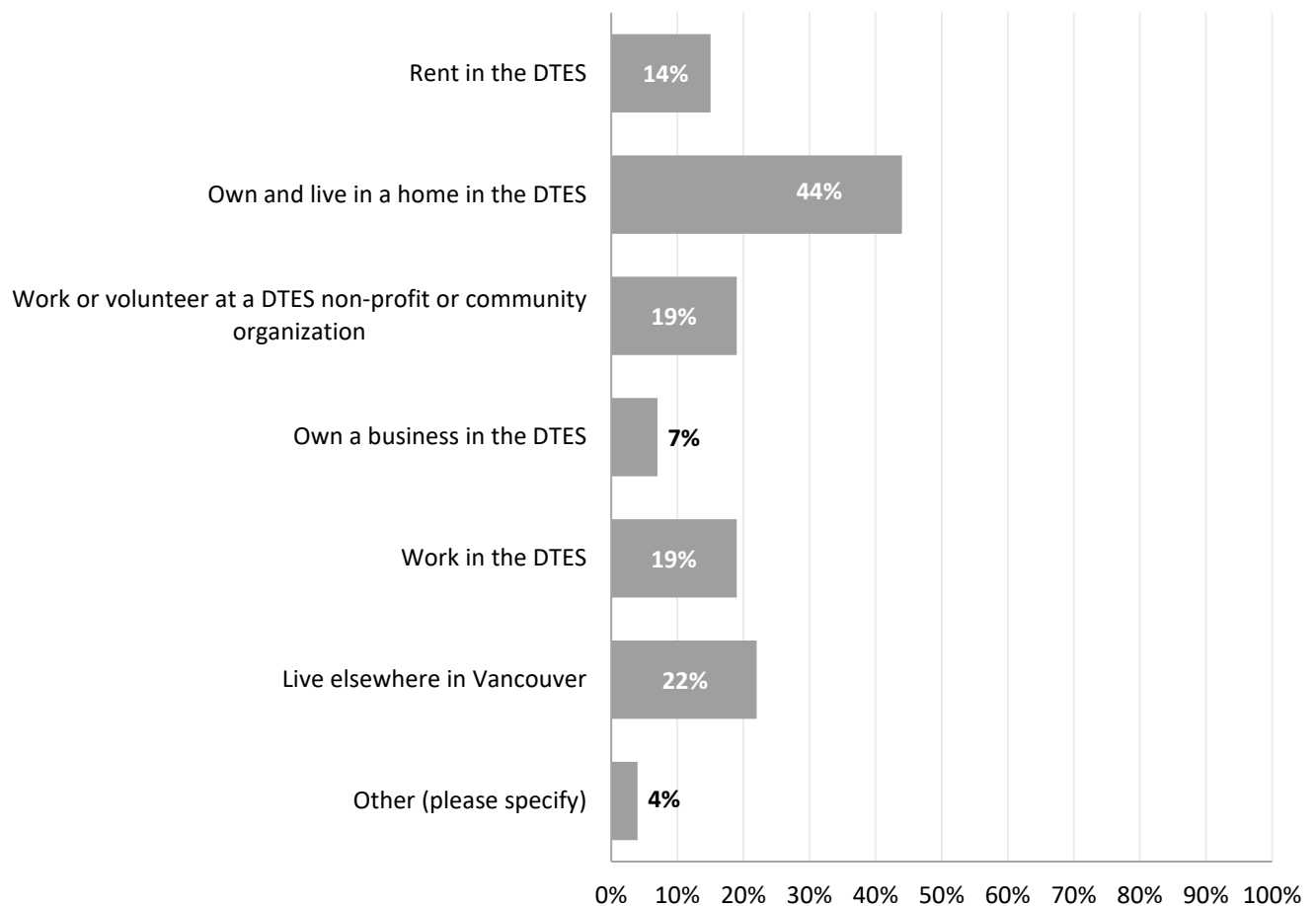
What is your connection to the Downtown Eastside?

