

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO

PRAIRIE CREEK NEIGHBOURHOOD TRAIL: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT



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PREPARED BY

EDS

PREPARED FOR

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO

MARCH 2023



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

EDS Group Inc. (EDS) has been retained by the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) to complete targeted consultations with local stakeholders to design a trail surrounding the Prairie Creek residential development in Fort McMurray. The existing neighbourhood has numerous informal paths surrounding the community that are prone to standing water. The scope of work includes a set of engagement activities, site evaluations, and a detailed design package for a paved trail around the community.

The approved scope of work for this project includes a commitment to engage local stakeholders and residents of the broader community, and was achieved through conversations, workshops, a project page on *Participate Wood Buffalo* and email exchanges. In summary, engagement for this project included:

- Meetings between the EDS team and the RMWB Project Manager;
- Online engagement with local stakeholders and residents of the Prairie Creek community, to assess the needs and vision for the trail alignment; and
- A written"What We Heard" report made available on Participate Wood Buffalo.



1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS ENGAGEMENT PLAN

An engagement plan was created to outline the target audience, information to be presented, engagement goals and objectives, timing, and strategies for reaching out to Prairie Creek residents and stakeholders.

The objectives of this engagement plan include:

- To obtain approval of the proposed engagement program for this project;
- To work collaboratively with the RMWB's Communications & Engagement department to execute the public engagement program;
- To pursue engagement that ensures stakeholders and affected residents have an effective and meaningful opportunity to learn about the project and share informed feedback about the final design;
- To comply with the RMWB's engagement policies and practices; and
- To understand stakeholder perspectives on proposed options for trail alignments.

1.3 POLICY CONTEXT

Several existing statutory and non-statutory plans were reviewed as part of our understanding of the policy context for this project. These include, but are not limited to:

- Alberta Trails Act;
- Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act;
- Alberta Public Lands Act;
- Alberta Wildlife Act;
- RMWB Engineering Servicing Standards;
- Wood Buffalo Sport Strategic Plan;
- RMWB Parks Master Plan; and
- Any RMWB bylaws associated with trail development.





2.0 PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

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The overarching purpose of public engagement is to promote transparency in the public planning process, ensuring that future trail use and planning best suits intended purposes while incorporating stakeholder perspectives where possible before final decisions are made. Overall objectives include:

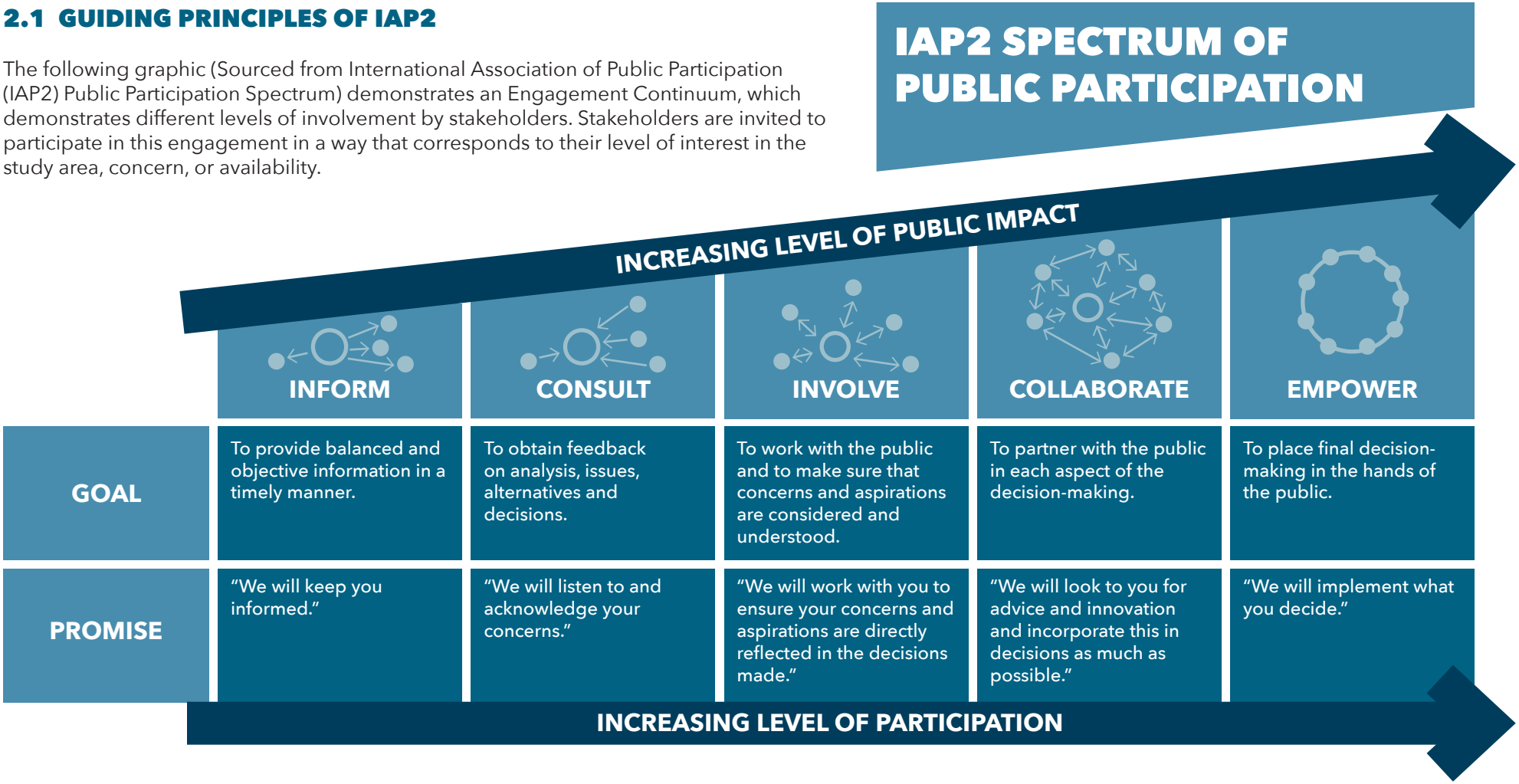
- To get input on Community experience;
- To understand how Community members want to use the trail; and
- To understand stakeholder perspectives on proposed options for the trail alignments.

Public engagement is an opportunity for the Municipality and consultant (EDS Group Inc.) to demonstrate that the recommendations are consistent with various statutory and non-statutory planning instruments.



2.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF IAP2

The following graphic (Sourced from International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum) demonstrates an Engagement Continuum, which demonstrates different levels of involvement by stakeholders. Stakeholders are invited to participate in this engagement in a way that corresponds to their level of interest in the study area, concern, or availability.



The following chart includes the highest level of involvement by each identified stakeholder in this process, and suggested engagement techniques:

STAKEHOLDER	LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION	TECHNIQUES
Identified Stakeholders and User Groups	Consult	Participation in a workshop session allowing for open exchange of ideas and to affirm the direction of this design. Will also engage using *Participate Wood Buffalo* platform.
Administration	Consult	Face to face meetings, email exchanges and review of draft and final designs.
Other Government Agencies	Inform	Email exchanges, provide details of the project as it is at various steps through the process.



