

# **Mineral exploration and Development survey**

## **What We Heard Report**

**City of Whitehorse**

**August 29, 2025**

## Introduction

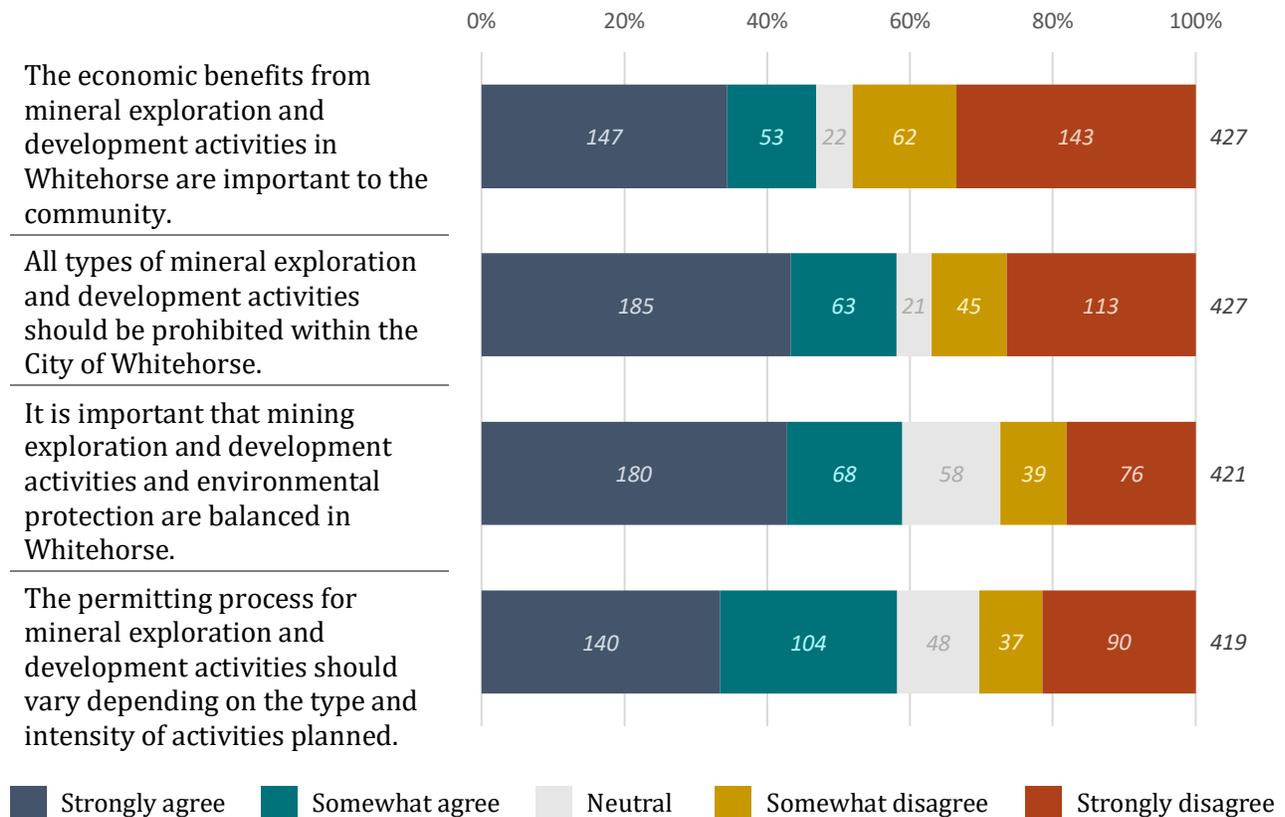
Regulating mineral exploration and development in the City of Whitehorse (City) is complex. While the Yukon Government regulates mining activities through the *Quartz Mining Act* and the *Placer Mining Act*, the City guides land use through its Official Community Plan (OCP) and Zoning Bylaw. This includes the City identifying areas where certain activities—like mineral exploration and mining—should or should not be allowed.

In recent years, the City has received several applications for mineral exploration projects, mainly in the Copper Belt area. Several of these operations have been permitted and exploration is ongoing at different locations.

The City is considering potential updates to the OCP and Zoning Bylaw to clarify how mineral exploration and development are regulated within city limits. This survey was developed to gather feedback as the City works to develop regulations that reflect community values and goals and provide clear guidance to mineral claims holders and those involved with mineral exploration and development.