Snapshot

- More than half (51 percent) of respondents owned a home and/or business in the DTES
- Less than one fifth (14 percent) of respondents rented in the DTES
- Almost a quarter of respondents (22 percent) lived elsewhere in Vancouver

Results

Total respondents (27)



Demographic Question 2

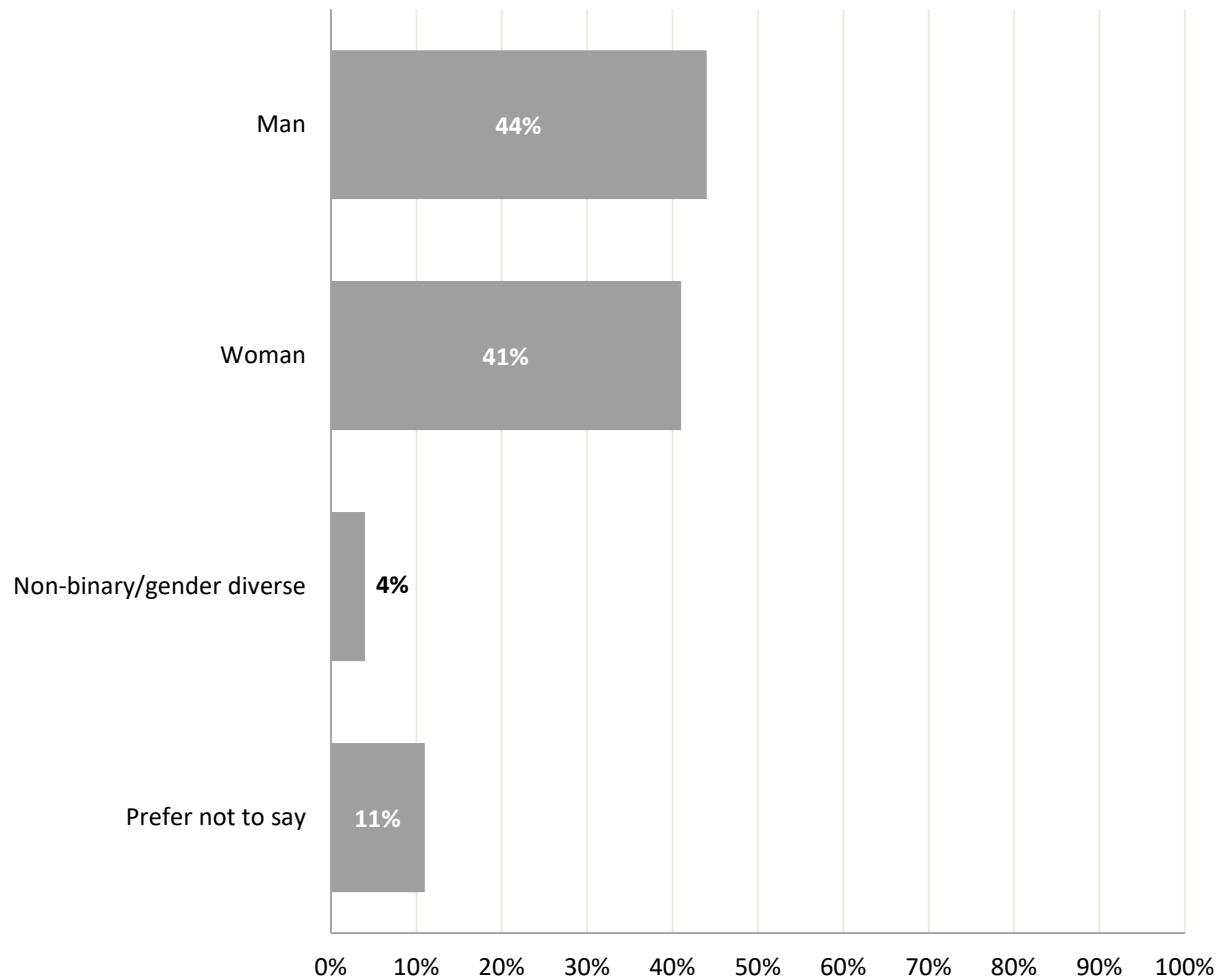
How would you describe your gender identity?

