



District of Central Saanich 1903 Mt Newton –RFP Input

What We Heard Report

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Prepared by:
Engage Delaney

[engage] delaney

ENGAGEMENT, FACILITATION, COMMUNICATIONS & CHANGE

Executive Summary

The District of Central Saanich is advancing redevelopment of 1903 Mount Newton Cross Road; a municipally owned site located in the core of Saanichton Village. As part of this process, the District is seeking community input to help inform priority elements for the site, including housing, amenities, greenspace, and overall design, prior to releasing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to prospective developers.

To support this work, three focus groups were facilitated, two on March 31 (in-person sessions) and one on April 1, 2026 (virtual session), with a total of 36 participants registered and 28 who participated. Sessions were facilitated by Engage Delaney and designed to support staff recommendations to Council regarding specific site and design elements to be included in the RFP.

The purpose of the focus groups was to receive detailed feedback from community members to identify and refine priorities within Council's existing direction related to the following:

- Built form and neighbourhood interface
- Public space and greenspace
- Transportation, access, parking, and active transportation
- Health care and community services
- Financial considerations
- Housing types

Participant feedback included detailed input on site priorities, design considerations, and community needs. Key insights from the focus groups are summarized below:

- **Housing priorities:** Housing was the most consistently identified priority across all sessions. Participants emphasized the need for larger, family-oriented units (2–3 bedrooms) that support people in entering and remaining in the community. There was also support for a mix of housing types, including for seniors, young adults, and lower-income households, with differing views on how these should be prioritized. There is strong interest for housing that supports aging in place.
- **Affordability:** Affordability was raised frequently, with participants questioning what it means in practice, who it applies to, and whether it will meet community needs. There was interest in ensuring affordability across a range of housing types.
- **Green space:** Green space was identified as a core component of the site and a key part of how it would function. Participants emphasized that it should be usable, accessible, and integrated throughout the development to support everyday activities such as play, gathering, and informal recreation. It was also identified as playing a role in buffering surrounding homes from the development. Some participants questioned how the land will be developed to maximize greenspace.
- **Amenities and services:** Participants had mixed views on the inclusion of commercial space, childcare, medical uses, and plazas. Some supported these elements as

contributing to a more complete community, while others questioned their necessity or appropriateness for the site. These elements were often discussed in relation to available space and overall site priorities.

- **Design and impacts:** Participants identified several design considerations to reduce impacts on surrounding homes, including limiting building height, increasing setbacks, incorporating landscape buffering, tree corridors and addressing privacy, light, and noise. Smaller-scale buildings (i.e. townhomes, single-family homes, carriage houses) and varied layouts were generally preferred over larger, continuous structures.
- **Community character:** Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that the development reflects the existing Saanichton Village character. This included maintaining appropriate scale, cohesive design, and a sense of place that aligns with the surrounding community.
- **Accessibility and movement:** Participants highlighted the need for safe and accessible movement to and through the site for people of all ages and abilities. This included pedestrian connections, universal design features, and improvements to intersections, traffic flow and overall safety given the continued reliance on vehicles due to current transit limitations.
- **Trade-offs:** Participants noted that trade-offs will be required in balancing housing, green space, amenities, site design, and financial considerations, particularly given the size of the site and range of priorities identified.

Participants received clear information during the registration process and in the focus group about the scope of the engagement and overall purpose of the focus groups, namely that Council had directed engagement to better understand community preferences on site design and amenities. Participants shared additional project feedback beyond the focus group objectives.

Across all sessions, dialogue was respectful and participants engaged thoughtfully with the discussion; however, they noted frustration with the overall process, confusion about the process, and the sequencing of decisions before Council. Participants expressed concern about what they perceived as limited opportunities for meaningful public engagement with a strong feeling that decisions may already been made, and a lack of clarity around how input will influence outcomes. The pace of the project was also described as feeling rushed.

Additionally, participants noted strong encouragement and support for maintaining the rural, heritage, and village character of Saanichton as a central theme throughout the discussions. Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that future development reflects the existing community, including its scale, green space, and overall sense of place.