The survey was open from June 24, 2025 to July 28, 2025, and was completed by 430 people. This What We Heard Report provides a summary of the survey results. It is important to note that the survey results are not statistically relevant. Survey participants who chose to complete the survey likely have a specific interest in the issues being discussed. This means that results of the survey should not be used to conclude how all Whitehorse residents feel about these issues; rather, the survey results reflect the views of the respondents that can be considered as the City determines how to move forward.

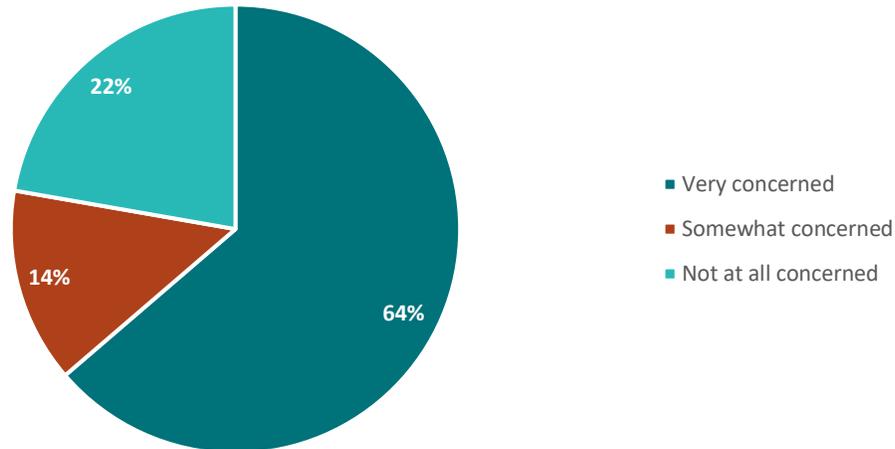
# Q1 – How do you feel about the statements below.



## MINERAL EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT

- Opinion is split on the importance of economic benefits from mineral exploration and development activities for the community.
- Over half (58%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that all types of mineral exploration and development should be prohibited within City limits.
- Over half (58%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that permitting process for mineral exploration and development activities should vary depending on the type and intensity of activities planned.
- No comments were collected as part of this question.

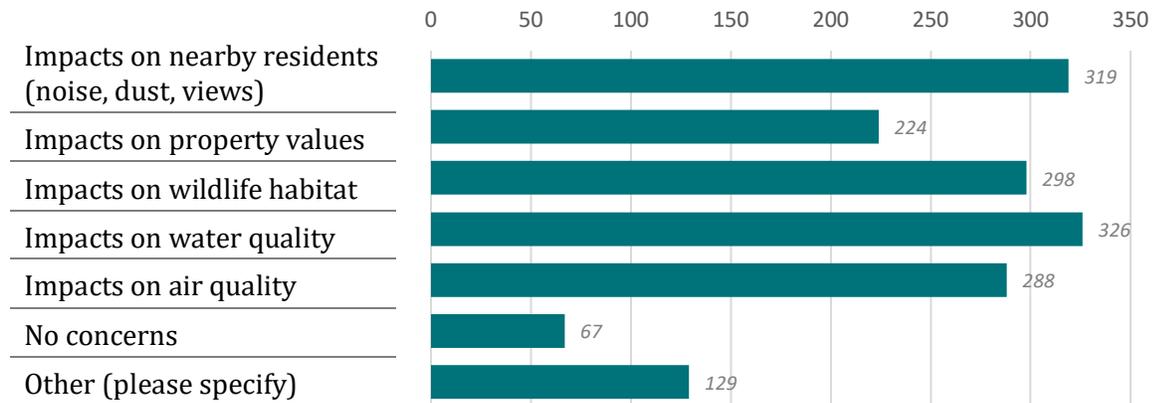
## Q2 – How concerned are you about the impacts of mineral exploration and development within the City limits?



### CONCERNS ABOUT IMPACTS

- Most respondents (78%) are either concerned or very concerned about the impacts of mineral exploration and development within the City limits.
- No comments were collected as part of this question.

