

RM OF ALEXANDER COMMUNITY COFFEE HOUSE 2016

RICHARD WINTRUP & ASSOCIATES  
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## A. INTRODUCTION

Richard Wintrup & Associates (RWA) was retained by the RM of Alexander in June 2016 to provide facilitation services for a series of Community Coffee House meetings. The RWA team met with community organizations and cottage associations throughout the RM of Alexander from June 2016 – August 2016 to gain insight and feedback on important community issues. RWA asked community residents to share their insight into their personal connection and experience with the community and gain an understanding of future challenges and opportunities for the RM of Alexander.

The purpose of the Coffee House Meetings:

- To compare the results of the 2015 RM of Alexander Community Coffee House meetings
- To assess if the RM of Alexander is on track with its current Strategic Plan
- To inform future decisions

The following report has six separate sections:

- A. Introduction
- B. Community Engagement Strategy
- C. Executive Summary
- D. Community Coffee House Analysis
- E. Recommendations
- F. 2016 Community Coffee House Meeting Map

## B. ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The RM of Alexander supplied a list of community organizations and cottage associations to RWA. This list became our 'contact list' for the community coffee house meetings. The list contained email addresses and phone numbers of 'active' community organizations and cottage associations in Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4.

There were two separate phases to the Community Coffee House meetings. We travelled to the RM of Alexander between June – August 2016 often meeting during the weekends and evenings with residents.

### **Phase 1: June – August 2016**

- One-on-one meetings with 15 community organizations and cottage associations. The majority of the meetings took place at the Bird River Fire Hall and the East Beaches Senior Scene. We also had meetings at the Great Falls Community Hall, Hillside Restaurant and the Community Club on Stead Road.
- Engagement Strategy: Each open-ended question was asked of the group and all answers were recorded.
- Advertisement: Email invites were sent to community organizations and cottage associations that outlined the purpose of the meeting and community coffee house questions to be discussed. On occasion, follow-up phone calls were made to discuss the details of the project.

## **Phase 2: August 2016**

Richard Wintrup & Associates organized three Open House Events

- August 24, 2016 – Ward 1 – 2 Open House Event at the East Beaches Senior Scene
- August 25, 2016 – Ward 3- 4 Open House Event at the Great Falls Community Hall
- August 30, 2016 – Winnipeg Open House Event at the Red River Community Centre
  
- Engagement Strategy: Six presentation boards were designed to provide an overview of the Community Coffee House project and a list of all the questions. Each resident was asked to provide answers, in writing, to the Coffee House questions before leaving the open house event.
- Advertisement: RM of Alexander Ward Meetings was advertised in The Lac Du Bonnet Clipper on August 18, 2016 email invites sent to all community organizations and cottage associations. Winnipeg meeting was advertised in the CanStar Times community newspaper on August 24th, 2016.

## **Community Coffee House Questions**

The following questions were asked during the each Community Coffee House meetings. To allow for comparison with the 2015 Community Coffee House Meeting, the same questions were asked this year.

### **Question 1: Connection**

- What are some of the personal experiences that have helped develop your attachment to the area?
- Do you feel a sense of belonging or attachment to the community and surrounding areas? Why?
- What is it that makes your home special?

### **Question 2: Values**

- What do you feel are the most important pieces in “your community”?
- What do you value the most?
- What are the things about rural and cottage living that keep you here?
- How does this enhance your life and health as well as the life and health of your family and loved ones

### **Question 3: Action**

- In your view, what are the greatest and future obstacles to overcome to ensure the health, strength, growth and sustainability of your area?
- How have we been limited?
- How have we limited ourselves?
- What is it that hinders us from flourishing?
- How have we been impacted negatively?

### **Question 4: Dreams**

- Imagine it is 2036 and think about the greatest achievement of our area. What are the things that have been created? Changed? Improved?
- What does it look like?
- How are we working together?
- How does it feel living here 20 years from now?

RWA met with 15 community organizations and cottage associations and a total of 57 residents from June 2016 – August 2016. We travelled to the RM of Alexander on eleven separate occasions often meeting on weekends and evenings with community organizations and cottage associations. Each meeting took approximately 45 – 60 minutes and each question was discussed individually. All responses were recorded.

## C. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RM of Alexander residents prize and hold to esteem their natural surroundings, freedom of living in the country and proximity to the water and nature. Rural and cottage living affords many the ability to enjoy the natural surroundings and connect with family and friends. Many interviewees came to the area as young children with their parents and grandparents and now they are bringing their own children to experience the community and make their own memories. Its truly perceived as a “special place” among the majority of residents we spoke to.

