



Community Engagement Report

Township of Minden Hills

March 13, 2025



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Introduction

The **Township of Minden Hills** (Minden Hills) recently embarked on a Community Engagement Program as a preliminary step to developing a Community Priority Plan.

Community Plans that provide meaningful direction over the course of their duration rely on an authentic engagement process, one that genuinely seeks input from those invested in the future success of the Township. As part of a strong engagement process, the Township invited Council, staff, community partners and champions, business and industry community members, community organizations, and the public, including both year-round and seasonal residents, to share their insights and perspectives about the future of Minden Hills.

Among other things, the Township looked for answers to three fundamental questions:

1. Who are we today?
2. Where do we want to go?
3. What do we want to accomplish?

Engagement occurred during December and January 2025, using different methodologies, attracting input from close to 700 people. These fulsome interactions and discussions allowed residents to provide an unvarnished perspective about their community, what it currently is, and what they would like it to be going forward into the future. In addition to engagement, demographics of the community were examined, comparing them to the County, a regional population centre, and to the province. Previous municipal and county reports were also reviewed, providing additional information about the community.

The information contained in this report will play an important role in informing decisions for the future of the Township. This report outlines results of the research and engagement process and includes the following sections:

- A summary of key observation
- Engagement and research process
- A summary of community input

- Identification of key community differentiators
- Insights about the community’s character, aspirations, and identity
- Answers to the key questions: Who we are today? Where we want to go? What do we want to accomplish?

A Summary of Key Observations

The following summary of key observations can be used to form the basis of a Community Priority Plan - one that details goals and objectives, as well as a set of values against which individual actions can be assessed. Detailed findings are included in the body of this report.

Figure 1 - Summary of Key Observations

People are the Foundation of the Community
Protecting the Rurality of the Community in the Face of Growth
Transforming Fear of Change into Embracing the Future
Downtown Revitalisation to Launch a Spirit of Renewal in the Community
Council Needs to Both Govern and Lead the Community

People are the Foundation of the Community

Unequivocally, participants in the community engagement process identified Minden Hills’ people as its primary and best asset. People were described as caring, friendly, generous, helpful, and a group that pulls together in a crisis. Respondents noted that residents identify with the rural nature of the community and associated values that include a collective history, self-reliance, conservatism, faith, work ethic, emphasis on family, individualism, and an acceptance of things that individuals can’t change.

These values were seen to reside in all components of the community even allowing for differences in circumstances – year-round and seasonal residents; people of wealth and those of more modest means; retirees and parents raising families; newcomers and those who have lived in the community for generations.

The desire for renewal expressed in the consultations will need to build on these values and sense of community, which many residents describe as dormant and want to have rekindled. Speaking hopefully, respondents expressed that the community is small and cohesive enough to get things done and shape its own future and that there is a willingness to establish community priorities through a lens that ensures inclusivity of the entire community.

Protecting the Rurality of the Community in the Face of Growth

Most engagement participants believe that growth is inevitable. Many saw this as positive at the same time as a majority of participants want it to be limited, and everyone emphasized that any growth needs to be appropriately managed.

Universally, respondents want the community to maintain its rural roots, continue to have a small-town feel, and embrace and celebrate rural values, and the reality of people being connected to each other. Respondents want a genuine connection to the land that can be nurtured and celebrated.

“It’s a place where the Amazon driver knows the name of your dog.”

- Town Hall participant

As Minden Hills contemplates what change looks like, as the population grows, new businesses are attracted, new job opportunities created, and new cultural, social, and recreational opportunities are developed, respondents insist that the rural nature of the community be maintained and strengthened.

Transforming Fear of Change into Embracing the Future

Many respondents spoke of a sense of weariness and suggested that the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be felt. The impacts of national issues like health care, housing, transportation, and poverty weigh on residents. They shared that the cumulative impact of incremental change

continues to erode the fundamental nature of the community, that loss of the Minden Emergency Department (ED) had been demoralizing, and that a lack of planning has left the community unfocused.

Many respondents describe Minden Hills as having great potential, but not yet realized. To fully realize the community's potential, respondents suggested the following needs to occur:

- An embrace of change
- A willingness to try new ideas and approaches
- Being unafraid to fail and the importance of trying again
- The importance of developing a plan that sets priorities and creates a sense of renewal
- Council and community leadership

There exists a fundamental faith in the community, its residents, and its potential. As the philosopher Lao Tzu said, ***“a thousand-mile journey begins where one stands.”***

Downtown Revitalisation to Launch a Spirit of Renewal in the Community

A recurring theme echoed by many residents is the importance of renewing the downtown of Minden Village. The area was described as tired, run down, unattractive, and not fulfilling its potential. Discussions revealed that people want to see a physical renewal of infrastructure, an elimination of out-dated structures, and initiative(s) to renew community spirit and pride.

Respondents want the downtown to be a gathering space that can be enjoyed by all segments of the population, with opportunities to engage family, neighbours, and friends. Downtown is seen as a place for unique retail offerings, where the enjoyment of food is mingled with social interaction, and a place where frequent and often recurring events and entertainment attract residents and visitors alike. Core to renewal is the Gull River and the desire to re-emphasize its ability to connect all downtown activities in addition to being a regional attraction of its own.

Respondents want the renewal of downtown to be based on traditional rural values, connected to the commercial highway 35 corridor, and stimulated by the Community Improvement Plan. This important project has many components which could be considered as early wins in the process of renewal.

Council Needs to Both Govern and Lead the Community

Respondents were consistent in asking Council to take on a dual role: governing the township by effectively exercising its responsibilities outlined in the municipal act **AND** providing strong community leadership by participating in and fostering activities that enhance the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the township and its residents.

Respondents are supportive of Council’s desire to engage the community in a broad-based conversation and to follow this up by identifying a community vision and a set of values that can shape strategic priorities intended to foster community renewal.

As outlined in the [Ontario Municipal Councillor’s Guide](#), from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing:

A strategic plan is forward thinking and proactive. Once adopted by council, it can be a guide to decision-making, project planning, and budgeting. If a municipality does not know where it is going, how can it make sure that both council and staff [and the community] are all going in the same direction?

ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH PROCESS

A thorough engagement and research process was undertaken to gather input from residents and to inform development of this report. Activities are described below.

Document Review and Environmental Scan

A scan of best practices, relevant policies and legislation, as well as political, economic, and social trends was conducted so that engagement and this report could be informed by the real-world environment in which the Township of Minden Hills operates.

Previous township and county reports were reviewed, including the Official Plan, the Community Safety and Well Being Plan and the Community Improvement Plan, which provided additional information about the community. Additionally, demographics of the community were examined, comparing them to the County, a regional population centre (City of Kawartha Lakes), and to the province (detailed in [Appendix A.](#))

Communications

The Township led recruitment for the engagement opportunities, including focus group sessions and interviews, and conducted advertising for the Town Hall sessions and survey.

Survey and Town Hall Communications

The Township used their media release process to launch the project. This process included posting the media release to the website, sharing it on social media, and emailing it to Council, all staff, local media, and cottage associations.

Figure 2 - Communication Highlights

2 media releases
14 social media posts (Facebook and X)
3 ads in local newspapers
1 write-up in local newspaper

Other communication and marketing tactics included:

- Signage and copies of the survey were provided to each Township facility (Cultural Centre, Library, Arena, Municipal Office and Waste Facilities).
- Signage was posted in local stores including Pharmasave, Stedman's, Keep it Local, Foodland, and Valu-Mart.
- Following feedback from residents, the survey image and link were added to the website homepage banner.
- The Township posted regularly on social media highlighting the survey and Town Hall sessions.
- Details were included in the Township information page that appears in both local papers weekly (the Minden Times and the Highlander).

- Toward the end of the project, a second Media Release was posted informing residents that there was still time to participate and how.

In addition, local media wrote and shared stories after the Town Hall sessions had concluded about participation and outcomes.

Engagement Participation by Methodology

Residents of Minden Hills were engaged in a variety of ways with the goal of maximizing reach and participation. As there was overlap in participation between the different methodologies, we cannot provide an overall number of participants. However, the number of participants for each type of engagement opportunity is listed below.

Figure 3 - Engagement Highlights

Focus Group Sessions	• 48 participants in 5 sessions
Town Hall Sessions	• 77 participants in 2 sessions
Interviews	• 11 participants in 10 interviews
Online Survey	• 481 responses
Email Submissions	• 5 submissions

Five (5) focus group sessions were held with different groups, including:

- Council and senior leadership
- Township staff
- Community, Institutional and Development Organizations
- Cottage Associations and Tourism Operators
- Businesses

Two (2) Town Hall sessions - one in-person and one virtual - open to all residents of Minden Hills, including year-round and seasonal.

10 key informant interviews with 11 participants were held with additional community partners and leaders.

One (1) online survey was developed to ensure broad input and to take a pulse-check of the community. Survey results have been consolidated with other engagement findings in this report. Detailed survey responses are included in [Appendix B](#).