Project Context

The District of Central Saanich is planning to redevelop the 1903 Mount Newton Cross Road site, a 4-acre municipally owned site located in the core of Saanichton Village. The site, currently home to the municipal hall, has been identified as a key opportunity to support the long-term evolution of the village, including accommodating growth, enhancing community amenities, and making more effective use of a significant public asset.

Given its central location and proximity to existing services, the site is intended to support a more complete, walkable community. Planning for the site has been informed by existing policy direction, including the Official Community Plan and the Saanichton Village Design Plan, which identify priorities such as housing diversity, greenspace, and community-serving amenities.

The District is preparing to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to guide the future development of the site. Through this process, a development partner will be selected, and proposals will be evaluated based on alignment with Council's direction, site design principles, and overall community benefit. As part of this planning phase, the District is seeking to refine key design elements for the site to ensure that future development reflects both existing policy direction and community input.

The focus groups were conducted to provide detailed, qualitative insight into community perspectives on key elements such as housing, greenspace, amenities, and overall site design. These insights are intended to help inform Council's decision-making and the development of criteria that will shape the RFP.

Engagement Objectives & Approach

Based on Council direction, the following engagement objectives were the focus of the engagement.

1. To welcome feedback from interested community members and groups, to understand preferences for specific community priorities for the following key site elements:
 - Housing types - Family- and senior-oriented housing, mixed market
 - Greenspace/plaza/public gathering areas
 - Small-scale commercial or larger scale grocery stores
 - Medical/dental and wellness-adjacent services
 - Childcare space and community need
2. To gain insights into what community members would like to see to connect the site to the broader community, including walking, cycling, transit and parking connections.
3. To gather new ideas from the community on how the project's principles can be made real, so the site becomes a welcoming community hub that serves people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

To support this phase of planning, a series of three focus groups were designed to enable discussion and detailed feedback from community members on key elements such as housing, greenspace, amenities, and accessibility.

These sessions were facilitated by Engage Delaney, a neutral third-party consultant, to support open dialogue and ensure that a range of perspectives could be shared. The focus group format was intentionally selected to allow participants to engage more deeply with the topic than is typically possible through broader engagement methods. Each session was structured to provide all participants with the opportunity to contribute, while also allowing for ideas to be expanded on and explored through group discussion.

Each session was approximately two hours in length and were guided by a consistent discussion guide with consistent questions aligning with the engagement objectives. These questions focused on key elements of the proposed redevelopment, including housing types, amenities, greenspace, design considerations, and accessibility.

Participants were also informed that certain elements of the project had already been determined or were being considered by Council and were not part of the focus group discussion.

The focus group contributions were gathered and are consolidated here into this *What We Heard report* and is intended to help inform Council’s decision-making on the RFP.

Who We Heard From

A total of 28 participants took part across three focus group sessions, including two in-person sessions held on March 31, 2026, and one virtual session held on April 1, 2026.

Participants were recruited through an open online registration process. Individuals were asked to indicate their preferred session and identify the Central Saanich neighbourhood they live in. From this pool, participants were selected by Engage Delaney, to reflect a mix of neighbourhood participants with the aim of geographic representation across the municipality.

The selection approach included proportional representation by neighbourhood, with additional representation from the Saanichton Village area due to its proximity to the site. Each session also included space for a local business representative.

Focus groups were designed to include a mix of participants, enabling a range of perspectives related to housing needs, community character, and site design. Participation was voluntary, and individuals were able to register interest but were selected to ensure balanced group composition.

	Neighbourhood	# of representatives across sessions
1	Saanichton	13
2	Brentwood Bay	8
3	Keating / Tanner	2
4	Lochside /Turgoose	2
5	Tsartlip /Tsawout	1
6	Business (Saanichton)	2

What We Heard

This section summarizes what participants shared across the three focus groups. Input has been organized by discussion topic, aligned with the questions used to guide each session. While responses are presented by question, some themes were raised across multiple questions. In addition to question-specific feedback, several broader themes emerged consistently across all three sessions.

In the section below, are the question specific responses. The content represents all input from all three focus groups.