# Q3 – What are your concerns about mineral exploration and development within City limits?



## COMMENTS ABOUT IMPACTS

### Environmental Protection

- Water quality and air pollution
- Impacts on wildlife and habitat
- Long-term ecological damage
- Damage due to increased public access to wilderness areas
- Cumulative impacts and climate change

### Health and Safety

- Contamination, accidents and spills, especially given unpredictable weather
- Noise and traffic
- Mental and physical health impacts
- Safety risks

### Cultural and Social Impacts

- Impacts on trails, parks, and outdoor activities
- Limits on access to the outdoors
- Concerns about First Nations' rights and subsistence harvesting

- Impacts on community values, and social consequences (e.g., violence, substance abuse)
- Impacts on aesthetics and sense of wilderness

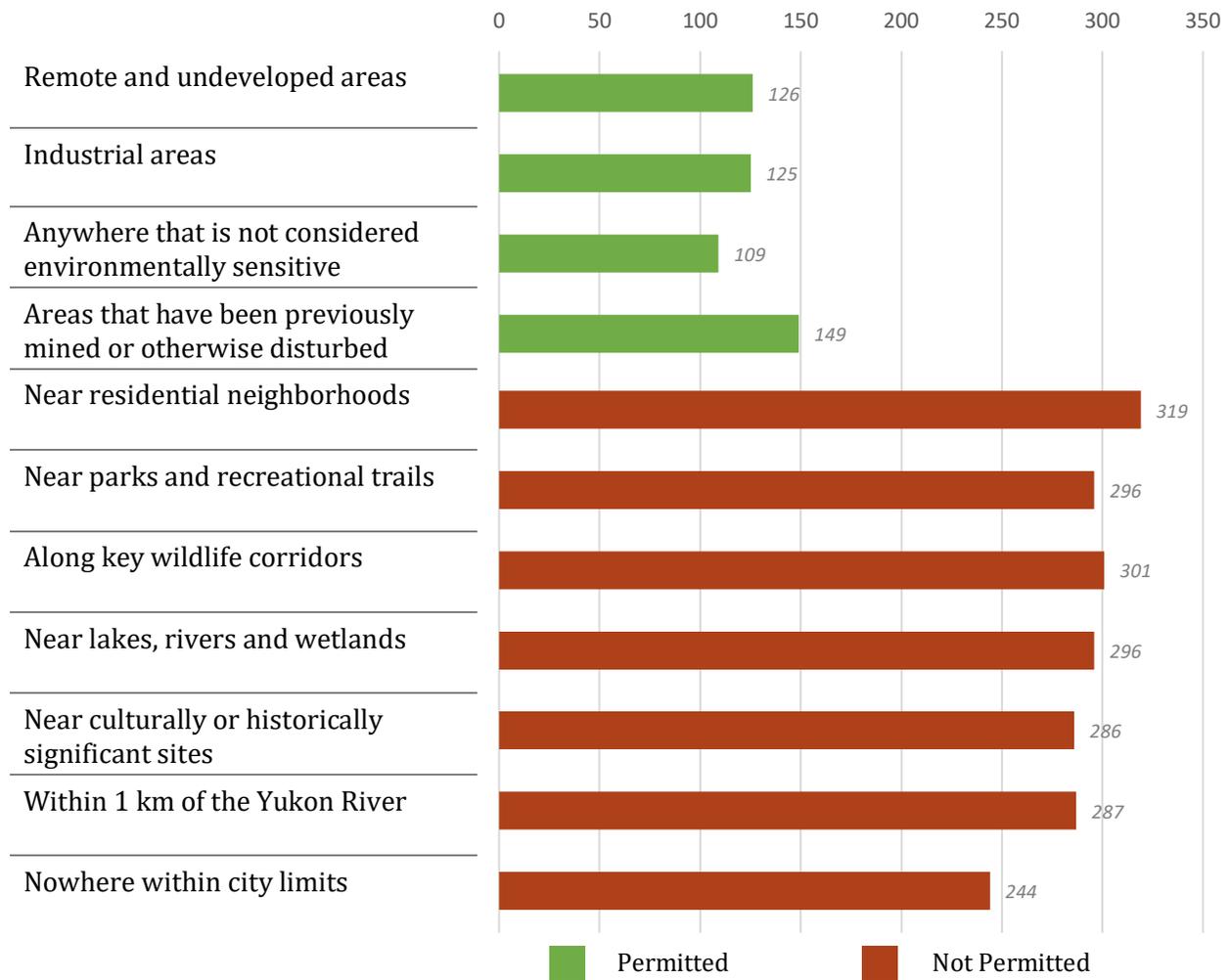
### Community Impacts

- Impacts on infrastructure, services and community facilities
- Land used for exploration may not be available for other uses, including residential growth

