

Portable Signs Engagement

What We Heard Report

Jan. 2026



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO

We humbly acknowledge that the land on which we live, learn, work and play is Treaty 8 Territory, the traditional lands of the Cree, Dene, and the unceded territory of the Métis.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2025, a council motion was passed to review – and engage on – portable sign regulations in the region.

From Nov. 17 to Dec. 5, the following opportunities were provided to gather feedback on how portable signs are used in the region:

- A **survey** was available online, via phone, and in print. In total, 238 survey contributions were completed.
- Three targeted **interviews** with local portable sign company owners were held.
- Three **pop-up sessions** were hosted at Jubilee Centre, MacDonald Island Park, and Peter Pond Mall. Between the three sessions, 54 engagement interactions were recorded.

The feedback gathered will help shape recommendations on potential changes to portable sign rules in the region.



PARTICIPANTS

Who did we talk to?

- Residents
- Business owners
- Portable sign companies



ENGAGEMENT IN NUMBERS



aware

Aware

- **36,405** social media post impressions
- **2,673** Participate Wood Buffalo newsletter recipients
- **520** project page views
- **8** email invitations to key stakeholders
- **4** portable sign placements in Fort McMurray



informed

Informed

- **91** total visits during three pop-up information sessions
 - Jubilee Centre
 - MacDonald Island Park
 - Peter Pond Mall
- **3** project page followers



engaged

Engaged

- **238** survey responses
- **54** total interactions at pop-up information sessions
 - Jubilee Centre
 - MacDonald Island Park
 - Peter Pond Mall
- **3** targeted interviews with portable sign companies



OVERALL KEY FINDINGS/THEMES

- **75% of respondents** preferred portable signs remain **temporary**, though a significant minority supported permanent use.
- All three sign companies supported long-term or permanent use, citing business continuity, client expectations, and reduced administrative burden.

Temporary signage supported



- **47% of respondents** preferred a short-term limit of **three months**.
- While shorter durations received some support, **40% of respondents** preferred a limit between **6–9 months**.
- Portable sign companies suggested 9–12 months or longer, with some advocating for no fixed timeline provided signs meet standards

For temporary use, short-term limit is preferred



- While a range of distances were supported, **48% of respondents** preferred a separation distance of **100 metres**.
- Portable sign company interviews supported 30 metres as effective in many contexts, with a suggestion of shorter distances in appropriate commercial or industrial areas.

Greater separation distance effective tool for managing visual clutter



OVERALL KEY FINDINGS/THEMES

- **67% of respondents** supported **limits** on the number of signs per property.
- Portable sign companies preferred approaches based on other factors, such as separation distance, frontage length, and number of businesses on site.

Limits preferred for number of signs per property



- Respondents consistently linked spacing and quantity to **visual clutter**.
- Portable sign company interviews highlighted support for maintenance and aesthetic standards as opposed to strict duration limits.
- There is broad agreement that design, spacing, and upkeep are critical for managing visual impacts, regardless of regulatory approach.

Visual impact is a shared concern



- All three sign companies cited the 180-day rule as **restrictive**.
- A permit processing times of up to one month were described as disproportionate for short approval periods.

Permitting process identified as key operational issue



NEXT STEPS

Planning and Development Services will share their recommendations on proposed portable sign regulations with Council in April 2026.



