

# South Quad Open Space Planning Study

## What We Heard Report

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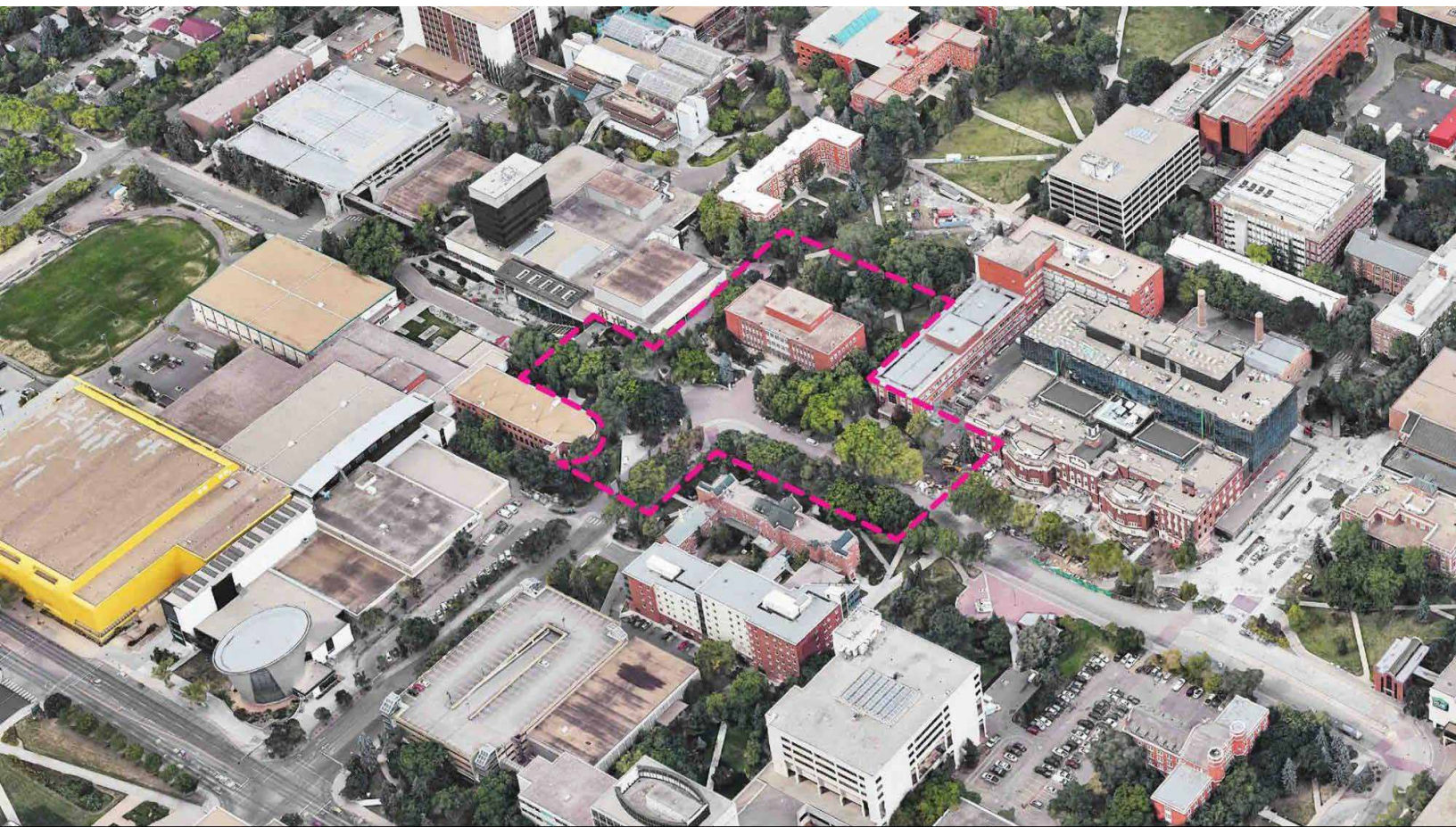
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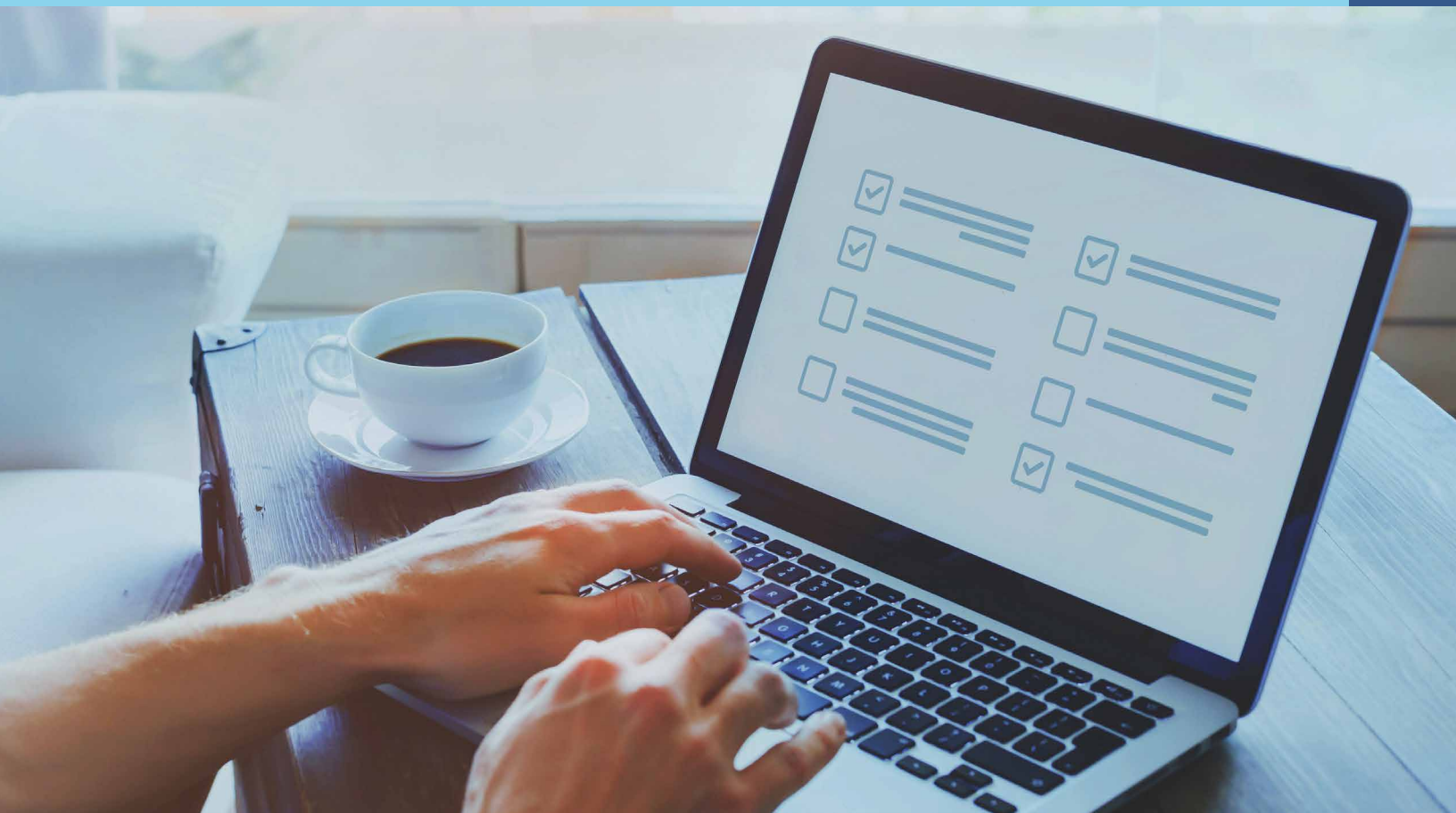


## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The South Quad Open Space Planning Study is an exciting initiative of the University of Alberta aimed at transforming a key location on North Campus into a vibrant, inclusive and dynamic outdoor space that reflects the university's diverse culture and history.

The proposed redevelopment area will incorporate the current Celebration Plaza and adjacent open spaces near the intersection of 114 Street and 89 Avenue Students' Boulevard, as well as the south end of Main Quad. The south side of Quad is currently occupied by the Administration Building, which is nearing the end of its lifespan and has been identified for removal. This planning study asks the university community to consider the future potential of the south side of Quad without the Administration Building, including its purpose, meaning and functions.





## ENGAGEMENT

A two-round engagement process was designed to create opportunities for the campus community—students, faculty/staff and alumni—to learn about the planning study objectives and scope and provide input to inform the development of conceptual designs.

Engagement took place in two phases:

**Round 1 (January 2025)** – to gather input to inform the vision for and future programming of the South Quad outdoor space

**Round 2 (April 2025)** – to gather input on two draft concept options to inform a future refined concept

This document reports on both rounds of engagement.

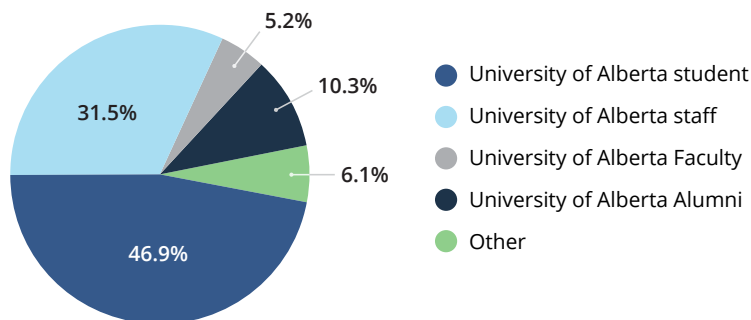
## HOW WE ENGAGED

Similar engagement activities took place in each phase as outlined below:

### ROUND 1

#### Online Survey

An online survey was available on the project webpage on the University of Alberta website from January 16 to 27, 2025. There were 216 responses to the survey.



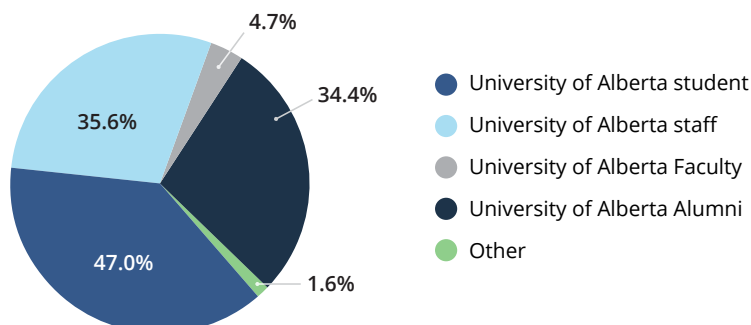
#### Pop-up Engagement

A pop-up event was held at the Student's Union Building (SUB) on January 22, 2025, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Display panels explained the project and prompted feedback. Participants were invited to leave comments and drawings to share their vision for the future site, as well as programming ideas. Nearly 200 comments were received along with 23 drawings.

### ROUND 2

#### Online Survey

An online survey was available on the project webpage on the University of Alberta website from March 25 to April 8, 2025. There were 253 responses to the survey.



## Pop-up Engagement

A pop-up event was held on Wednesday, April 2, 2025, at the Student's Union Building (SUB) from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and at the Central Academic Building (CAB) from 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. Display panels explained the planning study and the concept options and prompted participants to provide feedback. Nearly 120 comments were received.

## HOW WE COMMUNICATED

To create awareness for the project and the engagement opportunities, the following communication tools and tactics were used during each round:

### Project webpage

A webpage on the university's website provided a project overview and details of the engagement opportunities.

### University communications

Project information and links to the project survey were shared via the following university communications tools: YouAlberta newsletter, The Quad newsletter, email digests and Events Hub page.

### Project postcard

500 postcards were distributed during the Round 1 pop-up engagement event encouraging participation in the online survey and 1000 postcards were distributed during Round 2.

### Outdoor signs

Ten A-frame signs and ten lawn signs were placed on the project site, as well as elsewhere on campus.

# WHAT WE HEARD

The following provides a summary of what we heard during each round of engagement.

## ROUND 1

### 1. What word or feeling comes to mind when you experience the South Quad open space in its current state?

Respondents provided both positive and negative feelings about the current state of South Quad.

#### Positive

- Historical/traditional
- Natural beauty
- Peaceful/calming
- Functional thoroughfare

#### Negative

- Boring/average/bland
- Underutilized
- Empty
- Uninviting
- Disjointed
- Dated
- Busy/loud/congested
- Vehicle-oriented

### 2. How do you want to feel when you spend time in the new South Quad open space? (e.g., relaxed, inspired, energized, connected)

**Relaxation and Comfort** - Respondents indicate a desire for a calm and peaceful space that promotes relaxation; a serene atmosphere where people feel at ease and sheltered from the busyness and chaos of the campus. Respondents also desire physical comfort noting the need for protection from noise and weather.

