

Survey report

City of Guelph

Urban forest management plan survey

Parks Operations and Forestry, January 2020

Background

The City is preparing to report on the implementation of the first phase of the 2012 approved strategic Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) and developing the next phase of the plan.

The original development of the UFMP's framework in 2007 addressed community priorities identified through a series of workshops as well as initiatives in City plans that were supportive of urban forest resources and natural heritage assets such as the Official Plan (2002), Natural Heritage Strategy (2006), Smart Guelph (2003), Environmental Action Plan (2003) and Strategic Plan (2006).

Since then, updated and new City plans, bylaws and policy, such as Guelph's updated Official Plan (2018) and Strategic Plan (2019), have recognized the urban forest as "green infrastructure" as well as continued to support the importance of protecting and enhancing the urban forest and associated benefits.

An online survey was completed between December 12, 2019 and January 8, 2020, using Guelph's "Have your say" online community engagement site. The survey was made available to the public but was also emailed directly to over 140 key stakeholders including city council and executive team, City of Guelph staff, developers, consultants, green industry contractors, members of the building community, forestry and arboriculture professionals, landscapers, non-profit organizations and environmental interest groups. The purpose of the survey was to gain insight about the community's:

- Awareness of the City's 20-year strategic UFMP;
- Support and opinions of the vision of the UFMP;
- Opinions on the City's progress to meet goals to support the vision;
- Opinions on the strategic direction and priorities of the UFMP;
- Opinions on continued investment in the urban forest; and
- Engagement or involvement in UFMP initiatives.

The survey is just one part of the City's approach to adaptive management, which uses a systematic, practical approach to improving resource management policies and practices.

A total of 170 people from across the City completed the survey.

The results of the survey suggest that overall the respondents agree with the current vision of the UFMP and the City's management approaches and are supportive of the UFMP vision, strategic goals, ongoing initiatives and long-term investment in the urban forest.

Key findings

Most respondents are aware of the UFMP and agree with the vision

- Sixty-seven per cent know that the City has an approved urban forest management plan; and

- Sixty-two per cent agree with the plan’s vision.

Respondents believe that the City needs to do more to meet the vision

- Only 7 per cent strongly feel that we meeting the vision; with most specifically saying that the we need to plant more trees and protect and preserve more trees and woodlands; and
- Sixteen per cent do not know if the City is doing enough to meet the vision.

Respondents agree that the City should continue to implement UFMP actions and invest in the urban forest

- Ninety-six per cent support in the long-term investment in the urban forest; and
- Eighty-nine per cent agree that there are benefits of in continuing current initiatives and actions as well as prioritizing new initiatives and actions; most importantly the implementation of a proactive monitoring and maintenance program, development of a tree planting strategy and building community partnerships.

Survey results

UFMP vision and strategic goals

The guiding vision and strategic goals were developed with consideration for the approved Framework for Guelph’s Strategic Urban Forest Management Plan (2007), Guelph’s environmental and land use context, and input from City staff, various stakeholders and the community. The vision statement reflects the desired outcomes of the successful implementation of this Plan, while the strategic goals are intended to guide the implementation of this Plan over the 20-year planning period (2013 to 2032).

The following questions relate to the current vision and strategic goals.

Q1

Question: Do you know that the City has a Council-approved urban forest management plan?

- sixty-seven per cent of respondents are aware that the City has a Council approved urban forest management plan

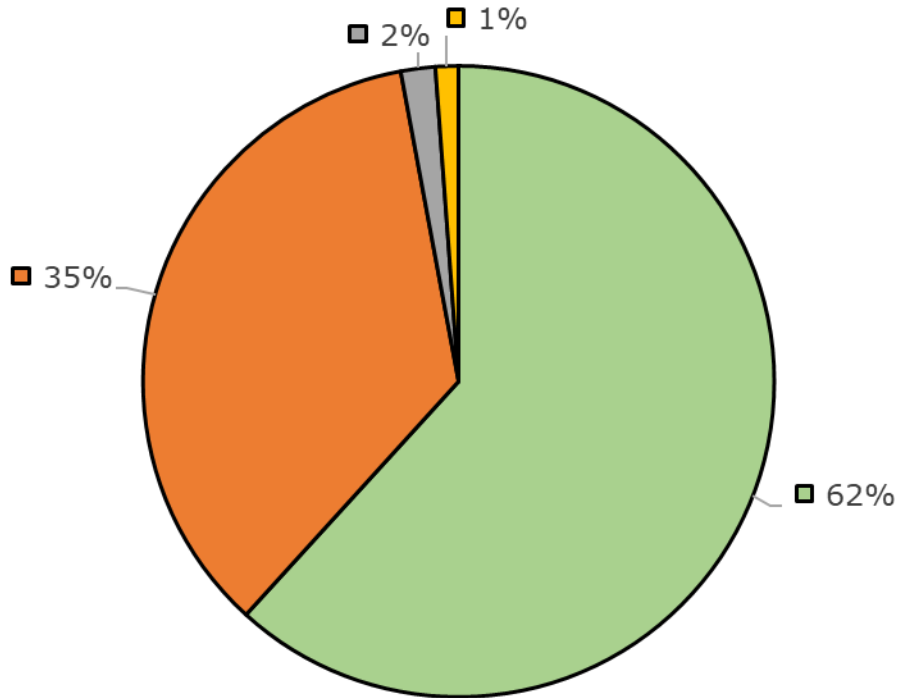
Q2

Question: Do you agree with the urban forest management plan’s vision?

The vision statement:

The City of Guelph will foster the health and sustainability of its community by increasing its urban forest cover. Continually pursuing and promoting the implementation of best practices for tree protection, tree establishment and tree maintenance will

provide a range of environmental, economic and health benefits for residents, and habitat for a diversity of plant and animal species. By setting an example on its own lands and supporting expanded local stewardship, the City will enjoy and sustain its urban forest for the long- term.



- I strongly agree with the vision
- I agree with the vision
- I disagree with the vision
- I strongly disagree with the vision

Figure 1: Question 2, level of agreement with current vision of the UFMP

- Ninety-seven per cent agree with the vision statement (of those, 62 per cent strongly agree)

Q3

Question: Do you have any further thoughts on the vision statement?

Comments received about the vision statement spoke more to the strength, or lack there-of, of the vision than the wording, although a few did suggest it is too wordy. In response to the vision statement, respondents would like to see prioritization of stronger regulations for the protection of trees during development and increasing diversity of trees planted across the City. Although the vision statement is based on the 3 pillars of good urban forest management - enhance, protect, engage -

comments reflect more the concerns of respondents for the City’s lack ability to achieve the vision rather than having issue with the statement itself.

