



**STRATHCONA
COUNTY**

2021 February SCOOP Mixed Topic Survey: Community Standards

Research Results

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Communications

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I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In February 2021, Strathcona County conducted two online surveys as part of its Strathcona County Online Opinion Panel (SCOOP) initiative. This project, entitled *the Mixed Topic Survey*, consisted of different survey areas whereby only a limited number of questions were asked within one or more topic areas and was exclusive to residents who signed up to be part of SCOOP. Establishing community standards associated with residential and commercial properties were spread across two online surveys conducted in February 2021.

Obtaining primary data from residents directly will provide Strathcona County departments with information and enable County officials to make decisions that accurately reflect the perspectives and attitudes of residents. This report will provide a comprehensive review of all steps undertaken in the development and implementation of the survey, as well as a detailed summary of the results. The results from this study were prepared by Phil Kreisel, Ph.D. (Communications); SPSS was used for the data analysis.

A review of the methodology associated in the development and implementation all aspects of both surveys can be found in the next section of this report.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. The questionnaire

The questions used in this study were new, using questions that were submitted by department representatives from Legislative and Legal Services (LLS). The survey was then created, reviewed and modified where necessary by members of Survey Central for wording, question ordering and general understanding. This included a final check of the content by FOIP¹ prior to the release of the survey to the public.

B. Sampling design and data collection procedure

The sample frame used in this study consisted of 637 people who answered questions on wood/coal burning appliances, RVs, and fences in the first February mixed topic survey. In the second February mixed topic survey, 582 people answered questions on front/side yard appearances on properties in Strathcona County and questions on building appearance and maintenance practices. All participants from both surveys were drawn from people who had previously signed up to be part of SCOOP, Strathcona County's online opinion panel. Between the two surveys, 67.8% of the participants lived in the urban area, 30.5% came from rural parts of Strathcona County, and the remaining 1.6% worked in Strathcona County but did not live there.

Although poll-based data is derived from people who decide to participate, were not randomly selected and have access to the online poll, the margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is $\pm 3.9\%$, 19 times out of 20.²

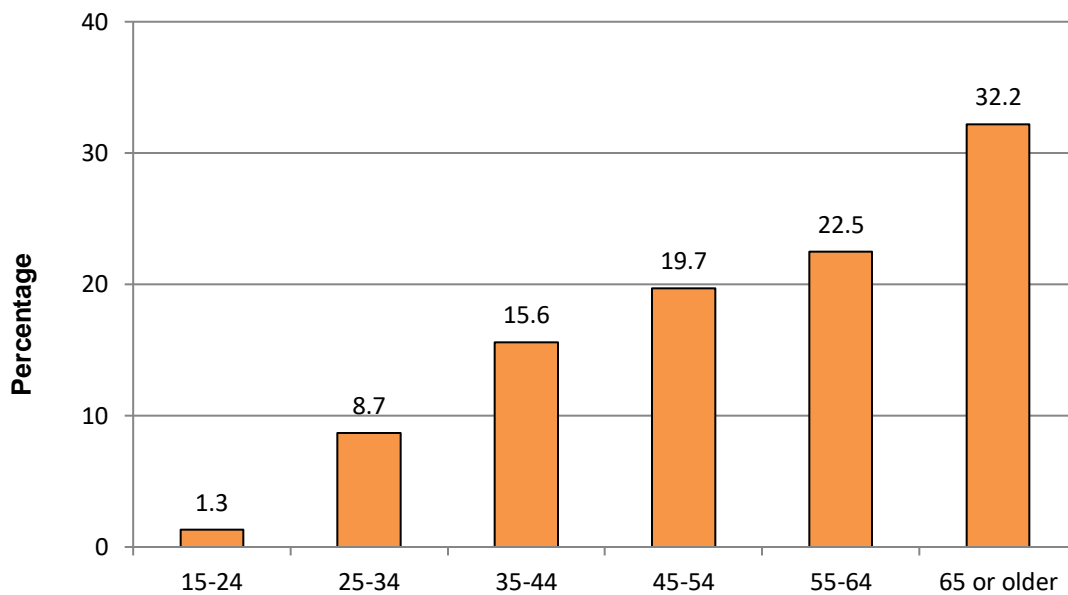
¹ FOIP stands for Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy and was reviewed by selected members from Strathcona County's Legislation and Legal Department (LLS).