Amenities and Components

Participants were asked, *“Thinking about the amenities and potential components that could be included on this site (such as affordable housing, housing mix, a plaza, medical space, childcare, shops, or services), which of these would matter most to you or your household, and why?”*

Across the three focus groups, participants most often identified housing, particularly affordable, family-oriented housing, as the most important site component. Green space was also consistently emphasized as a key part of the site. Other elements, such as childcare, commercial uses, plazas, and medical space, were discussed with more mixed views and were often considered secondary or dependent on how much space is available and how the site is designed.

Amenities and Components with Broad Support

1) Housing that meets the needs of local households

Housing was the most consistently prioritized element across all three sessions. Participants emphasized the need for housing that supports working and middle-income households, particularly larger, family-oriented units such as two- and three-bedroom homes or units with space for working from home. There was also interest in providing a mix of housing types to support different life stages, including families, seniors, and lower-income households. Some participants spoke about the importance of creating housing that allows people to age in place and remain in the community over time.

2) Green space that is usable and accessible

Green space was widely identified as a key priority. Participants emphasized that it should be functional and support everyday use, including children’s play, informal recreation, and opportunities to gather. There was interest in features such as playgrounds, open lawn areas, and community gardens, as well as maintaining meaningful amounts of green space within the site.

3) A community-oriented feel

Across focus groups, participants emphasized the importance of creating a place that feels integrated into the existing feel and character of the community with spaces and opportunities for interaction across age groups, and a layout that supports a village-like atmosphere.

Amenities and Components with Mixed Views

1) Commercial uses (shops, cafés, restaurants)

Perspectives on commercial space varied between participants. Some supported small-scale shops, cafés, or restaurants, noting that they could provide more local options, contribute to economic activity, and enhance the sense of community. Restaurants were specifically raised as a nice-to-have add on for the community. Others, however, questioned whether additional commercial space is needed in Central Saanich and whether there is sufficient demand. There were also concerns that commercial uses could increase traffic, parking demand, noise and development costs. For a few participants, they expressed a preference to limit or exclude commercial uses all together.

2) Childcare

Childcare was identified by several participants as an important amenity, particularly given long daycare waitlists and the need to support working families. At the same time, a few participants questioned whether this site is appropriate for childcare, noting space constraints, the need for outdoor play areas, or suggesting that childcare may be better located near schools or workplaces.

3) Medical or wellness space

There were mixed views on including medical or wellness services. Some participants supported this as a useful community amenity, while others did not see it as a priority for the site and preferred a stronger focus on residential or community-oriented uses.

4) Plaza or formal gathering space

Participants had differing views on the need for a formal plaza. Some supported having a central gathering space for community use or events, while others felt it was not necessary or should be a lower priority compared to green space and housing.

Key Considerations Raised

1) Balancing priorities within the site

There was recognition that including multiple amenities such as housing, green space, commercial uses, and services would require trade-offs. Participants noted that prioritizing one element could reduce space available for others, particularly green space, and could introduce additional impacts such as traffic and parking demand.

2) Overall fit within the community

Participants also questioned how the combination of these elements would come together on the site. This included concerns about whether the scale needed to support multiple uses would align with the character and rural nature of Central Saanich.

Housing Types

Participants were asked *“When you think about housing on this site – family units (2-3 beds), seniors’ housing (1-2 beds), or a mix – what types of housing do you believe are most important for the community and why?”*

Participants were largely aligned on the need for housing that better reflects the needs of people living in, or trying to remain in, Central Saanich. Across all sessions, there was a strong emphasis

on housing for young families, particularly larger units with two or three bedrooms and layouts that support day-to-day living. Participants noted that many current housing options, particularly smaller units, do not meet these needs and are not supporting families to enter or stay in the community.

At the same time, participants consistently spoke about the importance of including a mix of housing types to support a range of residents, including families, seniors, young adults, and lower-income households. This included housing that enables aging in place or downsizing, as well as options for those entering the housing market. However, there were differing perspectives on how this mix should be prioritized. Some emphasized the need for seniors' housing, while others noted that many seniors are already housed and that the more immediate gap is for young families. There was also discussion about ensuring housing is accessible to more vulnerable seniors, especially those with very low incomes.