Five (5) email submissions were received from those who contacted the consultants directly with input and/or feedback about the consultation process.

Community partner organizations, businesses, and groups that were able to participate in focus group sessions and interviews include:

Table 1 - Engagement Participant Groups

Aging Together	Minden Community Food Centre
Arts Council	Minden Horticultural Society
Boshkung Brewing	Minden Mercantile
Dominion Hotel pub	Minden Pride
Haliburton Chamber of Commerce	Ommmh Salon Services and Cheese Shop
Haliburton County Master Gardeners	Ontario Provincial Police
Haliburton County Economic Development	Places for People
Haliburton County Library	Rotary
Haliburton County Tourism	Sirch Inc.
Harvest Haliburton	Trillium Lakelands District School Board
Lakeland Millwork & Windows	U-links
Let's Get Local	Up River Trading
	WAI Products

Limitations / Gaps in Engagement

A limitation of this process was that even though the entire community was invited to participate, there was some underrepresentation from certain groups of the population. These groups could be targeted in the next phase of the project.

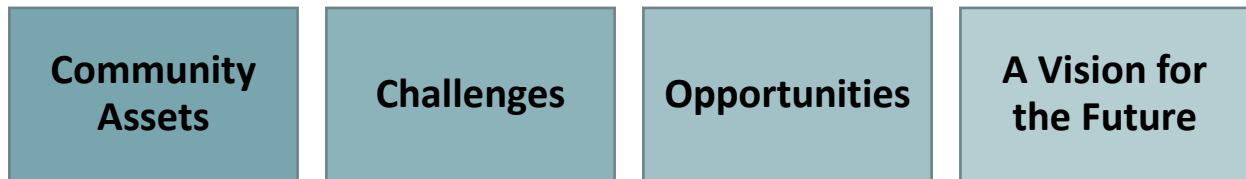
Underrepresented groups include:

- Youth
- Seasonal residents
- Visitors and tourists

Summary of Community Input

Drawing on the extensive experience of the consulting team, engagement findings were correlated and analyzed thematically into the following four categories:

Figure 4 - Community Input Categories



Community Assets

By far the number one asset identified by most engagement participants is the **people of the community**. Minden Hills residents are the ultimate source of inspiration, motivation, and renewal. They form the heart and soul of the community and more than anything, define the character and identity of the municipality.

Words used to describe residents were mostly positive and included:

- Inclusive
- Family-focused
- Supportive of each other
- Proud
- Giving
- Kind-hearted
- Humble
- Independent
- Friendly
- Closed
- Fighters
- Resilient

As one resident put it: *“If you want to have people come to a meeting, just tell them somebody is in trouble.”* This sentiment was re-enforced in survey responses as respondents identified the community itself and its people as a significant asset and described the population as caring, friendly, helpful, and generous, that they pull together in a crisis, and that the community is safe and a good place to raise a family.

An additional cross-cutting asset consistently identified is the **rural nature of the community** (see [demographic profile](#)). People expressed that that the community is small and cohesive enough to get things done and to shape their own future. Many people identified this as their reason for living and working in the community. People used phrases like ‘small town feel, people know each other’, ‘willing to talk’, and ‘people are friendly.’ Most expressed that the growth that has occurred to date has left the

small town feel intact, but they worry about the future.

Related to the concept of “rurality” is the **river as the heart and soul of the municipality** - something that shapes the community physically, but also socially and culturally. It is seen by many as a central asset upon which renewal can be centered.

Beyond people and the rural nature of the community, the highest ranked assets by survey respondents included:

- The natural heritage
- A safe community to raise children
- Neighbours
- Friends

Rated as less important were the availability of retail services, proximity to urban areas, and availability of recreational and cultural services.

Other assets identified in either the survey responses or consultation included:

Table 2 - Community Assets

NATURAL	BUILT	INTANGIBLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural beauty • Availability of outdoor activities • Agriculture • River • Landscapes • Walkable downtown • Designation as “Bee City” • Snow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HGY 35 corridor • Artistic/cultural community • Supportive local media • HCDC • Riverwalk • Cultural Centre • Library • Arena • Water & wastewater systems • Fairgrounds • Ball diamonds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serenity & quiet • Community charm • Small town feel • Community events • Volunteerism

Challenges

Ironically in many of the consultations, and very specifically in the online town hall, participants identified people as a community challenge – or more specifically the **diverse nature of the make-up of the community**. Residents noted the significant contrasts that exist in Minden Hills:

- Seasonal vs. year-round residents
- Those with wealth vs. those of modest means
- Those who arrived recently vs. those who have lived in the community for a long time
- Retirees and older residents vs. those seeking to make a living and raise a family

It was suggested by some that these contrasts emphasize the gap that exists between those with financial resources and those without, that this divergence is growing, and that the recent influx of new residents during the COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating the disparity. Conversely, many recognized this diversity as an asset that has the potential to add to the strength of the community and build on the many positive attributes individuals bring to the community.

To allow this diversity to be a community benefit, it will be important to bridge divisions, be inclusive, and create a set of community priorities through a lens of how they affect the entire community and not just one segment. To maximize the individual contributions of residents and to have the best chance of success, renewal will need to be built on the spirit and sense of community - something that clearly exists, but is too often dormant and needs to be rekindled and nourished.

Beyond the issue of community diversity, participants identified other challenges facing the community. Many of these reflect national issues, particularly in survey responses, and include:

- **Health services.** The most frequently identified broader challenge was a lack of access to medical services, with an emphasis on the recent closing of the Minden Hills ED.
- **Housing.** The issue of housing in terms of affordability and a lack of housing stock was frequently highlighted. Many identified the connection between a lack of housing and the inability to attract a workforce to support existing or potential

new businesses. Homelessness is an increasing concern and manifests itself in less obvious ways, given the rural context of the community.

- **Internet.** Respondents pointed to lack of reliable high speed internet access as an impediment to commercial development, provision of services, and the marketability of the community.
- **Transportation.** The lack of any public transportation was identified as a burden on lower income individuals without a car, impeding access to services, and creating barriers to those seeking entry level employment.
- **Cost of living.** A cross-cutting observation was the high cost of living, especially in a rural community like Minden Hills.
- **Food insecurity.** Many participants spoke specifically of a lack of food security, and particularly in relation to having a strong local food system.

Additionally, there were two important local challenges noted that are relationship-based:

1. The community's relationship with council
2. The community's relationship with Dysart et al and specifically the village of Haliburton

Relationship with Council

The role of Council and its relationship with the community was a central theme in discussions. Participants are looking for enhanced communication with Council collectively and individually. They expressed a desire to see Council be more involved in community initiatives and to see existing partnerships between the Township and community organizations be expanded and new ones be established.

Engagement participants would like council and staff to be creative in finding positive solutions to requests from the public. Although residents understood that sometimes their demands could not be accommodated, they appreciated when efforts were made to find solutions to barriers that may exist.

As participants talked about renewal in the community, they identified greater Council leadership of residents as critical to a positive outcome. It is important to note that both staff and Council are aware of this community concern. They identified a need to better

inform residents of what was a Township corporate responsibility and what was a broader community responsibility. They spoke to the challenge of balancing a desire for more or improved services with the desire to keep taxes low. They also expressed concerns that service limitations inherent in a rural community were sometimes not fully understood by residents more familiar with urban standards.

When addressing the relationship with Council, participants identified concerns and their desires in three broad areas: communication, service delivery, and partnerships.

Table 3 - Relationship with Council

COMMUNICATION	SERVICE DELIVERY	PARTNERSHIPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee turnover impairs the ability to communicate with staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Township departments need to be more client focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More support for local businesses would be welcomed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find ways to capitalize on community talents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support staff in implementing Council’s decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance partnerships with the County and neighboring townships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host regular town halls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a municipal strategic plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of provincial funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council meetings should be held when the public are better able to attend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regressive property tax system causes inequities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakdown silos - horizontal thinking as opposed to vertical silos
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a community relations staff position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimize “red tape” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement CIP tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better understanding of the needs of vulnerable populations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Township can be a catalyst for community events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead a renewal of downtown that engages all segments of the community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) public realm improvements 	

Survey respondents indicated that there is an important role for the municipality to facilitate community engagement. When asked about the activities that give people the best opportunity to engage with other members of the community, a full 18% said there were no activities or none that they participate in. The most frequently cited opportunities that people participate in were sports and service clubs.

Relationship with Haliburton County

Many individuals who participated in the community engagement pointed to the competitiveness between Minden Hills, Haliburton, and other area communities as something that could be recast from a challenge to a source of motivation and cooperation.

These rivalries have been long-standing and recently intensified by decisions regarding health care delivery. Rather than being sources of irritation many spoke of the importance of communities working together to achieve common objectives that benefit the entire region.

Respondents felt that Minden Hills should not be defined in relation to other communities but instead should celebrate its unique and special character and take pride in its history and heritage.