3.0 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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3.1 ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

PHASE 1:

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY REFINEMENT

FALL 2022

PHASE 2A:

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

DECEMBER 2022

PHASE 2B:

PARTICIPATE WOOD BUFFALO PAGE:
SURVEYS, IDEAS, POLLS, HOTSPOT MAPPING & MORE

DECEMBER 2022 - JANUARY 2023

PHASE 3:

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

MARCH 2023



3.2 ENGAGEMENT PROMOTION

The Municipality and the consultant (EDS Group Inc.) promoted the engagement for this project and encouraged participation in numerous ways. Specific tactics included:

- Door hanger advertisements;
- *Participate Wood Buffalo* (PWB);
- PWB newsletter;
- Social media;
- Direct emails to stakeholders and community groups;
- Electronic message boards; and
- Pulse.





4.0 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

4.1 PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

On Monday December 5th and Wednesday December 14th, our team facilitated a 90-minute meeting with identified internal departments and a two-hour evening workshop with local residents. The purpose of these engagement sessions was to gather additional information on the project. The following outlines the program for these sessions:

- Our initial engagements session allowed us to present findings to date, site inventory and assessment and our understanding of challenges and opportunities along the trail alignment;
- Learn of each person's interest in this trail, known information from years past, recommendations on the feasibility of improving the trail and potential partnerships between, user groups and also identify user group needs and gaps, and assess existing and potential user conflicts and provide a clear and concise process for addressing and resolving them;
- The sessions involved a range of trail users who are residents of Prairie Creek or intimately familiar with the site; and
- We hosted these workshops online via Microsoft Teams. A video recording of the local resident workshop was posted on Participate Wood Buffalo, so those who couldn't attend the workshop could still hear the discussion and provide informed feedback through online tools provided (i.e., survey, forum, etc).

The following user groups were invited to attend the session:

- Clearwater Horse Club;
- Alberta TrailNet;
- Fort McMurray Search and Rescue Society;
- YMM – Fort McMurray Airport; and
- Alberta Environment and Parks.

4.2 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Both sessions followed the same format, starting off with group introductions. All attendees were asked to state any current or past involvement in trails, and any knowledge of stakeholder and resident needs in Prairie Creek. Attendees were also asked what would make it easier for them to participate in the session (i.e., speaking loudly and clearly, pausing for question breaks as opposed to raising hands, etc.).

Next, an overview of the Prairie Creek Trail Development project was given focusing on background information, goals, why we are undertaking is project principles and the study process. Findings of our site assessments were then presented to the group. We then collected the following information from the group:

What are your top 3 values we should consider when developing the Prairie Creek trail? The most common responses included:

- A continuous loop around the community;
- Preservation of existing vegetation;
- Best value for tax dollars;
- Safely support multiple users on the trail; and
- Preserving indigenous land interests in the area.

Are there any other site constraints we should be aware of?

- We need to be realistic that neighbours will leave their homes on OHVs to access the greater trail system. We should be realistic and plan for this (especially from the south side of the community);
- If an additional sidewalk is being added in we need to consult residents whose side properties are adjacent to it because shoveling those portions would become their responsibility;
- The berm along Highway 69 has created a lot of drainage concerns for residents backing on to this;
- People accessing the trails from their backyard; and
- Wayfinding signs should be in English, Cree & Dene - the RMWB is currently completing a Wayfinding Strategy that could address this topic.

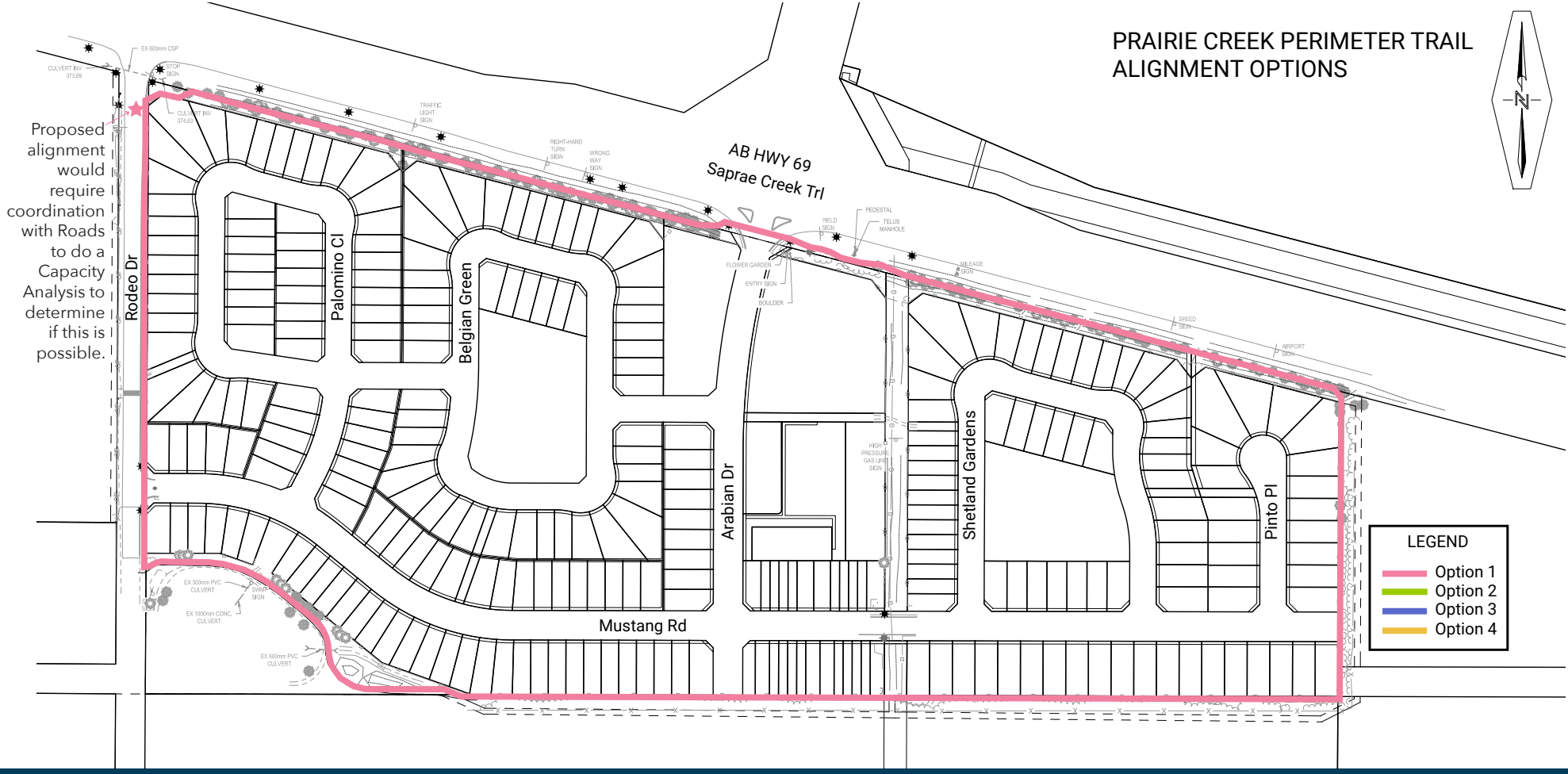
Following our site assessments, four potential trail alignments were proposed for discussion. These trail alignments are detailed below:

Top 3 values:

a continuous loop around the community;

preservation of existing vegetation; and

best value for tax dollars.