Q4

Question: How well do you think the City is doing in meeting this vision? Tell us how much you agree with the following statements:

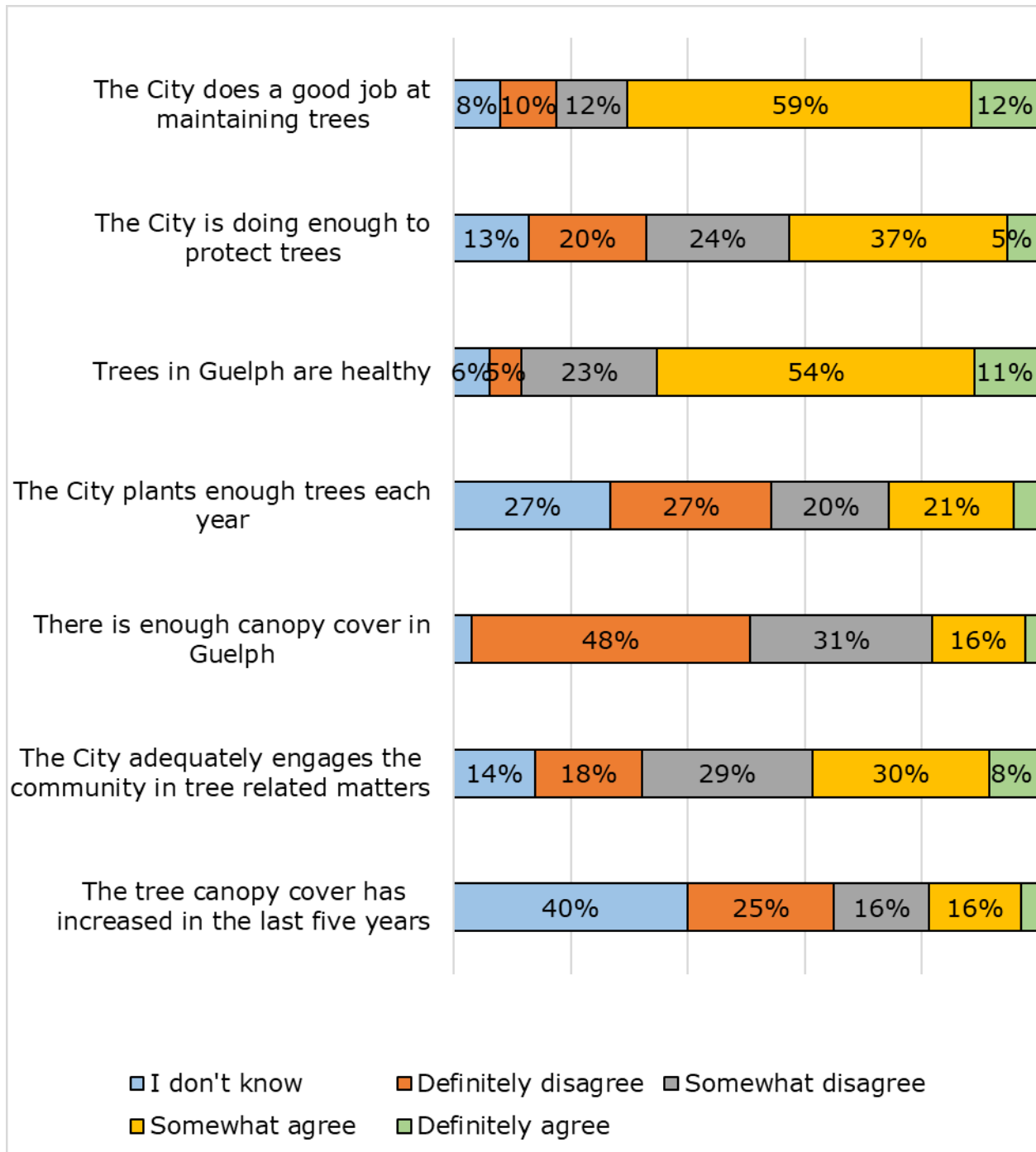


Figure 2: Question 4, how well do you think the City is doing in meeting the vision?

While there is some agreement that the City has achieved some progress in meeting the vision of the UFMP it is apparent that many respondents do not feel that the City has done enough with respect to tree planting, engaging the community and tree protection. Most concerning is that 40 per cent of respondents do not have sufficient knowledge of the City's progress; knowing if the tree canopy has increased in the last 5 years or if we have planted enough trees.