**Inspiration and Energy** - Also important to respondents is a dynamic, vibrant space that inspires, motivates and encourages learning, creativity and engagement.

**Meaningful Connections** - A sense of connection is desired; emotionally to the university's history and tradition, to traditional lands and nature, and the campus community, as well as physically to other areas on campus. The design should foster interaction and social engagement. It should be more than a walkway, rather a place to stay and experience campus life.

**Welcoming** - A welcoming transition to campus is desired, suggesting that South Quad should serve as an inviting entrance point.

**All-season Functionality** - Respondents also noted the need for a space that is practical in all seasons, as well as welcoming and usable for people of all abilities.

**3. What specific elements or features would help create this feeling for you? (e.g., seating areas, green spaces)**

**Landscaping and Greenery** - There is an overwhelming desire to preserve and enhance natural spaces. Integrating additional trees, plants and flowers, as well as rocks, ponds or other features is highly supported.

**Seating and Study Spaces** - There is a strong desire for more seating, including picnic areas, sheltered benches, communal and individual seating, as well as relaxed outdoor study spaces.

**Aesthetics and Art** - Respondents suggest enhancing the space with Indigenous and cultural elements and public art. There is a desire to preserve the university's historical elements. While modernizing the area, it should remain connected to the institution's legacy and culture.

**Social Gathering and Event Spaces** - Respondents suggest informal spaces that promote socialization and formal spaces to host indoor and outdoor events. Ideas include multi-purpose venues, amphitheatres and performance stages.

**Campus Connectivity** - Respondents would like to see improved pathways and new pedways to enhance connectivity within the campus.

**4. What types of activities or events would you like to be able to experience/enjoy in the South Quad open space in each season? (e.g., socializing, fitness activities, events, food trucks, outdoor classrooms)**

Respondents desire a multifunctional space, one that brings people together to create a sense of community and supports a mix of structured and casual activities in all seasons.

**Most often mentioned are**

- Food trucks
- Student events and activities, markets, celebrations
- Performances and concerts
- Exercise equipment/fitness activities
- Outdoor classrooms

**5. Is there anything that would make the space more comfortable or inviting for you to spend time in the South Quad open space? (e.g., shade, Wi-Fi, lighting, accessibility)**

The vision of respondents is for a space that is comfortable, accessible, enhanced by nature, connected and inclusive.

Suggestions to make this possible are strong desires for windbreaks and other weather protection shelters and multiple seating options including picnic tables. In addition, appropriate lighting for safety, available Wifi, enhanced greenery and art are suggested.

Respondents reiterate the need for both all-season use and accessibility for all abilities.

**6. Share your thoughts on the project planning principles. Did we get them right? What's missing?**

When responding to the proposed planning principles the vast majority feel that the principles are well-guided, on the right track and comprehensive.

**7. Is there anything additional that you would like to share?**

When asked if there is anything additional to add, responses varied, but no key themes emerged.

## ROUND 2

### CONCEPT A

#### 1. What do you like most and why?

**Gathering, event spaces and amenities** – There is strong support for the flat central plaza as a multi-use space that can accommodate events, performances and gatherings which are seen as essential to creating a lively and inclusive campus hub. Many respondents highlight the outdoor skating rink as a valuable winter amenity that encourages social interaction.

**Cycling and active transportation** – Dedicated bike lanes are supported for improving safety, reducing conflicts with pedestrians and providing a more efficient way to navigate the campus. Covered bike racks are a desired addition, though several respondents request increased visibility to deter theft.

**Seating, accessibility and relaxation** – Respondents appreciate the emphasis on varied, well-integrated seating—ranging from social stairs to eating areas to quiet, shaded nooks—highlighting how these address current campus shortages.

**Green space, gardens and environmental features** – Some respondents support the bioretention garden as both a sustainable stormwater solution and a beautiful, nature-integrated feature on campus. The integration of green spaces, including trees and shaded areas is appreciated for providing wind protection and creating calming retreats.

