

REACH NEIGHBOURHOOD ORGANIZING INITIATIVE



Mill Woods Town Centre and Transit Centre Safety Engagement Report

March 2023



Executive Summary for Mill Woods Town Centre and Transit Centre Survey

In response to community safety concerns regarding the spaces in and around Mill Woods Town Centre and Mill Woods Transit Centre, Councillor Tang asked REACH Edmonton to engage local stakeholders for further feedback. In consultation with Edmonton Transit Services and the Neighbourhood Empowerment Team, REACH Edmonton designed an online questionnaire which invited community members to share their concerns while using the Mill Woods Town Centre and Transit Centre spaces—and provide suggestions for how these spaces might feel more vibrant and safer for everyone. 52 community members participated in the online questionnaire, which was active from mid-November 2022 to end of February 2023. The following are some key takeaways of the summary:

Most who responded identified as female Mill Woods residents over the age of 60 years who did not belong to a racialized community and frequented the mall to shop for groceries or use the food court to eat/socialize.

Just over 1/3 of participants said that they had safety concerns on a regular basis when they visited the area but felt safe once they were inside the mall in more populated places, such as the food court.

More than half of folks in this response group attributed their safety concerns with the presence of vulnerable persons in and around the mall and bus terminal—in particular, folks who appeared under the influence, mentally unwell, or asking for money.

The large remainder of folks in this response group said they felt unsafe because of pedestrian hazards, such as cars and buses driving too fast through the parking lot and poor sidewalk conditions. A few more folks in this group said they felt unsafe using the space at night when there were less people about.

Safety issues after dark was also the top concern for 7 more participants, who reported having safety concerns in the mall and transit spaces only some of the time.

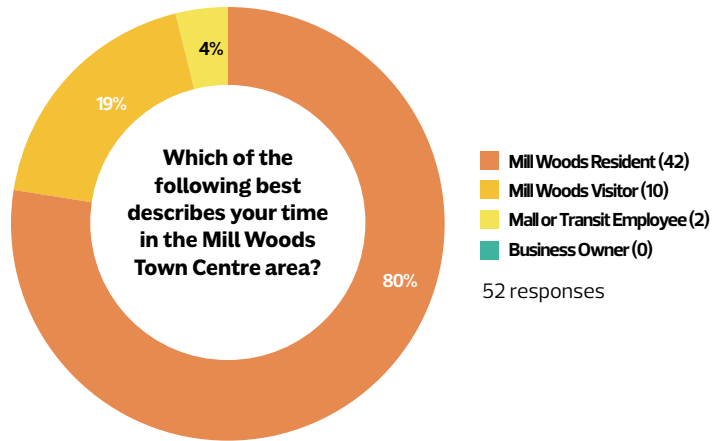
The most notable suggestions to improve safety and vibrancy in and around Mill Woods Town Centre and Mill Woods Transit Centre included:

- Infrastructure to control traffic (e.g., speed bumps), improved lighting, and landscaping to promote safe use of the outdoor spaces surrounding the mall and bus terminal
- 24-hour security presence in the transit centre
- Evening community events hosted by the mall to animate the space at night
- Finding a new grocery tenant to replace Co-op to help maintain shopping vibrancy

Some additional things to note is only 5 participants identified as users of ETS. Therefore, further engagement with transit users, as well as with youth, BIPOC folks, members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, and mall vendors/employees would help provide a clearer understanding of the issues and opportunities regarding Mill Woods Town Centre and Mill Woods Transit Centre.

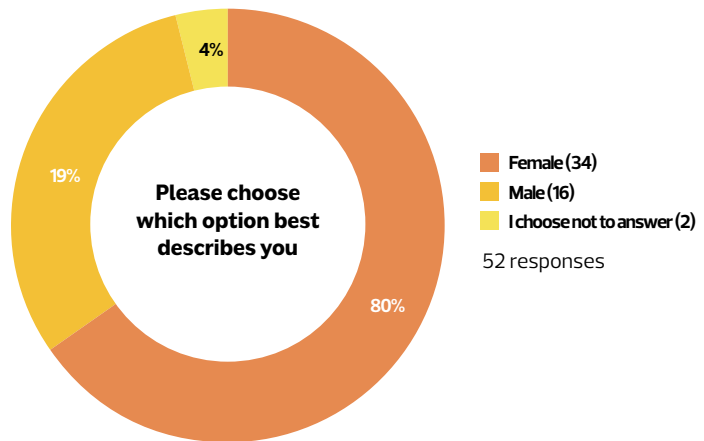
I. Which of the following best describes your time in the Mill Woods Town Centre area?