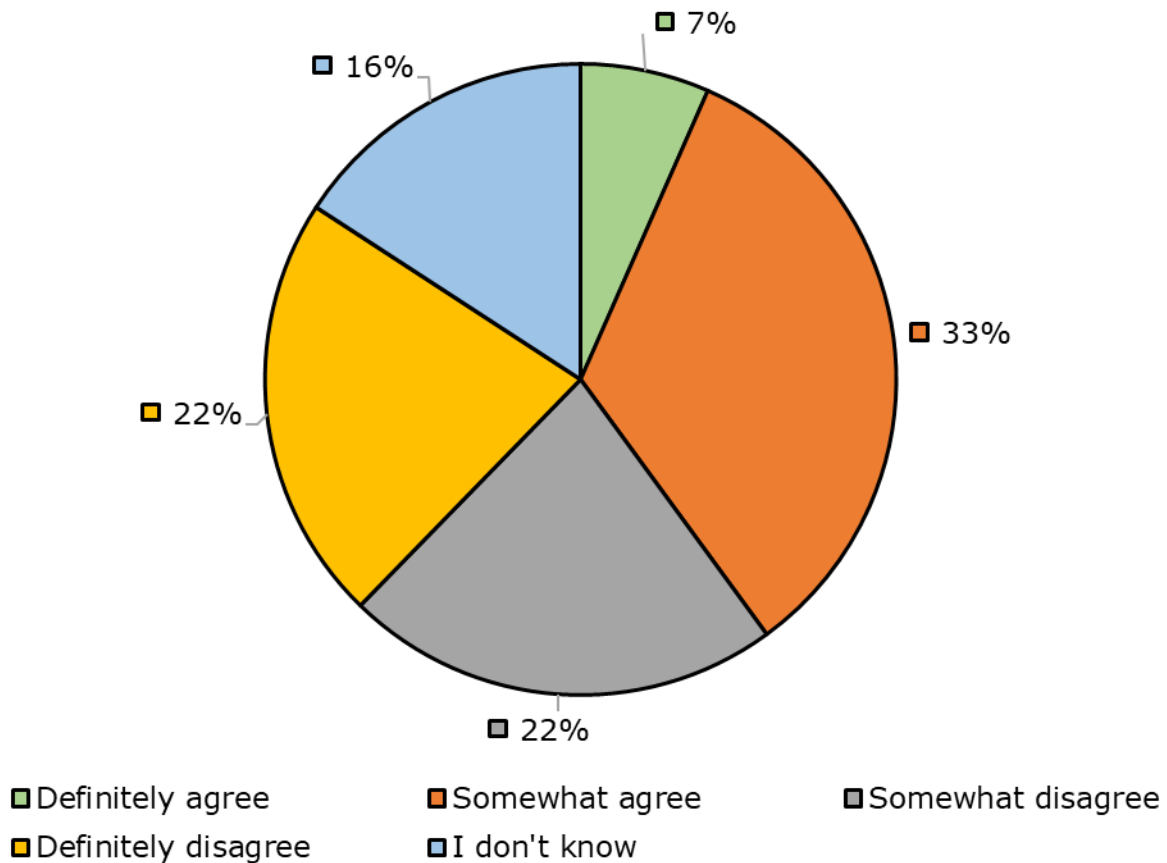


Figure 3: Cumulative responses for Q4

Only about half of respondents somewhat feel that we are achieving the vision. These results are concerning.

- Only 7 per cent feel that overall we are meeting the vision
- Twelve (12) per cent of respondents definitely do not agree that there is enough canopy cover in Guelph
- Only 20 per cent of respondents definitely agree that the City does a good job at maintaining trees, while 59 per cent only somewhat agree with that statement

Q5

Question: The following are Council-approved strategic goals listed in the Urban Forest Management Plan. Please tell us the degree to which you support the strategic goal as a way to meet our vision for Guelph's urban forest cover?

Strategic Goals:

- A. Improve knowledge of the City's urban forest assets through a more comprehensive inventory program.
- B. Monitor and review the status of the City's urban forest management every five years using established criteria and indicators, and revise planning and practices as required to ensure ongoing progress towards realizing the vision.
- C. Foster a "tree-friendly" culture among City staff through interdepartmental coordination on tree issues and sharing of ideas and best practices for tree protection, maintenance and planting.
- D. Foster a "tree-friendly" culture in the community through exemplary programs and activities on municipal lands, sharing best practices and techniques, and providing support and incentives for tree protection, maintenance and planting on private lands.
- E. Prioritize protection of mature, healthy trees and preservation of older large-canopied species to the greatest extent possible.
- F. Explore transition towards proactive tree establishment and replacement whereby all potential plantable spots in the City.
- G. Explore the use of new technologies in selected areas for integration of trees in hardscapes such as downtown and parking lots.
- H. Move towards proactive tree risk assessment and Plant Health Care practices on municipal lands, and reduce the need for emergency responses.
- I. Improve the resilience of the urban forest to current and anticipated stressors, including climate change, by implementing policies and management practices that optimize tree species diversity, structure and age classes.
- J. Build on existing initiatives, and expand partnerships and funding related to urban forest initiatives on private lands, including building partnerships with local industries and businesses.