Snapshot

- More respondents identified as men (44 percent) than women (41 percent)

Results

Total respondents (27 responses)



Demographic Question 3

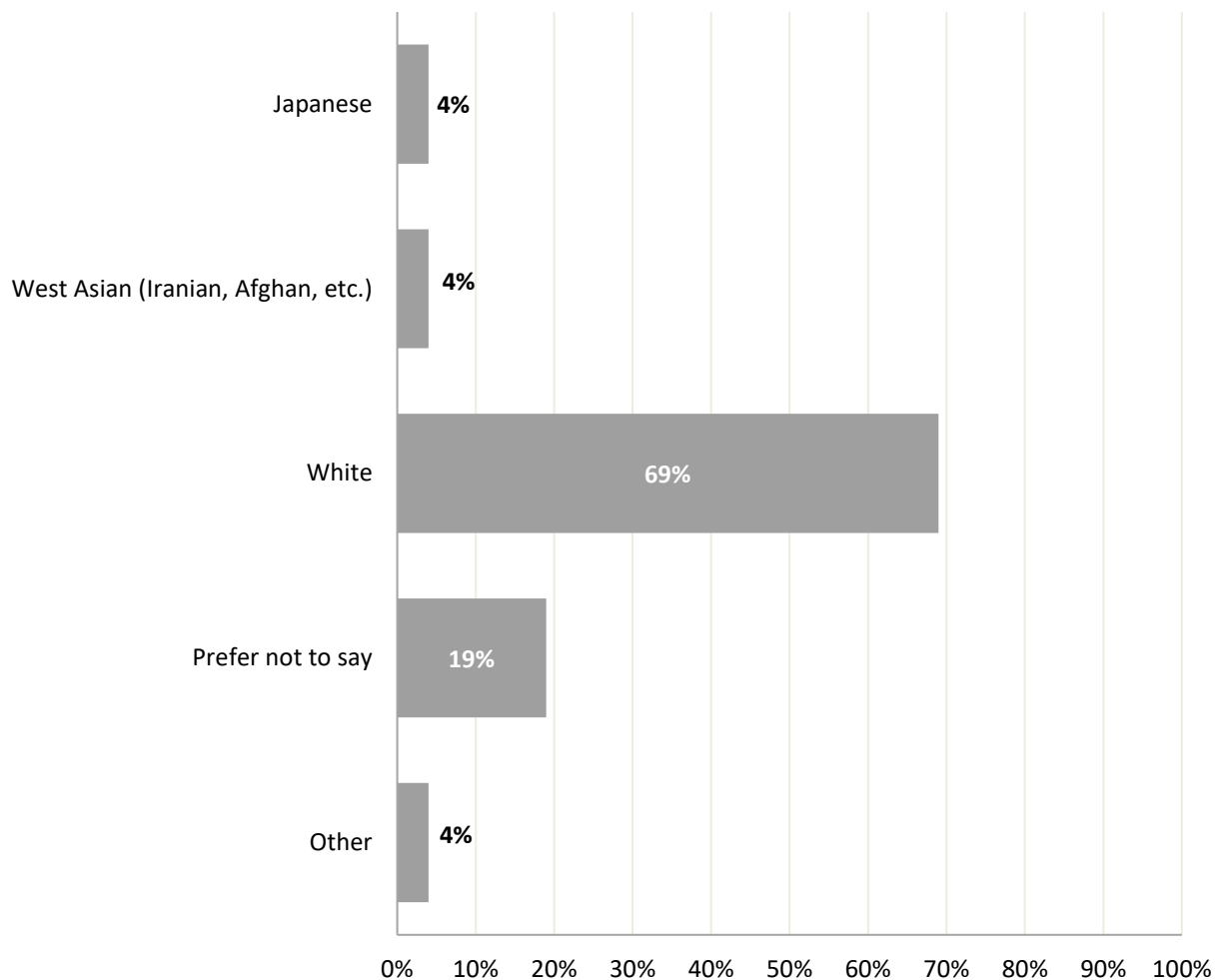
How would you describe your ethno-cultural / racial identity? (Check all that apply)