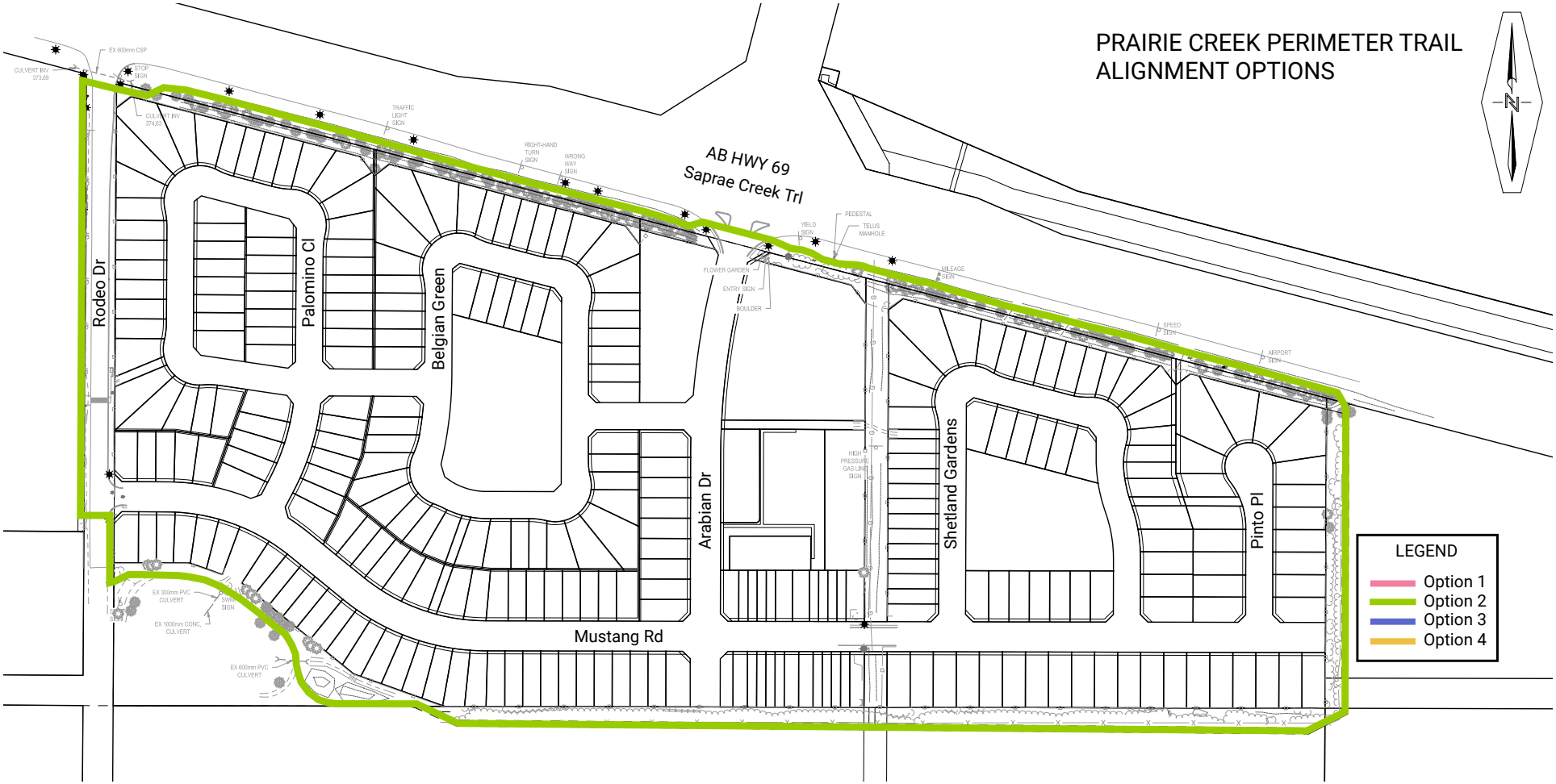


Option 1 (pink line):

- This trail option is a fully continuous perimeter loop trail;
- This option minimizes the number of road crossings required;
- This option would require the addition of a sidewalk along the east side of Rodeo Drive, consequently eliminating the turn lane and requiring the north-bound traffic on Rodeo Drive to become single-lane;
- As the north side of the trail runs along Hwy 69/Saprae Creek Trail, it would run along the top of the existing berm. This alignment would require the removal of existing vegetation on the berm, but would keep the trail out of the roadside ditch resulting in a dry, stable trail;
- This alignment option runs immediately adjacent to the back of lot lines on the south and east sides of the neighbourhood. This option would require significant engineering as these areas are currently experiencing drainage issues; and

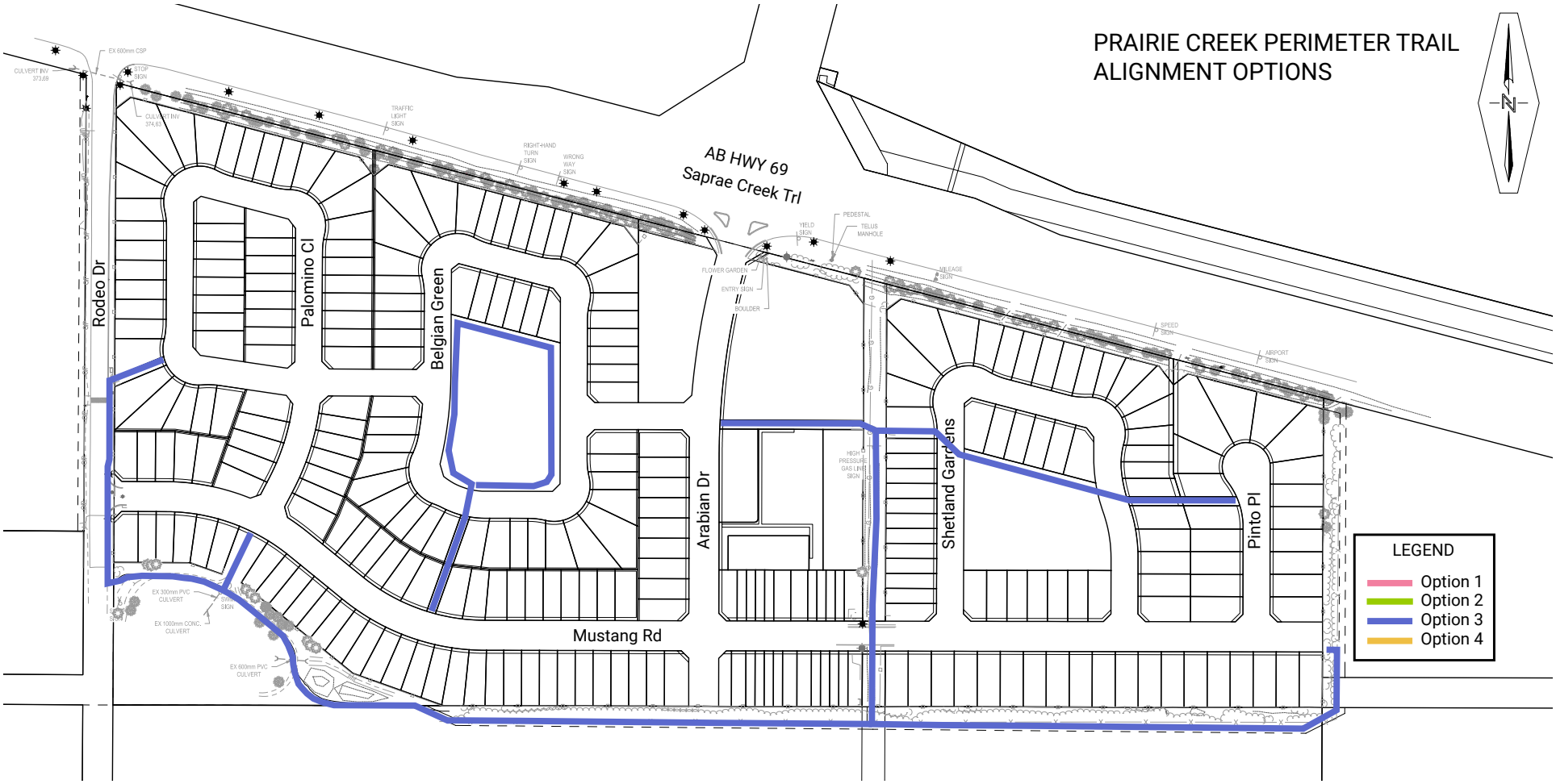
Option 2 (green line):