Of the users of the Mill Woods Town Centre and Transit Centre spaces, respondents identified with the following groups. It's interesting to note that no one selected more than one response, even though it was offered as an option.



2. Please choose which option best describes you: Female, Male, Other, or I choose not to answer

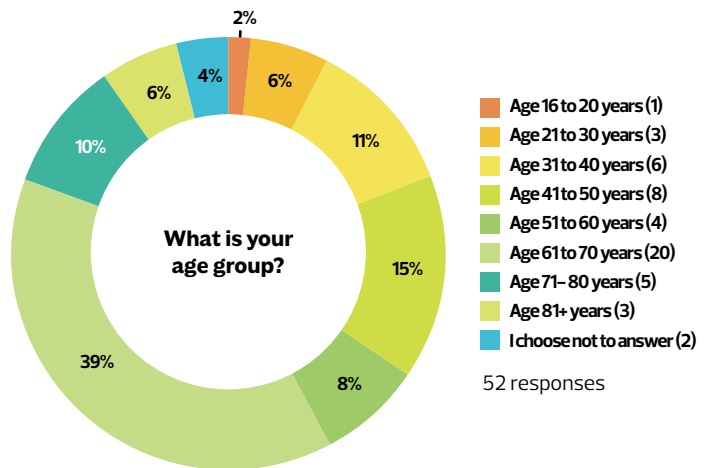
34 respondents identified as female, 16 identified as male, and 2 people selected the choice of not answering.



3. What is your age group?

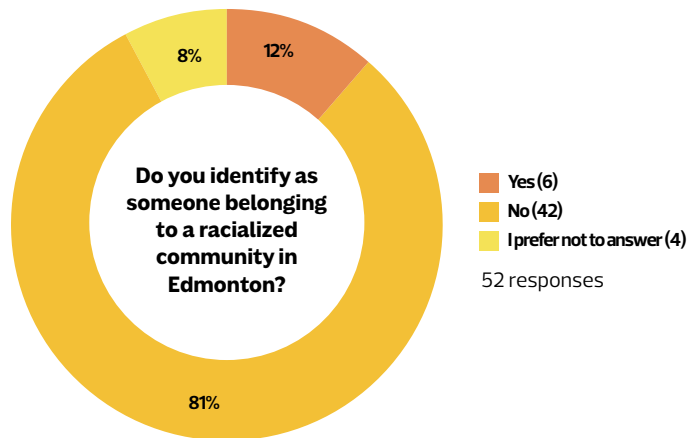
Senior folks were the largest response groups of the questionnaire. There were 20 people identifying within the 61- to 70-year-old age bracket, 5 people between the ages of 71 and 80 years-old, and 3 people between 81 and to 90 years-old.

The second largest age group who responded were between 41 and 50 years of age, followed by the third largest group who identified within the 31- to 40-year-old age bracket. Out the 52 participants, only 3 people under 30 years of age responded--and there were notably 2 participants who did not wish to disclose their age range.



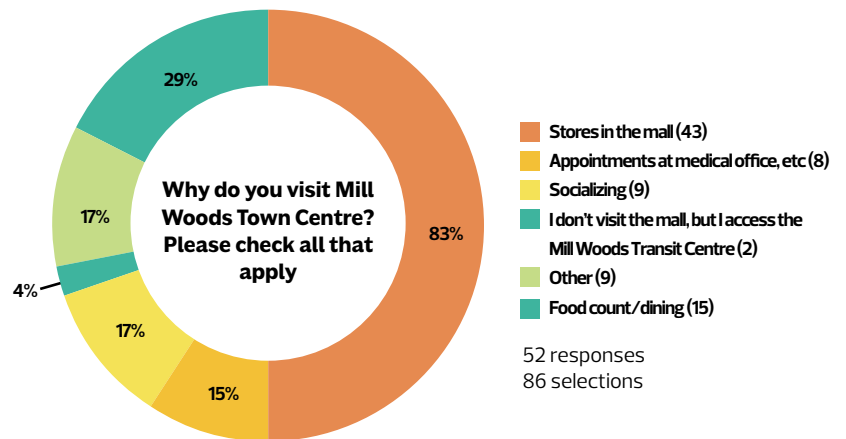
4. Do you identify as someone belonging to a racialized community?

42 out of 52 participants did not identify as being a part of a racialized group in their community, 6 participants responded that they did, and another 4 reported that they preferred not to answer. Because [Government of Alberta data from 2021](#) suggests that visible minority groups account for 40% of the Edmonton population, the demographic of Mill Woods questionnaire participants might not accurately capture the ratio of community members identifying with a minority group in the Mill Woods area. The writer also wonders whether some respondents interpreted the description “racialized group” in diverse ways that contributed to inaccuracies in this answer.