Appendix A

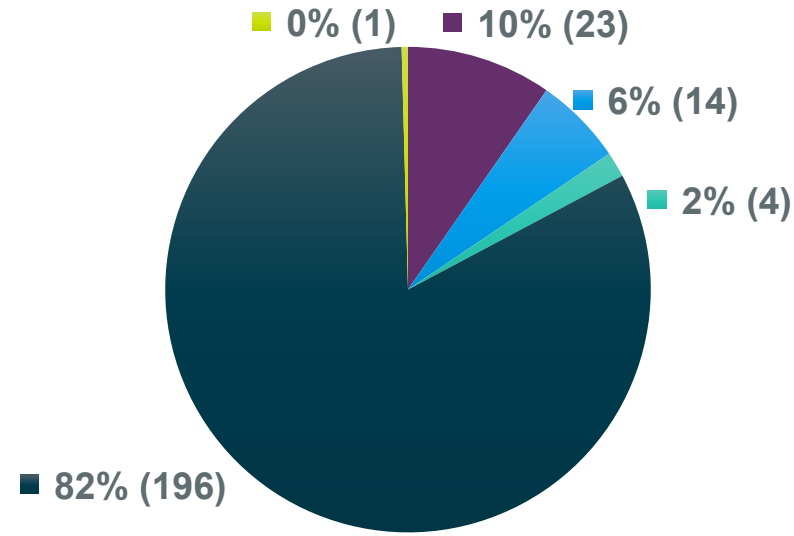
Portable Sign Engagement survey

238 responses



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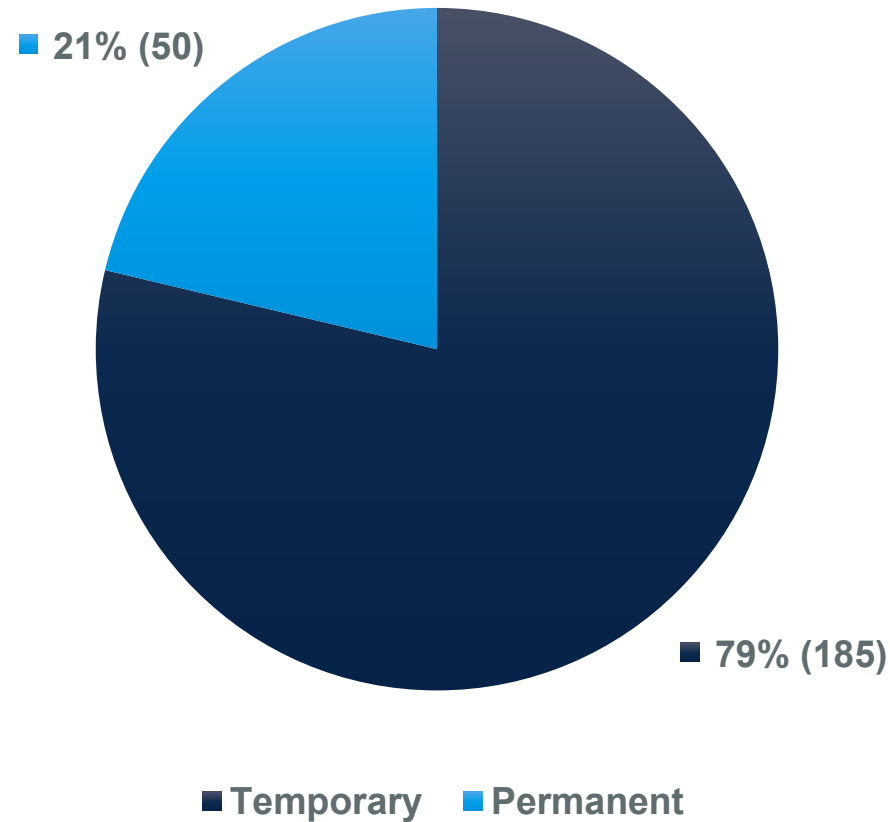
Q1: Please tell us about yourself: (238 responses)