Additional Challenges

Additional challenges and the needs of residents can be categorized into three areas – economic, services, and social. Those noted by participants included:

Table 4 - Additional Challenges

ECONOMIC	SERVICES	SOCIAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of hotel or motel options to host significant size events• Better marketing of the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More opportunities for families – day camps, etc.• Need for a senior centre and related housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fewer community events than in the past• Lack of community events that appeal across demographics

ECONOMIC	SERVICES	SOCIAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to increase retail offerings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown gathering place that accommodates all components of the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better use of the fairgrounds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for a community pool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better public access to the water
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved infrastructure downtown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for a splash pad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly events to draw people downtown
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public washrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service expectations of new residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better integration of new community residents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial funding models that do not account for rural realities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for more retail and service offerings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Night life for younger residents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High cost of goods (groceries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of mental health services – especially for youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social capital is depleted and needs to be revived
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International uncertainty 		

Opportunities

Participants identified many individual opportunities for Minden Hills to build on the community’s assets and address identified challenges. Beyond specific opportunities, **four themes** emerged throughout consultations when speaking of prospects for Minden Hills:

1. Strengthening the small business, tourism, and local food sectors as a means of creating additional wealth and jobs
2. Employing a “Back to the Future” approach
3. Pursuing innovative approaches to community and broader challenges
4. Reinvigorating the village downtown

Strengthening the Small Business, Tourism, and Local Food Sectors

There is a widespread belief that the economic well-being of the community is dependent on tourism and the small business sector which services it, as well as the need to strengthen the local food system, including agriculture and local markets. Complementing this approach is the opportunity to expand the small business retail, service, and food sectors to better serve year-round and seasonal populations.

Participants provided a number of suggestions, most of which were shaped around four themes:

- Position Minden Hills as the gateway to cottage country
- Create a marketing plan that encourages temporary visitation to complement seasonal visitation
- Provide a regulatory environment and infrastructure improvements that encourage investment in new small businesses providing goods, services, and food
- Better connect the downtown to the Highway 35 business corridor

Specific ideas included:

- Creating additional short-term rentals to both serve as a waypoint to other destinations and provide accommodations for destination events
- Create a distinct lure that attracts people to the community
- Create a destination musical festival event that incorporates use of the fairgrounds
- Build a plan based on the community's history and heritage
- Leverage the knowledge and enthusiasm of young seniors moving to the area

Back to the Future

Beyond an expected nostalgia, a recurrent theme is the belief that many of the social, cultural, and economic drivers that were successful in the past should be revitalized and, where necessary, adapted to today's realities. Participants identified a number of these opportunities including:

- Increasing the number and scope of community events that appeal to all segments of the population
- Creating a downtown gathering space where residents can congregate to engage, celebrate, and participate in community events

Pursuing Innovative Approaches

Complementing the suggestions of building on past successes is the idea that Minden Hills could champion innovative solutions to both local and national challenges. Many suggested that the rural nature of the community could be leveraged to develop best practices in addressing a series of challenges including:

- Becoming a service centre for niche online retailing
- Developing a rural transportation system that is effective, sustainable, and affordable
- Promoting multi-generational families in multi-generational homes, as a mirror of a seasonal population practice

Reinvigorating Downtown

A consistent idea expressed by many participants and foundational to the concept of renewal is the need to reinvigorate the downtown core. There is an identified need for physical renewal, an emphasize of community as central to civic well-being, and a celebration of rural as being core to community identity. Included in suggestions about downtown revitalization is using the river as the foundational anchor. The Gull River was described as the most beautiful aspect of downtown Minden and a source of fun and joy – especially during the summer months.

To complement the river as the core to downtown, many expressed the need for a community hub such as an expanded cultural center, creation of a green commons where people could gather, or establishing a community-built meeting place for socialization. It was also noted that whatever was established would need to appeal to all segments of the community.

Specific suggestions included:

- Enhancing the general visual appeal
- Removing derelict buildings and enforcing the property standards bylaw
- Repairing and maintaining downtown municipal infrastructure
- Incorporating the river and river-based activities as the core of the community
- Providing additional downtown parking
- Championing the creation of higher-intensity housing in the core settlement area
- Creating a Business Improvement Association
- Funding tools to assist businesses as part of the CIP

- Creating a link between the downtown and the Highway 35 commercial core
- Attracting more unique Minden retail offerings
- Attracting more restaurants that serve all segments of the population
- Hosting more events and expanding cultural offerings downtown
- Establishing a youth drop-in centre
- Maintaining a thrift shop to serve less affluent residents
- Facilitating the redevelopment of the Rockcliffe property
- Promoting the downtown as a place for entrepreneurial innovation and opportunity
- Marketing a revitalized downtown as a tourism destination

A Vision for the Future

In addition to identifying specific opportunities for action, engagement participants were also asked to provide a vision of what the community could look like beyond the next decade. Dominating this discussion was the issue of growth and what it should look like. Most believe that growth is inevitable, and while many see it as positive, a majority want it to be limited, and everyone emphasized that it needs to be appropriately managed.

Many expressed principals that could govern growth including that:

- It should be governed by a renewed official plan
- Maintaining the rural nature of the community is a priority
- Residential and commercial growth should be limited to specific areas
- Accompanying municipal and service infrastructure needs to be built and appropriately funded and maintained
- Growth can be achieved through intensification within the settlement core

More broadly, participants want to see more businesses and job opportunities in the community. Also identified as important is the establishment of more social and recreational opportunities, as well as the establishment of more things for young people to do.

The survey revealed few people opposed to change; however, most want to ensure that change does not alter the rural nature of the community. These observations were

reinforced by comments made during the town hall and the various other interactions. Many made the point that growth must also be environmentally sustainable.

Specific long-term suggestions for community development include:

- Technology to promote sustainability development
- Hydro development
- Alternative housing development such as modular homes
- New water and wastewater technologies
- Have seasonal residents become year-round residents earlier in their life cycle
- New revenue through expanded assessment
- Better high-speed connectivity
- Consider moving to a single-tier government
- Create economic opportunities by leveraging growth happening in areas like Lindsay
- Expanding activities on the river

Key Community Differentiators – A Demographic Perspective

As part of the analysis, a demographic profile was studied and identified key indicators were compared to the County, a regional population centre (City of Kawartha Lakes), and the province as a whole. Rural Ontario comparators were published by the [Rural Ontario Institute](#). The Profile Table is included in [Appendix A](#).

Key Observations

- Minden Hills has a typical rural Ontario community profile.
- Like many rural communities, Minden Hills experienced significant population growth during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Over a third (34.7%) of residents are over 65, while approximately one in ten (10.5%) is fourteen and under.
- The median age is 58.8, compared to an average median age in rural Ontario of 47.
- Approximately 1 in 20 residents (4.5%) live in a multi-residential unit as compared to almost 1 in 3 (31.2%) in Ontario.
- The average individual income (\$50,320) is lower than the average individual income reported in rural Ontario (\$52,760).
- 91% of residents are non-immigrants compared to 70% in Ontario.
- 74.6 % of the population is considered third generation Canadians as compared to 43.6% in Ontario.
- 2.8% of the population is a visible minority compared to 34.3 % in Ontario.
- 15.6% of the population has a university degree compared to 30% in Ontario.

Community Character, Aspirations, and Identity

Throughout engagement, questions were asked to help define a community identity shaped by common interests and shared experiences. Although a diverse community, residents do have characteristics that make them similar to each other, aspire to similar goals of community improvement, and have a shared sense of belonging and connection with one another.

The issue of identity was explored by asking participants a series of question which included:

- Why do you choose to live in the community?
- What best describes Minden Hills?
- What is a single word or phrase that captures the heart and soul of Minden Hills?
- How would you best describe the identity of Minden Hills?

Items more frequently cited are indicated in bold in the tables below.

Why do you choose to live in the community?

- **Multi-generational cottagers**
- **Natural beauty of the area**
- **Great place to raise a family**
- Cultural amenities
- **Family vacations in the area**
- Social opportunities
- **Proximity to the GTA**
- **Family lives in the area**
- Job opportunities
- **Transition from cottager to year-round resident**
- Outdoor amenities

What best describes Minden Hills?

- **Surrounded by natural beauty**
- **Friendly**
- Unwillingness to try new things
- Opportunity for life balance
- **Home**
- **Welcoming**
- Social problems hidden
- COVID isolation lingers
- Lack of diversity
- **River community**
- **Unwillingness to change**
- Rural community
- Conservative

How would you best describe the identity of Minden Hills?

Outdoor experience Roots run deep Life is slower
 Connection with nature A place to make connections A place to be healthy

What is a single word that captures the heart and soul of Minden Hills?

Overall, there was a **variety of opinions in response to this question**. A majority of engagement participants have a balanced perspective of the community, and can identify both positive community assets and more negative challenges facing the community. There were also some participants who have solely a positive perspective, and some who have solely a negative perspective.

The most frequently-shared words can be classified into five broad categories, as they relate to attitude, people, attributes, factual statements, and the metaphysical ‘feel’ of the community. More negative comments have been italicized in the table below.