Many residents that we interviewed did see a number of areas for improvement for the future. Mainly preserving the natural habit, trails and most importantly the river system. A healthy ecosystem is essentially what attracted them to the area and will continue to attract newcomers to the area. The natural beauty of the area needs to be protected. Collaborating with neighbouring RMs for the delivering of health care services and road maintenance would be essential for delivering more efficient services to residents in the RM of Alexander. More specifically, having an aging in place facility for residents who wish to remain in the communities and have the available services to meet their healthcare needs.

Residents also believed that improving the communication between the RM of Alexander Council and residents is very important moving forward. Improving transparency and improving communication would allow residents to better understand issues in their community and have an opportunity to provide input in the process.

## D. COMMUNITY COFFEE HOUSE ANALYSIS

### **Methodology**

The method of analysis for the Coffee House Meetings is called “open coding” that was applied to define and analyze the results of each meeting. This analysis involves labeling ideas (concepts) and developing categories (themes). The information is then catalogued into a framework matrix for further analysis. Information gathered was first arranged into concepts, which represent the key ideas and thoughts expressed by residents in Wards 1, 2,3 and 4. Concepts are then grouped into larger themes, which serve to represent the larger ideas and thoughts expressed on a broader scale.

In order to understand what ideas and thoughts are most prevalent in the RM of Alexander, concepts have been organized into graphs that detail the following information:

- Total frequency of use for all respondents
- Total frequency of use for each ward. These numbers only include concepts gathered at community group meetings in Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4.

## **Community Engagement Results**

The following questions were asked during the Community Coffee House Meetings.

### **Question 1 – Connection**

- What are some of the personal experiences that have helped develop your attachment to the area?
- Do you feel a sense of belonging or attachment to the community and surrounding areas? Why?
- What is it that makes your home special?

The majority of residents that we interviewed reflected on the beauty of their surroundings, the attachment to nature and how the location offered them a sense of peacefulness and stress relief. Their attachment to the area was formed during their early childhood. Often many of the residents have been here for several generations. Their community offered them a second home, away from Winnipeg. Many continued to come throughout the years, eventually bringing their own children to the area. Many could remember visiting the community with their parents and grandparents to hike, have family dinners, go swimming and partake in other fun activities. The country lifestyle is a big draw to residents.

For Wards 1, 2 and 3 the beach lifestyle, people, friends and family have created a memorable connection to the community. However, despite other activities and opportunities in other communities, few people would go to other communities and attend neighbouring events. The isolation of the area is perceived as an advantage and strengthened their sense of connection to nature and their surroundings. Ward 4 also reflected on their connection to their natural surroundings and also the presence of their community centres such as the Birds Hill Fire Hall and the Great Falls Community Centre that offered residents a gathering place to host community events. As well, the slow paced lifestyle and the ability to hunt, fish, golf and live at the cottage helped to fuse their sense of community to the community even more.

### **Predominate Themes**

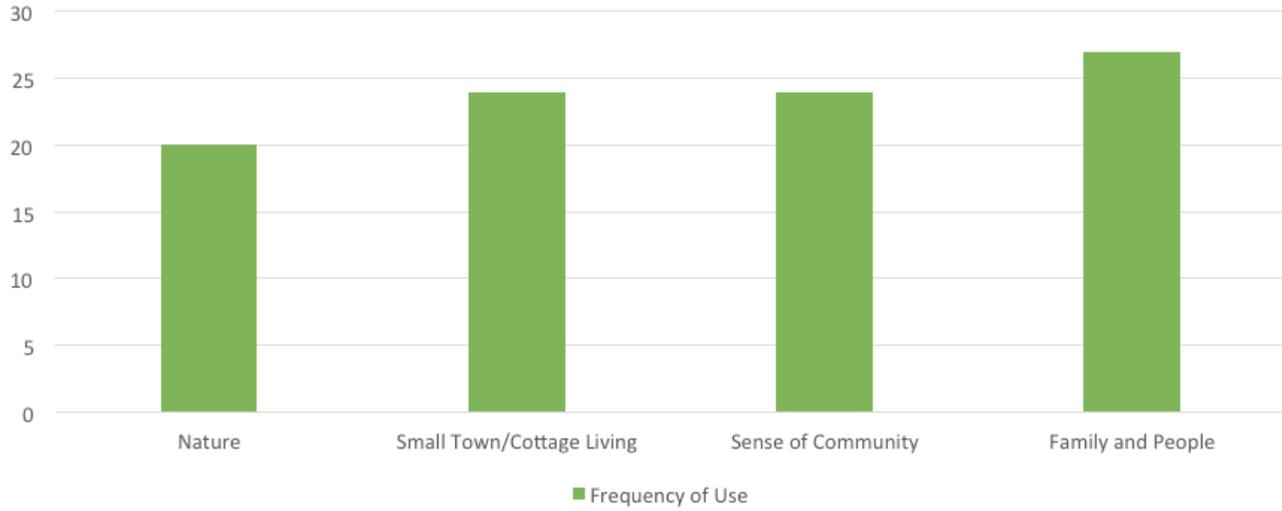
**Nature – 12 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (80%)**