#### 2. Are there any features/areas you feel are not necessary or would not be used/enjoyed?

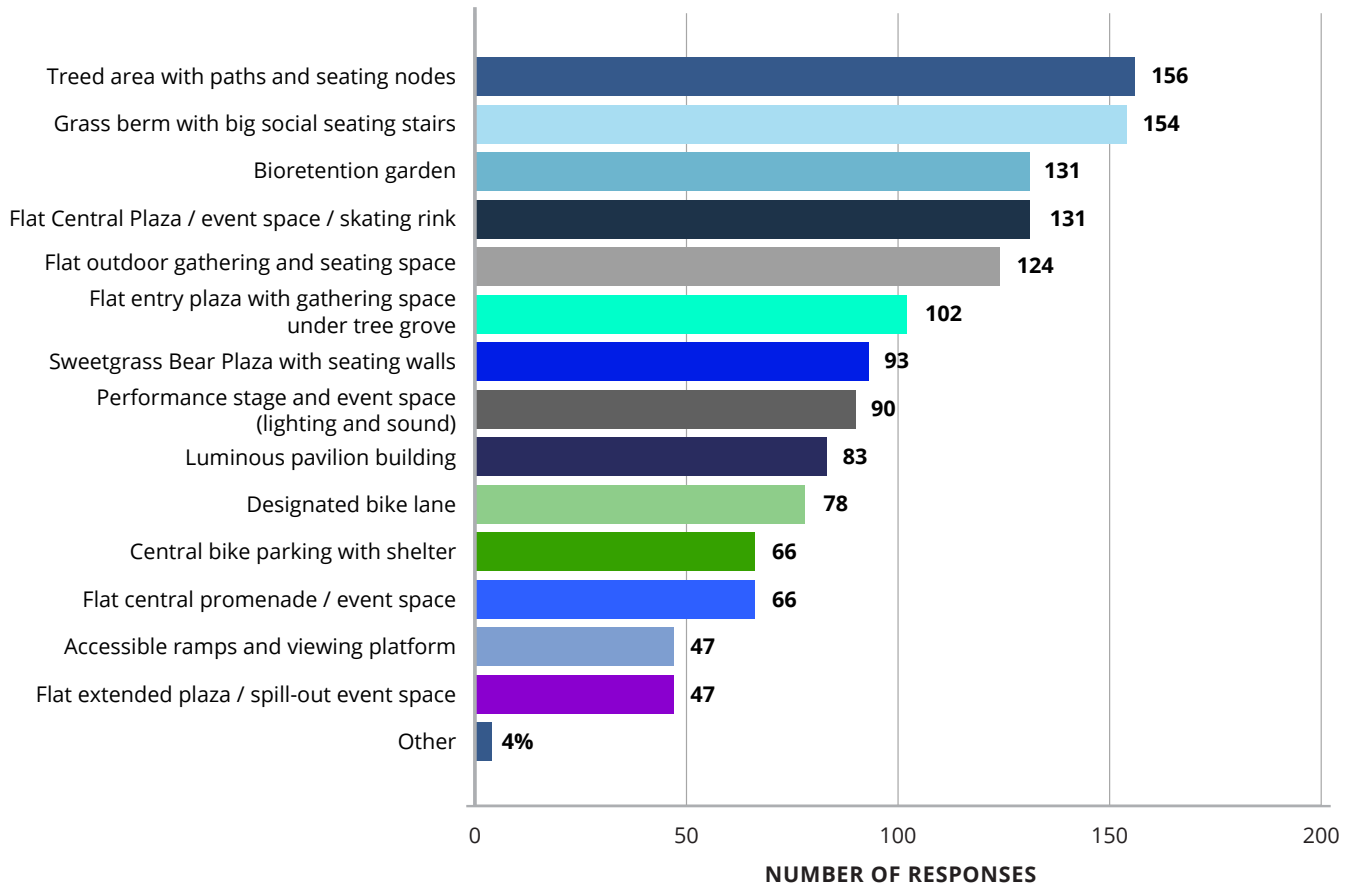
**Gathering, event spaces and amenities** – The flat central plaza and stage area draws some concern for its extensive use of Concrete. The general feeling is that it may become a hot, uninviting area that is underused outside of events and may be noisy/disruptive to the campus when in use. Some respondents feel the skating rink would be underused and costly to maintain.

The interactive floor lighting and decorative concrete walkways were mentioned by some as non-essential, expensive, high-maintenance and easily damaged.

The luminous pavilion building drew concerns by some due to its potential cost, maintenance requirements and that its placement would disrupt the natural movement through Quad.

**Cycling and active transportation** – The designated bike lanes are seen as unnecessary by some, noting that bike use is low especially during the winter months and there is the potential for them to become extensions of pedestrian walkways, leading to safety issues and conflicts.