Table 5 - Perspectives of Minden Hills

ATTITUDE	PEOPLE	ATTRIBUTES	FACTUAL	METAPHYSICAL
The Rock	Inclusive	Gateway	Resident	Living the dream
Electric	Giving	Beautiful	County seat	Heaven
Getting things done	Friendly	Picturesque	Home	Comfortable
Full of potential	Family-oriented	Great green space	Small town	Community
Work in progress	Kind-hearted	Quiet	High taxes	
Opportunity	Supportive	Gull River playground		
Changing	Humble	Tranquil		
Re-identifying	Fighters	Nature		
Lacking identity	Proud	Lake country		
Accepting	Independent	Small but mighty		
Unique	Generous			
<i>Isolating</i>	Resilient			
<i>Declining downtown</i>	Compassionate			
<i>Business unfriendly</i>				
<i>Dying</i>				
<i>Stuck</i>				
<i>Negative / Tired</i>				

In trying to summarize what we heard in respect to overall community identity, the phrase that most readily comes to mind is ***unfulfilled potential***.

There were four themes or community attributes that contributed to this finding:

1. **Most of the physical attributes that were identified are under-utilized.** There is a significant body of traditional use which should be reviewed and re-shaped to meet the realities of the middle of the 21st-century. A new approach should not be seen as a reputation of one's history and values - rather an evolution of it.
2. **There is a clear resistance among some segments of the population to try new things.** This is based on a number of factors including potential cost, less than satisfactory experiences in the past, and an unwillingness to accept new ideas and approaches championed by an influx of seasonal residence and newly arrived full-time residents.
3. **There is a lack of strategic direction to help shape what new initiatives should look like and what items should be a priority.** The public provided a wide range of ideas. Individually each has merit, but to try to proceed with all of them would likely result in none of them being successful. It will be imperative for the community to decide on its priorities, hopefully in the context of a strategic plan that is shaped by widely-held community values.
4. **Those that live in the community love it and are proud to call Minden Hills home.** Many recognize that things could be better, however there is resistance to change as people worry that the outcome may negatively impact the positive attributes of the community. How to ensure that change is managed and produces positive results needs to be addressed through a continuing community discussion, leadership by council, and the development of strategic priorities to guide the community's evolution.

Conclusion – Proposed Answers to The Key Questions

As part of the engagement process, Arising Collective was asked to uncover answers to three fundamental questions. Based on the outcomes of community engagement, research, and analysis, answers to these questions are below.

Who are we today?

A small Ontario rural community with a unique heritage and proud history. A community surrounded by extraordinary natural beauty, made up of diverse groups of year-round, seasonal, long-standing, and newer residents. One that hosts retirees and younger families, and people from a wide range of financial situations, all of whom can be described as generous and caring.

It is a community that has accomplished much, is modest in its outlook, and has great potential for its future.

Where do we want to go?

Minden Hills wants to build on its natural and built assets as it renews itself in an inclusive and comprehensive manner. Building on the diversity of its residents' talents and through an invigoration of volunteerism, leveraging of social networks, and with the leadership of Council, it intends to establish community priorities that address all segments of the community, while contributing to an increased standard of living and a better quality of life.

The journey may be long, and it may be challenging, but it needs to begin now.

What do we want to accomplish?

A thriving small community that continues to be a great place to live, visit, retire, and raise a family by being one that:

- Embraces changes, manages growth, and remains consistent with its rural values.
- Expands its small business sector, anchored in a renewed downtown, to create new wealth and jobs.
- Rekindles the social and cultural drivers that have enriched the past and can contribute to a renewed future.
- Finds innovative local solutions to the challenges of healthcare, housing, transportation, and poverty, by building on the generosity of residents.

Appendix A: Community Profile Table

As part of the analysis, a demographic profile was studied, and key indicators were compared to the County, a regional population centre (City of Kawartha Lakes), and the province. Rural Ontario comparators were published by the [Rural Ontario Institute](#).

Table 6 - Community Profile Demographics

CATEGORY	MINDEN HILLS		COUNTY OF HALIBURTON		CITY OF KAWARTHA LAKES		ONTARIO	
	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016
Population	6,971	6,088	20,571	18,062	79,247	75,423	14,224M	13,448M
Growth Rate	14.5%		13.9%		5.1%		5.8%	

The following information is from the 2021 Census Year.

Table 7 - Community Profile Information

CATEGORY	MINDEN HILLS	COUNTY OF HALIBURTON	CITY OF KAWARTHA LAKES	ONTARIO
AGE				
0 – 14	10.5%	9.3%	13.3%	15.8%
15 – 64	54.8%	55.4%	58.5%	65.6%
65 & OVER	34.7%	35.2%	28.2%	18.5%
Average Age	52.0	52.8	47.4	41.8
Median Age	58.8	59.2	51.6	41.6
HOUSING				
Private Dwellings	6,019	21,042	38,947	5,929M
Private Dwellings occupied by Residents	3,230	9,714	32,708	5,491M
Single Dwelling	95%	94.5%	87.7%	68.4%
Apartments	4.5%	5.2%	11.6%	31.2%
Mobile	0.5%	0.3%	0.7%	0.4%

CATEGORY	MINDEN HILLS	COUNTY OF HALIBURTON	CITY OF KAWARTHA LAKES	ONTARIO
MARITAL STATUS				
Married, Single Parent, Common Law 15 & over	64.2%	63.8%	61.7%	56.5%
Single 15 & over	35.8%	36.2%	38.3%	33.5%
HOUSEHOLDS				
Living in Census Family	80.1%	79.8%	83.8%	82.7%
Single Living with Others	4.7%	5.1%	5.8%	7.0%
Single Living Alone	14.2%	15.1%	10.8%	10.3%
INCOME (AGE 15 & OVER)				
Median	\$38,000	\$38,000	\$39,200	\$41,000
Average	\$50,320	\$50,400	\$50,400	\$56,350
% Population Employed Full Time	22.9%	22.8%	21.9%	28.0%
% in Receipt of Government Transfers	23.0%	23.2%	22.1%	17.1%
% Low Income	12.3%	12.9%	10.1%	10.2%
FAMILY INCOME				
Median	\$90,000	\$90,000	\$98,000	\$111,000
Average	\$109,500	\$110,000	\$117,600	\$137,200
IMMIGRATION				
Non-Immigrant	91.3%	90.7%	86.0%	70.0%
Immigrant	8.7%	9.3%	14.0%	30.0%
Immigrant within last 10 Years	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%	2.8%
3 RD Generation	74.6%	75.3%	77.1%	43.6%
Visible Minority	2.8%	2.1%	3.4%	34.3%
MIGRATION				
% who Moved to Area in Last 5 Years	36.0%	35.1%	21.9%	21.7%
EDUCATION				
No High School	17.1%	17.0%	17.4%	15.2%
High School	31.6%	31.1%	33.6%	27.2%
Some Post Secondary	35.7%	33.8%	35.5%	27.6%
University Graduate	15.6%	18.1%	13.5%	30.0%

Appendix B: Survey Responses

To ensure broad stakeholder input, an **online community survey** was developed and disseminated broadly to residents of the Township of Minden Hills. A total of 481 responses were received, and 85% of those who opened the survey took it through to completion.

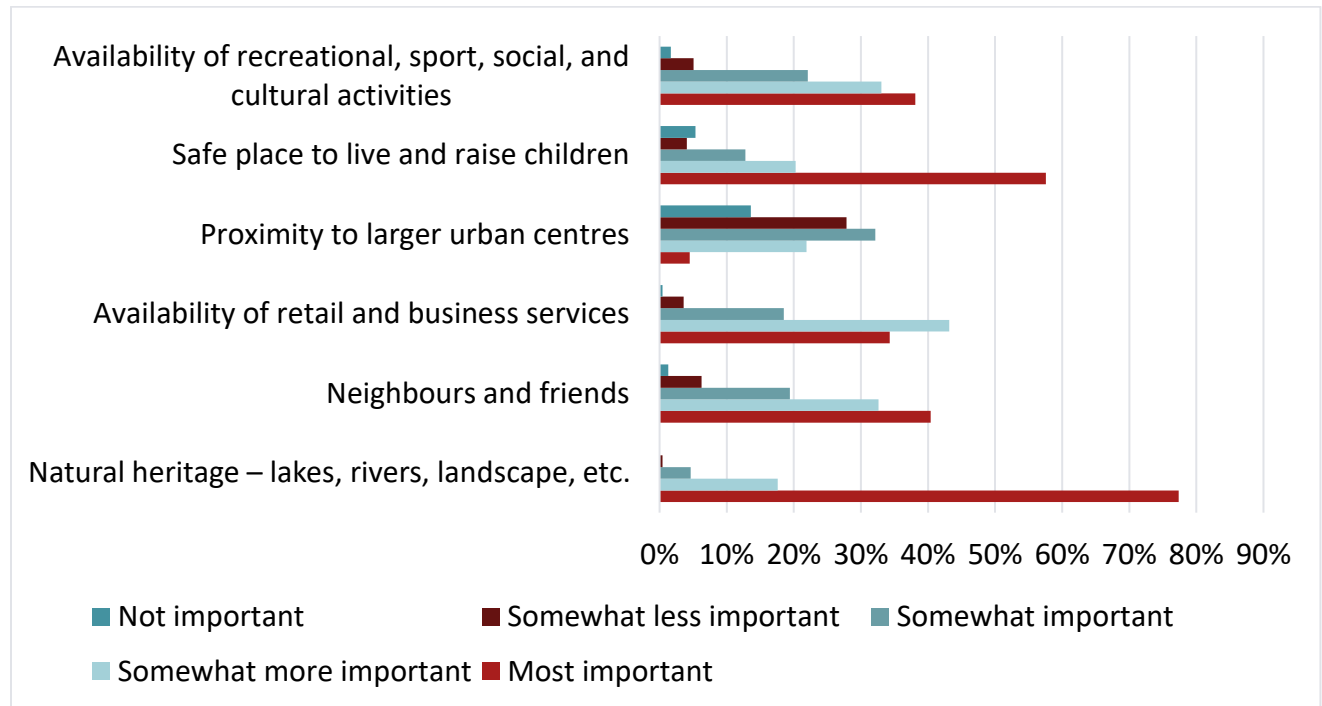
A number of the questions allowed for additional text responses to be submitted, and a few questions were open-ended to allow for more fulsome commentary. These have already been included in the [Summary of Community Input](#). In the case of the two questions related to communication methods, a summary of additional responses is included below the relevant chart.