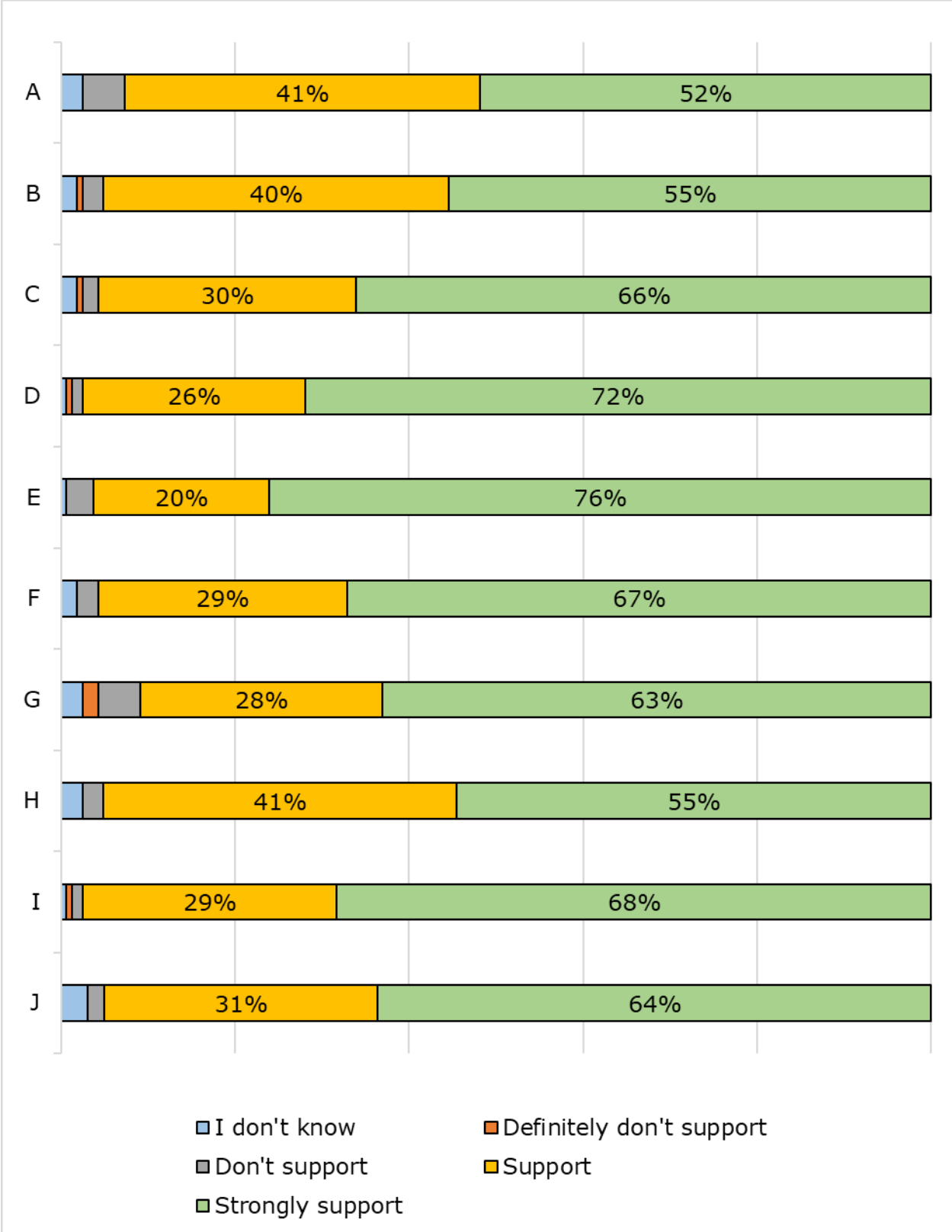


Figure 4: Level of support for strategic goals

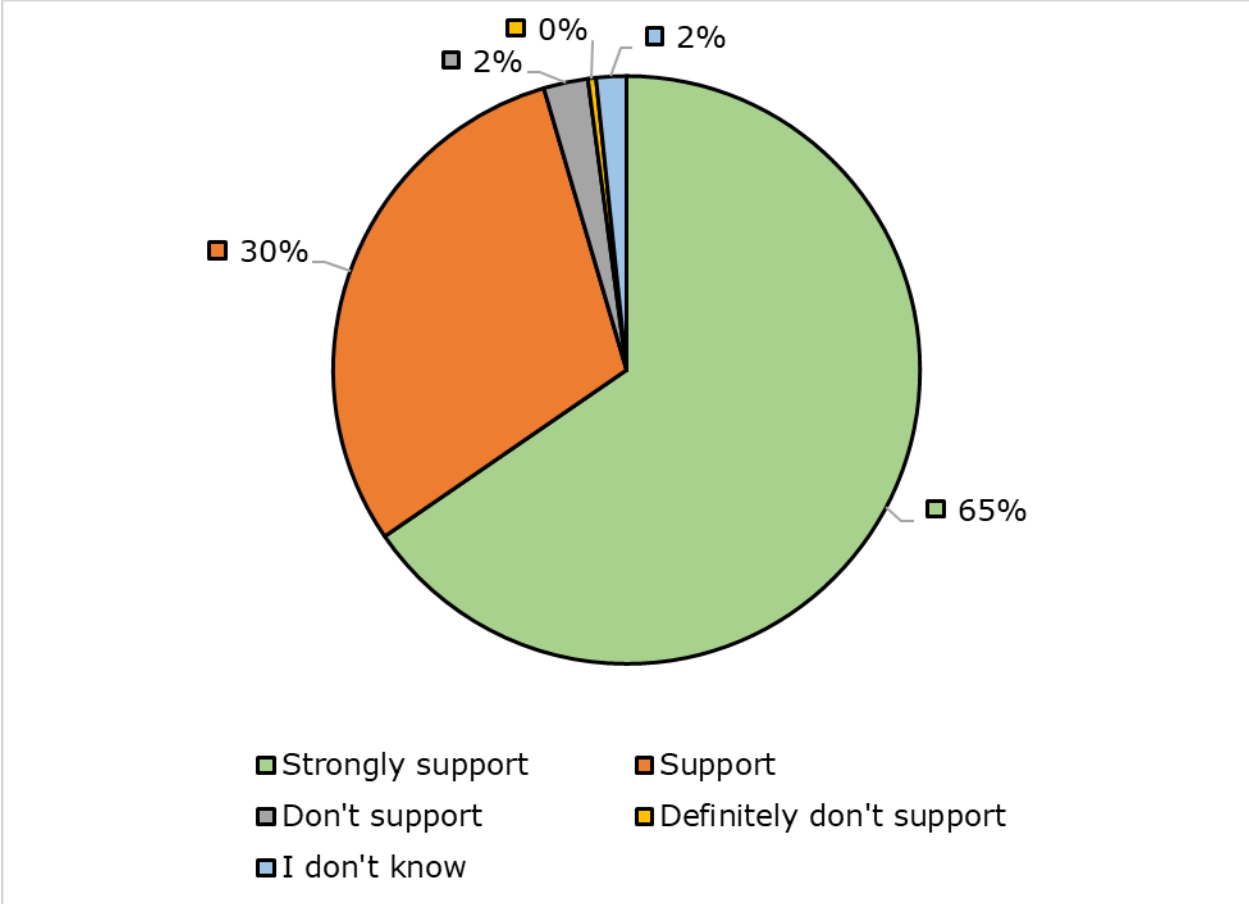


Figure 5: Cumulative responses for questions 6-10

Strong support for the strategic goals in the UFMP suggests that respondents are of the opinion that the goals are the pathway to enhancing and protecting the urban forest and fostering engagement of the community.

UFMP priority actions and initiatives

Q6-10

Question: Do you agree that there is benefit in:

Maintaining ongoing initiatives and actions such as:

- A. The removal of invasive buckthorn from forested natural areas
- B. The emerald ash borer plan

Enhancing preservation and protection of trees through a review of tree-related policies such as:

- C. The current private tree bylaw
- D. A potential future public tree bylaw
- E. The Technical Tree Manual

Increasing tree canopy cover (and urban forest health) by:

- F. Developing a city-wide tree planting strategy and planting more trees
- G. Increasing the health and resilience of existing trees by implementing a proactive monitoring and maintenance program

Increasing communication and collaboration by:

- H. Developing and implementing a long-term communication plan
- I. Continuing to build community partnerships

Monitoring our progress to deliver a "state of the urban forest" report after each five-year plan by:

- J. Monitoring our progress to deliver a "state of the forest" report after each five-year plan