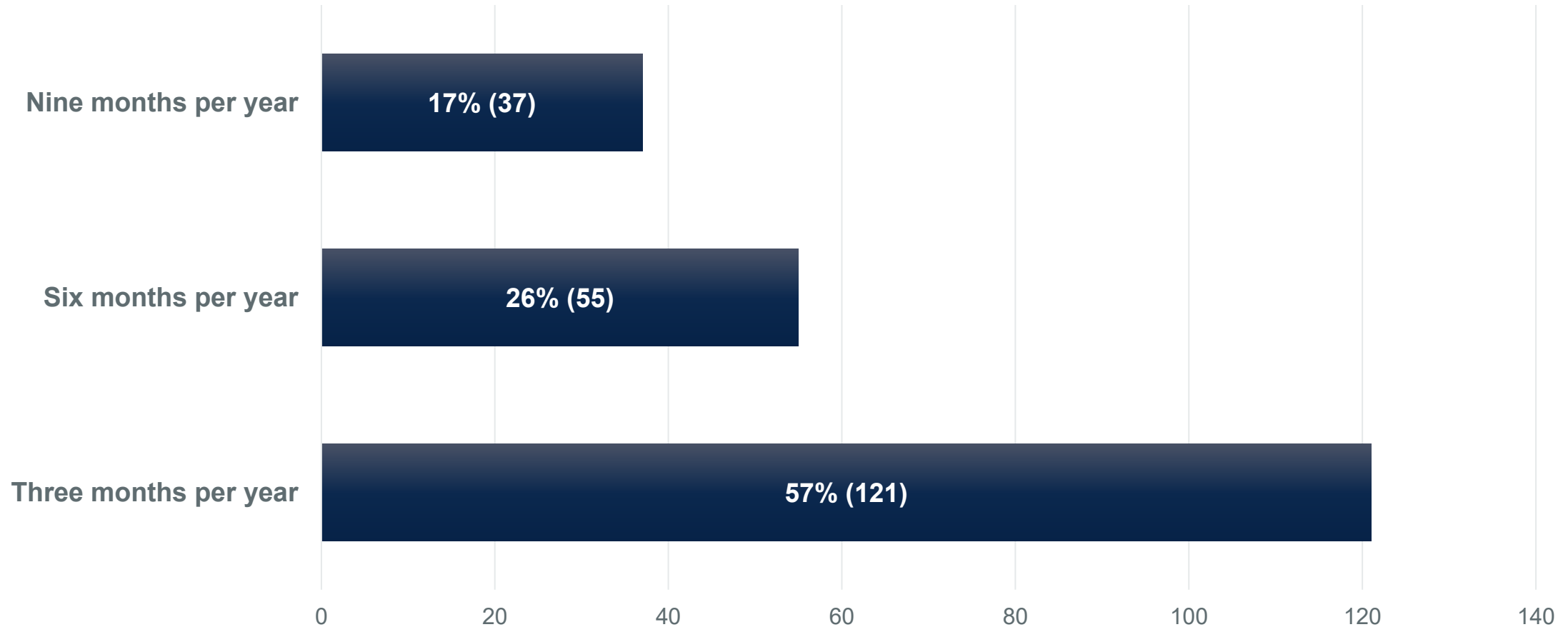
- I use portable sign(s) for my business/organization.
- I work for a business/organization but do not currently use portable signs.
- I own or work for a sign company.
- I am a resident in the RMWB.
- Other



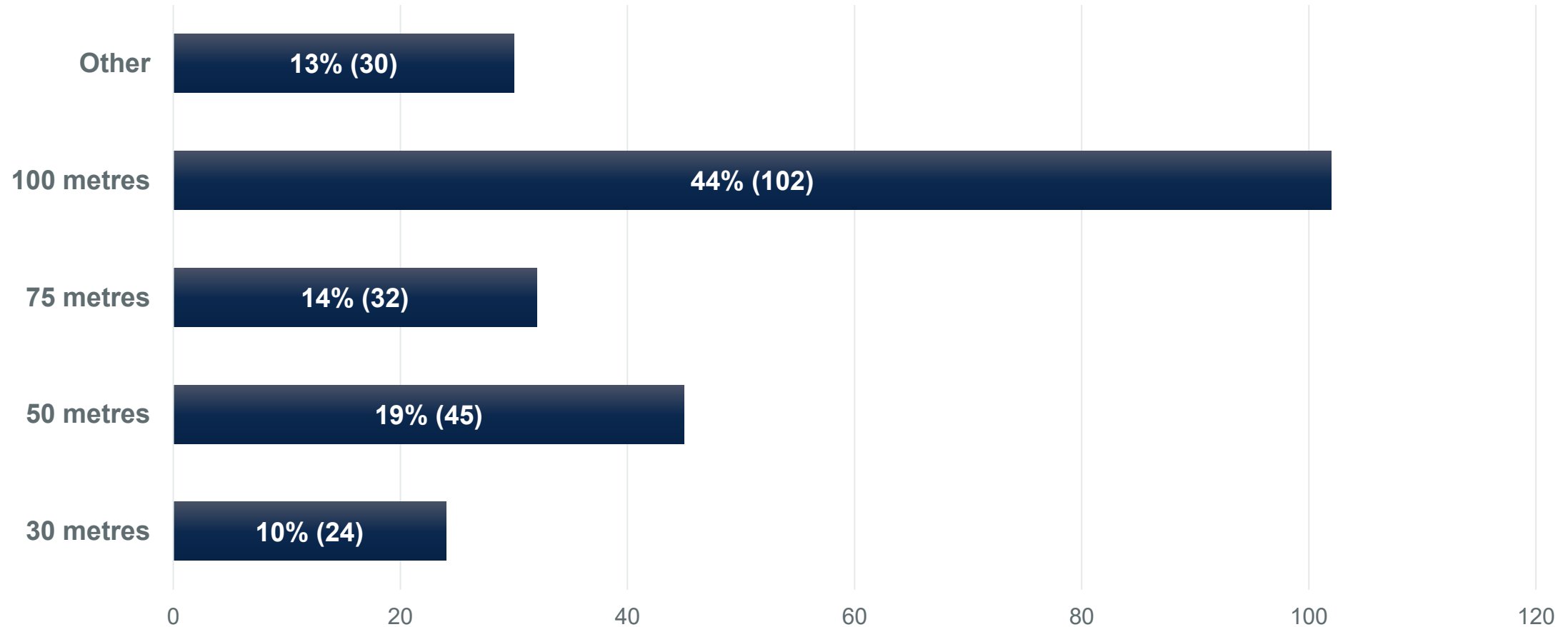
Q2: Should portable signs be temporary or permanent? (235 responses)