What do you like most about living (year-round or seasonally) in the Township of Minden Hills?

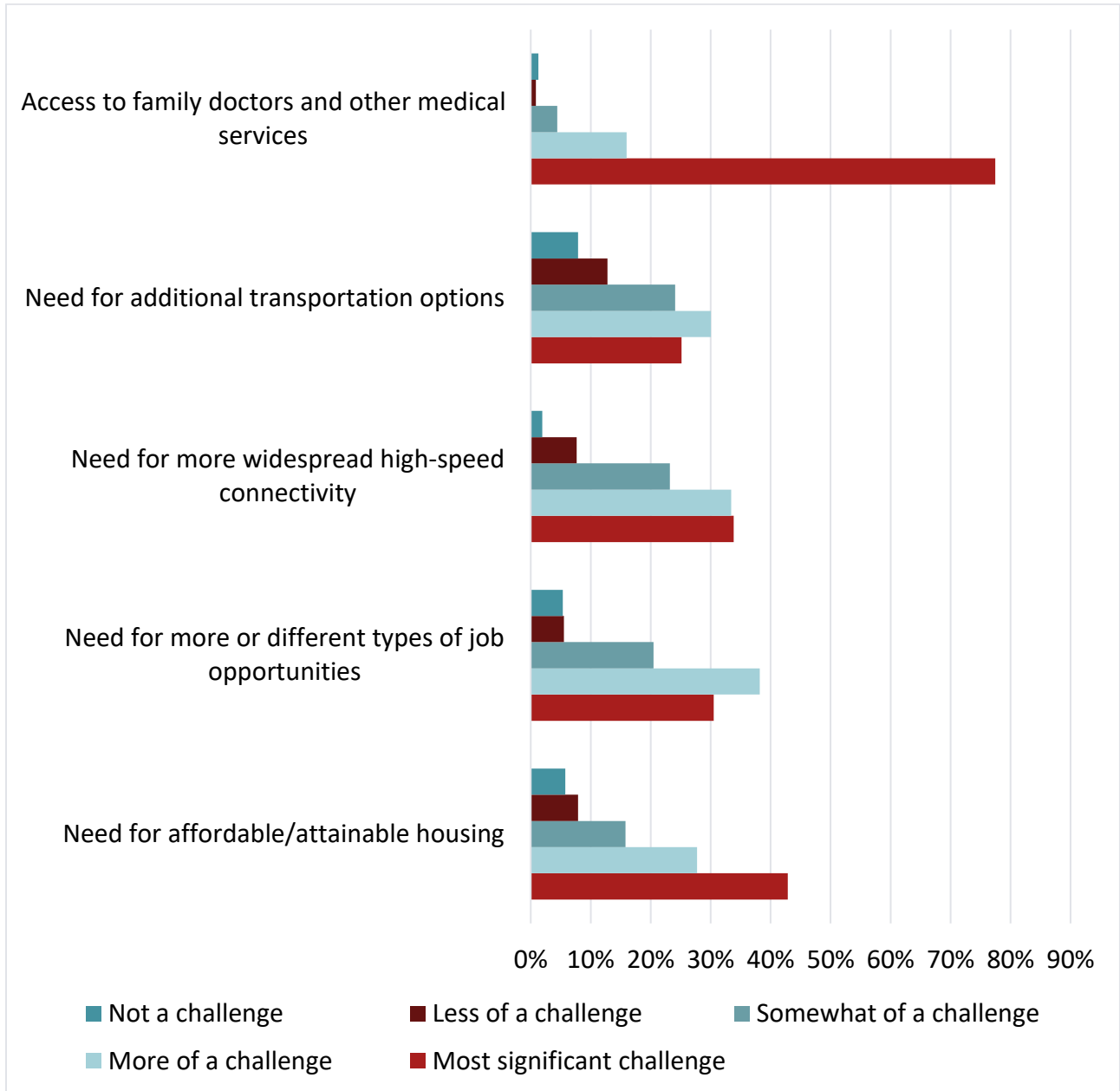
The ten most frequently used descriptive words in the response to this question were:

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 1. Lakes | 5. Quiet | 9. Beauty |
| 2. Nature | 6. Beautiful | 10. Small town feel |
| 3. Community | 7. Love | |
| 4. People | 8. Friendly | |

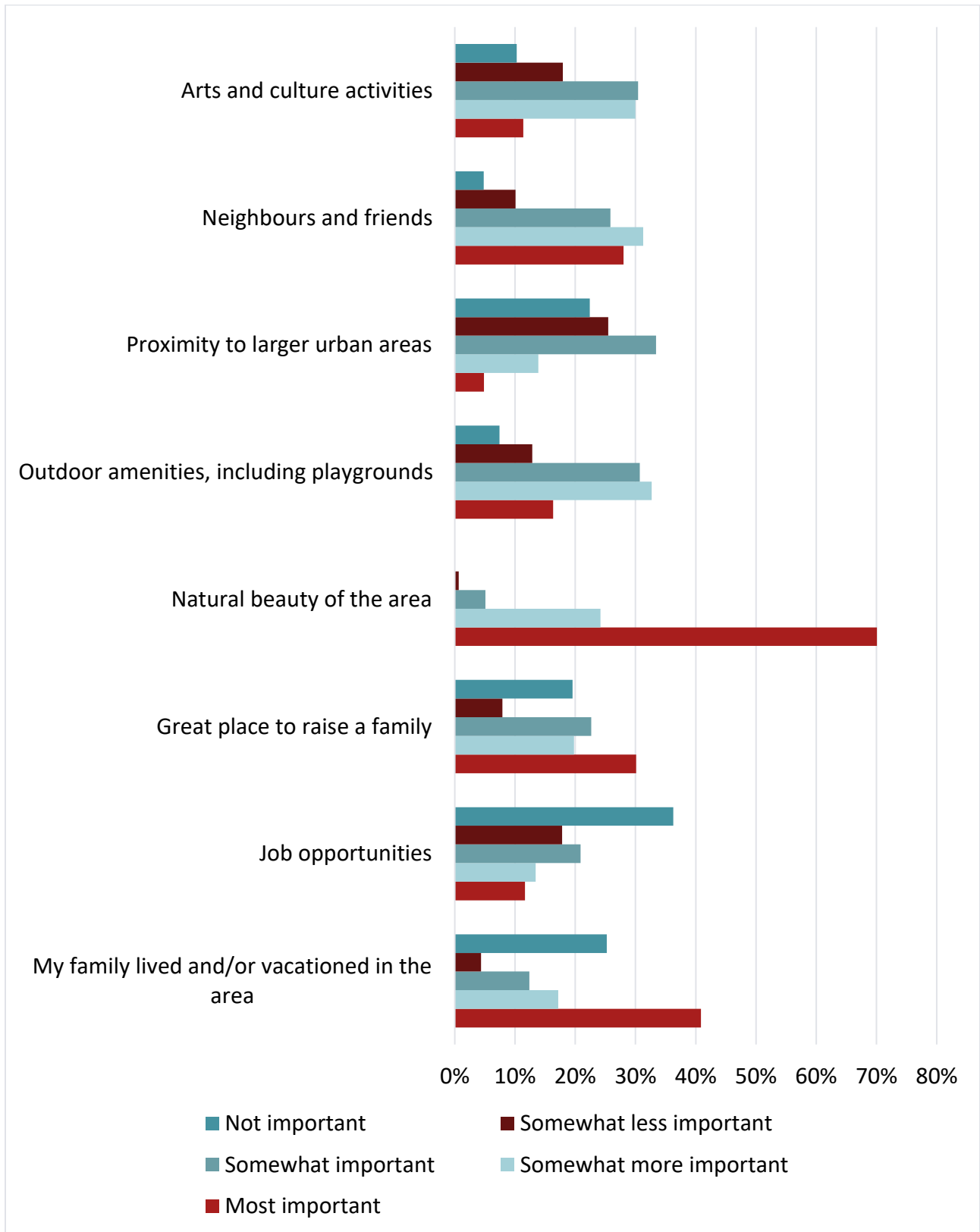
Thinking generally of Minden Hills, how important are the following community assets to you?