### Remediation

- Distrust in mining companies' ability to remediate
- Insufficient security deposits to deal with proper remediation
- Concerns about burden on the City and taxpayers from failed projects

## Q4 + Q5 – Where should exploration and development be permitted, or not permitted?

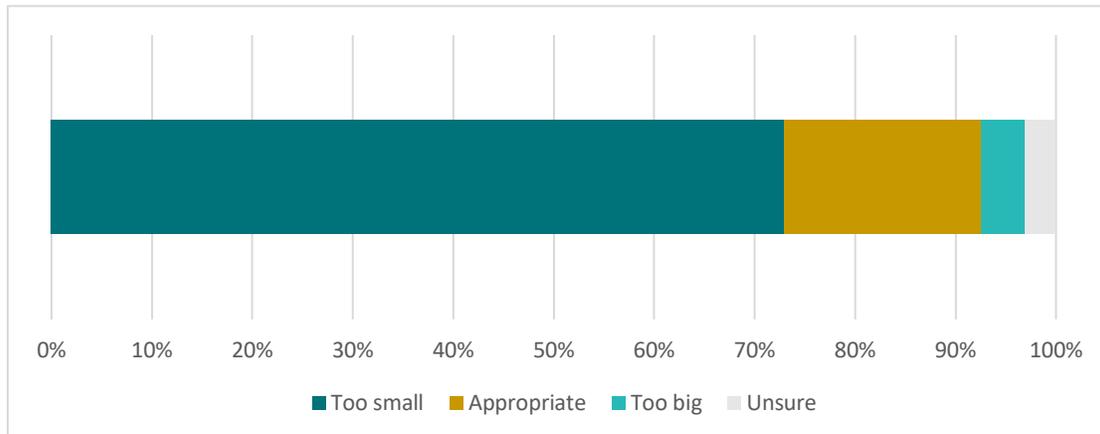


### COMMENTS ABOUT WHERE MINERAL EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE ALLOWED

- First Nations need to be involved the permitting approvals process, especially on or near Settlement Lands.
- Large buffers are needed to protect drinking water sources.
- No mineral exploration or development should be allowed anywhere within 5 to 20 km of the City limits.

- Mineral exploration and development should be allowed as permitted by Yukon Government guided by the *Quartz Mining Act* and Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Board (YESAB); the City should not play a role in this discussion.
- The location of mineralization and existing mineral claims should guide where mineral exploration and development are allowed. Allowing activities in areas with no mineral potential does not make sense.
- Each proposed activity needs to be considered on its own merits with consideration given to the activities proposed, cost benefit analysis and specific local site conditions.
- Mineral exploration and development should be allowed in the Copper Belt area, or in locations that have been previously distributed by mining or other industrial activities.
- Exploration should only be allowed where a mine would be acceptable, such as at Whitehorse Copper.
- Mineral exploration and development should be focused outside of the existing Order in Council (OIC).
- Mineral exploration and development should be allowed close to communities as this will allow more frequent inspections and closer oversight.
- No mineral exploration or development should be allowed near Cowley Creek.

## Q6 – The OCP requires a 300 m buffer between natural resource extraction and residential designations, which includes mining. What do you think about the size of this buffer?