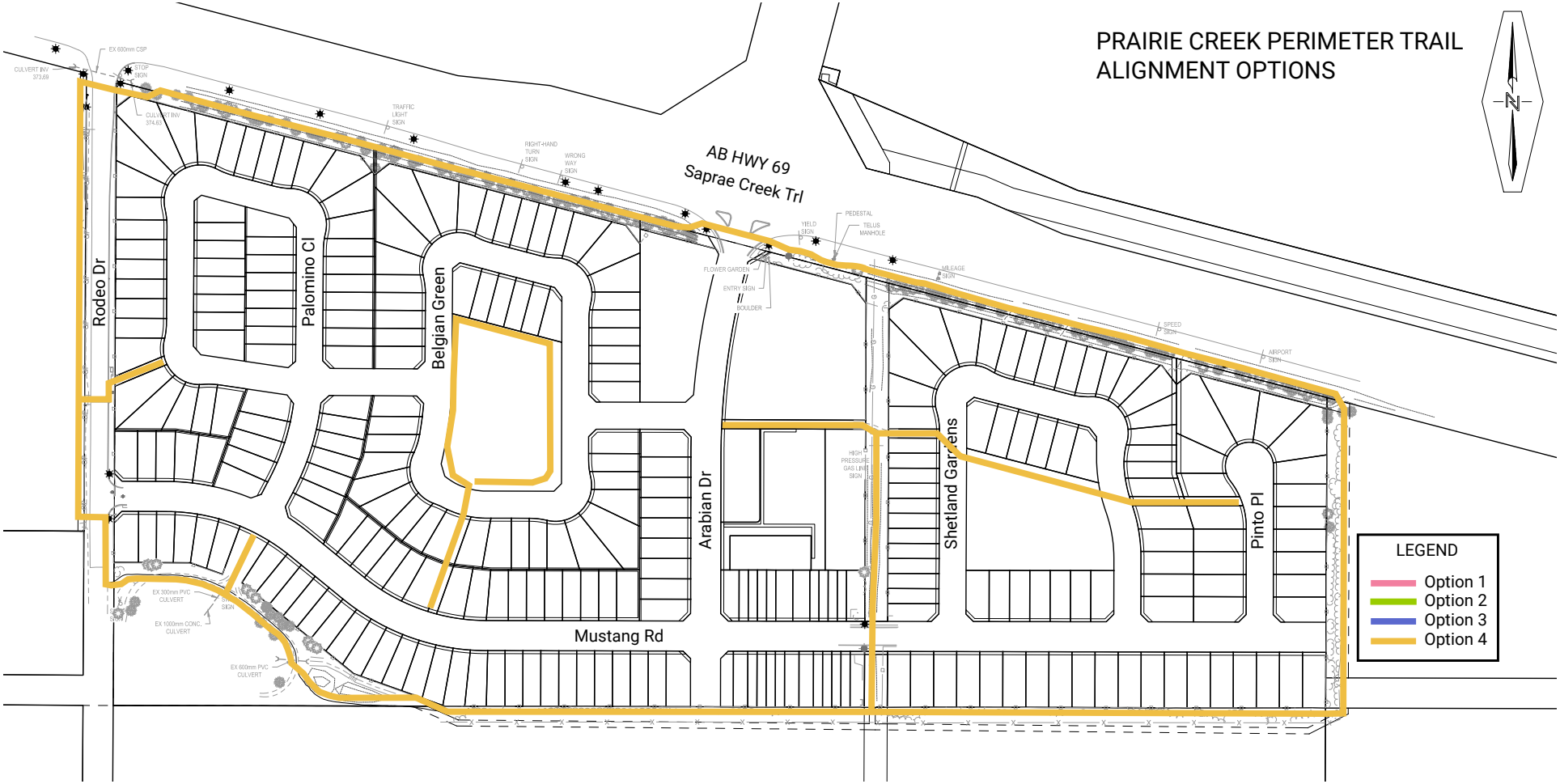
- This trail option is a fully continuous perimeter loop trail;
- This option requires three road crossings;
- This option features a trail on the south and east sides that are not on Municipally-owned land. These lands are being leased to the Municipality for the use of trails and will require additional considerations such as fencing to satisfy agreements. This trail alignment does not contend with the same drainage issues mentioned in Option 1, however, significant vegetation removal would be required to implement the trail;
- As the north side of the trail runs along Hwy 69/Saprae Creek Trail, it would run within roadside ditch. This trail would be subject to seasonal flooding after storm events;
- This alignment option runs along the west side of Rodeo Drive and would be located within a roadside ditch. This option would require more engineering to ensure trail stability; and
- This option does not contain any internal connector trails.



Option 3 (blue line):

- This trail option is not a fully continuous perimeter loop trail – rather, it focuses on creating internal connector trails within the neighbourhood;
- This option requires five road crossings and the use of roadways to complete walking loops;
- This option features a trail on the south side that is not on Municipally-owned land. These lands are being leased to the Municipality for the use of trails and will require additional considerations such as fencing to satisfy agreements. This trail alignment does not contend with the same drainage issues mentioned in Option 1, however, significant vegetation removal would be required to implement the trail;
- There is no trail along Hwy 69/Saprae Creek Trail; and
- This option would require the addition of a sidewalk part way along the east side of Rodeo Drive. This sidewalk would end just beyond the existing crosswalk where it connects into the neighbourhood at Palomino Circle.





Option 4 (yellow line):

- This trail option is a fully continuous perimeter loop trail with numerous internal connector trails;
- This option requires 8 road crossings throughout;
- This alignment option runs along the west side of Rodeo Drive and would be located within a roadside ditch. This option would require more engineering to ensure trail stability;
- As the north side of the trail runs along Hwy 69/Saprae Creek Trail, it would run along the top of the existing berm. This alignment would require the removal of existing vegetation on the berm, but would keep the trail out of the roadside ditch resulting in a dry, stable trail;
- This option features a trail on the east side that is not on Municipally-owned land. These lands are being leased to the Municipality for the use of trails and will require additional considerations such as fencing to satisfy agreements. Significant vegetation removal would be required to implement the trail in this location; and
- This alignment option runs immediately adjacent to the back of lot lines on the south side of the neighbourhood. This option would require engineering as this area is currently experiencing drainage issues.