Affordability was a central and recurring theme throughout the discussion. Participants questioned what "affordable housing" means in practice, whether current targets are sufficient, and who would ultimately benefit. Some noted that affordability needs to extend beyond market definitions to include those who may not be able to afford housing at all. There was also recognition that the type and amount of housing delivered will need to balance community priorities with financial realities, given the role of the site in advancing municipal objectives.

Participants also raised the importance of planning for both current and future community needs. This included consideration of demographic trends, such as an aging population and younger households entering the market, as well as the need for evidence-based decision-making to determine what types of housing are most needed. Some participants emphasized that the site should reflect community priorities rather than being driven primarily by financial return, and that it should contribute to a complete, inclusive community while maintaining the character of Central Saanich.

Design Attributes

Participants were asked *"What design attributes do you believe should be considered to reduce impact on surrounding homes and support it being a welcoming community hub?"*

Participants identified a range of design attributes that were seen as helping to reduce impacts on surrounding homes while also supporting the site as a welcoming and integrated community space. Some participants also noted that it was difficult to fully assess design considerations without a clear understanding of the site layout and scale.

1) Increasing setbacks and using landscape buffering

Setbacks, buffering, tree canopies and green space were consistently identified as key to reducing impacts on surrounding homes while also contributing to a welcoming environment. Participants emphasized increasing distance between buildings and neighbouring properties, particularly along the west, south, and Scohon Drive edges. Landscape buffering, such as trees, hedges, and planted areas, was seen as essential for screening building mass, reducing noise, and improving privacy. Some participants suggested layered approaches, including berms, tiered landscaping, or nature and tree corridors.

2) Designing for privacy, light, and noise

Minimizing overlooking, shadowing, and light and noise impacts was a key priority. Participants emphasized careful building orientation, avoiding balconies facing neighbouring homes, and ensuring adequate spacing between structures. Noise from building systems (e.g., HVAC, elevators) and increased activity was also noted, along with the need to preserve sunlight access for adjacent properties.

3) Ensuring the development fits with community character

A strong emphasis was placed on aligning design with the existing Saanichton Village character. Participants highlighted the importance of cohesive design, and materials that reflect the surrounding area. There were concerns about development that feels too urban, with a preference for designs that blend in and feel like a natural extension of the community.

4) Addressing parking, traffic, and site access

Participants emphasized the need to manage parking and traffic impacts through design. This included providing sufficient parking, locating access points away from intersections, and ensuring safe movement for vehicles, pedestrians, and emergency services. Concerns were also raised about underground parking costs and safety, as well as increased traffic in an already constrained road network.

5) Supporting a connected and welcoming community space

In addition to minimizing impacts, participants also suggested creating a space that feels open, connected, and inviting. This included ensuring seamless integration with surrounding neighbourhoods, and providing spaces for gathering, play, and connection. Some participants described the site as a potential community hub and emphasized the importance of making it feel accessible, cohesive, and welcoming.

6) Additional design considerations

Participants also raised a number of additional design considerations, including:

- Providing adequate storage for residents living on the site
- Incorporating sustainable design approaches (e.g., energy and water efficiency)
- Avoiding materials that may negatively impact wildlife (e.g., reflective glass)
- Considering how the land balances buildings, green space, and parking
- Focussing on keeping the immediate neighbours updated during construction
- Recognizing trade-offs between site design and constraints with affordability and character

Green Space Design

Participants were asked *“From your perspective, how should green spaces be designed so that all members of the community can enjoy them? (For example: benches, play areas, gardens, lighting, or shady trees.)”*

Participants described green spaces as needing to be designed in ways that are usable, inclusive, and support a range of activities for different members of the community.

1) Designing for everyday use and enjoyment

Green spaces should support daily activities such as children’s play, informal recreation, walking, and gathering. Participants emphasized including features such as playgrounds, open lawn areas, picnic spaces, and flexible areas that can be used by different age groups. There was also interest in spaces for dog walking and family-oriented use.

