Student Housing Expansion: Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report

Introduction

The University of Victoria is proposing the development of a new, 500 bed student residence dedicated to upper year undergraduate and graduate students. The new housing will be adjacent to Sinclair Road behind the Tower Residences, using land currently occupied by part of parking lot 5.

The project will enhance the residence precinct through the careful design of size and space, connecting to the Campus Greenway and providing safe connections access to outdoor space.

This project is in the planning and design phase, which is informed by three phases of community consultation. This engagement summary shares the process and findings from Phase 1 of community engagement.

The engagement process follows the University's *Community Engagement Framework.*
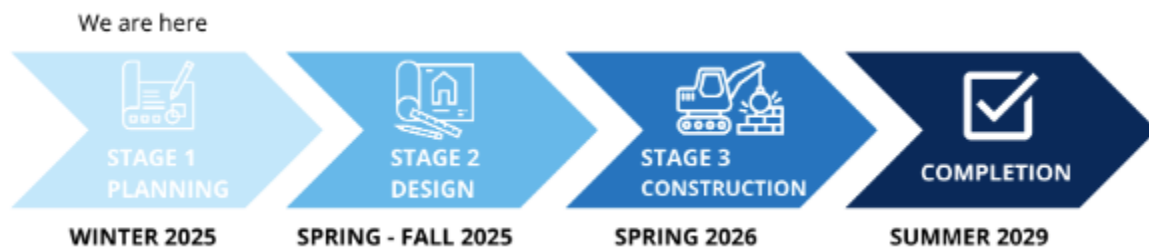
Project Timeline

Engagement Activities

Promotion

The project and community engagement events were widely promoted through UVic's communication channels, including the UVic.ca homepage and events calendar, social media posts and the Alumni monthly newsletter. All promotional materials directed audiences to the project webpage, where they could learn more about the project, complete the survey, and stay informed about the Open House events.

Committee Presentations

In January, the project team presented the Student Housing Expansion project to two key UVic committees: the Community Association Liaison Committee (CALC) and the Graduate Students' Society (GSS). These presentations served as an opportunity to introduce the project, promote upcoming engagement opportunities, and gather initial feedback on the conceptual design.

Engaging with these diverse groups allowed the project team to connect with a broad range of stakeholders, including neighbouring community members, undergraduate students, and graduate students.

Open Houses

Two public open houses were held on campus on January 28 at the Jamie Cassel Centre and January 30 at McPherson Library, both running from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. to engage students and staff during class breaks or lunch hours.

The open houses featured project team members on-site to answer questions, gather feedback, and facilitate discussions. Informational poster boards were displayed, showcasing key project details such as the proposed site, program elements, project timeline, and design principles, ensuring that attendees had access to clear and comprehensive information.
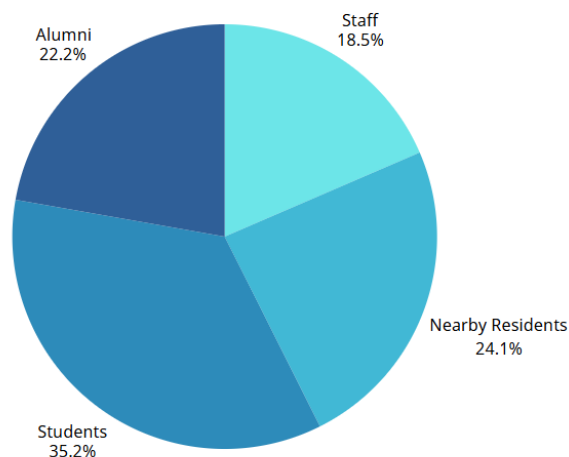
Survey

To ensure broad participation and gather feedback from those unable to attend the on-campus Open Houses, a public survey was made available on Survey Monkey from January 28 to February 9. The survey link was accessible to everyone through the project webpage, allowing community members to share their input at their convenience. The survey questions aligned with those presented at the Open Houses, providing a consistent approach to collecting feedback on the project concept.