Comments on the Four Trail Alignment Options:

Participants were presented with the four trail alignment options (as outlined on pages 11-14). The following summarizes the questions, comments and observations we heard on these options:

- **Question:** Along Highway 69 - is it feasible to place the trail in the ditch? This is where people walk now and we wouldn't need to remove trees, but would this negatively impact the drainage?
  - **Response:** It is possible - but it is not the best option in our professional opinion because placing the trail in the ditch will significantly deteriorate the asphalt trail and shorten its lifespan because it will be saturated more often. However, placing the trail in the ditch provides more privacy for residents backing onto the highway and preserves trees.
- **Question:** What is the distance between the proposed trail within the Highway 69 ditch and the edge of the roadway?
  - **Response:** We do not have the precise distance at this time, but we estimate +/-8m.
- **Observation:** Residents were supportive of the addition of a sidewalk along the west side of the development and removal of turning lane on Rodeo Drive.
- **Question:** Is there a possibility of running the trail on the west side through the fire-burnt woods as opposed to right along the side of the road?
  - **Response:** This would not be possible due to land ownership.
- **Comment:** We need to try and keep the trees along the Highway 69 berm while not building the trail in the slushy ditch.
  - **Response:** We do have the option of doing a hybrid where the trail meanders from top of berm to bottom of ditch depending on viewpoints and trees we want to save - this just may be a more costly or more challenging option.



The following summarizes some more specific questions we posed to the groups:

What is the feasibility of removing the turning lane on Rodeo Drive, as proposed in trail alignment option 1:

- Removing turning lane may decrease traffic safety for residents;
- There was a study conducted that precipitated the necessity of this turning lane;
- A Traffic Impact Assessment would be required in order to remove the turning lane; and
- This can be explored during the design phase.

What is the desired alignment of the trail along Highway 69 (on the berm vs. in the ditch)?

- Trees along Highway 69 were planted about 5 years ago, and they were about 2m tall when planted;
- Placing the trail on top of the berm would require the entire width of top of berm (+/-4m) to ensure its stability. This would result in removal of these trees;
- Would it be possible to replant trees and bushes along inside edge of the berm to increase privacy for homeowners? This can definitely be explored if residents express the need for increased planting; and
- Can the cross slope of the trail run towards the highway so that it doesn't affect residents? - Yes.

What are the group's thoughts on the west side trail alignment?

- No preference - something to keep in mind is that people from outside neighbourhoods park along Rodeo Drive for extended periods.

Let's Talk Drainage:

- Residents of the Prairie Creek neighbourhood have expressed concerns regarding drainage issues.

Perimeter Loop Trail vs. Internal Connections

- A perimeter loop trail is RMWB standard that each neighbourhood has one.



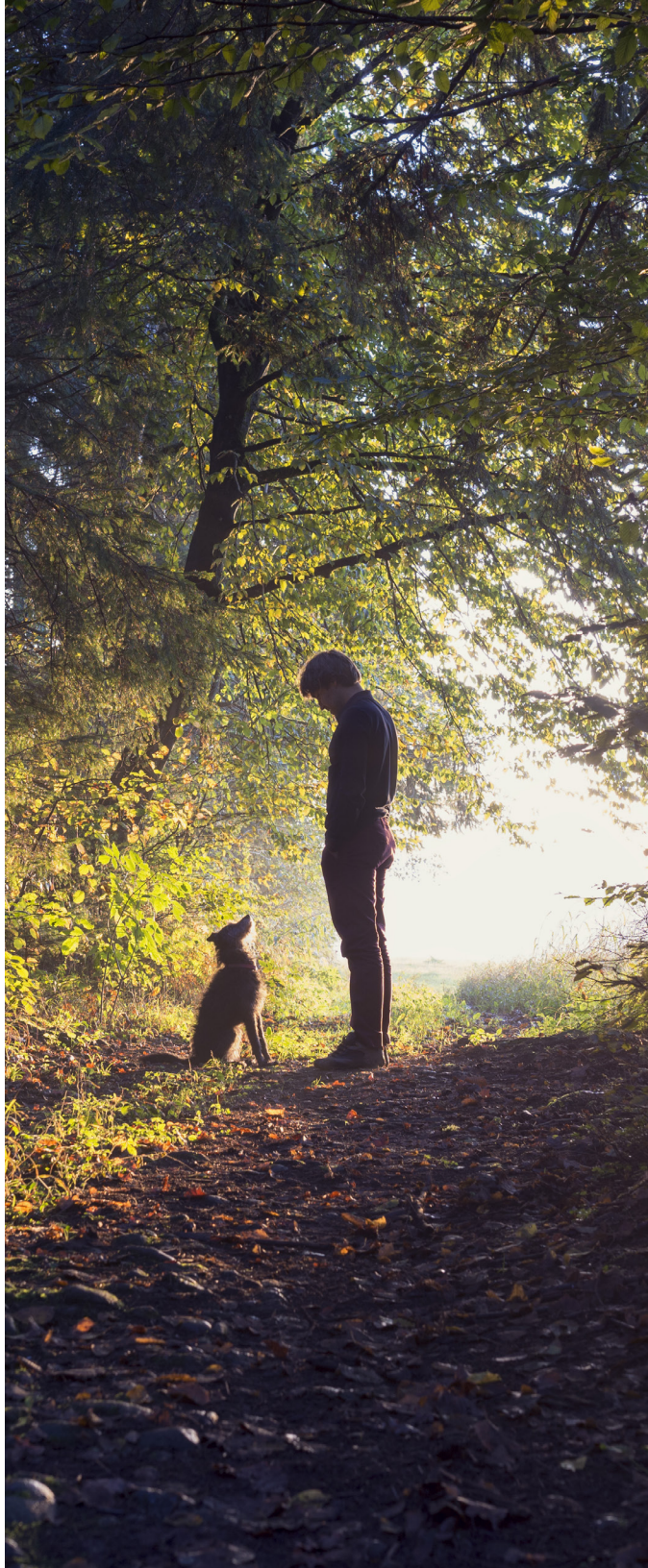
Is there a preference for the south side trail alignment?

- Preference expressed to have the trail run further from back of lot on the leased lands to the south; and
- There is a small patch of trees identified for upcoming FireSmart treatment in this area (see image below).



Questions / Comments:

- It is important to consider how to make the trails safe for all users
- We should talk to the Provincial Government about the land owned by Alberta Transportation to the north west of the community to see if we can add more trails and make it an off-leash dog area. There is currently no use of this land.
  - **Response:** There is potential, however further investigation would be required.
- Have formalized off-highway vehicle trails been planned for the Prairie Creek to Gregoire Lake Estates area?
  - **Response:** At this time there is no plan.
- Horse Club has been very adamant that the double fence needs to extend right to Rodeo Drive on the south side of the property.
  - **Response:** This will depend on finalized trail alignment and further conversations with the club will occur.




5.0
PARTICIPATE
WOOD
BUFFALO

5.1 PROJECT PAGE

The project page on Participate Wood Buffalo was designed as a hub of project information and central location of tools for residents to provide feedback and share ideas. To-date, the project page has engaged 25 participants and harnessed 217 visitors. Page content and tools include the following:

- Places tool;
  - Ask people to place pins identifying hotspots;
  - i.e., areas of use conflict, wildlife sightings, concerns, etc.;
- Ideas tool: this is where we ask people to share their vision for the trail;
  - Allows people to post their ideas and others can comment on them or like them; and
- Public survey.