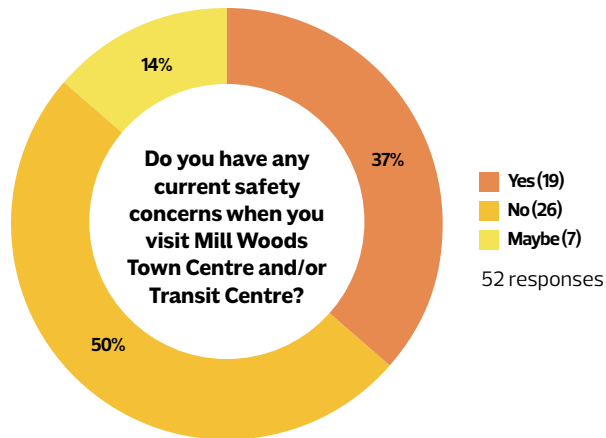
5. Why do you visit Mill Woods Town Centre? Please check all that apply.

Most respondents reported that they access the area for retail shopping in Mill Woods Town Centre. Almost one-third of folks said that they visited the area for the dining amenities in the mall. A similar number of people shared that they accessed the mall for appointments and socializing opportunities. 10% of participants (including 2 people in “Other” category) reported that they used the Transit Centre. Other notable places included the library, bank, and Co-op grocery store.



6. Do you have any current safety concerns when you visit Mill Woods Town Centre and/or Transit Centre?

Half of the respondents did not have any current safety concerns while accessing the Mill Woods Towns Centre or Mill Woods Transit Centre. The other half of the participants were divided among 2 response groups, which were 19 folks who had safety concerns all the time and 7 people who felt unsafe only under certain conditions in the space.



6a. If you answered “yes” or “maybe” to Question 6, can you please share which safety concerns you have? If you answered “maybe” can you also please explain why you chose this option instead of choosing “yes”?

Of the 19 people in the “yes” response group, 11 attributed feeling unsafe due to the presence of folks who are mentally unwell, using drugs, and/or asking for money.

4 people in the “yes” group also said they felt unsafe in the area because of increased traffic from buses and speeding vehicles.

The remainder of respondents in this group said they felt generally unsafe because of having to use the space at night and/or when there’s no one around to offer help in a safety situation.

Of the 7 participants in the “maybe” response group, the majority only had concerns while in the area after sundown, and a few people reported they sometimes felt unsafe because of speeding cars and buses going through congested traffic areas.

Additional things to note were: one respondent from each subcategory reported safety concerns due to crime outside the mall, such as theft and vandalism; 2 out of the 5 participants accessing transit were concerned about the lack of security and comfort using the unheated bus shelter, so more exploration within this population might be helpful.



7. If you answered “yes” or “maybe” to Question 6, are there specific areas in Mill Woods Town Centre or Mill Woods Transit Centre where you feel unsafe?

Because this question is open-ended, participants sometimes listed more than one area of concern. More than half of folks with safety concerns either sometimes or all the time associated the Transit Centre spaces with feeling unsafe--even if they weren't transit users.

Pedestrian safety was next most frequently mentioned. Examples included poor sidewalk conditions, increased traffic at crossings due to public transit, and speeding vehicles in the parking lot.

The 5 people who reported having safety concerns in the Mill Woods Town Centre space either attributed these concerns with mall entrances, or less-populated areas in the mall.



7a. If you answered “yes” or “maybe” to Question 6, are there specific areas in Mill Woods Town Centre or Mill Woods Transit Centre where you feel safe?

Respondents again had the opportunity to list more than one location where they felt safer. Most folks reported feeling safe in the mall, and 3 of these respondents specifically mentioned more populated areas such as the food court. Other individual responses included: being inside stores within the mall, wherever there was a security or police officer present, the semi-enclosed bus shelter, and small park area on the west side of the mall.

Out of the 25 people within these response categories, 6 people within “yes” group and 2 from the “maybe” group did not provide an answer. There were also 2 respondents said they could not think of any locations where they felt safe.





7b. If you answered “yes” or “maybe” to Question 6, what are some things that would help you feel safer when accessing Mill Woods Town Centre/Mill Woods Transit Centre.

The most frequently mentioned suggestion was an increase in security presence, such as more guards and cameras to survey the area. The second most common responses were related to increasing pedestrian safety through improved environmental design—for example, better lighting and landscaping for visibility, improved sidewalk conditions and pathways, and features to reduce speeding and traffic congestion.