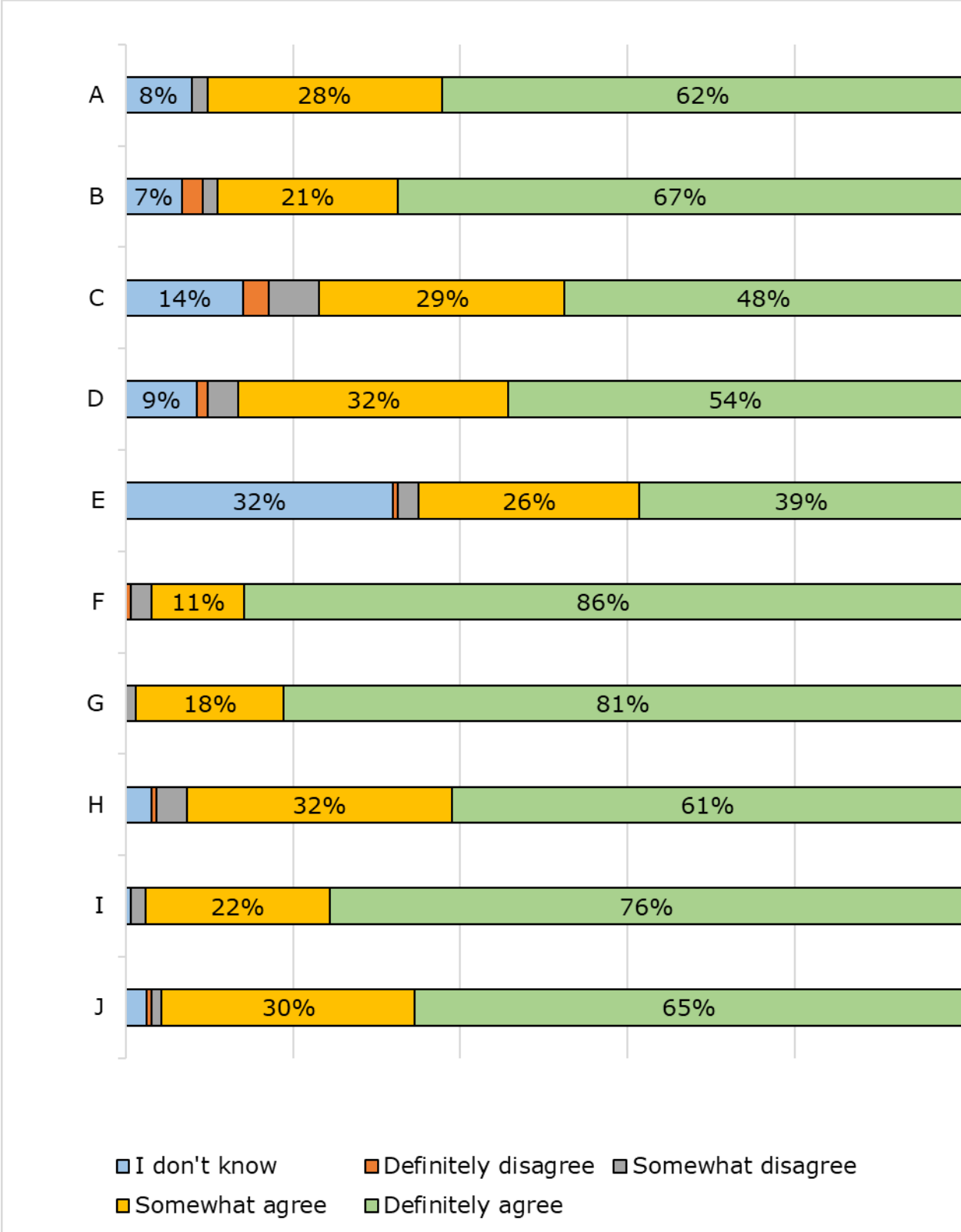


Figure 6: Questions 6-10, level of agreement in benefits of priorities, initiatives and actions

Respondents are of the opinion that the top three most beneficial actions are:

1. Developing a city-wide tree planting strategy and planting more trees;
2. Increasing the health and resilience of existing trees by implementing a proactive monitoring and maintenance program; and
3. Continuing to build community partnerships.

Thirty-two per cent are unsure if the Tree Technical Manual will be effective.

Q11

Question: Is there anything you would add as a priority over the next 5 years?

Questions 11, 12, 13 and 15 elicited very similar comments. The comment themes were combined for all three questions. Respondents think increasing canopy, protection of trees, monitoring progress, good planning, increasing resilience and implementing best practice are top priorities. Comments aligned with the strategic goals of the UFMP and recommended prioritized actions for the 2019-2023 plan. The figure below lists the themes of comments – ranked highest to lowest – across all key areas of the UFMP:

1. Management and monitoring;
2. Legislation, policies and guidelines;
3. Protection, establishment and enhancement; and
4. Outreach, stewardship and partnerships.

The figure that follows shows the highest to lowest ranked themes within the four key areas of the UFMP by the percentage of total comments.