**Small Town/Cottage Living – 12 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (80%)**

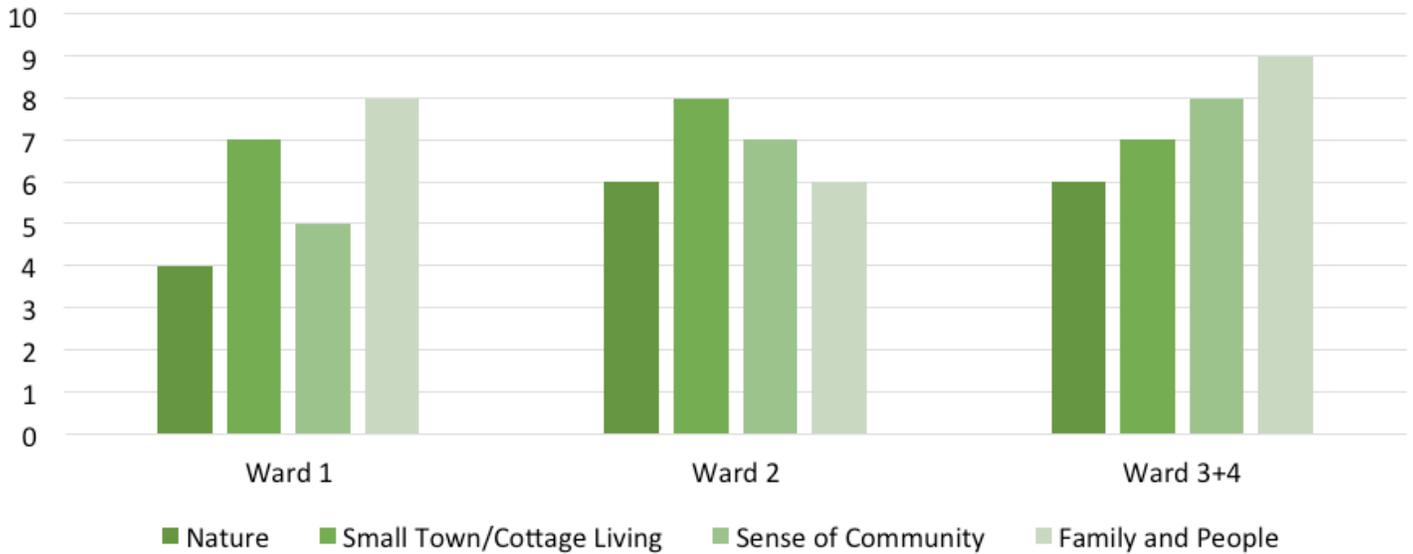
**Sense of Community – 14 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (93%)**

**Family and People – 14 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (93%)**

"Connection" - Concept Frequency of Use (Total)



"Connection" - Concept Frequency of Use (by Ward\*)



## Question 2 - Values

- What do you feel are the most important pieces in “your community”?
- What do you value the most?
- What are the things about rural and cottage living that keep you here?
- How does this enhance your life and health as well as the life and health of your family and loved ones?

The majority of the residents that we interviewed believed that the most important pieces in their community are people, places and nature. These elements continue to make their communities special and hold meaning and value. The personal relationships that people developed enhanced their way of life. The community centres, beaches, green space, golf course, and bakery all provide meaningful gathering places for social activities. Rural and cottage living offered residents peace and quiet, rest and relaxation. For some cottage owners, going up to their cottage gave them an opportunity to reconnect with family and friends. Many residents stated that the safety of the area allowed their children to “just have fun” and not worry about cars on the road or strangers, since “everyone knew each other and watched out for each other”. The ability to enjoy the pristine surroundings and a slower pace of life makes the area truly special. Some stated that their surroundings allow them to even “turn back the clocks of time” and made them feel younger.