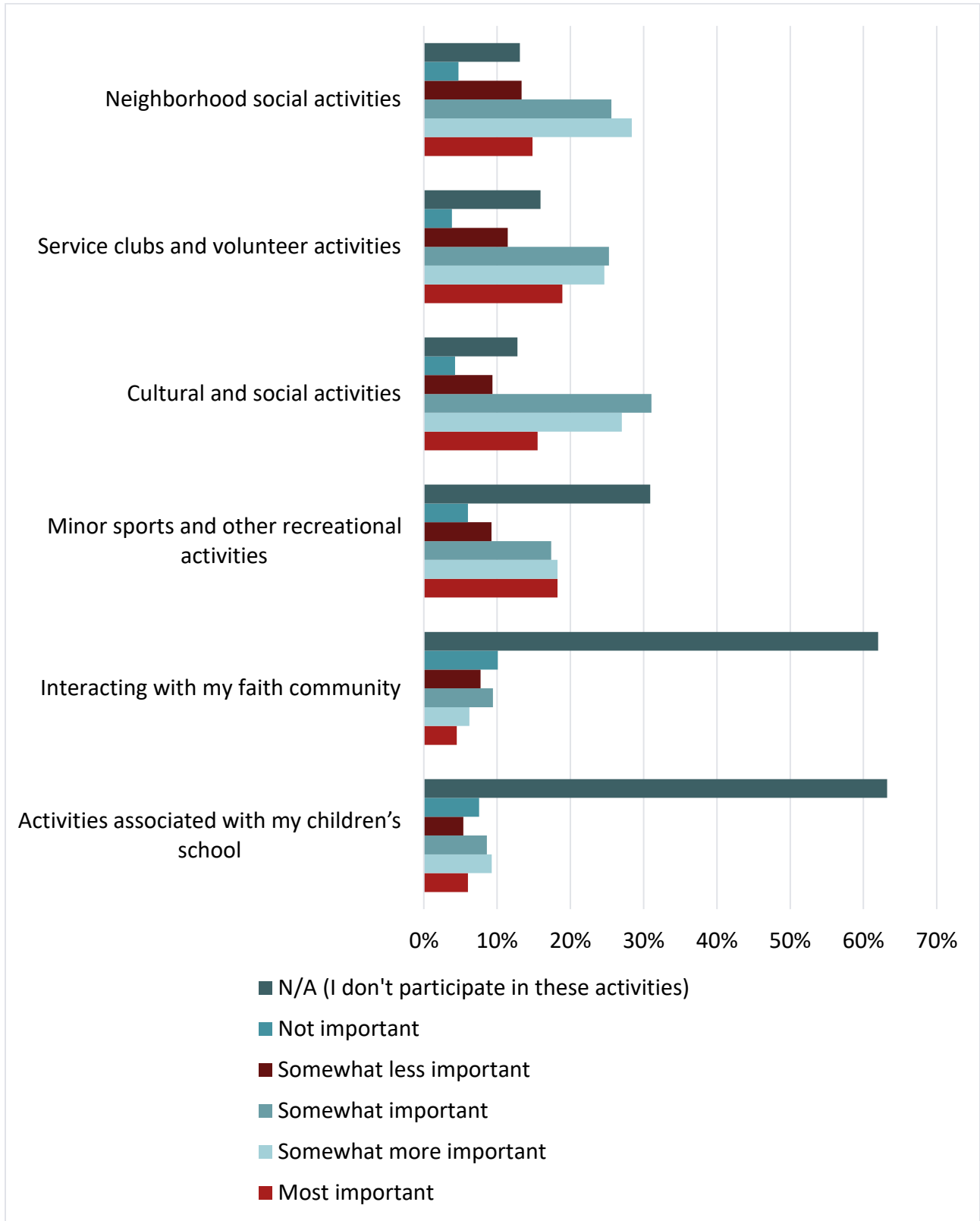
What do you consider the most significant challenges facing our community of Minden Hills?



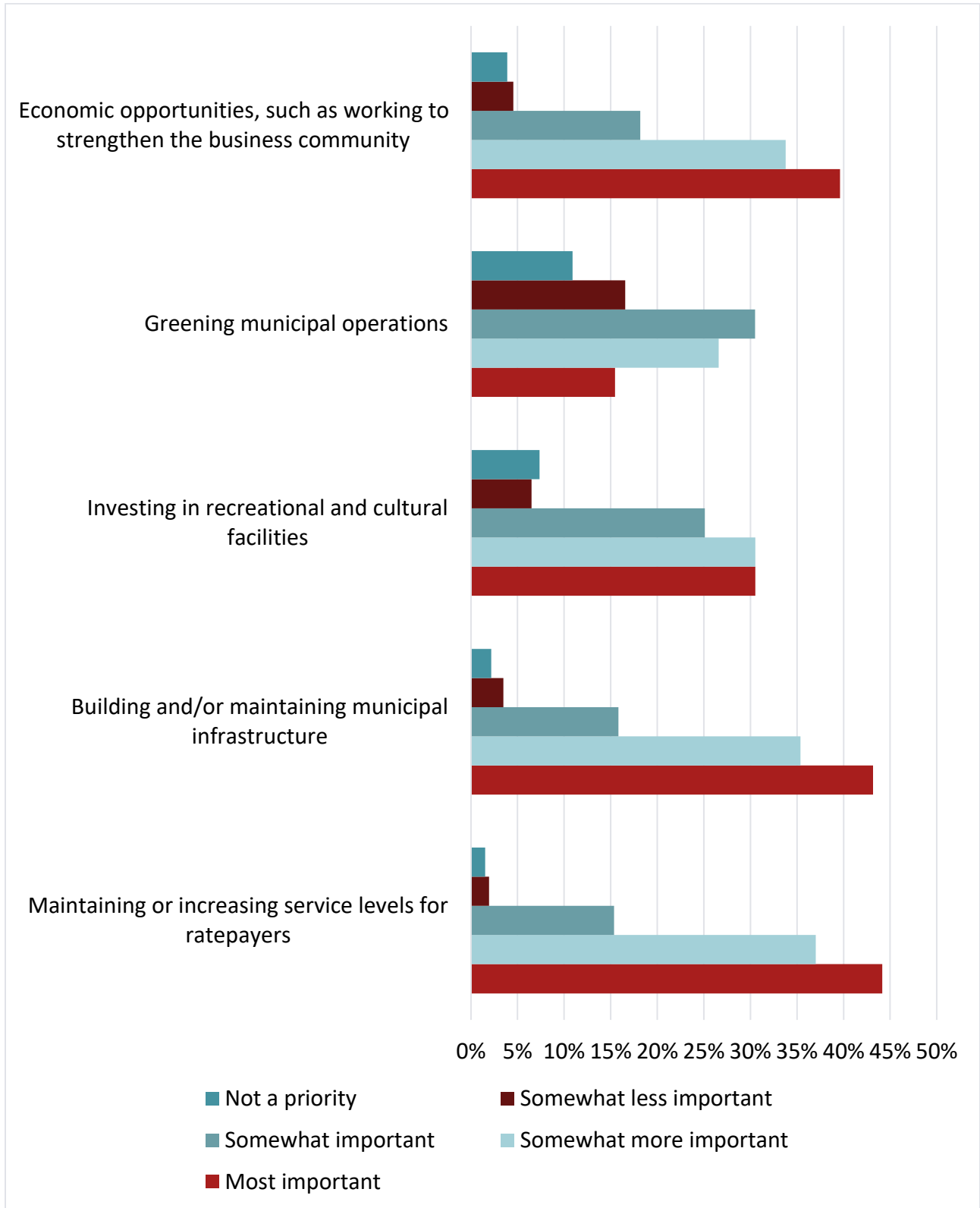
Why do you choose to live (year-round or seasonally) in Minden Hills?