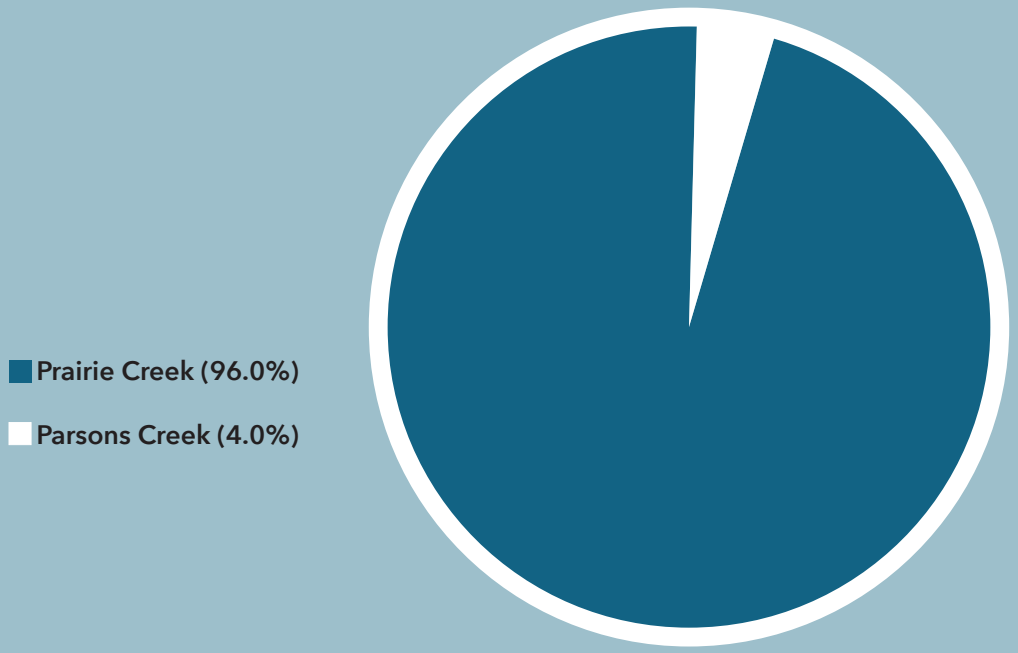
5.1.1 Public Survey

The public survey was open from December 14th, 2022 to January 9th, 2023 and received 25 responses. The following summarizes the results:

100%

of respondents live in the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray.

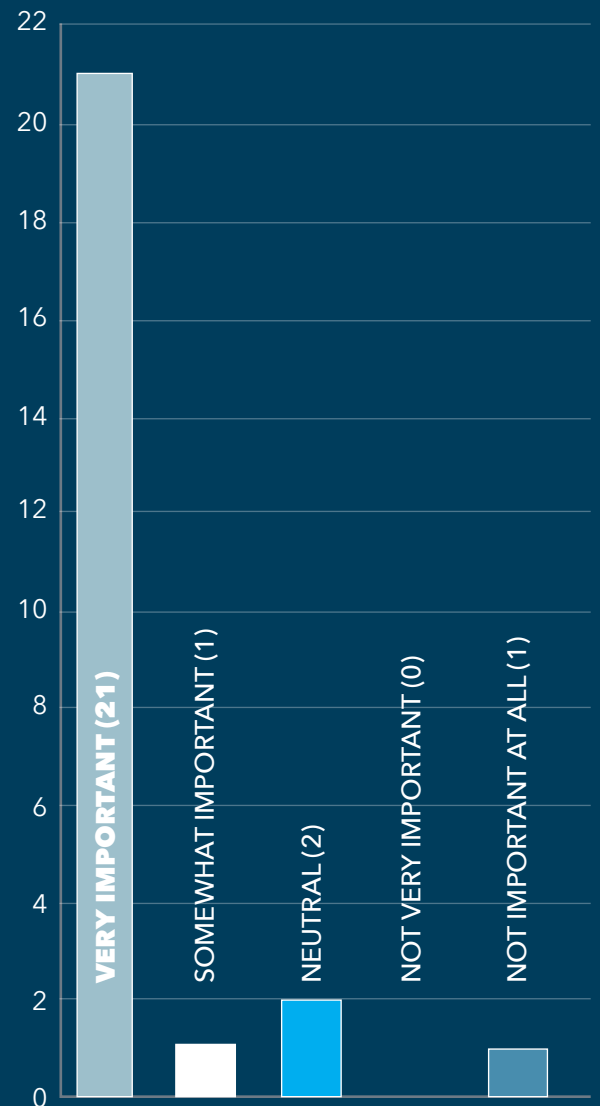
What neighbourhood in Fort McMurray do you live in?



96%

of respondents live in Prairie Creek.

How important to you is a trail for Prairie Creek?