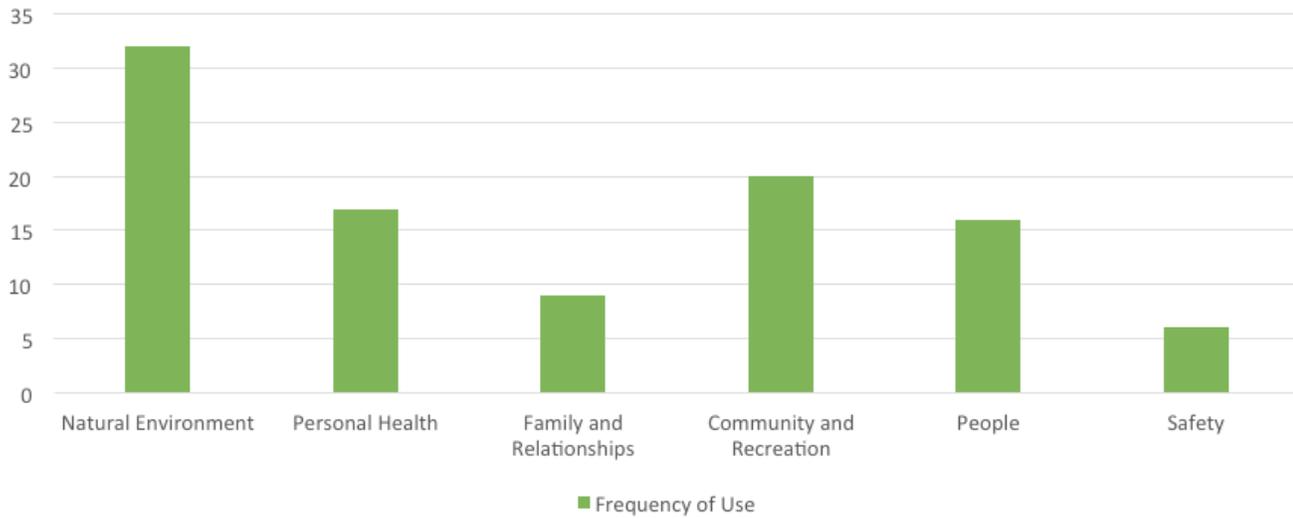
Wards 1 and 2 reflected on how the proximity to the beach, community days of celebration and community spirit are the important pieces in their community. Being close to neighbours and getting to know people in the community were also valued most by residents. Their communities offered them the feeling of living in a small town, which stands in sharp contrast to how many felt while in Winnipeg. Nature, proximity to water and people keeps them coming back to the area and enhances their life and health and the life and health of their family and loved ones.

Ward 3 and 4 echoed the sentiments of Wards 1 and 2 with their views that the proximity to nature and water provided them with a sense of calm. The need to protect the surrounding nature is imperative moving forward. Being close to family and friends, freedom of the outdoors and a slow paced lifestyle was stated by many residents as to what they valued most in their community and what needs to be preserved moving forward.

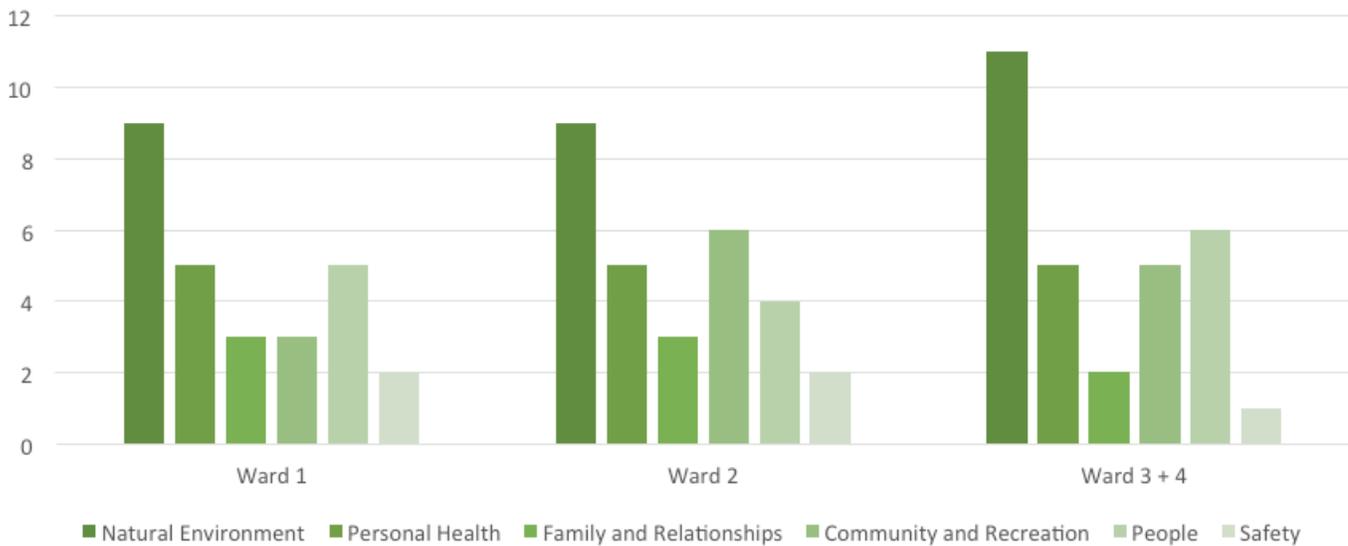
### Predominant Themes

- **Natural Environment – 12 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (80%)**
- **Personal Health – 13 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (87%)**
- **Family and Relationships – 7 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (47%)**
- **Community and Recreation – 11 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (73%)**
- **People – all groups mentioned this theme (100%)**
- **Safety – 5 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (33%)**