² The $\pm 3.9\%$ is the *margin of error* associated with this study and refers to the potential percentage spread that exists within answers to questions. This means that an answer could be up to 3.9% higher or lower than what is reported. Please note, however, that the data was gathered through an online survey and no controls were undertaken to make this a random sample.

During the fielding of both surveys, respondents had the option to skip a section if they felt that the topic had no relevance to them.

As seen in Figure 1, between the two surveys, most of the respondents who participated in the survey are over the age of 44, with 24.3% of the participants between the age of 25 and 44. Only a very small percentage of participants were under 25. Overall, 56.9% of participants were female while 43.1% were male.

FIGURE 1
Age of Respondents



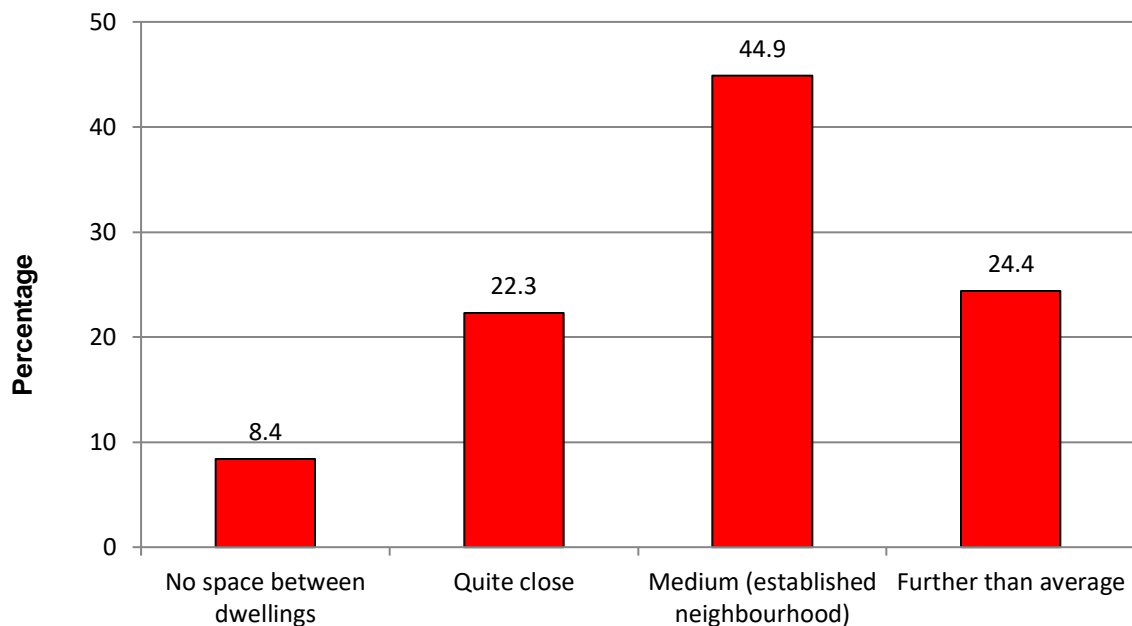
III. SURVEY RESULTS

A. Wood or Coal Burning Appliances

Respondents were asked if they would like to answer a series of questions about wood or coal burning appliances. Overall, 88.7% of the participants opted to answer this question.