Who Participated

Through the engagement opportunities, the project team engaged with 220 community members at the Open Houses. Attendees were predominantly students and staff/faculty with some nearby residents attending to learn more.

The survey had 163 survey respondents with a diversity of demographics, noting from the survey that respondents included 38% students, 26% nearby residents, 20% staff and faculty and 24% alumni.

Demographics of survey respondents

What We Heard

Key themes

Throughout the engagement process, participants shared valuable feedback through open houses, online surveys, and committee presentations. The project team carefully reviewed and analyzed all input, identifying key themes that reflect the community's priorities, concerns, and ideas.

This section summarizes the common themes that emerged across all engagement activities, highlighting the perspectives and insights that will inform the next steps of the project's development.

Support for Student Housing

The feedback from both, open house engagement sessions and survey responses, showcased the community's support and desire for more student housing on campus. Particularly, people voiced the need for more on-campus housing for upper-year students.

"Great Idea! Go for it"

"Grad housing NOW!!" "We need Grad Housing!" "Housing for Grad students, affordable and close to campus!"

Parking Impacts

A key theme from this engagement phase was concern over the loss of 120 parking stalls. Although some community members thought building housing over parking lots is supportable, majority of people expressed worry over the project site contributing to parking demand challenges for students and staff that currently use the lot.

"Less parking and more housing – win-win!" "Building on the parking lot is good"

"There is already a parking issue on campus, is there a plan to replace the lost stalls?"

"Concerned with loss of parking" "How will parking be managed?" "Parking on move in day is a concern"

Maximizing Building Height and Housing Capacity

Many participants expressed support for a bold architectural approach, encouraging the project team to maximize building height to increase housing capacity. Comments highlighted a preference for taller structures, aligning with the university's goals of providing more student housing.

Feedback emphasized the importance of using inviting building materials and creating aesthetic designs that avoid a cold, industrial feel. Participants suggested incorporating warm materials, greenery, and design elements that support a sense of community and comfort.

"Supportive of maximizing the height" "[I] like the tall building" "It should be taller"

"Indigenous plants and design please!" "Indigenous design! Tall buildings, modern"

"Don't make it a concrete industrial building" "More greenery – makes the view out of window less depressing and adds some privacy"

Building Features

Students were supportive of both, studio and suite-style proposed layouts, and there was excitement over the inclusion of in-unit kitchens. Students suggested pet-friendly units. Additionally, maximizing the amounts of secure bike parking, laundry machines, and study lounges is considered to be a priority.

"Be intentional and realistic about bike parking! Racks that accommodate cargo bikes are appreciated"

"Accessible graduate student studies" "Collaborative tables, inside & outside! – more charging outlets!"

"Covered, secure bike parking at no extra cost – incentive to not use car"

Tree Retention and Green Spaces

Participants expressed a desire to implement more green and outdoor spaces by minimizing tree removal and increase the amounts of Indigenous plants.

"Indigenous planting and natural landscaping"

"Please avoid cutting our beautiful trees!"

Survey Results

Through the online survey, several questions sought feedback on the building design and project priorities. The project team provided participants an opportunity to share their overall concerns and thoughts through open-ended responses.

The responses from the survey questions are summarized below.

Q1: The project proposes two room layout options: private studios and quads (private rooms with shared kitchens and bathrooms). Each room will include a desk, bed, and storage space. Common spaces will include study spaces, social lounges, laundry and athletic storage (including bike parking). Please use this space to share your thoughts on what is proposed.

The highlighted themes gathered from 97 responses are as follows:

Privacy

Many participants emphasized that privacy is a top priority for them and appreciated the idea of offering studio layouts, as this layout caters to those seeking a more private living space. Additional suggestions to enhance privacy were also mentioned like private bathrooms, in-suite laundry, and one-way glass on lower floors.