**3. What specific features/elements/areas do you see yourself enjoying/using most often? (choose all that apply)**



**4. Multifunctional space: What other ways can you envision this space being used?**

- Respondents envision the space as a flexible, year-round venue for diverse uses including concerts, cultural performances, art displays, markets, food trucks and wellness activities like yoga or meditation.
- Many also hope it would support informal gatherings, studying, club events, outdoor classes and recreation.
- Some suggest the addition of features like community gardens or pop-up installations to promote engagement and make the space vibrant and inclusive.

**5. Is there anything else you would like the Planning Study Team to consider adding? (think about how and when you would use the space, lighting, security, etc.)**

**Safety, security and accessibility consider:**

- Lighting: for safety, wayfinding, ambiance, sidewalks, winter, events
- Security: CPTED principles, cameras, call buttons, building access, event security, bollards
- Safety concerns: open sightlines, blind spots, pedestrian/bike conflicts, protest controls, noise disturbance
- Accessibility and movement: direct routes, slip-resistant materials, ramps, wayfinding signage, pedestrian/cyclist navigation, clear winter accessibility and drainage planning

**Gathering, comfort and year-round use consider:**

- Seating and study: inclusive, cozy, winter-friendly seating, shaded areas, back supports, study spaces with power/WiFi
- Shelter and comfort: covered structures, heated areas, retractable roofs
- Plazas and quiet zones: quiet areas, noise barriers, windbreaks and noise buffers near the bus loop
- Winter use: heaters, snow/ice maintenance, wind/fume barriers, Sweetgrass Bear site buffered/enclosed

**Green space and sustainability consider:**

- Green design: more trees, less concrete, native landscaping, community gardens, bird houses
- Sustainability features: permeable pavement, bioretention, low impact development (LID), concrete heat concerns, tree health/preservation

**Amenities and infrastructure consider:**

- Functional infrastructure: washrooms, charging stations, water drinking fountains
- Skating rink: needs infrastructure support like skate rentals, heated changing areas
- Food and social: food trucks, café, market tables, running water
- Technology and miscellaneous: WiFi, campus wayfinding maps, garbage bins, dog stations, accessible/unmovable tables

**Cultural identity, maintenance and cost consider:**

- Culture and programming: Indigenous art, ceremonies, land acknowledgments
- Cost and maintenance: misuse, vandalism, deterioration, construction timing/expense

## CONCEPT B

### 1. What do you like most and why?

**Gathering, event spaces and amenities** – Respondents appreciate the addition of a water feature for its calming, aesthetically pleasing presence and its winter transition to an ice sculpture, making it both functional and visually engaging throughout the seasons.

The amphitheatre and stage area are supported for their potential to host events like concerts and performances, creating an inviting space for campus gatherings. The transformation of the lawn gathering area into a skating rink in winter is seen to support activity in all seasons.

**Cycling and active transportation** – Respondents appreciate the natural flow and layout of the pathways, which some feel align with existing movement patterns. The design is seen to improve connections between key areas and encourage a calm, shared use of space for both pedestrians and cyclists.

**Seating, accessibility and relaxation** – Respondents like the seating proposed in this natural, green setting as it provides a calm, welcoming atmosphere. The amphitheatre, main lawn and shaded seating areas are seen as versatile and inviting for studying, relaxing and casual gatherings.

**Green space, gardens and environmental features** – The design is widely supported for its emphasis on greenery and natural landscaping, offering a calming, park-like atmosphere that has less concrete than Concept A. Respondents appreciate the inclusion of lawns, gardens, trees and biodiversity-friendly features, which contribute to a sustainable, visually appealing and peaceful environment.

### 2. Are there any features/areas you feel are not necessary or would not be used/enjoyed?

**Gathering, event spaces and amenities** – Some respondents are concerned the water feature/ice displays displaces green opportunities and would be costly to maintain and vulnerable to vandalism.