Snapshot

- More than two thirds (69 percent) of respondents identified as White, and almost one fifth (19 percent) prefer not to say

Results

Total respondents (26 responses)



Demographic Question 4

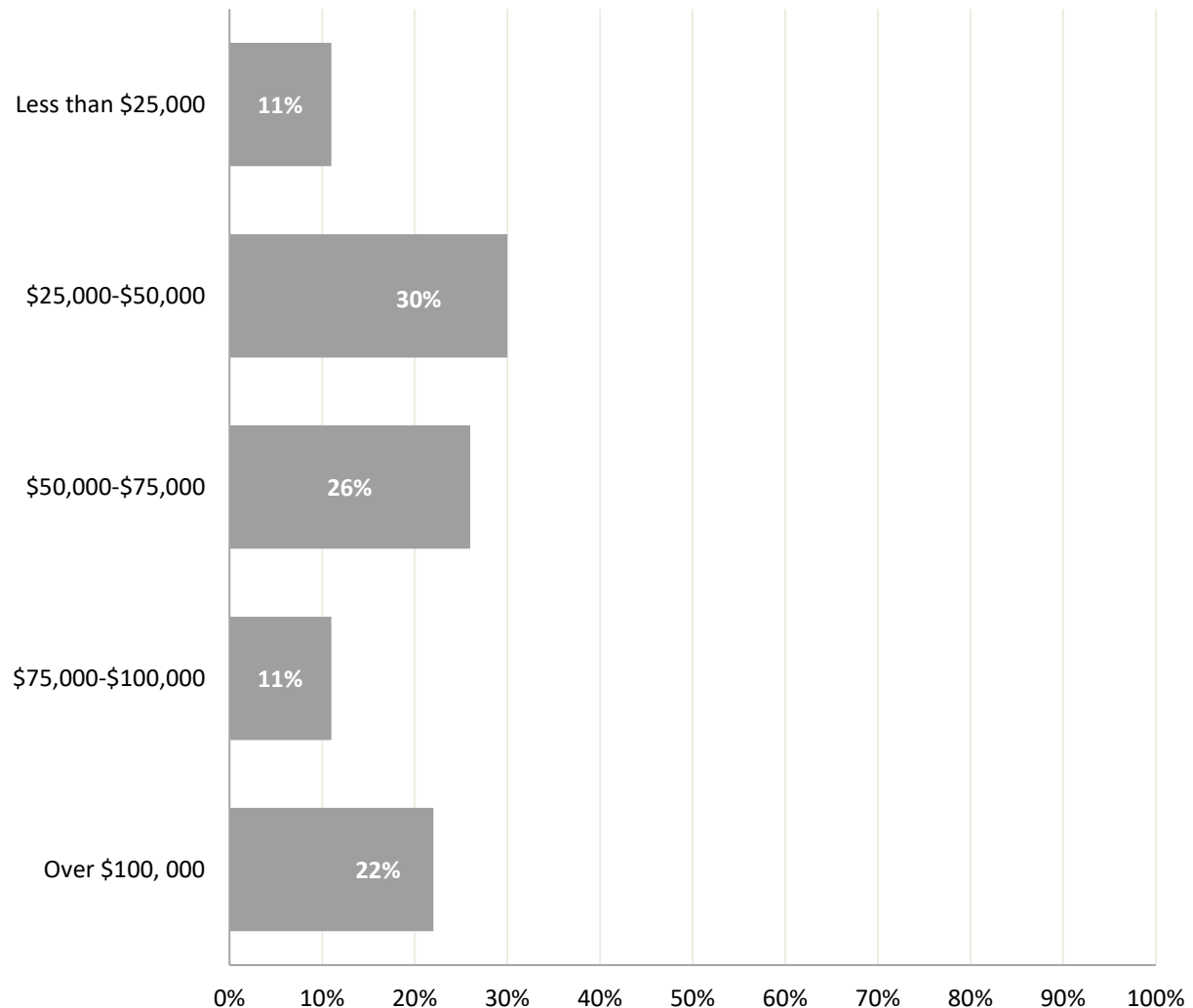
Which category best describes your total household income (before taxes)?