Q3: If portable signs are temporary, how long should they be allowed on a site? (213 responses)



Q4: What is the ideal separation distance between portable signs? (233 responses)



Q4 continued: Other responses (30, by theme)

1. **Support for specific minimum spacing distances.** (13 mentions)

- Around 10-30 metres (4 mentions)
- Around 100-250 metres (6 mentions)
- Larger distances: 300-500 metres, 1 km (3 mentions)

2. **Preference for fewer restrictions.** (5 mentions)

- “Let businesses do whatever it

takes to stay open”

- “Discretionary – up to planner”

3. **Concern about visual clutter and aesthetics.** (3 mentions)

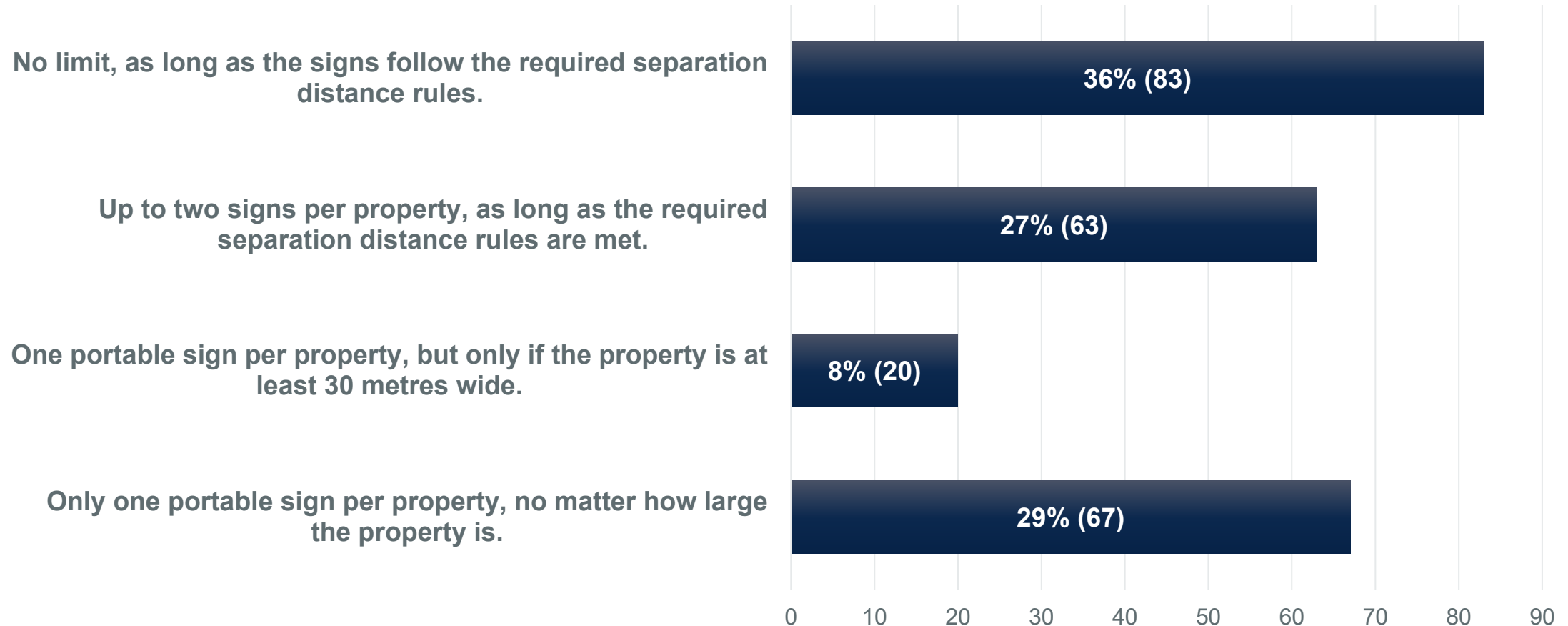
- “Eye sore...looks untidy”
- “They clutter the street view”