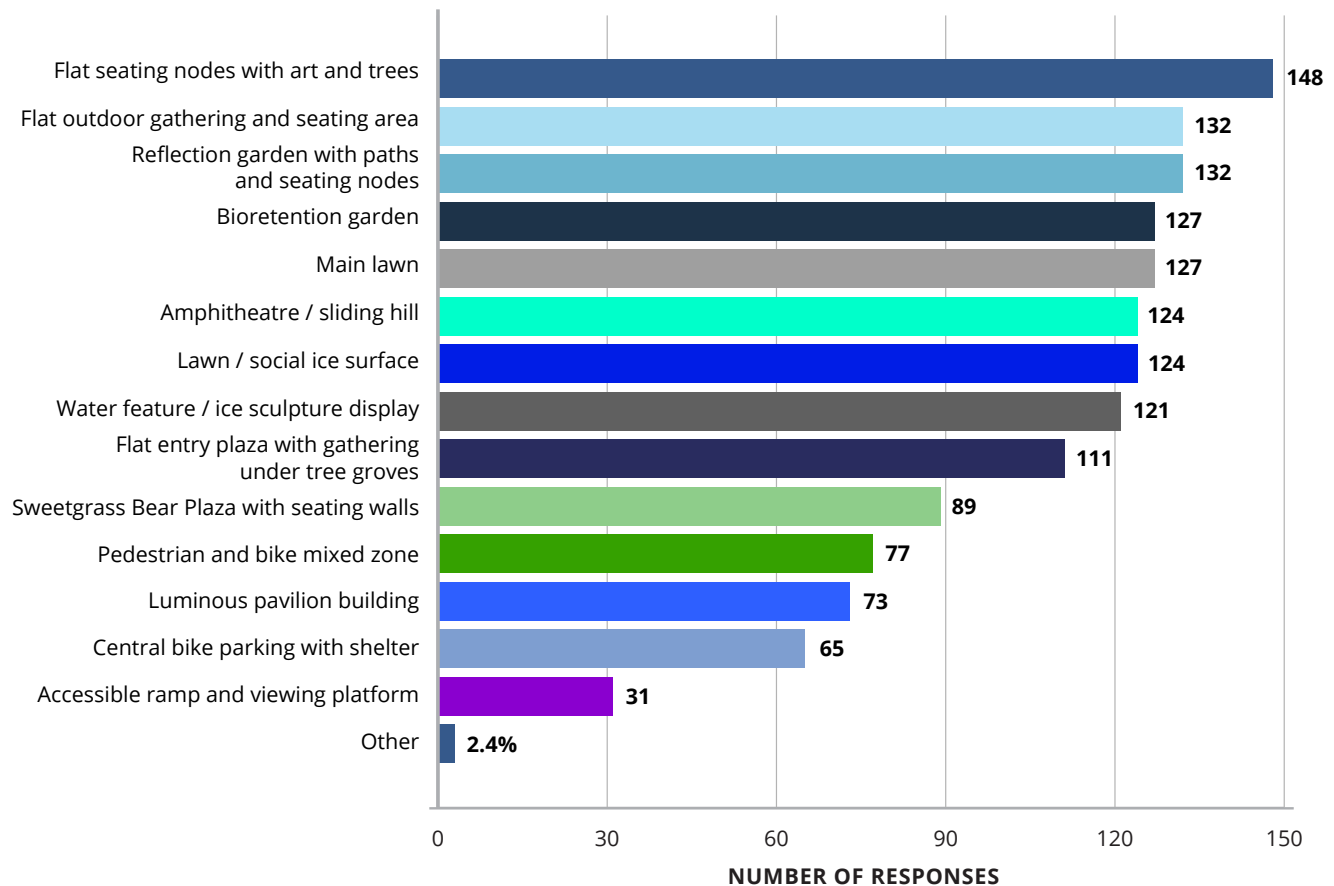
The social ice surface is described by some as too small, awkwardly shaped and unlikely to be useful; high maintenance costs are also a concern.

The interactive floor lighting, pavilion and sliding hill are seen by a few as not necessary, impractical and/or costly.

**Cycling and active transportation** – A few respondents express concern over shared-use spaces increasing bike/pedestrian conflicts and frustration over having indirect routes that slow movement, particularly for students navigating campus between classes.

**Outdoor seating and furniture** – Some respondents are concerned that much of the seating would be underused during colder months, becoming wet, snow-covered, and uncomfortable. Others note that movable furniture could be stolen, damaged and that placing tables and chairs on grass could damage the turf and complicate maintenance.

**3. What specific features/elements/areas do you see yourself enjoying/using most often? (choose all that apply)**



**4. Multifunctional space: What types of programming or features would you like to see in this plaza to keep it vibrant and active year-round, even during colder seasons?**

- Respondents suggest a wide range of year-round programming and features to keep the plaza vibrant, including concerts, student performances, art installations, food trucks, pop-up markets and cultural events in warmer months.
- For winter, many emphasize the need for skating rinks, warming shelters, hot drink kiosks, outdoor fire pits, light displays and interactive winter programming like snow sculpture contests, sledding or small festivals.