"Private studios would be an incredible option for grad students who have perhaps 'outgrown' living with roommates"

"Windows that allow the inside to see the outside but not the other way around"

"Putting in a bathroom per room or shared between two singles would add a lot of privacy and likely be more secure"

"Windows are great, but don't make it into a fishbowl for students on the main floors"

Amenities

Responses were also heavily focused on amenities that would promote active transportation and community building. Additionally, people agreed that kitchen spaces are important in upper-year units as some students may prefer to not partake in a meal plan.

"I think it is important to make sure the kitchen has an oven, but please make sure it has more laundry machines"

"Secure bike parking"

"Consideration towards moving some things in suite like laundry or bathroom"

"Comfortable lounge chairs and couches throughout the common spaces and residential units should be prioritized"

"Adding things like pool tables, air hockey, projectors, and book exchange shelves would increase the usage of social lounges"

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Affordability

Many participants emphasized affordability as a top priority, expressing enthusiasm for the assumption that quad units would be a more budget-friendly housing solution.

"Adding some cluster units might be helpful for students looking for a more affordable housing option and a more social living atmosphere"

"I hope more quads are offered, as these are higher density"

"Would much rather see the quads being the main focus"

Soundproofing

A main theme that emerged from this engagement phase was the importance of soundproofing, particularly given that this project is designed for upper-year students who may be seeking a quieter environment for studying.

"Better soundproofing would be appreciated"

"High quality soundproofing between units, as well as bedrooms within the same unit, should be prioritized"

"Adequate soundproofing would significantly improve the quality of life for students and make cluster units more livable"

"Please make sure the doors close quietly and please make sure the walls are as soundproof as possible"

Q2: How should the building be designed to enhance the pedestrian experience and campus vibrancy?

The 161 participants that responded to this question were given the opportunity to select multiple answers. The following were the top three answers:

122 WELL-LIT PATHWAYS AND OPEN SPACES AROUND THE BUILDING

113 LANDSCAPING AND GREENERY TO SOFTEN THE BUILDING'S APPEARANCE

104 TALLER BUILDING HEIGHTS TO PRESERVE GREEN SPACE AND DENSIFY THE HOUSING PRECINCT

Other themes were highlighted on the open-ended option of this question including outdoor connectivity, commercial spaces, and accessibility features.

"Include commercial opportunities so that students don't have to travel to shop"

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"The key to good planning is to build up and increase setbacks to preserve green space"

"Casual dining restaurant that could also open onto the greenway with patio space"

Q3: Please rank the outdoor features based on their importance to the project. Most important being 1, and least important being 7.

A total of 156 participants responded.

The community considered green spaces, seating areas for relaxation or socializing, and minimal tree removal to be the most important outdoor features.

Q4: Please use this space to identify any final comments related to the student housing expansion project.

This open-ended question saw some reoccurring themes including pedestrian connectivity, preservation of green space, building design, commercial spaces, privacy, parking, and a desire for amenities that will provide opportunities for more community bonding.

"Please make sure it has enough laundry machines"

"There should also be a dining area and food services in the new building as "the Cove" will not be able to handle more traffic"

"More parking should also be prioritized"

"Not only is this project removing parking spaces, but students who live at this residence and own cars will take up additional parking for commuter students."

"Quality and ease of maintenance of walkways ramps and other accessibility features should be a very high priority in increasingly high-density residence areas, thank you"

"500 is nice, but 1000 is nicer"

"Encourage use of public transport but also provide reasonable parking for bikes and vehicles"

"I'm concerned if this is built in parking lot 5, what would happen to the parking lot? Because currently it's packed full every day. There would need to be parking alternatives added to prevent serious issues."

"I think having nice materials and not feeling institutional would be great"

"Please don't make it like the new building because it's so uninviting on the outside (and the inside from photos I have seen) harsh industrial is not the vibe and is very ugly. Make it more comfy, accessible, warm, and inviting for students with soft wall colours and garden spaces"

"I would invite the decision-makers to opt for an architectural style that besides being 'energy efficient' is also aesthetic and welcoming"