4. **Concern about safety and visibility.** (3 mentions)

5. **Desire for different rules in rural vs. urban areas** (1 mention)



Q5: How many portable signs should be allowed on one property? (233 responses)



Q6: Please provide any additional comments related to portable signs. (103 responses, by theme)

1. Support for business use. (25 mentions)

- Comments expressed conditional support, particularly for small businesses.
- Many acknowledged the important of signage for small businesses, local visibility, and temporary promotions.

2. Concerns about visual clutter and community appearance. (20 mentions)

- Respondents described portable signs as visually distracting, cluttering roadways, and detracting from community aesthetics.

3. Safety and visibility concerns. (12 mentions)

- Concerns included obstructed views for drivers, placement near intersections or driveways, and distractions to motorists.



Q6: Please provide any additional comments related to portable signs.

4. **Desire for better design and maintenance. (9 mentions)**

- Comments focused on how signs look and are maintained.
- Respondents referenced poor condition or faded signs and voiced a preference for more professional-looking signage.

5. **Preference for temporary or limited-duration use. (8 mentions)**

- Many respondents reiterated that portable signs should remain temporary, not permanent.
- Permanent signs were often linked to increased clutter and reduced effectiveness of advertising.

6. **Opposition to portable signs altogether. (7 mentions)**

- Several respondents expressed strong opposition to portable signs in general, some referencing the impact to community aesthetics and safety.

7. **Support for clear limits and enforcement. (6 mentions)**

- Comments referenced the need for consistency, frustration with signs that appear non-compliant, and perceptions that current rules are not always enforced.



Appendix B

Pop-up information sessions
54 interactions



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POP-UP INFORMATION SESSIONS

Overview

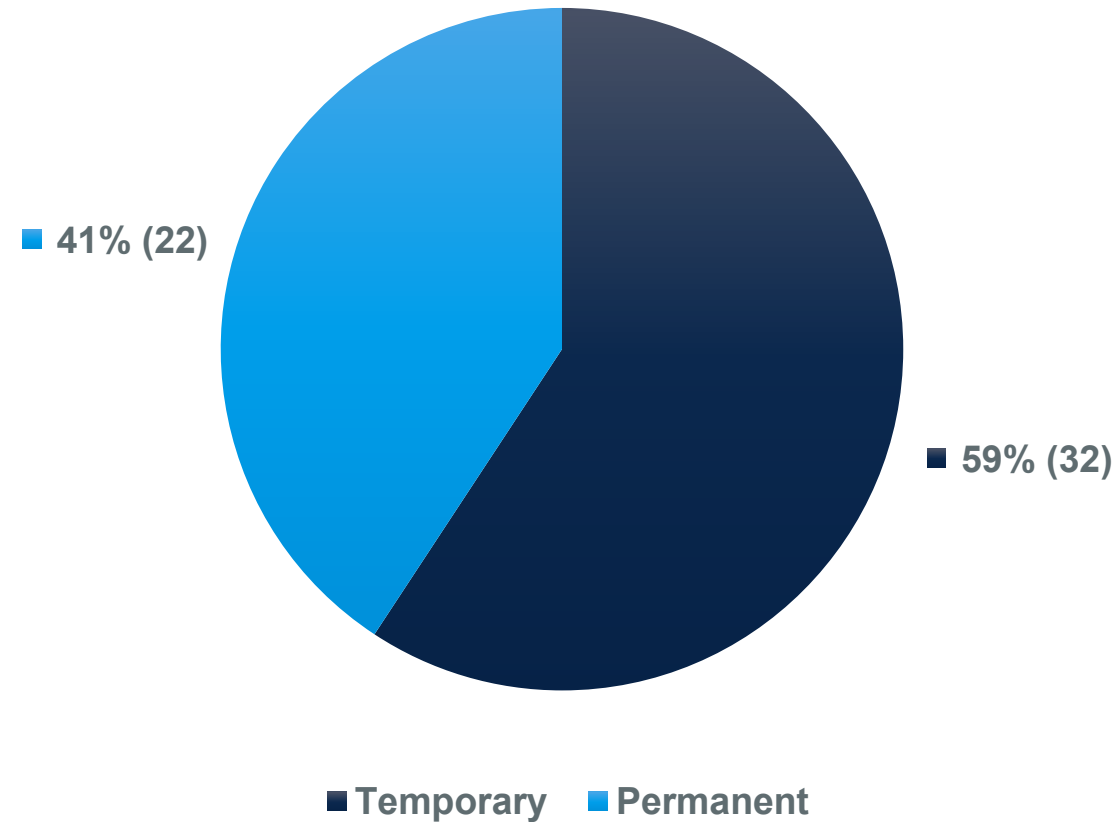
- Over three pop-up information sessions, **54 attendees** interacted with the portable sign engagement booth at Jubilee Centre, MacDonald Island Park, and Peter Pond Mall.