2) Providing a variety of spaces for different users

Participants noted that green spaces should accommodate different preferences, including both active and social areas as well as quieter spaces for relaxation. Designing spaces that separate or balance these uses was seen as important, so they do not conflict.

3) Incorporating natural elements

There was strong support for designing green spaces with natural features such as trees, native plants, rocks, and water elements (e.g., fountains). Some participants suggested creating a more natural environment that supports biodiversity, provides shade, and avoids a “concrete-heavy” feel.

4) Ensuring accessibility and comfort

It was noted that green spaces should be accessible to all users, with wide, even pathways and minimal barriers. Participants also identified the importance of benches, rest areas, shaded spaces, and weather protection. Lighting should support safety while minimizing light pollution. Public washrooms were also mentioned as a desirable feature.

5) Integrating green space throughout the site

Participants emphasized that green space should be a central and integrated part of the site design. This includes larger gathering areas, smaller pocket spaces, and potentially rooftop or vertical green space. Green space was also seen as serving additional functions, such as buffering neighbouring homes and creating a cohesive, welcoming environment.

Accessibility and Movement

Participants were asked *“When you think about convenience and accessibility from your perspective, what design considerations are important to helping people of all ages and abilities move easily to and from the site?”*

They described accessibility as ensuring that people of all ages and abilities can move easily, safely, and intuitively to and through the site, while also recognizing the role of vehicles in the community.

1) Designing for universal accessibility

Participants emphasized the importance of incorporating accessibility from the outset. This includes wide and even pathways, ramps instead of stairs, automatic doors, accessible units, and pathways that can accommodate wheelchairs, scooters, strollers, and pedestrians. Removing barriers such as curbs and uneven surfaces was also identified as important.

2) Supporting clear and intuitive movement

Movement through the site should be easy to understand and follow natural pathways. Participants highlighted the importance of well-connected walking routes within the site

and to surrounding areas, including safe and direct connections to nearby streets and paths.

3) Ensuring safety for pedestrians and all users

Safety was a key consideration, particularly with increased traffic and pedestrian activity. Participants identified the need for improved intersections, crosswalks, and traffic controls (e.g., signals or flashing crossings), as well as designs that allow safe movement without reliance on crossing guards.

4) Accommodating vehicles and traffic flow

Participants noted that, given current transit limitations, vehicle access remains important. Accessibility includes the ability to safely enter and exit the site, manage traffic flow, and provide sufficient parking without negatively impacting surrounding streets. Concerns were raised about increased traffic, road capacity, and the ability to accommodate emergency vehicles.

5) Lighting and visibility

Lighting was identified as important for safety and wayfinding, with a preference for well-lit pathways and public areas that avoid excessive brightness or spillover into neighbouring properties.

6) Considering broader movement and site function

Participants also noted that accessibility includes how the site functions within the broader community, including how people move through the village, the impact of increased population on circulation, and how infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, intersections) may need to be updated to support safe and efficient movement.

Disclaimer: This report excludes all comments pertaining to density, building height, or other zoning-related matters as under the legislative requirements associated with the public hearing held on March 9, 2026, the District is prohibited from receiving, recording, or considering further public input on zoning issues following the close of the hearing. No additional submissions can be accepted until such time as Council makes a determination on the proposed rezoning of the property.

Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

1. Thinking about the amenities and potential components that could be included on this site (such as affordable housing, housing mix, a plaza, medical space, childcare, shops, or services), which of these would matter most to you or your household, and why?
2. When you think about housing on this site – family units (2-3 beds), seniors' housing (1-2 beds), or a mix – what types of housing do you believe are most important for the community and why?
3. What design attributes do you believe should be considered to reduce impact on surrounding homes and support it being a welcoming community hub?
4. From your perspective, how should green spaces be designed so that all members of the community can enjoy them? (For example: benches, play areas, gardens, lighting, or shady trees.)
5. When you think about convenience and accessibility from your perspective, what design considerations are important to helping people of all ages and abilities move easily to and from the site?