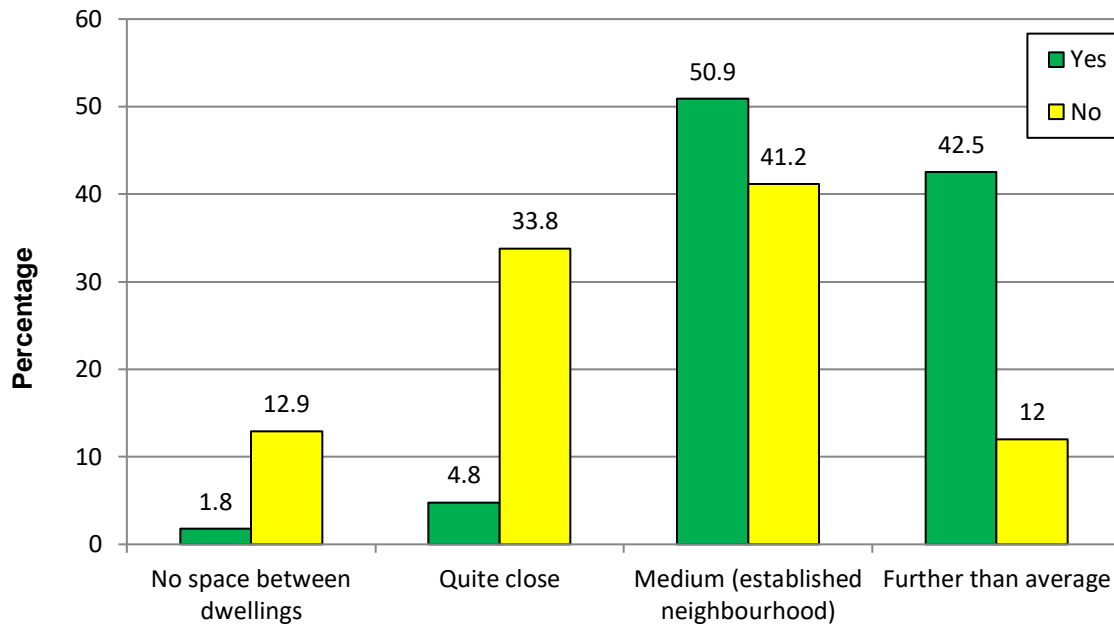
One of the questions asked in this section was where their property was located relative to other dwellings. It can be seen from Figure 2 that about 70% live in dwellings that are spaced somewhat far apart from their neighbours.

FIGURE 2
Location of dwelling



Initially, respondents were asked if their home had any wood burning appliances such as a fireplace, or coal burning appliances such as a coal furnace. Overall, 41.3% said they did, while 58.7% did not. A further analysis revealed that dwellings that were located close to their neighbours were less likely to have a wood/coal burning appliance (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
Presence of wood/coal burning appliance in type of dwelling



Of the 41.3% who had a wood or coal burning appliance were then asked if they ever had any issues with neighbours around the smoke coming from their home. Most of them (95.7%) did not, while 4.3% said yes. Only one who said that he had indicated that was because of the smoke. There were others who did not like the smoke coming from other people's houses, even though they themselves had a wood/coal burning appliance

The 58.7% who did not have any wood burning appliances were asked if they had ever been bothered by the wood/coal smoke coming from a neighbour's home. Of these people, 14.5% said yes; Most (85.5%) said no. Some who said "yes" indicated that the smoke triggered allergies. Many people cited that the source of the smoke came from outdoor firepits, and the annoyance often was dependent on windy conditions. Sometimes, the smell of the burning wood was as annoying as the smoke for some people.

All respondents were asked if there should be any restrictions on when/how wood or coal burning appliances are used? Overall, 37.9% said yes while 62.1% said no.

Those who said yes were asked to indicate what a reasonable restriction would be. A variety of answers were suggested. One of the most frequently suggested restrictions was to ban the use of coal. Another was to not allow people to burn garbage/waste materials and keep this to dry wood only. A third consideration is not to have fires on windy days or at times of the year when wildfires are more prevalent.

B. RVs in Residential Neighbourhoods

Respondents were asked if they would like to answer a series of questions about RVs. Overall, 93.9% of the participants opted to answer this question.

Overall, 35.4% of respondents owned an RV, while the remaining 64.6% did not.

Of the 35.4% who own an RV, 62.9% park their RV at their home, and of these people:

- 38.6% park it in the driveway
- 30.3% park it in the backyard
- 25.8% park it in the side yard
- 3.0% park it in the front yard
- 2.3% park it on the street

66.7% of those who own an RV park it at their home year-round.

All respondents were asked if they had concerns about RV parking in your neighbourhood. Overall, 20.4% said yes, 51.4% said no, and the remaining 28.1% said sometimes.