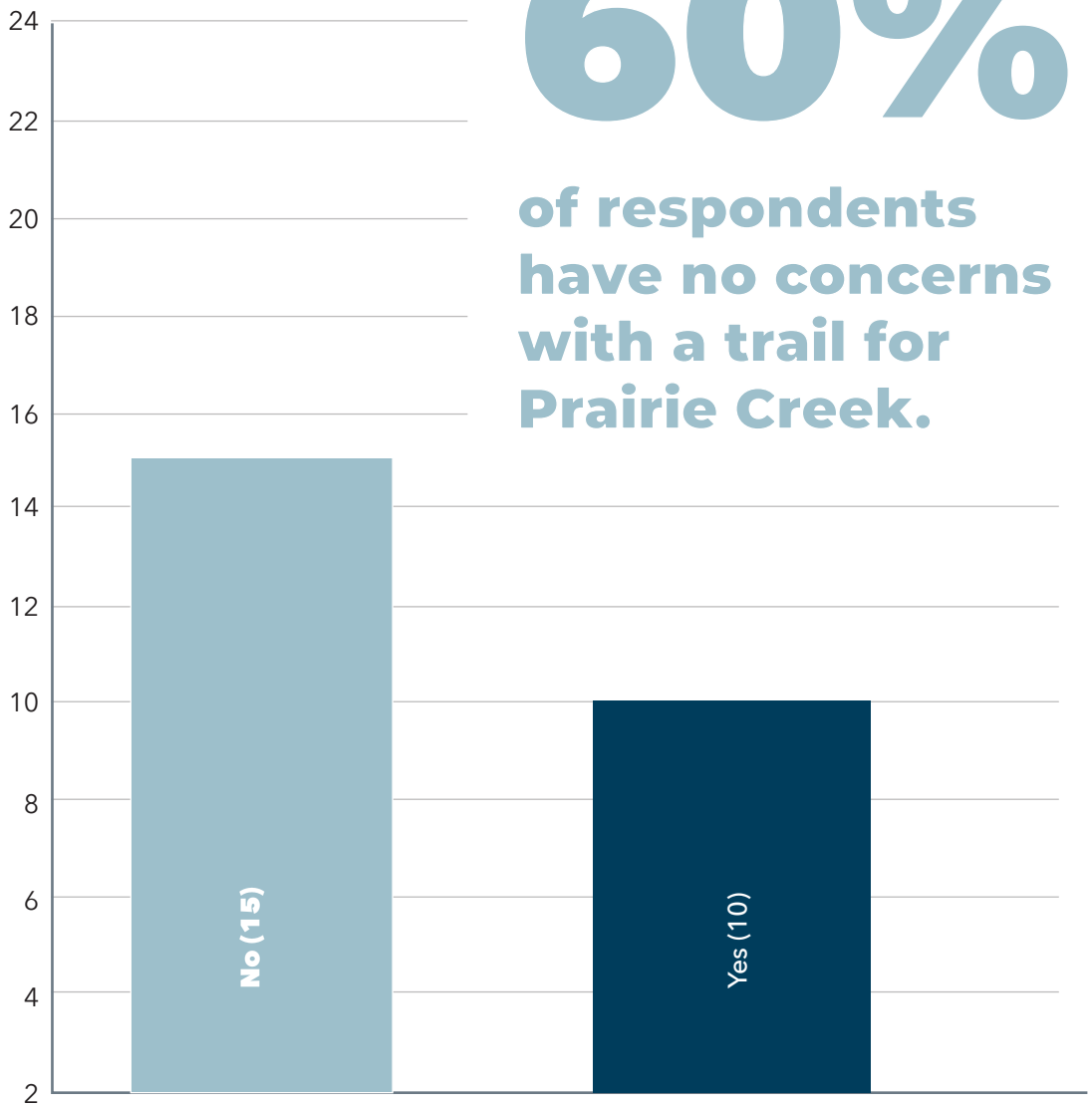
84%

of respondents say a trail for Prairie Creek is very important to them.

4%

of respondents say a trail for Prairie Creek is not important at all to them.

Do you have any concerns with a trail for Prairie Creek?



60%

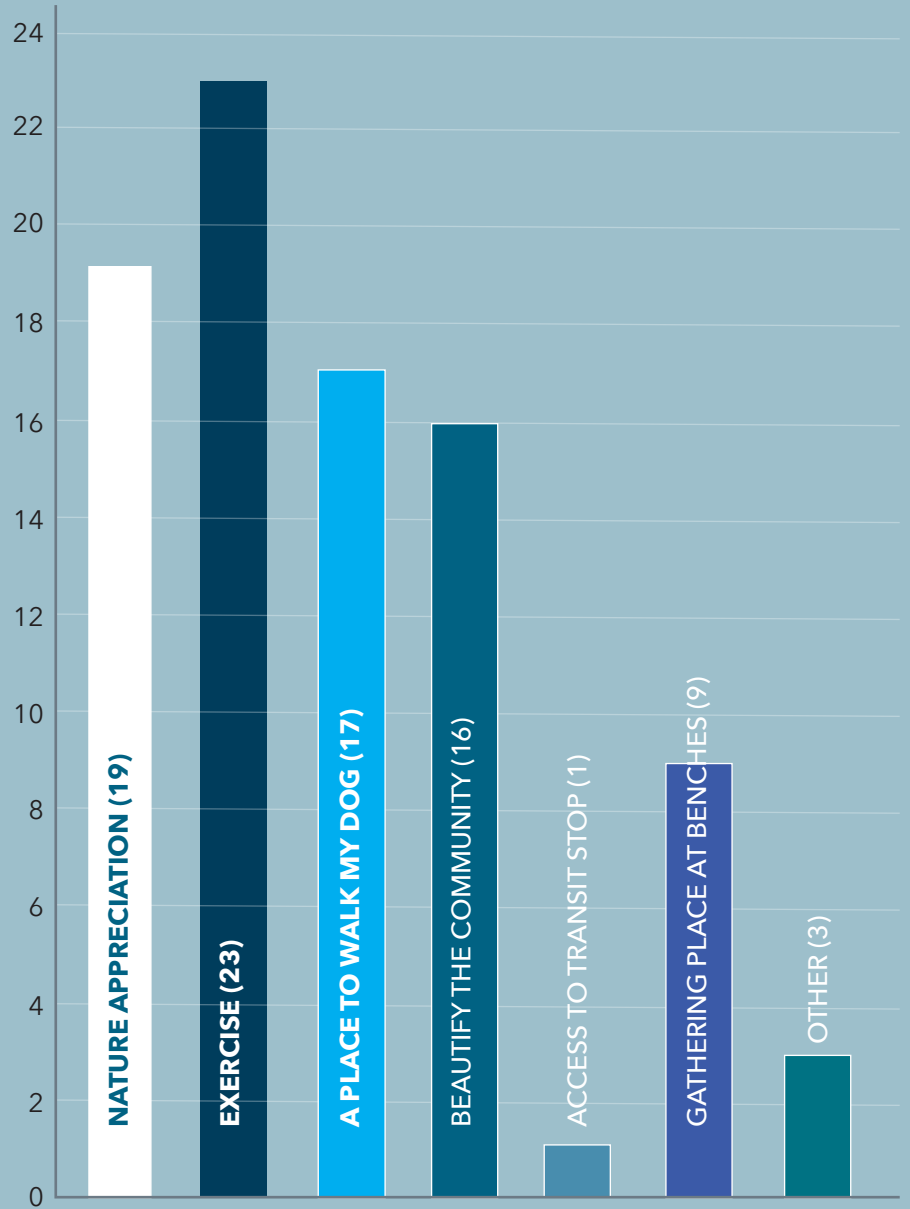
of respondents have no concerns with a trail for Prairie Creek.

40%

of respondents have concerns with a trail for Prairie Creek. These include:

- **safety of users**
- **environmental protection (tree preservation)**
- **flooding and drainage**
- **non-permitted OHV use on trails**
- **lost privacy**
- **noise & smell**
- **vandalism**

How would a trail for Prairie Creek benefit you and/or your family? (select all that apply)



Top 3:

ways a trail in Prairie Creek would benefit residents are:*

- **Exercise (92%)**
- **Nature Appreciation (76%)**
- **A Place to Walk my Dog (68%)**

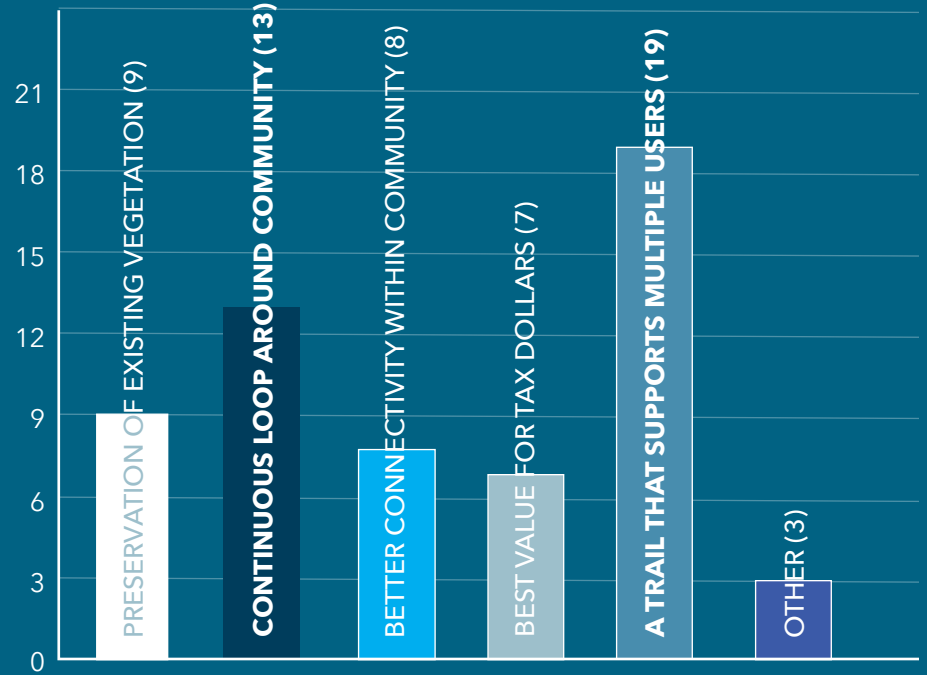
*** Residents were able to select more than one response.**

"other"

responses include:

- **Pathfinding for children; and**
- **Bike riding.**

What values are most important to you in the development of a Prairie Creek Trail?