Snapshot

- More than a third (33 percent) of respondents earned over \$75,000, while over two thirds (41 percent) earned less than \$50,000

Results

Total respondents (27 responses)



Questionnaire Methodology

As respondents are self-selected, the results are an indication of general sentiment rather than a statistically significant test of responses. The responses to the quantitative questions are summarised as percentages and charts. As a result of rounding, percentages may not necessarily add up to 100%. Respondents could also provide additional feedback through open ended questions.

Appendix B: Stakeholder Workshops Notes

Workshop #1: Former Local Area Planning Process committee **September 9, 2021**

Attendees: Strathcona Residents Association, Carnegie Community Centre – Seniors, Gastown Business Improvement Association

Summary of Comments:

- Clarification of whether the intent is to build social housing close to the new St. Paul's Hospital
- No question of need, but concerns about social housing definition and desire for a greater mix of income
- Concern with the amount and concentration of social housing within a single area, noting challenges faced by businesses
- Would like to encourage mixed-use developments that include market housing
- Concerns expressed about single room occupancy buildings
- Note that social housing is dependent on senior government funding, and questioned whether this is a concern.
- Housing is often talked about in isolation. Many services are concentrated in the DTES. Services should be spread across the city outside of the DTES, e.g. residents who have moved outside of the DTES but need to travel to the DTES to access services.
- Would like to see a continuum of housing, not just social and market housing. Something in between these need to be developed. Policy needed to bridge the gap.
- Capacity of non-profits is struggling to keep up with delivering social housing.
- Need for programs/policies to help transition into other forms of housing from social housing.

Workshop #2: Housing Providers | Sept 14, 2021

Attendees: BC Housing, Vancouver Native Housing Society, Affordable Housing Societies

Summary of Comments:

- Clarification on details of proposed changes, including community amenity contributions, commercial/retail requirements, and parking requirements
- DTES social housing definition of achieves the City's housing goal, but lower rent mixes impacts financial viability of projects and most require government funding
- Some DTES residents want to move else where but options and services are limited. Suggestion to relax the SRA by-law to help support people choosing to live elsewhere
- General support, but questions raised about financial analysis in relation to feasibility of materials and proposed heights, as well as encouraging mass timber construction
- Building wood frame up to 6 storeys is economically viable, but 10-12 plus storeys is needed for concrete/steel construction for project viability, noting construction costs change frequently and vary greatly, e.g. COVID-related impacts to cost and supply
- Multiple funding sources needed for social housing projects to be viable, noting that funding can change with governments
- BC Housing have some mass timber projects, but economics are challenging and financial viability is a key fact. Hoping cost efficiencies will improve as industry adapts and mass timber construction becomes more common
- Support for development process as quicker process, noting better communication between City departments within the development process would help with efficiency
- All agree that changes that makes regulations more certain and the processing of permits faster would be positive to the viability of projects
- All departments need to work towards a common vision of reducing impacts to non-market applications such as processing permits quicker like the SHORT process

Workshop #3: Non-profit Service Providers | Sept 15, 2021

Attendees: SRO Collaborative Society, WePress Collective/Powell Street Festival Society

Summary of Comments:

- Why don't we say "they need to reach a deeper level of affordability (100% welfare rate)?"
- General support for more social housing, but not in favour of the definition of social housing. The definition needs to be updated to fit the needs of the DTES. The housing mix is wrong
- Would like to see you push the government and non-profits to do more
- The welfare tenants are slowly being replaced. It takes a specific type of person to live in a mixed development without being evicted
- We need more of the type of housing that is on the photo of the first slide
- The price of the 60/40 units are very expensive. They are only below-market
- My feedback is "not convinced"
- I'm afraid this change can trigger (be a precedent of) other changes in other zoning districts.
- We worry about the number of replaced units whenever a development comes