### "Values" - Concept Frequency of Use (Total)



### "Values" - Concept Frequency of Use (by Ward\*)



### Question 3: Action

- In your view, what are the greatest and future obstacles to overcome to ensure the health, strength, growth and sustainability of our area?
- How have we been limited?
- How have we limited ourselves?
- What is it that hinders us from flourishing?
- How have we been impacted negatively?

The responses varied for this question across Wards, but residents were willing to voice and explore issues that need immediate attention in order to improve the quality of life in their communities. Residents in Wards 1 and 2 stated that they feel disconnected from the rest of the RM of Alexander and believe that there isn't sufficient communication between the "Beaches communities" and the RM Council. Their concerns are not reaching their local Council. This is especially true for seasonal residents, such as the Hillside Beach Traylor Co-op, who were unable to vote and thus unable to voice their concerns to the local Councillor.

Some residents believed that they didn't want "too much change" in their communities, but rather future growth should be done in a respectful way to nature and residents alike. Some residents stated that they did not want to see any growth at all or development in their communities, but rather have it stay the way it currently is. Some residents stated that the lack of amenities being provided by the RM was disproportionate to the amount of taxes paid. In particular, the amount of school taxes paid each year was perceived as "too high", since the majority of the residents interviewed did not have any children in the school system and were also paying Winnipeg school taxes. However, it should be noted that school taxes are provincial and is not a municipal tax.

Residents in Ward 1 and 2 were especially concerned about the erosion of the shoreline, the maintenance of the pathways and stairs leading to the beach area. The boat launch was also a point of contention among many residents interviewed. In particular the lack of communication from the RM Council regarding the boat launch and the financing of the project. Interviewees stated that these concerns had been brought to the attention of the RM Council and they are still waiting for the RM to take action.

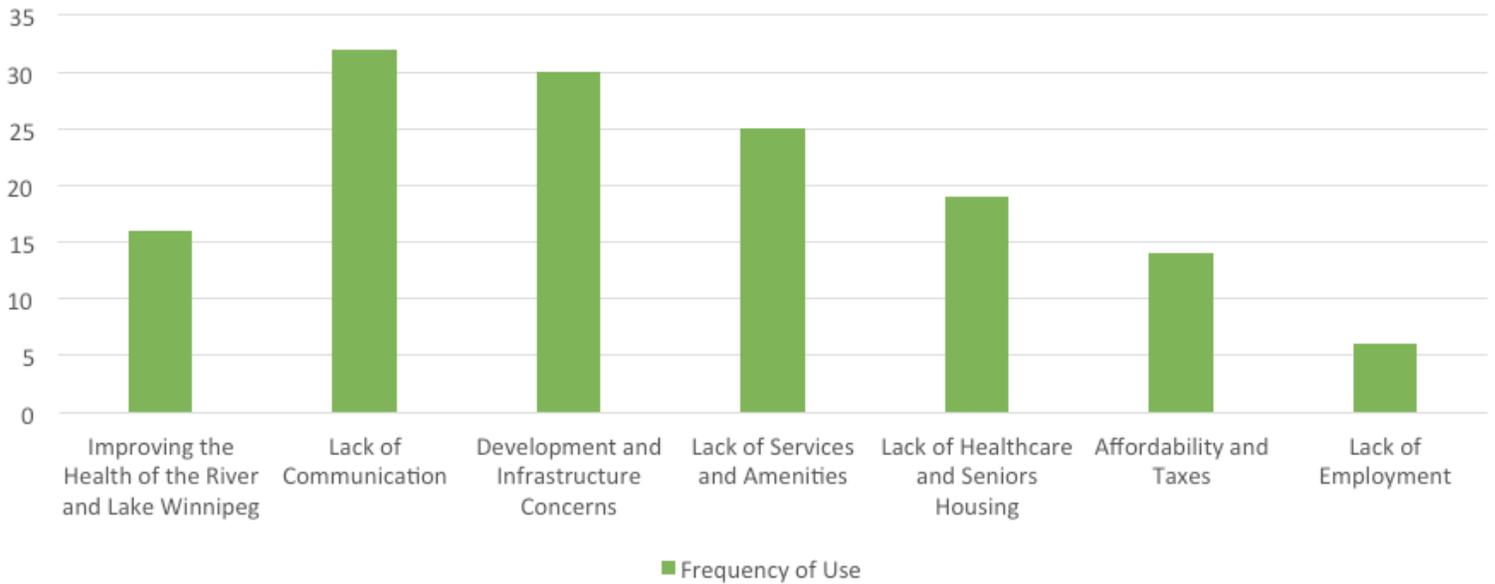
Residents of Ward 3 and 4, specifically in the Great Fall area believe that the condition of their water has been hindering their community and impacting residents negatively. They have been under a boil water advisory for 10 years and believe that action needs to be taken by the RM to resolve this issue. Due to the timing of the Community Coffee House meetings, the information of this study will be used to inform future decisions.