A few respondents suggested that ETS adjust their bus routes to reduce the amount of traffic through the access points to the mall. A couple people also wished that there were more direct bus routes to and from the mall, so they didn't have to wait longer for a bus after dark in an isolated spot.

2 additional participants suggested more supports for vulnerable folks to reduce the number of safety incidences—for example, drug use in the ETS terminal. And 2 more people said that tougher penalties for people committing crime and social disorder would be helpful.





8. Do you have any suggestions for creating more positive experiences within the Mill Woods Town Centre and/or Transit Centre spaces?

Of the 27 participants who answered this question, several folks gave more than one response and 2 people responded that they had no ideas. There were 11 suggestions that mall improvements would help—in particular, securing a new grocery tenant for the mall, more shopping options, and increased community-building events and services in the mall. One notable comment from a participant was that it was important to keep the mall vibrant because “it’s the center of Mill Woods. People want to use and would care for it more if it offered more shopping.” Another respondent reported that the mall apparently has a leaky roof in need of repair.

Structural improvements to promote accessibility and safety was suggested 10 times. More security presence, pedestrian crosswalks, and lighting were most notable. Additionally, 1 respondent requested a longer crossing time for folks with kids or limited mobility who would be accessing the mall from the LRT station. Another participant said that a free parkade would increase mall user rates.

ETS-related service improvements were next most-frequently mentioned. Improved connections to reduce wait times and ongoing security in the transit centre were top of mind for many folks in this response category. Additional suggestions included: an LRT parkade, moving the bus stop closer to the mall, and the option to reload the ETS ARC card in the mall where bus tickets are sold--instead of having to reload at the bus terminal.

Several respondents suggested that redevelopment and beautification of the area would promote vibrancy and increased foot traffic. Some examples offered by folks were high-density housing, improved pathways and green spaces, and more frequent litter clean-up.

Lastly, a few respondents felt that increased funding to community programs and hubs would be helpful. Additional funding for youth and after-school programming was mentioned twice—in particular, snacks for teens at the library who can’t afford dinner and more spaces for youth to socialize in positive ways. 1 person also suggested that washroom and laundry facilities with an attendant nearby would also help.

Final Thoughts:

Over a third of respondents expressed that they had safety concerns every time they accessed Mill Woods Town Centre and/or Mill Woods Transit Centre. However, the total number of survey participants is not a large enough to conclude that safety issues in these spaces are at a critical level of concern for a significant number of users. Feedback from racialized, BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+ communities, and youth would also be needed to provide a clearer picture of the acuity of need and areas of concern. And given the small amount of response from business owners and staff, additional engagement with mall tenants/employees and ETS staff could be helpful for Councillor Tang and her partners to gain a more complete perspective.

Based on the helpful insights provided by the 52 participants, here are some recommendations for possible next steps for survey partners:

Possible options for all partners involved :

Many folks expressed that they only had safety concerns in the outdoor spaces around the mall and bus terminal after dark. These concerns suggest that the most effective safety measures would be those that are implemented at night. Examples provided include improved exterior lighting, positive animation of the space after dark, and a security presence at night.

Possible options for Mill Woods Town Centre

Community members said that they only felt unsafe at the mall in entrance ways, less populated areas inside, or if they encountered vulnerable persons—in particular folks who are mentally unwell or under the influence. Other patrons said they were less likely to access the mall at night because there were less people around, which made the space feel less safe.

Suggestions include: securing a new grocery tenant, hosting evening community events in the mall, camera surveillance at entrances, communicating with ETS to coordinate security in the outdoor spaces, and possible trainings (e.g., RECOVER project) for security and mall employees for how to communicate more effectively with vulnerable folks in the space. Rio Can could also do a deeper engagement with mall tenants and employees for their feedback, which was mostly absent from this questionnaire.

Possible options for Mill Woods Transit Centre (ETS)

Because only a handful survey participants reported using transit, deeper engagement with ETS riders and employees for feedback is recommended. However, the following suggestions were provided by the folks who responded: 24-hour security presence at the ETS terminal, additional support for vulnerable folks in and around transit space (e.g., COTT team), the ability to reload ARC at venues where bus tickets/passes are sold.

Questions to explore for further engagement

Should Councillor Tang and her partners decide to seek further understanding and feedback surrounding the Mill Woods Town Centre and Transit Centre spaces, here some possible questions to explore:

What service changes are already coming to the area or might be possible to implement that might impact people's perceptions of safety?

What other stakeholders could be included in the conversation, such as nearby youth centres, 24/7 Crisis Diversion?

What opportunities might there be for existing and new stakeholders to collaborate on solutions to these issues?