Of the 48.5% who said yes or sometimes, the concerns were:

- 69.8% - RV extends off driveway onto the sidewalk or road
- 69.4% - Can make it difficult to see around the RV when backing out or entering an intersection
- 62.8% - Parking on the road for longer than 36 hours
- 52.8% - Trailers illegally parked unattached on the roadway
- 50.0% - Aesthetics of the neighbourhood
- 49.7% - Cords running across the sidewalk from RV to house
- 48.6% - Parking on front/back lawn or landscaped area
- 16.7% - Other

C. Fence Conditions in Strathcona County

Respondents were asked if they would like to answer a series of questions about fences. Overall, 93.7% of the participants opted to answer this question.

Does it bother you to see fences (residential, commercial or public spaces) that are not well maintained? Overall, 69.6% said yes, 6.3% said no, and the remaining 24.1% said sometimes.

Of the 93.7% who said yes or sometimes, the following areas bothered them:

- 94.7% - Crooked fences/falling down sections
- 78.8% - Missing boards
- 68.3% - Graffiti
- 51.8% - Peeling paint
- 33.9% - Mismatched color/style of fences when compared to adjacent areas
- 25.8% - Unstained/unpainted wood

Next, respondents were asked if they thought there should be a basic standard for fences that are adjacent to public roadways, pathways, or green spaces in Strathcona County. Overall, 61.6% said yes, 13.3% said no, and the remaining 25.2% were not sure.

When asked why they felt this way, aesthetics was the most common answer given by the participants, though others also noted variations such as maintaining a neighbourhood standard or that this helped demonstrate pride within a neighbourhood.

D. Front/Side Yard Appearance in Residential Neighbourhoods

Respondents were asked if they would like to answer a series of questions about front/side yard appearances. Overall, 97.8% of the participants opted to answer this question.

When asked if it bothered them to see a residential property where the owner has paved the entire front yard and/or the Side yard, 45.5% said yes and 54.5% said no.

Of the 45.5% who said yes, a variety of reasons were put forward. One frequently mentioned issue was drainage problems. The most common reason was that a paved yard lacked the proper aesthetics that people expect from a yard associated with a single-family dwelling (such as trees, flowers and grass). There were others who felt that a paved yard (especially the front) made a neighborhood property seem like a commercial property. There were also some people who felt that a paved front yard might attract excessive vehicle parking.

Of the 54.5% who said no, the majority felt that it was the owner's property and they could do what they pleased. Some people added that a paved yard looked better than one filled with weeds and a lawn that was not maintained. It might be done this way because of maintenance. They may not be able to do a lot of upkeep if they are older people, or seniors, or have health issues/impairments. As long as it doesn't look like a junk yard, then that's fine.

Should NEW residential properties in the County be required to have a tree or trees in the front yard? Overall, 55% said yes and 45% said no. Furthermore, when asked if residential properties in the County should be

required to maintain a certain percentage of greenery (trees, grass, bushes etc.) in the front yard, 60.4% said yes and 39.6% said no.

E. Building Appearance and Maintenance in Strathcona County

Respondents were asked if they would like to answer a series of questions about building appearance and property maintenance in Strathcona County. Overall, 97.4% of the participants opted to answer this question.

Respondents were initially presented with a list of potential issues and then asked to indicate what bothered them when they looked at residential buildings in Strathcona County. The results are summarized in Table 1. Garbage, litter, graffiti, broken or missing windows and unused vehicles or vehicle parts were the most common problems.

Table 1
Ranking of items based on percentage of respondents that are bothered by various problems associated with residential buildings in Strathcona County

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Garbage and litter	93.9%	0.7%	5.4%
Graffiti on residential buildings, fences or garages	82.9%	4.4%	12.7%
Broken or missing windows	76.8%	6.0%	17.2%
Unused vehicles or vehicle parts	73.3%	5.7%	21.1%
Lack of maintenance and repair	59.5%	7.8%	32.74%
Long, uncut grass	59.0%	10.7%	30.4%
Broken or missing siding	56.2%	15.0%	28.8%
Broken garage doors	52.0%	16.7%	31.3%
Peeling paint	49.4%	16.6%	34.0%
Damaged siding	33.5%	27.7%	38.8%
Broken or poorly maintained eavestroughs and downspouts	32.7%	32.5%	34.8%
Trees and shrubs that have not been maintained	31.3%	26.1%	42.6%
Damaged shingles or roof material	29.9%	35.0%	35.1%
Significant fading or chipping	21.6%	38.9%	39.5%
Broken/worn bricks	20.8%	43.1%	36.1%
Mismatched paint colours	16.1%	52.4%	31.5%

Overall, 66.6% felt that there should be minimum standards established for residential building maintenance/upkeep in Strathcona

County. Of the rest of the respondents, 12.5% said no, while the remaining 20.9% were not sure.