Residents interviewed in Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4 stated that there needs to be an aging-in place facility to assist individuals who wish to stay in the area as they grow older. The lack of adequate medical facilities in the RM of Alexander was concerning to most interviewees. They stated that they would need to go to Lac Du Bonnet or Pinawa for care and that some residents ultimately choose to move back to Winnipeg to get the medical care they need. An additional concern that was raised by interviewees in Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4 was the lack of employment opportunities and young families in their communities. They believed that jobs will attract new families to the area which, in turn, will allow for the RM of Alexander to thrive in the coming years. They stated that telecommunications and recreation in the area are poor, which may also discourage businesses and young families to move to the RM of Alexander. Although this is not reflected in the statistical outcome, residents were very passionate of these issues.

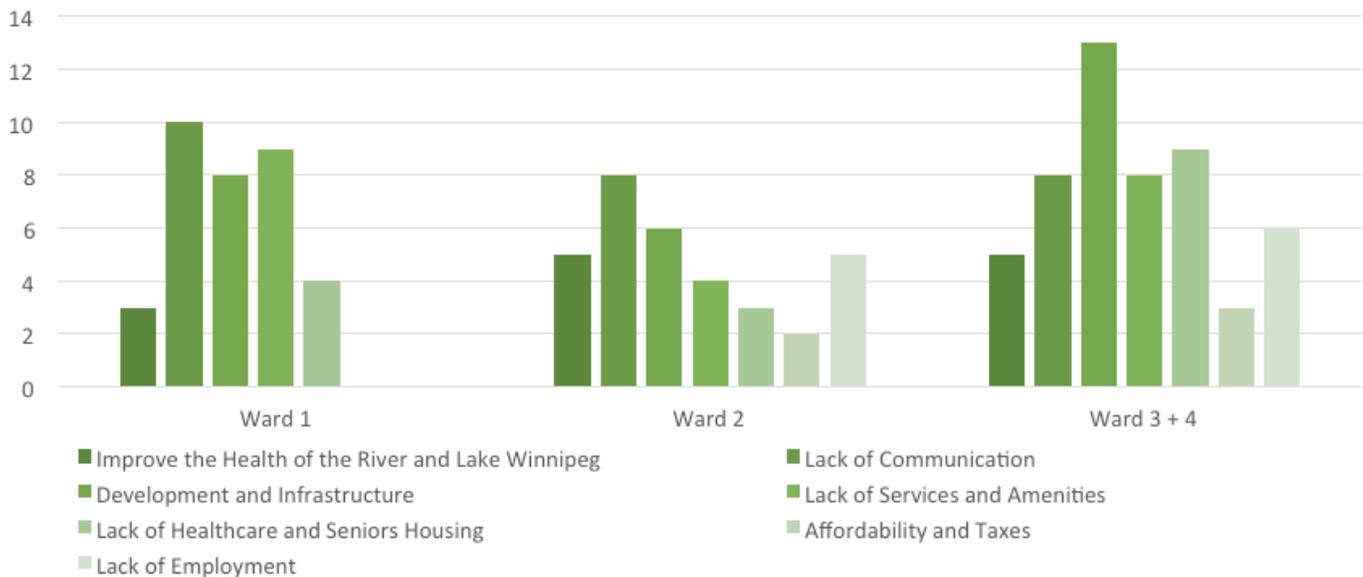
**Predominate Themes**

- **Improve the Health of the River and Lake Winnipeg – 8 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (53%)**
- **Lack of Communication – 14 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (93%)**
- **Development and Infrastructure Concerns – 12 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (80%)**
- **Lack of Services and Amenities – 12 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (80%)**
- **Lack of Healthcare and Seniors Housing - 10 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (67%)**
- **Affordability and Taxes – 7 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (47%)**
- **Lack of Employment – 6 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (40%)**

"Action" - Concept Frequency of Use (Total)



"Action" - Concept Frequency of Use (by Ward\*)



#### Question 4 - Dreams

Imagine it is 2036 and think about the greatest achievement of our area. What are the things that have been created?