TOP TWO

values most important in the development of the trail are:

- **a trail that supports multiple users (76%); and**
- **a continuous loop around the community (52%).**



Comments on the trail alignment options:

Option 1:

- Too limited
- Does this rectify drainage issues on the south and east sides of the community?
- Placing the trail on top of the berm along Highway 69 takes away the little privacy those residents have
- Love this one!
- I like this idea of a continuous trail I can use a stroller on.
- Don't remove the trees on the berm
- Concern over damage to fences, vegetation disturbance and drainage issues

Option 2:

- Too limited
- Only two significant road crossings which is not bad
- Trail along Highway 69 corridor will just encourage more OHV use
- Flooding concerns - trail would be unusable at certain times of the year
- Concern over damage to fences, vegetation disturbance and drainage issues

Option 3:

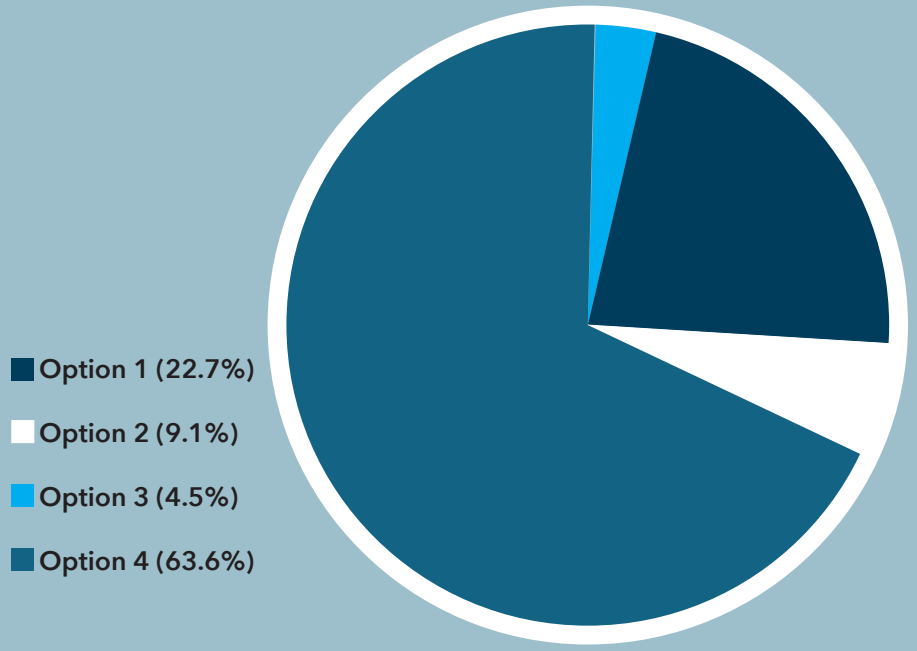
- Too limited
- Sidewalk along Rodeo Dr would be a nice addition as it would also serve the bus stop
- Don't like the idea that this isn't a continuous loop trail
- Very unimpressed with this one

NOTE: Refer to Section 4.2: Internal Engagement Summary (pages 11-14) for trail alignment options.

Option 4:

- This would be great!
- Preferred option for sure!
- Consider placing the trail on the east side of Rodeo Dr to eliminate the extra road crossings
- Don't like the trail placement on top of the Highway 69 berm - takes away the little privacy these residents have
- Drainage concerns
- Would rather see the trail on the highway side of the berm, but not directly in the ditch
- Do not remove the trees on the berm
- Not good
- I like it - will these road crossings be formalized with crosswalks and signals?
- I like the continuous loop with internal connections!

What is your preferred trail alignment option?



63.6%

of respondents prefer trail alignment option 4.

Why is this your preferred option?

Option 1:

- **"I would really like the current drainage issues fixed. Two birds. One stone."**
- **"This is good , no flooding on the highway side and gives us a nice long walk around prairie creek!"**
- **"Less road crossings."**

Option 2:

- **"A continuous loop is great and there is not that much traffic to have to worry about crossing on Rodeo Drive. The trail should continue over to Gregoire and make it loop around Gregoire."**

Option 3:

- **"Anything that does not disrupt the very limited vegetation along highway 69".**

Option 4:

- "More trails. Perfect for the community!"
- "Showcases whole community. Enhances current walking paths already developed. Minimal environmental distribution. Both internal and external walking system."
- "I think option 4 is a great idea to combine both trail systems. Prairie creek should have the same trail systems as south of the bridge. We have a lot of kids in this area and it would be great to give them places to ride there bikes etc away from the main road as Mustang road can be like a race track in the summer months."
- "I would prefer option 4, if the trail was not on the berm. A continuous trail with internal connectors gives people many options of longer or shorter paths depending on age, mobility, and time."
- "Fine with the perimeter trail being on top of the berm along Hwy 69. Would love to see option 4 as it gives us the internal interconnecting trails as well as the perimeter trial. A trail system is really needed in our neighbourhood and hopefully we can eventually be connected to other neighbourhoods via said trail system as mentioned in the online engagement session. We're moving in the right direction and would love to see this come to fruition."
- "Option four gives us a continuous trail and improving the dirt or gravel ones that are already there. It would make walking around the neighborhood a lot easier and give residents a place to exercise safely with out a constant worry about car coming out of driveways."
- "If I feel if we are going to create a trail system, it should be sufficient in length. Residents of Prairie Creek already walk the perimeter of the community by using the ditches on Highway 69, connectors would give us more options. Prairie Creek is a beautiful quiet community but the only thing we are lacking a trail system like Birchwood Trials. I am also wondering how come we are not accessing or using any of the surrounding tree areas so we can explore more of nature. These trails are really just creating a loop around our community and are not that enticing. I think we need to utilize more of the forest area (consideration of using the forest between Rodeo and Highway 63)."
- "It's a larger trail network, more connectivity, more functional."
- "More walking options and exits."
- "I like that you can take a trail from within the community to access the continuous loop. If the drainage issues are solved this would be perfect."
- "We need paved trails around our perimeter and interior of our community! We've longed for This as our trails are gravel and very muddy. Currently there is no nicely flowing trail system that fully connects in our community making it very undesirable to Get out and enjoy nature or have family time with your kids. Prairie creek is often the little area in town that is forgotten about and this is something residents feel very strongly about! Please provide us with more trails and paved!!"
- "Inter connectivity is important."



6.0 NEXT STEPS

6.1 REPORTING BACK

Residents will be informed of the engagement feedback through the What We Heard Report. Feedback will be reviewed and considered by Administration as part of the direction for the project.

6.2 NEXT STEPS

Administration will consider numerous factors to determine the appropriate trail alignment including public engagement and site evaluations. The public will be informed through appropriate communications when project information becomes available.

6.3 STAY INFORMED

To follow this project and get updates, visit or subscribe to rmwb.ca/participate.