Format

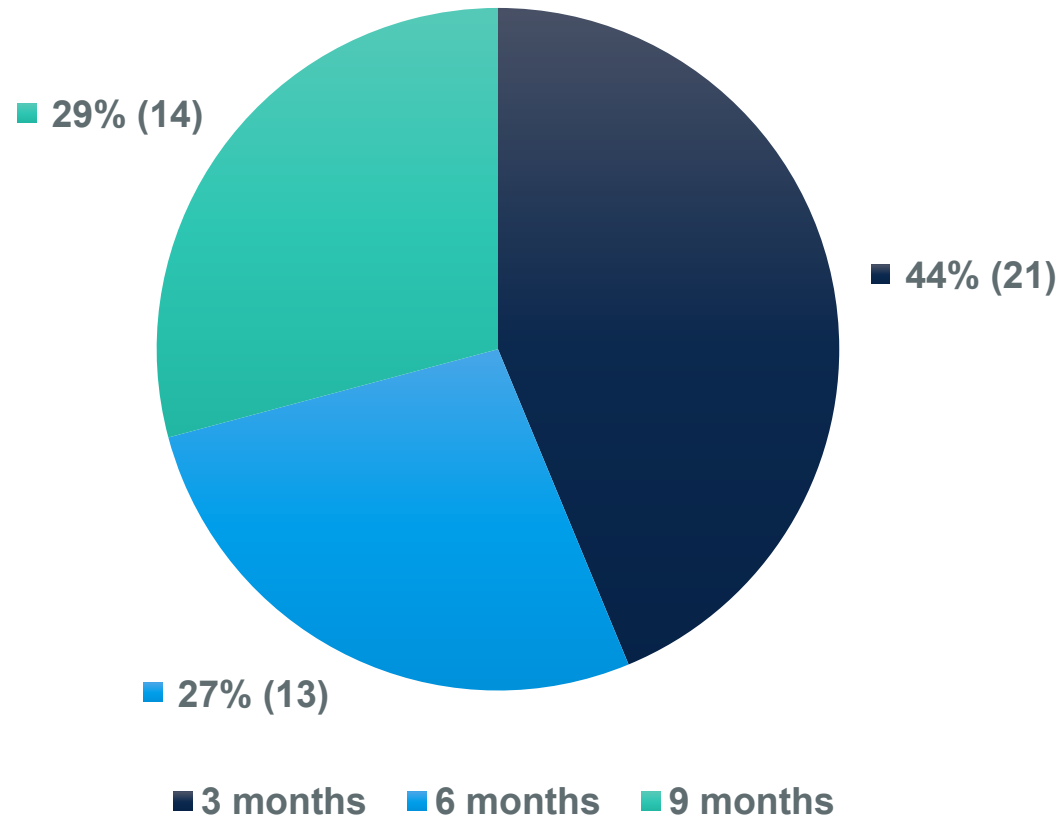
- A booth was set up at three prominent locations over two days to encourage the public to provide their input to planners – either through conversation or via dotmocracy boards.