Changed and Improved?

What does it look like?

How are we working together?

How does it feel living here 20 years from now?

The majority of residents interviewed in Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4 believed that the preservation of the natural landscape should be considered one of the greatest achievements of the RM of Alexander in 2036. They also stated that by 2036 dealing with the presence of algae and other pollutants in the river would be vital to ensuring the preservation of the natural landscape. Moving forward, it is also important to continue the preservation of the natural way of life and ensuring a balance between future development in the area and environmental protection.

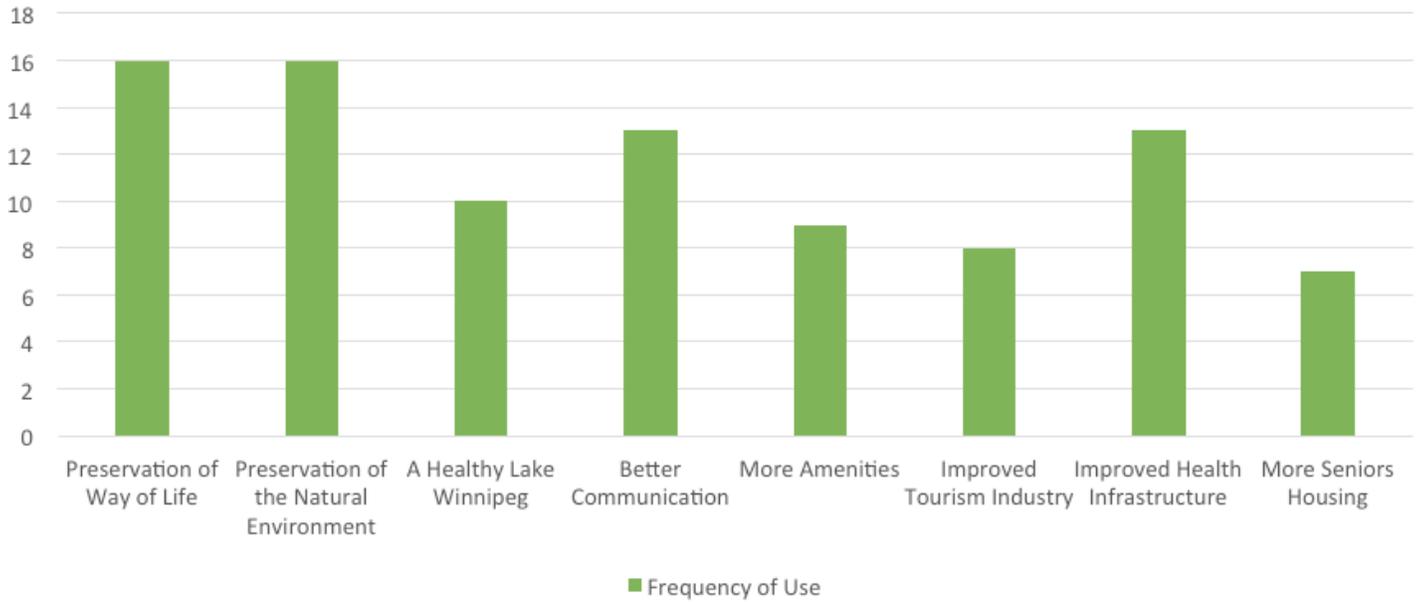
Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4 residents interviewed believed that their needs to be an improvement of transparency and openness between RM Council and residents. In particular, there needs to be a decrease in the number of “in camera” meetings” and improved communication between Ward Councillors and residents. In addition, improving economic opportunities and health infrastructure for residents in the area was also perceived to be a priority for residents. Improving collaboration between the RM of Alexander and neighbouring RMs on issues related to economic development, healthcare and road maintenance should also be improved by 2036.

Some of the residents interviewed in Ward 2 stated that preserving their community facilities with gathering spaces was deemed to be important. It offered them a meeting location and a place to host community events.