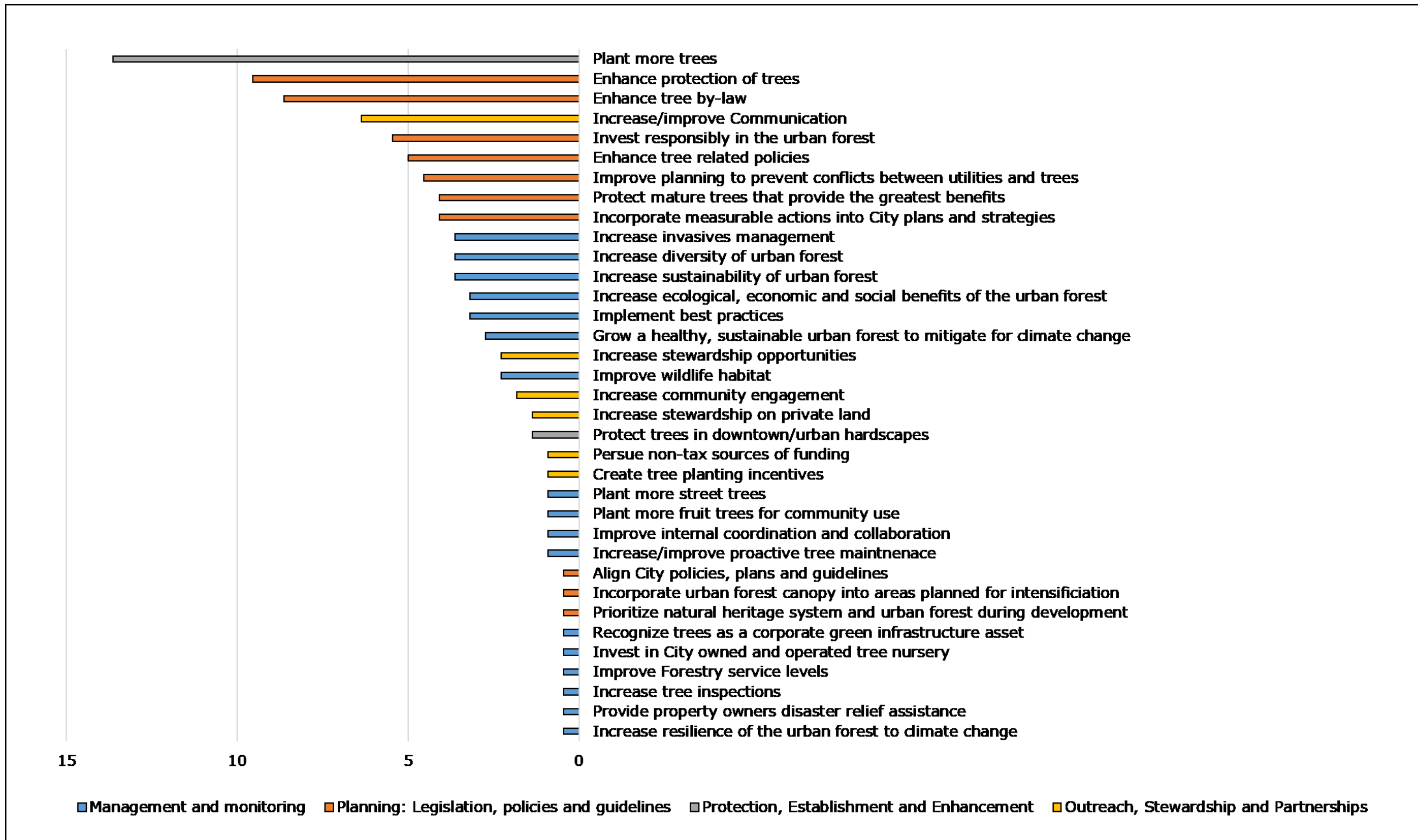


Figure 7: Per cent number of responses by theme categorized by key management area

Q12

Question: Do you have any further comments about the prioritized action for the next five-years of the urban forest management plan?

- See Question 11

Q13

Question: Is there anything you would add as a priority over the next 5 years?

- See Question 11

Funding the long-term vision

Q14

The urban forest management plan requires financial resources that has budget impacts. This is a multi-million dollar plan that spans 20-years. This investment has long-term benefits well past the 20-year plan. Do you agree that Council continue to financially support this plan?

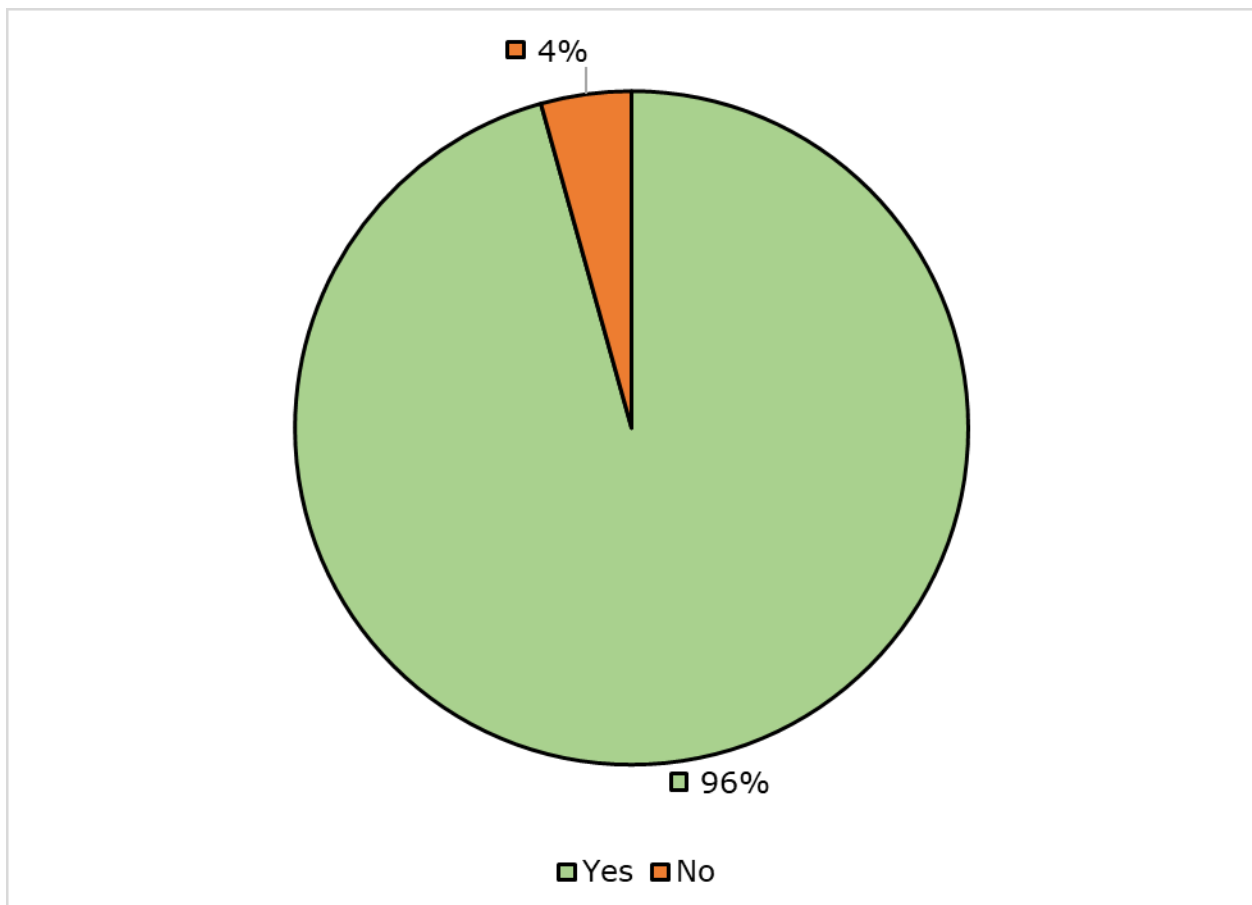


Figure 8: Question 14, should Council invest in the urban forest long-term?

An overwhelming majority (96 per cent) of respondents agree that Council should continue to support the long-term investment in the urban forest.

General comments and feedback

Q15

Question: Do you have any other comments for us?

- Refer to question 11

Getting to know survey participants

Q16

Question: What is your age range?