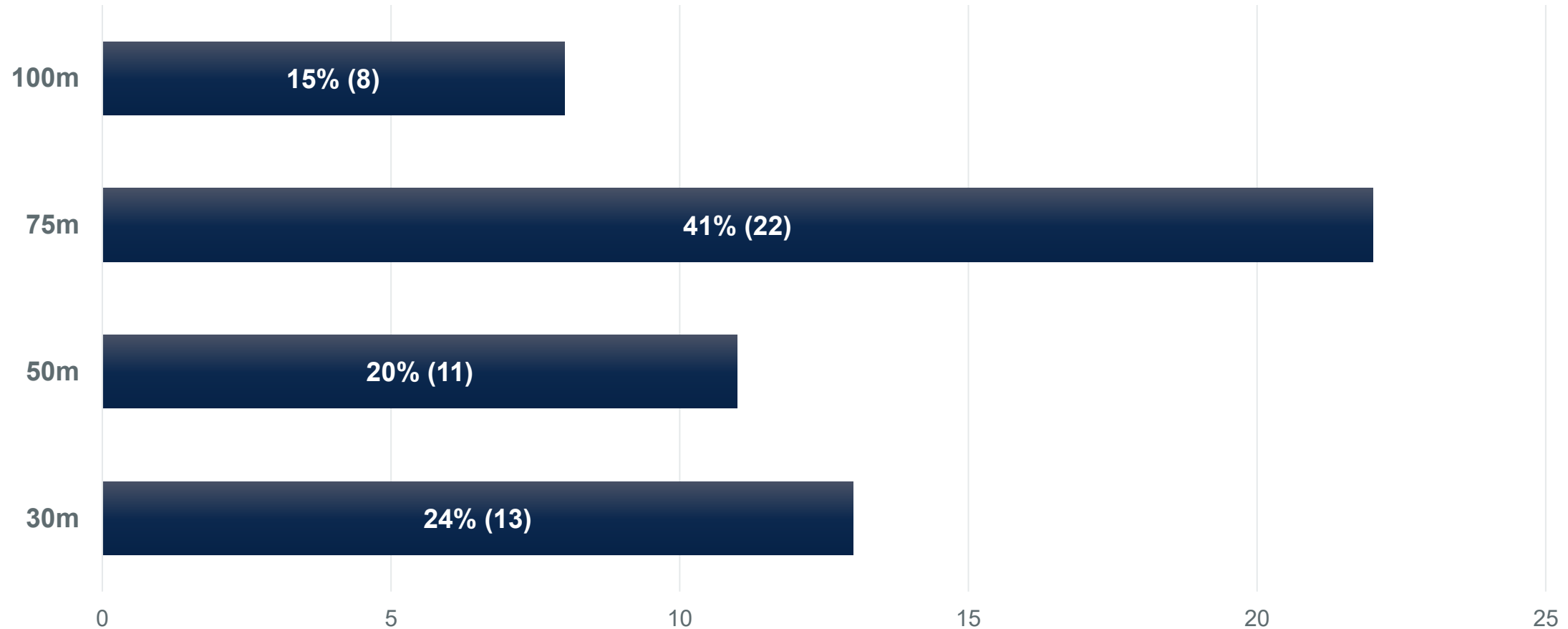
Q1: Should portable signs be temporary or permanent? (54 responses)