Of the 66.6% who said yes, here are the main reasons mentioned multiple times:

- A variety of answers were provided that centered on maintaining a professional appearance, as a maintained property reflected the pride that residential owners have for their community. Many people also added that living next to properties where standards are not maintained would affect their property values as well, by association of location.
- Broken window theory. If they neighbor doesn't care, others often follow suit, with a "why bother attitude." Related to this, if a place looks like no one cares about it, criminals will take advantage.
- Buildings that have not been maintained can create safety issues, security issues and are unsightly. It is unfair to owners who take the time and effort to maintain their buildings when their neighbours do not do the same.

Of the 12.5% who said no, here are the reasons:

- There are instances where people might fall on hard times and as such, may not be able to do repairs or upgrades as quickly as they might want to. As such, people should be left to decide how their home appears.
- There were also some people who wondered who was setting the standards that homeowners should follow, and are these standards consistent across different neighbourhoods?

Of the 20.9% who said not sure, here are the main reasons mentioned by many of the respondents:

- Like many who said "no" (above), there are many factors to consider so a minimum standard would be complicated. For example, long/uncut grass could be an indication of a poorly maintained house (weedy) or it could be an example of a naturalized yard which should be encouraged! This type of viewpoint was expressed by many residents who were not sure how to answer this question.

- There were many who felt that establishing standards could be problematic. There will be a big gray area that will be difficult to enforce. What would work better than minimum standards would be to allow for redevelopment options in mature neighbourhoods. Since there is no economic incentive to redevelop older homes (i.e. lot splitting, infill), many homes in older areas are falling into disrepair and the number of unsightly properties seems to be increasing quickly.
- Related to the above summaries, there were many who questioned who decides what the minimum standard is?

Respondents were initially presented with a list of potential issues and then asked to indicate what bothered them when they looked at commercial buildings in Strathcona County, such as retail or office buildings. The results are summarized in Table 2. Broken windows, graffiti and broken garage doors were the most common problems.

Table 2
Ranking of items based on percentage of respondents that are bothered by various problems associated with commercial buildings in Strathcona County

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Broken windows	87.4%	4.3%	8.3%
Graffiti on commercial buildings, fences, garages or other accessory buildings like sheds	84.3%	5.7%	10.0%
Broken garage doors	72.8%	11.3%	15.9%
Peeling paint	66.6%	12.4%	21.0%
Damaged siding	56.2%	14.1%	29.7%
Broken or poorly maintained eavestroughs and downspouts	53.4%	19.0%	27.5%
Damaged shingles or roof material	48.1%	21.1%	30.9%
Mismatched paint colours	34.9%	37.2%	27.9%
Broken/worn bricks	42.8%	25.6%	31.7%

Overall, 82.2% felt that there should be minimum standards established for commercial building maintenance/upkeep in Strathcona County. Of the rest of the respondents, 7.8% said no, while the remaining 10% were not sure.

Of the 82.2% who said yes, here are the primary reasons that were mentioned multiple times:

- Multiple answers were provided that centered on maintaining a professional appearance, as a maintained property reflected the pride that business owners have for their community.
- Maintaining a building and the surrounding property implies cleanliness and safety at the site. Safety of the site, such as maintaining sidewalks outside of the property in the winter, was also considered important by many of the respondents.
- Many people indicated their reasons for keeping a minimum standard for commercial buildings were the same as what was stated for residential properties.

Of the 7.8% who said no, the main reason given was

- Most of the people who took this stance felt that maintaining a commercial property was up to the owners and should not be subject to outside standards that were established after a property was built. The two exceptions, however, would be if there were health or safety concerns associated with the property.

Of the 10.0% who said they not sure, here are the main reasons:

- Most of the people were unsure felt this way because they weren't sure what standards were required at the time that the property and building was developed.
- There were several people who thought that there may be economic factors at play when maintenance to a property and/or building is deferred.