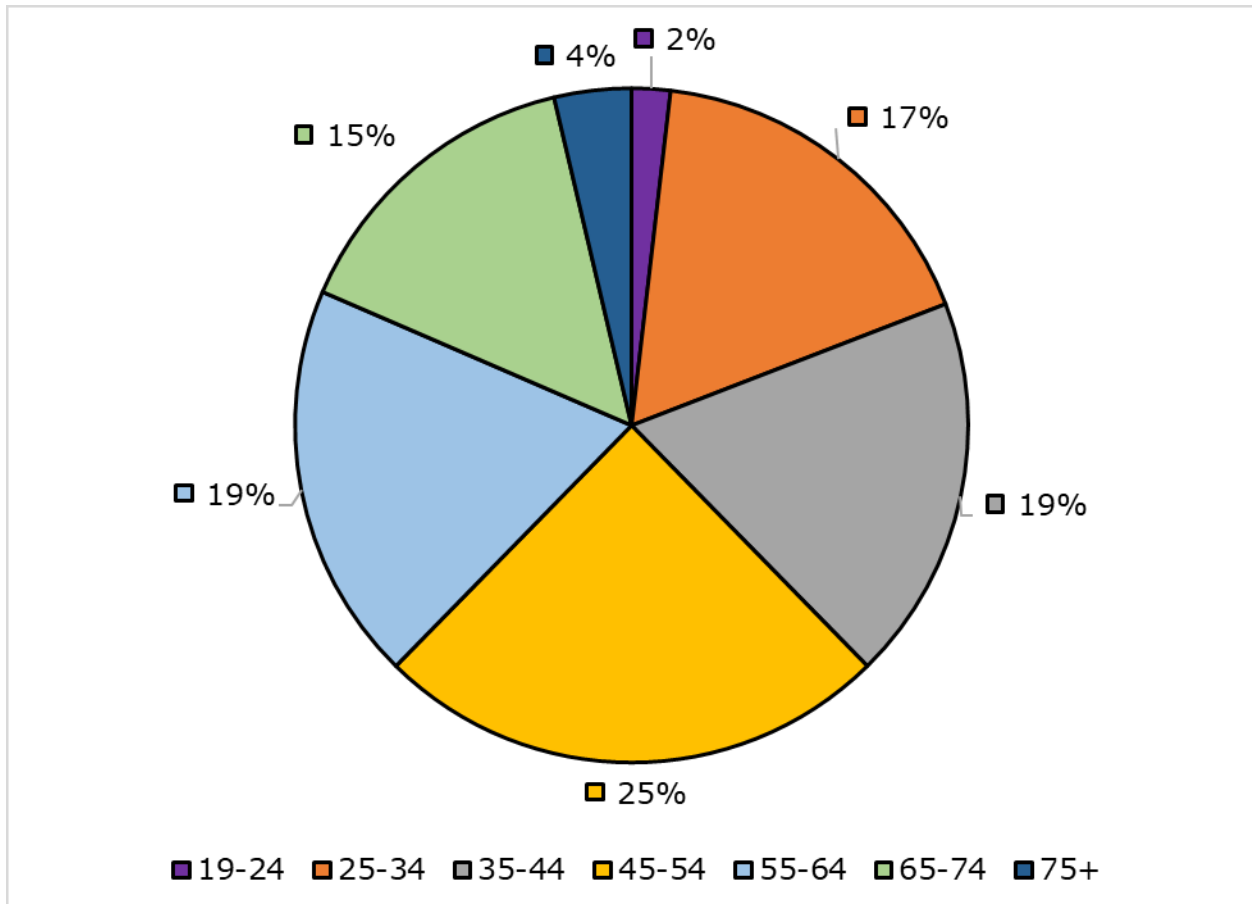


Figure 9: Age range of survey participants

The survey participants evenly spread across a wide range of age groups with no gaps in any one specific range.

Q17

Question: What is your postal code?

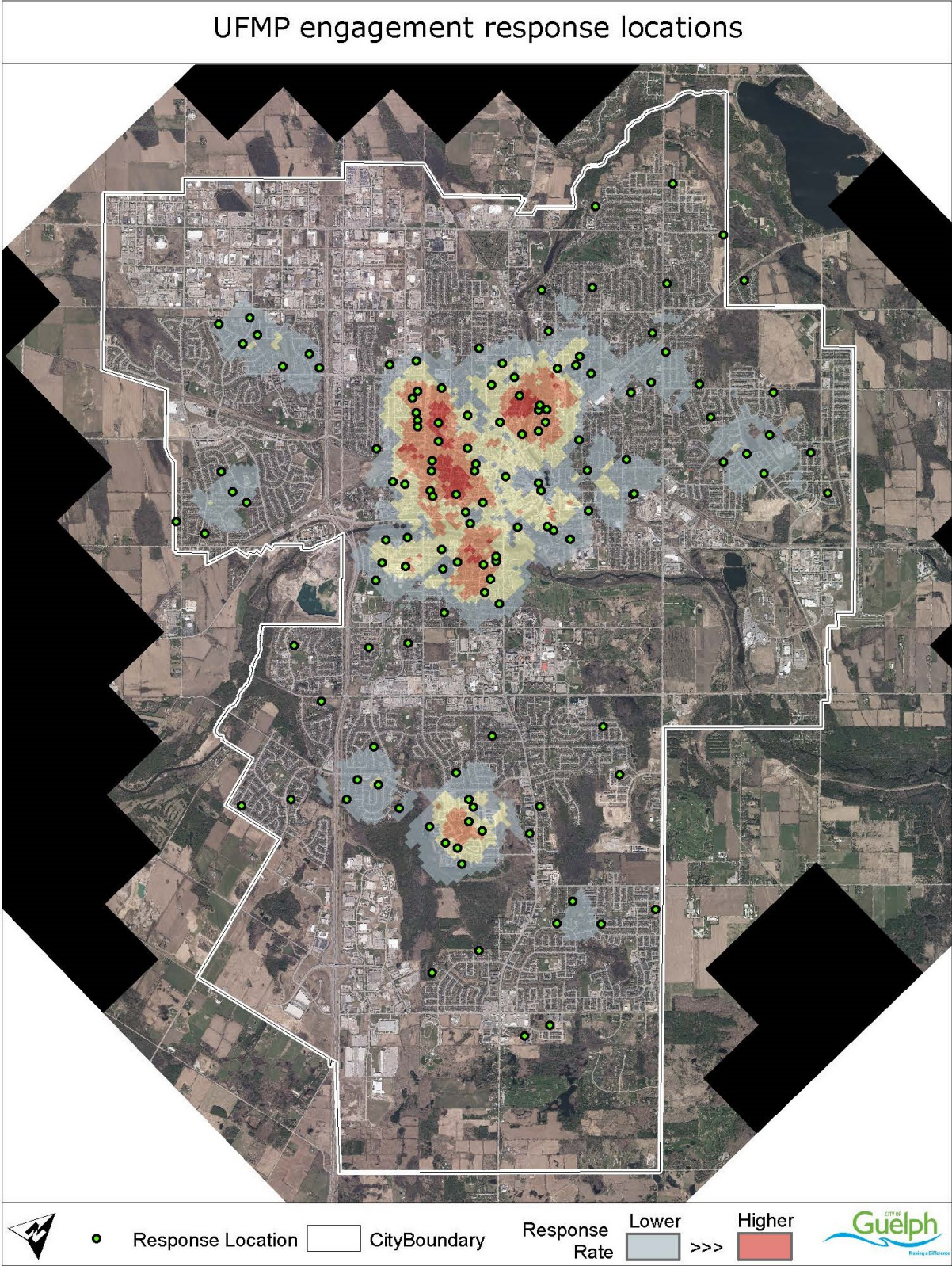


Figure 10: Survey response rates by postal code

Urban forest engagement and stewardship

Q18

Question: Have you participated or been involved in any activities that support healthy trees in Guelph?