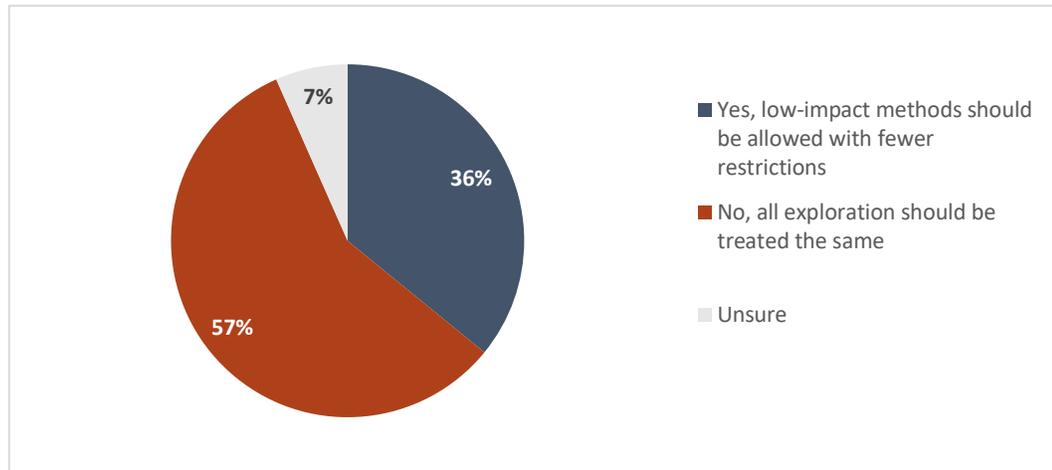
### BUFFERS

- Over 65% of respondents felt the 300 m buffer required in the OCP was too small.

### COMMENTS ABOUT BUFFERS

- Some respondents suggested buffers need to be 300 m to 1 km from residential uses.
- Would like to see case-by-case assessments to determine an appropriate buffer zone (e.g., 1–10 km from residences).
- Some respondents commented that a buffer should be set outside City limits and no mineral exploration or development should be allowed. Suggested buffer sizes ranged from 5 km to 50 km.

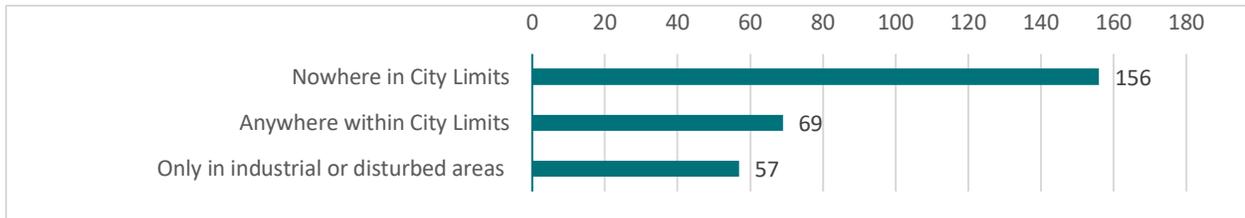
## Q 8 – Do you think the low-impact methods described above should be treated differently in policy than higher-impact methods?



### LOW IMPACT METHODS

- Over half (57%) of respondents think that all exploration activities should be treated in the same way, whereas only 36% of respondents think that low-impact methods should be treated differently.
- No comments were collected as part of this question.

## Q9 – Where do you believe low-impact exploration methods should be permitted?



### COMMENTS ABOUT WHERE LOW-IMPACT EXPLORATION SHOULD BE ALLOWED

- First decide what areas of Whitehorse need to be protected, and why, and then allow exploration in other areas.
- Low impact exploration should not be allowed in areas where a fully developed mine would not be allowed.
- Low impact exploration needs to be carefully defined and should not involve improvements to existing trails or tree removal.
- Low impact exploration projects can quickly escalate to larger projects with more impact.

# Q10 – Do you have recommendations about how the OCP and Zoning Bylaw could be updated to better address mineral exploration and development?

## OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATES

- Update the OCP to prohibit all mineral exploration and development within the City limits.
- Update the OCP to provide specific protection to parks, key recreation areas and areas slated for future residential development.
- The OCP should be updated to clarify that mineral exploration and development are not allowed in or near residential areas.
- Mineral exploration and development are temporary uses, and should be allowed in areas slated for residential development in the long term. The economic benefits from this would be a benefit to the community.
- The OCP should remain as a high-level guide without prohibiting specific activities.
- The OCP vision needs to be updated; we are much more than a wilderness city.
- The OCP designations should be updated to consider mineral potential and to support this important industry.
- Limited use of Future Planning as a designation as it leads to uncertainty and represents a inability of the City to make a decision.
- In the OCP, many areas designated 'Future Planning' coincide with Crown Grants that convey surface and mineral rights. These grants predate zoning and convey lawful rights to conduct exploration and mining.
- The OCP was updated recently and should be left as is.