**5. Is there anything else you would like the Planning Study Team to consider adding? (think about how and when you would use the space, lighting, security, etc.)**

**Safety, security and accessibility consider:**

- Lighting: for safety
- Security: cameras, sight lines/blind spots, use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, pavilion access control
- Pathways and circulation: directness, conflict points, wayfinding, pedway, pedestrian/bike conflicts, choke points/high traffic areas
- Accessibility needs: Students' Union Building (SUB) access, ramps, sidewalk type, bike access
- Bike movement and storage: cell activated storage, storage locations – visibility

**Gathering, comfort and year-round use consider:**

- Seating: quantity (more), tiered, shaded, unmovable
- Study spaces: with WiFi, power, covered
- Sheltered/covered spaces

**Amenities, culture and seasonal use consider:**

- General amenities: washrooms, fire pits, café, food trucks, map, skate rentals
- Winter readiness: heaters, windbreaks, protection
- Recreation: adult playground
- Cultural elements: Indigenous art/ceremonies, protest space, sculptures
- Unique features (pet-friendly, solar power, water feature design)

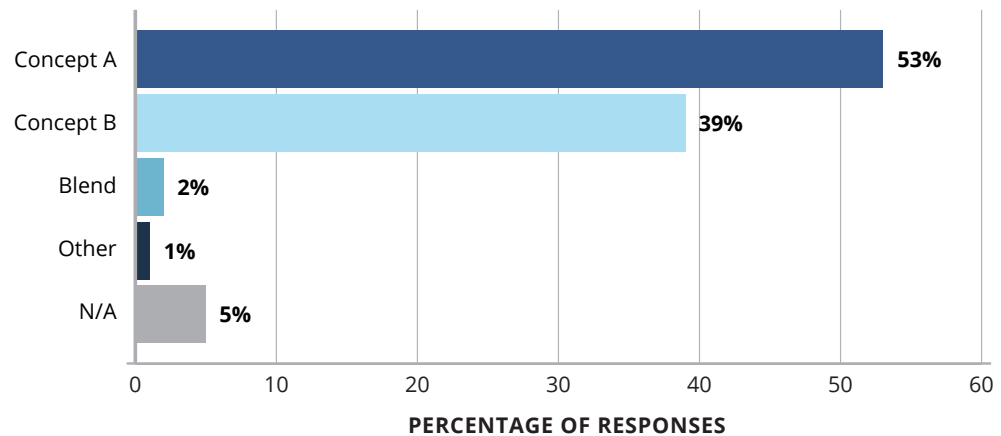
**Environmental design, green space and sustainability consider:**

- More greenery and nature: trees, native plants, bird houses, lawns
- Reduce concrete: increase permeable materials, reuse Administration Building bricks
- Community gardens and low impact development (LID)
- Sustainability concerns: allergies/pests, moss, save mature trees

**Maintenance and lighting design consider:**

- Lighting: ambience, aesthetics, warm/cool, ground, to bus stops, light pollution, rink lighting
- Maintenance issues: sidewalks, water feature, concrete

**6. Considering users of both the pathways and the nearby open spaces, tell us which active transportation approach you prefer and why?**



Respondents who prefer Concept A overwhelmingly value direct, separated pathways that support faster, safer and more efficient movement for both cyclists and pedestrians, particularly given the high volume of traffic between campus destinations. They feel dedicated bike lanes reduce conflict, prevent unsafe mixing of modes and reflect realistic student behavior (e.g., desire lines, rushing between classes), making Concept A the more practical, functional choice for a campus setting.

Respondents who prefer Concept B emphasize a slower, more relaxed pace that prioritizes pedestrian comfort, social interaction and a natural, green atmosphere. They feel a shared path approach reflects how the space is actually used—since pedestrians often ignore dedicated lanes—and avoids unnecessary infrastructure for cyclists, who they perceive as fewer in number. Many also appreciate that Concept B feels more inviting, park-like and conducive to gathering, rather than serving primarily as a transportation corridor.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Based on the feedback received and presented within this What We Heard report, a refined Concept Plan will be prepared and included within the final South Quad Planning Study report, expected to be completed in summer 2025.



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