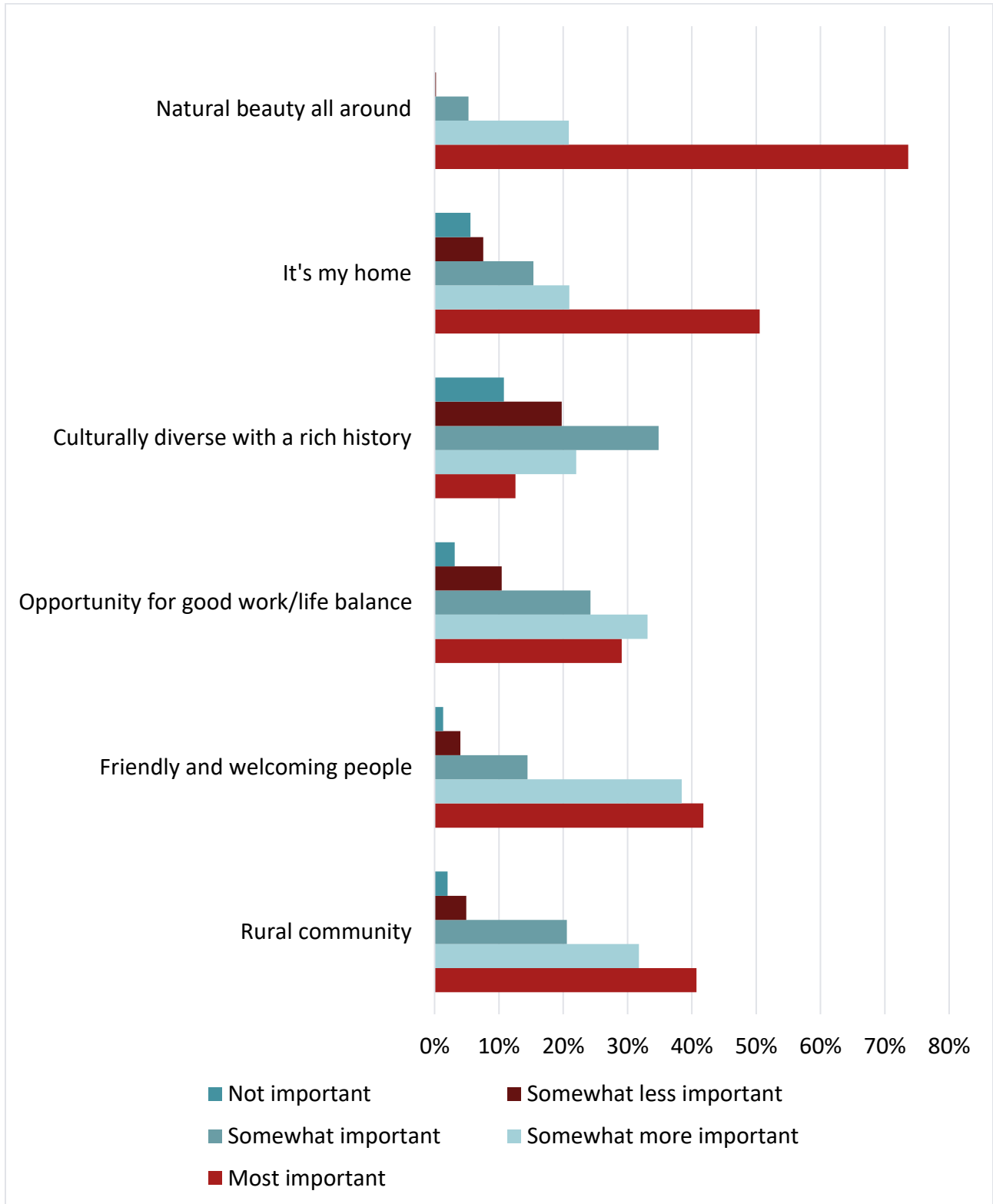
Which of the following activities give you the best opportunity to engage with other members of the community?



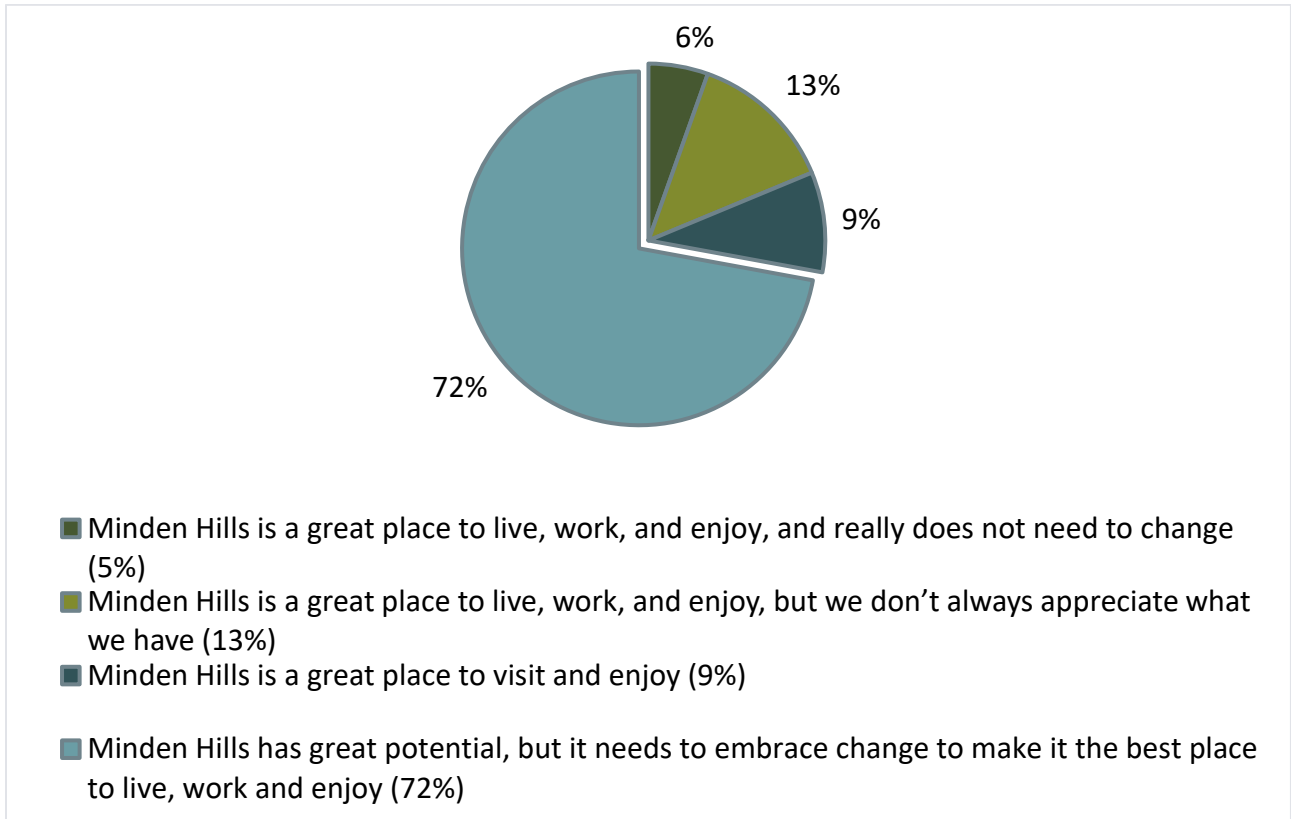
Which of the following should be a priority for Township of Minden Hills Council and staff?



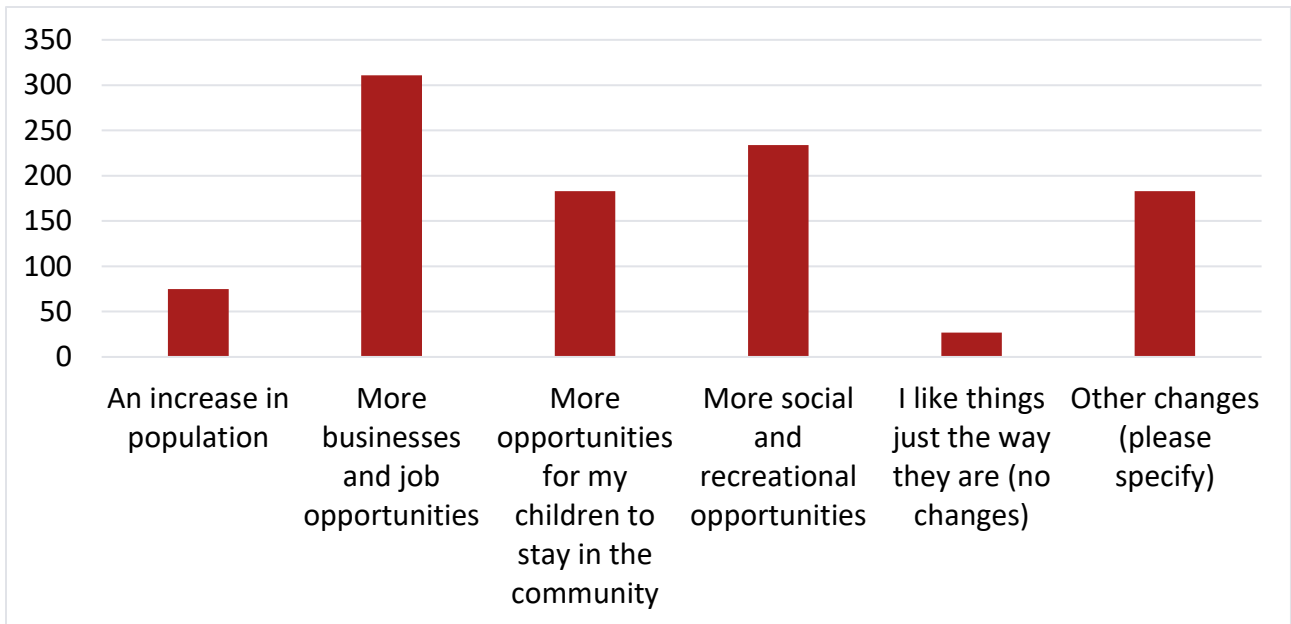
Thinking of Minden Hills today, which of the following best describes our community's identity?