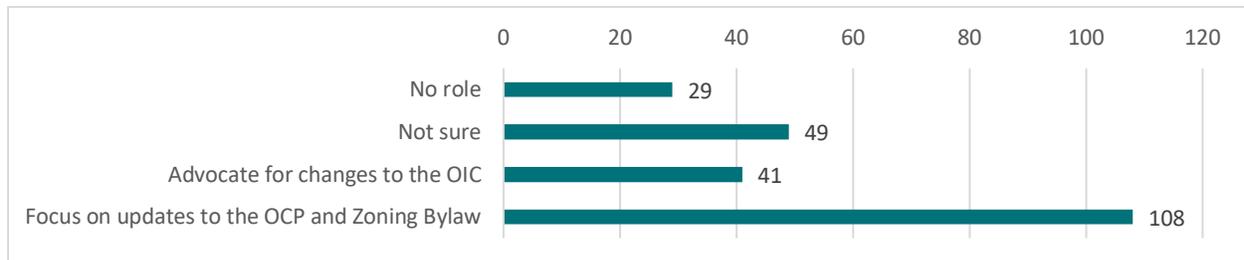
## ZONING BYLAW UPDATES

- Update the Zoning Bylaw to prohibit all mineral exploration and development.
- Consider allowing mineral exploration and development as a conditional use in all or many zones.
- The Zoning Bylaw should be updated to empower the City to implement the environmental stewardship policies in the OCP more effectively.
- Mining should have specific zoning and appropriate and clear definitions.
- Mineral exploration and development should be allowed in some zones, with a focus on areas that have been disturbed by previous mining activities.
- Update the Zoning Bylaw to be closely aligned with the Yukon government's permitting process. Activities that the Yukon government approves, should not be held up by the City.
- Clearly define mineral exploration as a permitted use and/or temporary in areas with existing mineral claims.
- Specific protection is needed for Chasàn Chùà, the Yukon River, and all surrounding waterways.
- The City's zoning framework should clearly support short-term, low-impact exploration in all zones where rights already exist.

## COMMENTS ABOUT REGULATIONS

- Rules and regulations are not meaningful without active enforcement and appropriate monitoring. This means that staff will need sufficient training and resources to do this well.
- Restrict hours of operation on exploration and mining operations to limit noise.
- Ensure that regulation is clear for industry and residents.
- Mining companies should be required to host public meetings to share information and specific plans with residents.
- Extensive and long-term studies should be required to understand potential impacts of exploration activities on land and waters.
- Regulations should focus on effective management of mineral exploration and development, rather than prohibiting activities.
- Minimize time and bureaucracy by addressing pragmatic risks.
- Regulation and permitted for exploration should be more straight forward. The current processes are unnecessarily complicated.
- A cross-jurisdictional evaluation of best practices and standard mitigative measures should be done and outcomes considered for Whitehorse.
- Mineral exploration and potential development need to be assessed and considered together, not separately.
- Regulation needs to recognize that mineral extraction is no longer the highest and best use of land within the City of Whitehorse.
- The City should hire experts and ensure staff have the skills and training required to develop and enforce appropriate regulations.
- Exploration on valid mineral claims or crown grants should be approved on a case-by-case basis by a development officer under a temporary use system.
- Regulation should focus on setting out relevant conditions to protect key values.
- The construction of roads and trails and use of skid-mounted drills is relatively low impact, temporary and the land adequately reclaimed. These uses should be permitted accordingly.
- City should impose a complete moratorium on mineral exploration and development until the new Quartz Mining Act is completed.
- Mineral exploration and mining are two separate things and need to be considered and regulated separately.
- Allow access to pre-existing mineral claims and by definition not "development" so to not burden taxpayers with potential costs for indirect expropriation.
- When drilling programs lead to the development of access trails, these trails should be converted for recreational use once they are no longer needed.
- Appropriate security deposits are required.
- Need to be careful not to limit access to gravel as this is a vital resource for the community.
- Require proponents to clean up previously distributed areas as a condition of permitting.