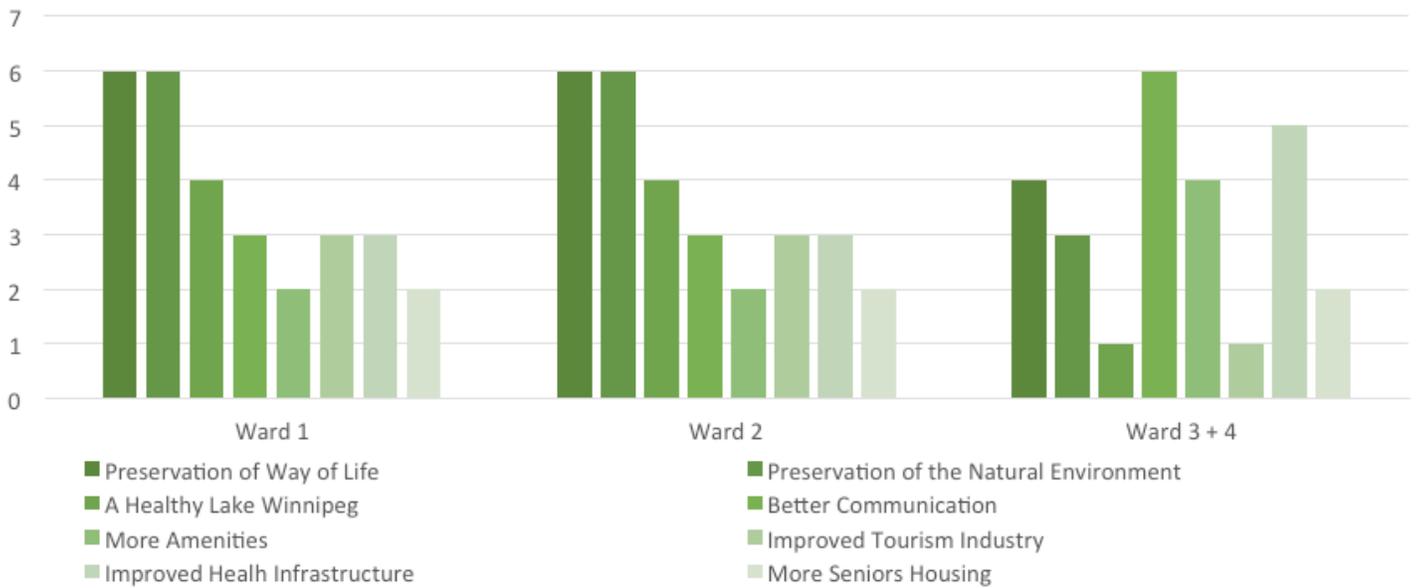
#### Predominate Themes

- **Preservation of way of life – 13 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (87%)**
- **Preservation of the natural environment – 12 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (80%)**
- **A healthy lake Winnipeg – 9 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (60%)**
- **Better Communication – 9 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (60%)**
- **Amenities – 8 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (53%)**
- **Tourism – 5 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (33%)**
- **Health Infrastructure – 11 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (73%)**
- **Seniors Housing – 7 of 15 groups mentioned this theme (47%)**

## "Dreams" - Concept Frequency of Use (Total)



## "Dreams" - Concept Frequency of Use (by Ward\*)



## E. RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a number of recommendations that can be made based on the results of the 2016 Community Coffee House meetings.

### 1. Improving the Health of the Ecosystem

- By using various educational methods (i.e. flyers, advertisements, etc) the RM of Alexander will be able to educate the general public about how everyone can take part in protecting the ecosystem. This education campaign should include an action plan, short-term and long-term goals and measures and methods of engagement based on demographics. The campaign should also include children and young adults in order to engrain the importance of the ecosystem at an early age and how they can become environmental stewarts.

### 2. Improvement of Communication between the RM of Alexander residents and the RM Council/Councillors

- Improving the location of online reports/documents on the RM of Alexander homepage to make it easier for residents to locate them
- Communicate publically as to why Council needs to have an “in camera” meeting. This would increase the level of transparency between residents and the RM Council

### 3. Improving Health Care Infrastructure

- Explore opportunities with the Regional Health Authority for an aging in place facility, in addition to additional personal care beds, to provide care for individuals who wish to remain in their communities, and who require a level of care on a daily basis
- Supportive housing for seniors is also another opportunity to explore further. The supportive housing option can help seniors delay or avoid personal care placement until an intensive level of care is required. Supportive housing combines living in a secure apartment setting with personal support services. \*Although this recommendation is not reflected in our statistical analysis, residents that we did meet with, spoke passionately about the need to improve health infrastrustructure and aging in place opportunities in the RM of Alexander

### 4. Economic Development Plan

- An economic development plan would focus on how to harness the assets of the RM and provide direction for the community. It could also provide a platform and a vision for the delivery of employment opportunities, short-term and long-term action plans and provide a guide for economic development actions (for example, the development of tourism sector). For example, a short-term action item could include the need to upgrade current municipal infrastructure to met the current needs of residents. The Plan can be used to inform residents, businesses and elected officials on the challenges and opportunities facing the RM of Alexander

## D. 2016 COMMUNITY COFFEE HOUSE MEETING MAP

This map indicates the locations of the 2016 Community Coffee House Meetings throughout the RM of Alexander.