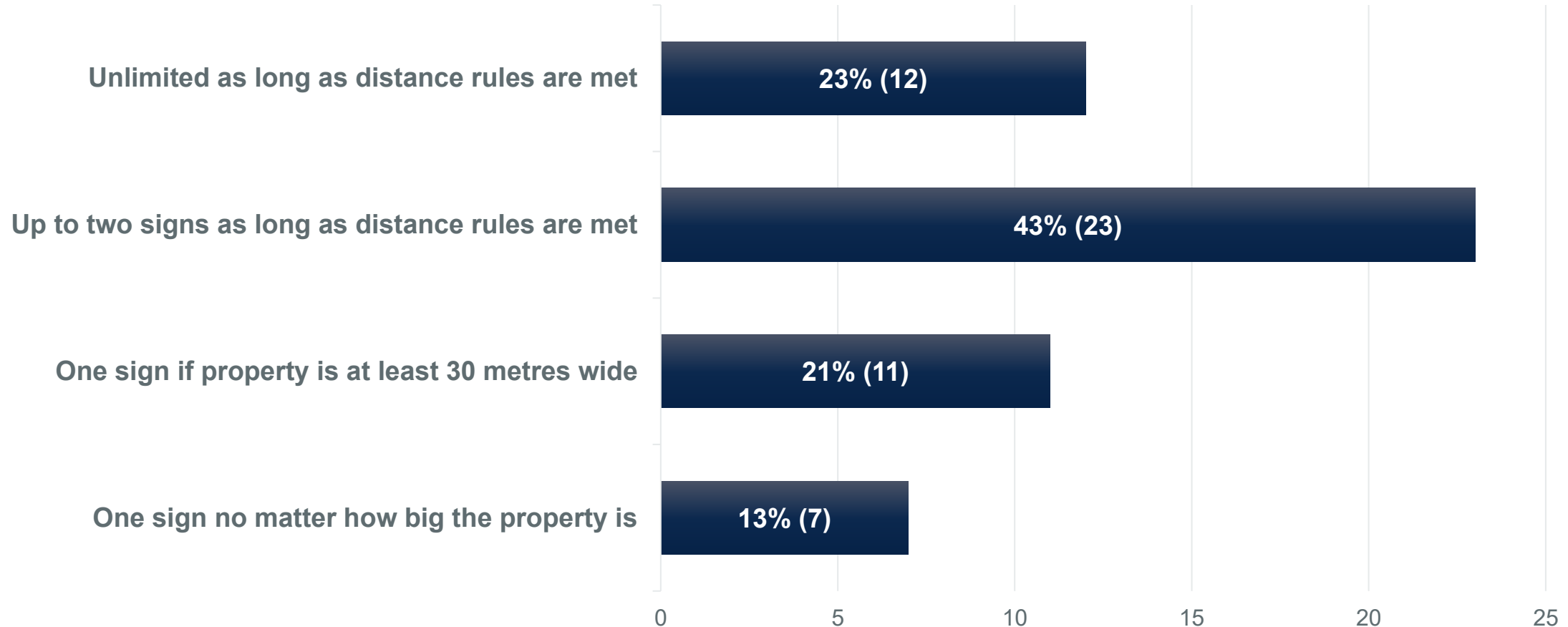
Q2: If temporary, how long should businesses be allowed to use them each year? (48 responses)



Q3: How far apart should portable signs be? (54 responses)



Q4: How many portable signs should be allowed on one property? (53 responses)



Appendix C

Industry interviews

**3 portable sign company interviews
(in-person + phone)**



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INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS

Overview

- Hosted by members of the RMWB Planning and Development Services team, two in-person interviews and one phone interview were conducted with local businesses that provide portable signs.
- Discussions provided first-hand insight into their experience with the current regulations for portable signs, and their solutions for meeting several challenges they identified.

Format

- Two to three planners met or talked with local sign companies to gather feedback on the use of portable signs in the region.



Key takeaways from portable sign company interviews

1. Strong concern with current time limits

- Current 180-day on requirement is seen as restrictive and disruptive to both businesses and sign providers.

2. Preference for more permanent or flexible use

- Companies supported treating signs as either long-term fixtures or allowing greater flexibility based on context and business needs.
- Some suggested that seasonal or event-based signs could remain temporary.

3. Desire for a simpler and faster permitting process

- Companies voiced frustration with the current development permit process for portable signs with the current time limit of 180 days.

4. Support for area-specific or flexible regulations

- Companies do not believe one-size-fits-all rules are appropriate across the region and suggest more flexibility is needed as a result.

5. General agreement on separation distances

- Current 30 metre separation distance was seen as acceptable, although some felt some flexibility is needed depending on where the signs are going in the region.



Key takeaways from portable sign company interviews (continued)

6. Preference for distance-based rather than fixed sign limits

- Instead of setting a maximum number of signs per property, companies supported aligns signs based on available frontage and separation requirements.

7. Recognition of visual clutter

- Companies acknowledged that signs can contribute to visual clutter if poorly managed. Suggested approaches to mitigate this are maintaining setback requirements, ensuring proper maintenance and appearance, and introducing basic aesthetic standards.

8. Interest in modern sign technologies

- Respondents noted that most signs have evolved from a blank sign with interchangeable letters to custom printed designs.
- Some also identified emerging trends – such as printed aluminum/magnetic sign panels or potential for digital display signs – that regulations may need to consider in the future.

9. Importance of portable signs for small businesses and non-profits

- Participants highlighted that these signs are widely used by small, independent businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and community groups as an affordable and effective advertising tool.