## Q 11 – What role should the City play in regulating or responding to mineral exploration and development activity?



### COMMENTS ABOUT THE CITY'S ROLE

- Yukon government is the main mining regulator, and the City should be working with relevant departments to ensure appropriate permitting and oversight.
- The City should focus on updates to the OCP and Zoning and advocating for changes to the OIC.
- The City should play a key role in enforcement and monitoring of ongoing projects within City limits.
- The City should advocate for a complete update to the Quartz Mining Act as it is outdated.
- The City should focus on sharing information and ensuring that residents are informed about proposed mineral exploration and development projects.
- The City should be a responsible regulator of mineral exploration and development, and staff should have the appropriate skills and capacity to manage and regulate mineral development.
- The City should be working to balance economic development with protecting the environment and the local way of life.
- There is no need for City involvement in the regulation of mineral exploration and development. Yukon government has jurisdiction and already has a permitting process. City involvement in regulation of mineral exploration and development is a duplication of effort.
- The City should always have the power to say no to a project, even if it is recommended by YESAB.
- The City should advocate for updated, ecologically responsible mineral development legislation at the territorial level.
- The City should be an equal regulator with its own permit system and inspectors. Yukon government continues to lag behind the rest of Canada in regulation of this industry.
- The City should have veto power at each phase of an exploration or development project.
- The City has no qualifications to regulate mineral exploration and development.
- The City does not have the expertise to access the economic feasibility of a mining project.

- The City should focus on traffic/road infrastructures, noise, disturbances, and prompt remediation.
- Yukon municipalities should be included in the review and update of the Quartz Mining Act.

## **Q12 – Do you have any other comments that the City should consider as they work on updates to the OCP and Zoning Bylaw related to mineral exploration and development?**

### GENERAL COMMENTS

- City should be prioritizing long-term ecological and community health over short-term industrial interests.
- Any changes need to be fair, transparent and balanced.
- Mineral exploration and development is done near communities all over the world. Decision makers need to have all the relevant information to make informed decisions.
- History has taught us that here in the Yukon, despite updated regulations and industry best practices, water contamination from mining has a totally unacceptable risk.
- The City should focus on a permitting process that is fair rather than viewing the mineral industry as something to eliminate.
- The mining industry has been important to the history of the Whitehorse and to the wealth generation of the Territory as a whole.
- Exploration in itself is not that problematic if done well, but it is intended to create industrial mining developments that are highly problematic in an urban residential/commercial setting.
- Water quality and wildlife preservation should be of the utmost priority for the municipality.
- Long term housing and residents use of areas of the city should prevail over short-term speculative exploration and short-term mine.
- Whitehorse has outgrown its mining past, and the vision should be updated to reflect this.
- In allowing for mining within the City, the wilderness City is losing touch with the values it promotes, with the needs of its citizens, with the ecological sustainability it promotes in its planning documents.
- If Yukoners don't want to develop remote wilderness, such as the Peel, then previously disturbed sites close to developed centres should be allowed to operate without additional process burdens for proponents.

### ECONOMICS

- Mineral exploration and development play a key role in our economy; exploration should be allowed to continue.
- Proposals should consider and evaluate potential climate costs of mineral exploration and development.

- Whitehorse needs economic benefits from mineral exploration and development and these uses should be allowed throughout the community.
- The Copper Belt has seen the extraction of resources for over a hundred years and the potential importance of this area for the development of minerals needed for the electrification of Canada's north needs to be recognized.
- Currently, Canada's economy is being threatened by tariffs from the US and other jurisdictions are minimizing or eliminating duplicate of regulation of industry. We need to do the same to remain competitive.
- Mining revenue continues to be minimal and does not provide significant local jobs or opportunities.
- Mineral exploration and development near Whitehorse could represent a great economic opportunity for the community, and could represent mining that contributes positively to sustainable development.
- The City should not work to prevent mineral exploration in a mineral rich area that has been previously disturbed, had good infrastructure, existing access and can be connected to the power grid.
- Yukon and Whitehorse need to figure out how to regulate mineral exploration and development and how to create real economic benefit for the community before allowing projects within City limits. Otherwise, outside companies will profit, without proper remediation.
- The City is not able to balance its budget and should consider mineral exploration as a key source of revenue.
- Historically, only the service industry made a significant profit from mining and some mining operations have left environmental issues and large clean up bills.

## MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY

- Consider making the municipal boundary smaller and then allowing some exploration outside the new boundary.
- The City's municipal boundary was expanded to take in the Copper Belt area and allow the municipality to capitalize on the taxes.
- The fact that the City includes the Copper Belt area has created land use conflicts.

## FIRST NATIONS

- Include First Nations in decision-making related to mineral exploration and development.
- First Nations need to play a role when it comes to approving mineral exploration and development within their Traditional Territories.

## ENGAGEMENT

- This survey is biased against mineral development.
- Hold a public referendum on the issue.
- The City is asking the public to engage on too many issues, does not provide the complete background information and does not provide enough time for people to comment. Some

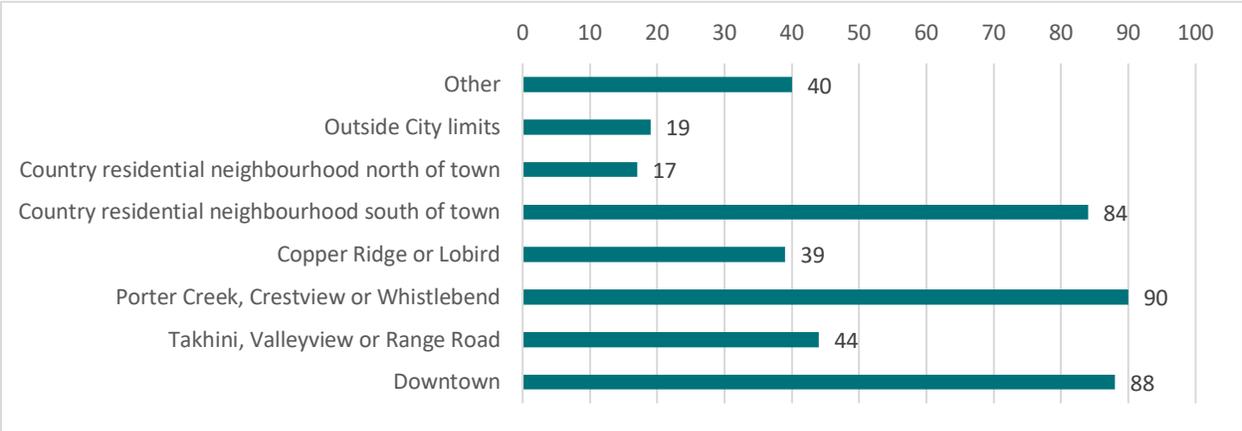
citizens feel like they are the last to know about important issues happening in their neighbourhood.

- The City routinely disregards feedback from residents and moves ahead with projects that most people oppose.
- Several of the survey questions were poorly worded and did not reflect the nuanced issues at hand.

#### QUARTZ MINING ACT AND STAKING PROCESS

- Land developers should consider existing claims before they build. This has already been an issue in some areas.
- Advocate for the relinquishment of all existing claims within the City and a permanent prohibition of staking within the City limits.
- Mining claims and the current staking process are not compatible with residential uses.
- The pre-existing rights of valid claim owners and Crown grant owners need to be protected.

# Q13 – Where do you live?



# Considerations

## OVERALL

- The issue of mineral exploration and development within City limits is divisive. Many survey respondents feel strongly that no mineral exploration or development should be allowed within the City limits. On the other hand, many respondents feel that local mineral exploration and development will benefit the local economy and community.
- Respondents who were in favour of allowing some mineral exploration and development in the community want to see it allowed where there are existing claims, and in previously disturbed areas.
- Many respondents want to see protection for environmentally sensitive areas and waterbodies, residential uses, and key community recreation areas.

## ROLE OF THE CITY

- Some respondents feel that the City should play a key role in regulating mineral exploration and development within City limits, while others feel that the Yukon government should be responsible for this regulation.

## MITIGATING IMPACTS

- Some respondents are concerned about potential impacts to water quality and natural systems, and impacts on residential neighbourhoods such as noise, dust, traffic and the risk of spills and contamination.
- Some respondents suggested that the permitting process needs to consider how to effectively mitigate all the relevant impacts.
- Some respondents want regulations to be backed up with active and well-resourced enforcement.

## CLARITY

- Requests for clearer zoning definitions, public engagement requirements, and alignment with territorial laws were noted as priorities by some respondents.
- Some respondents advocated for flexible zoning that allows for exploration in specific zones with strict conditions.