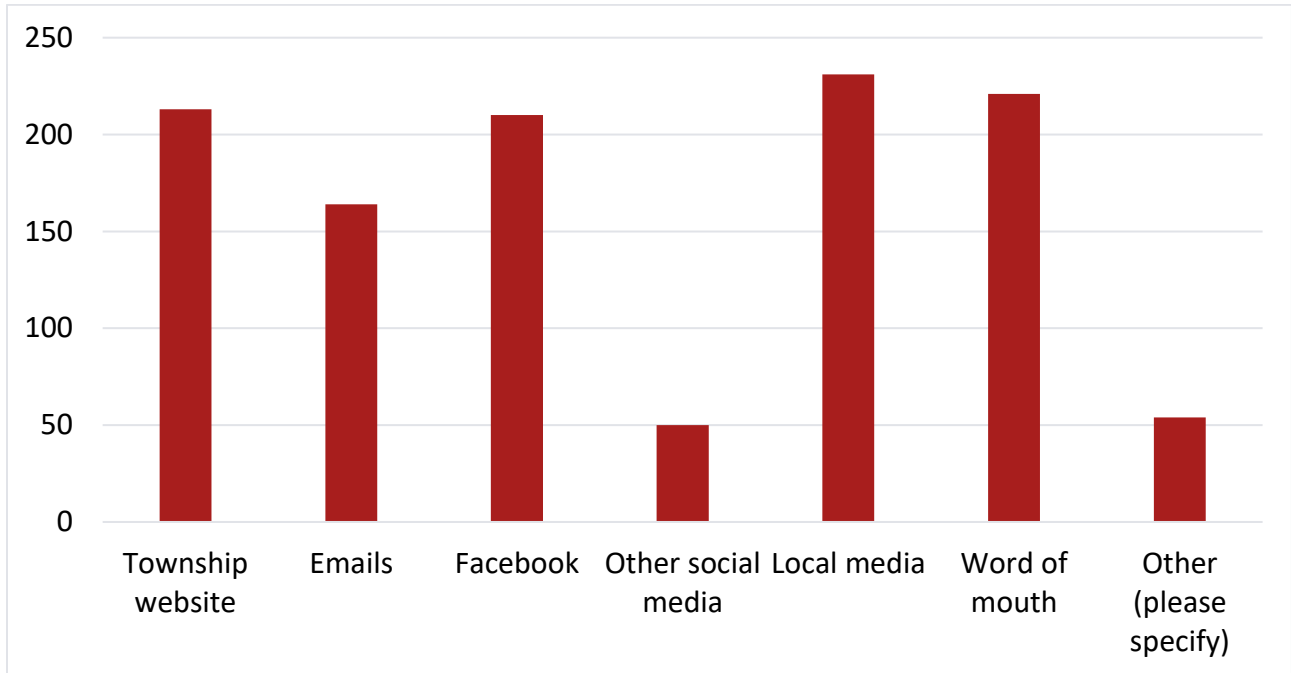
**Which of the following best describes how you see our community today?
(choose one option)**



Thinking 10 years into the future, what changes would you like to see in our community? (choose all that apply)



**Where do you most often get information about the Township of Minden Hills?
(choose all that apply)**

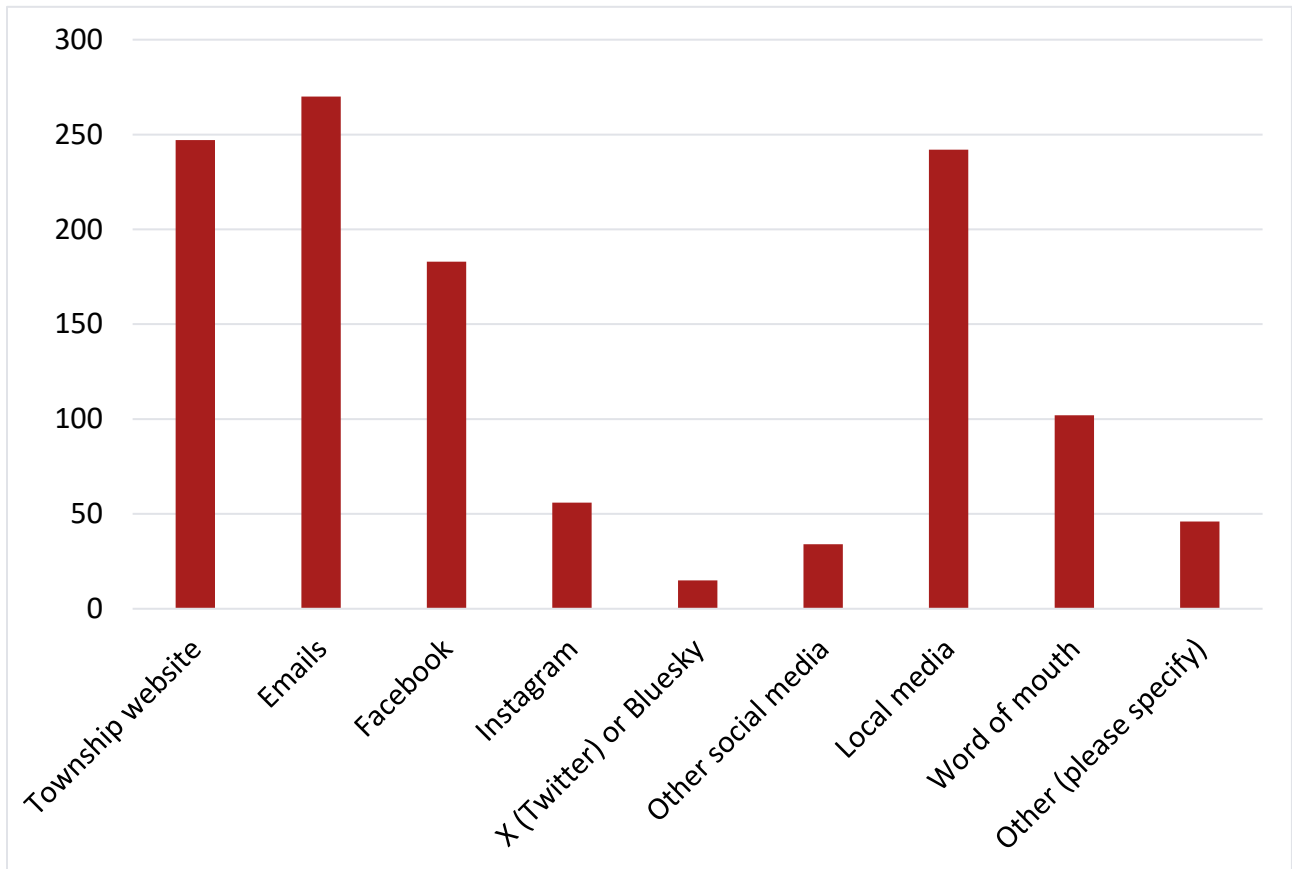


The most frequent text responses to this question generally echoed the responses below, with most respondents sharing specific local media outlets (including Canoe FM, the Minden Times, the Highlander, and the Haliburton Echo) and specific people they hear ‘word of mouth’ sharing of information from (friends, and family members).

Additional sources of information included:

- Tax bills from the Township
- Facebook pages operated by members of Council
- Lake associations
- Township staff directly
- Watching Council meetings on YouTube
- Local posters and/or billboards

Looking into the future, how would you like to receive information about the Township of Minden Hills? (choose all that apply)



Similar to the previous question, a number of respondents who chose to submit a text answer to this question identified the importance of local media (the Highlander, the Minden Times, and Canoe FM) and other social media (YouTube).

Additional suggestions for how to share information included:

- With tax bills
- Through lake associations
- With more frequent town hall and/or public meetings
- An updated Township website
- Signage and posters in the community
- Through the County of Haliburton tourism department
- Newsletters

What is one word, sentence, or phrase that best describes Minden Hills?

The ten most frequently used descriptive words (does not include words like ‘and’) in the response to this question were:

- | | | |
|---------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 1. Beautiful | 5. Potential | 9. Nature |
| 2. Small town | 6. Welcoming | 10. Natural beauty |
| 3. Home | 7. Great | |
| 4. Friendly | 8. Small | |

Please tell us more about how the Township of Minden Hills is doing. What do they do well? How can they improve? Is there anything else you'd like to share?

As noted earlier, responses to this question have been included in the [Summary of Community Input](#).

Which ward do you live in (either seasonally or year-round)?