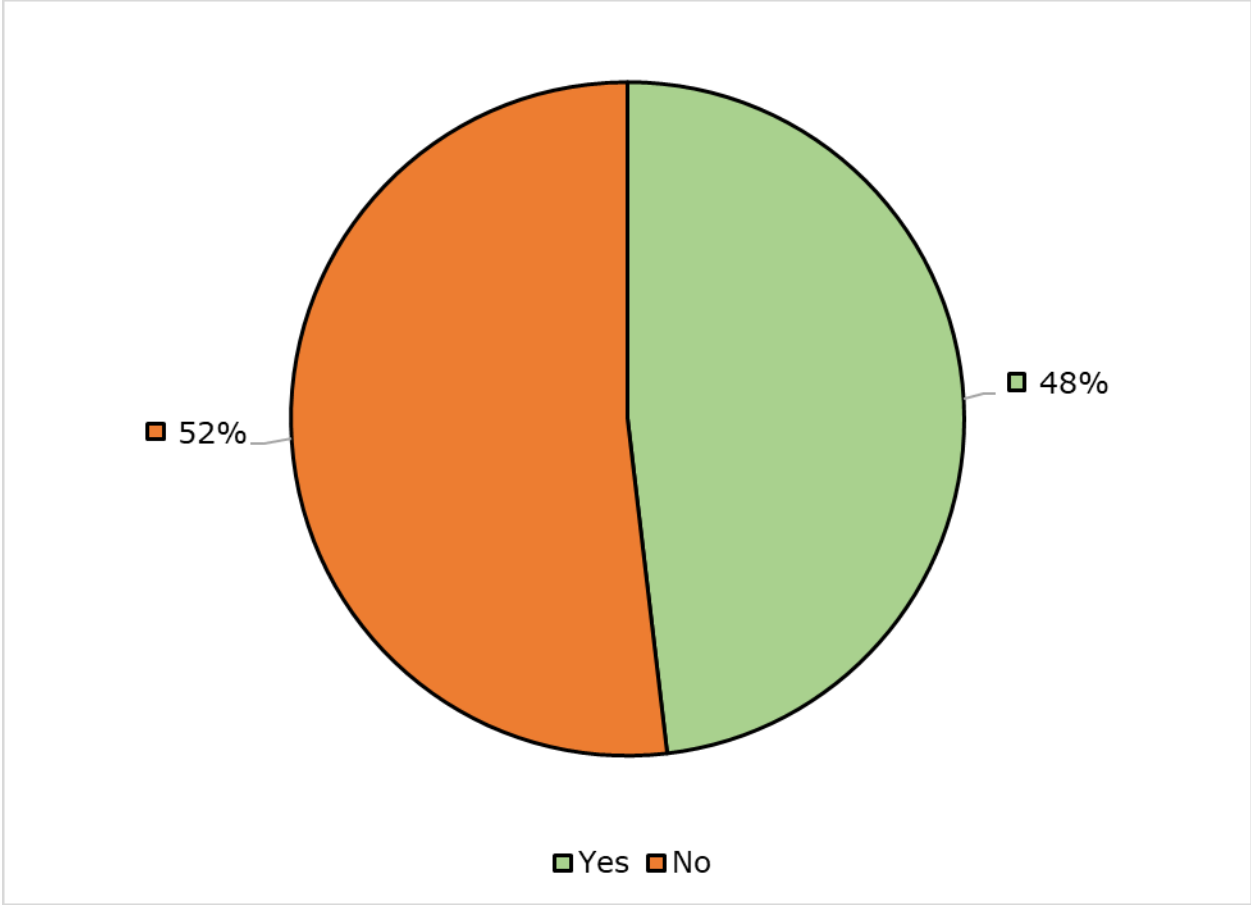


Figure 11: Question 18, per cent participation in activities that support healthy trees

Q19

Question: What were you involved in?

Most respondents listed tree planting as the top activity with 67 per cent of respondents taking part in a variety of tree planting and related activities led by the City, led by non-profit groups, on personal property or other. Other tree related activities included involvement or activities related to:

- Tree planting;
- Buckthorn removal;
- Urban forest advocacy/activism;
- Development application process;
- Tree related professional;

- Policy, plans and guidelines; and
- Environmental clean-up events.

Discussion

The survey results indicate a general agreement of the UFMP's vision, support of strategic goals, support for continuing priorities and long-term funding. The respondents would like to see more tree planting, tree protection and overall better planning of development to protect the integrity of natural areas including all natural heritage features, not just trees.

An overwhelming majority (89 per cent) of respondents agree that there are benefits to sustainably managing the urban forest through enhancing tree protection policies, increasing canopy cover, communicating effectively, collaborating with partners and the community and monitoring our process to make adjustments in our management approaches.

Results of question four indicate there is limited information on the state of the urban forest and awareness of the implementation of the UFMP regardless of annual reports to Council and various communications initiatives and that the UFMP has not yet resulted in significant progress towards achieving the vision.

Key themes of UFMP survey are as follows:

- Increase tree canopy cover through robust compensation requirements for development, providing incentives for tree planting and maintenance on private property, planting more trees;
- Increase the protection and resilience of the urban forest (individual trees and woodlands) through effective tree related policies, enhanced and enforceable regulations, standards and guidelines across all agencies;
- Proactively implement best practice management approaches for tree planting, maintenance and protection; and
- Increase communication and engagement to increase awareness of the state of urban forest and encourage action with measurable results.

These priority themes of protecting our natural heritage as part of complete healthy communities are reoccurring across both tree and non-tree related consultations. For example, the current results align with community engagement results from the original UFMP framework (2009), Clair-Maltby secondary plan (2018), Community plan (2019) and the NHAP (2018).

Overall, the results of the survey suggest that overall the respondents agree with the current vision of the UFMP and the City's management approaches and are supportive of the UFMP vision, strategic goals, ongoing initiatives and long-term investment in the urban forest. The results indicate that the UFMP recommendations still align with the priorities and needs of the community. However, most priority recommendations – protect, maintain and increase canopy cover - were not completed or started in the first phase of the plan. This survey will be used in the development of priorities in the second phase of the UFMP.