

## WHAT IS THE DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION PROCESS REVIEW?

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### ***We want to improve!***

The Town of Ladysmith is committed to improving. We understand that the development application process takes time and resources, and delays cost developers money. We believe we can establish an “open for business” culture while maintaining our high standards for development to preserve our small town character.

To continue to improve our service, the Town of Ladysmith is undertaking a review of the development application process for:

- ✓ Rezoning and OCP amendments
- ✓ Development variance permits
- ✓ Development permits
- ✓ Subdivisions
- ✓ Sign permits
- ✓ Temporary use permits



We have examined the applications, how they are approved, sought feedback on what works well and what does not, and are now identifying options to improve the efficiency of the process to ensure the Town remains open to development.

### **We invite you to ...**

- Review the presentation boards
- Complete a feedback form on what you have read and heard today
- Discuss your views with the project consultants

Your input will help build recommendations for improvements for the Town’s development application process.

## WHAT IS THE PROCESS?

We have undertaken a review of the development application process, including:

- Reviewed Town policies, procedure bylaw, application forms
- Reviewed past applications, including approval timelines
- Interviewed staff and members of Council
- Interviewed past applicants (13)
- Conducted an online survey for applicants regarding their experiences, thoughts and suggestions (16 responses)
- Researched what other municipalities are doing
- Reviewed best practices



The Forum is an opportunity to share the feedback we've received, including the tools and suggestions for improvements.

### ***Now it's your turn! Please share with us ...***

- Are we missing any perspectives or information?
- What are your thoughts on the suggestions presented?
- What other ideas do you have to improve the process?

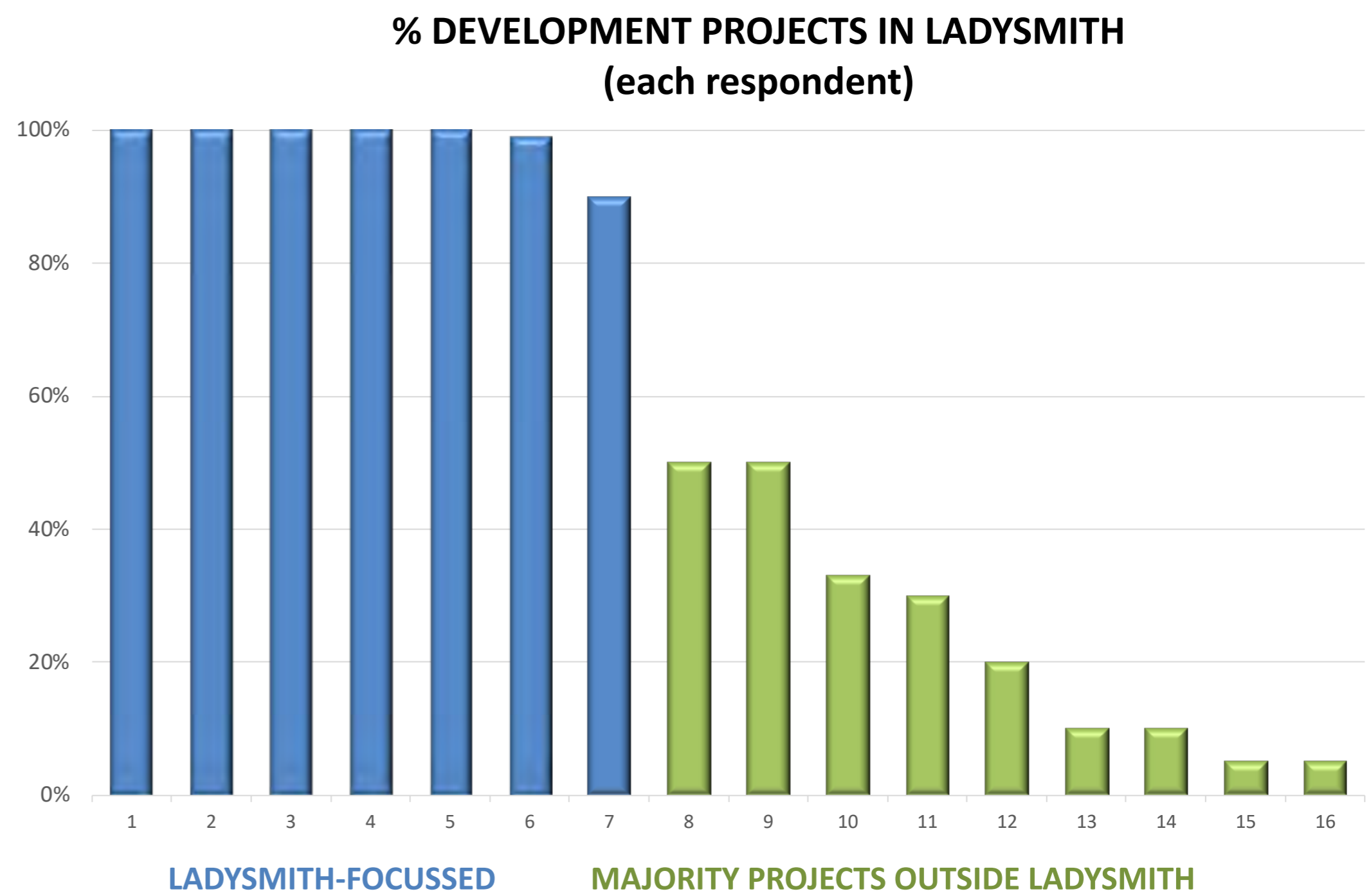
## WHAT WE HEARD

### Survey – Who Responded?

Of the 16 applicants who filled out the survey ...

#### LOCAL AND THOSE WITH BROADER FOCUS

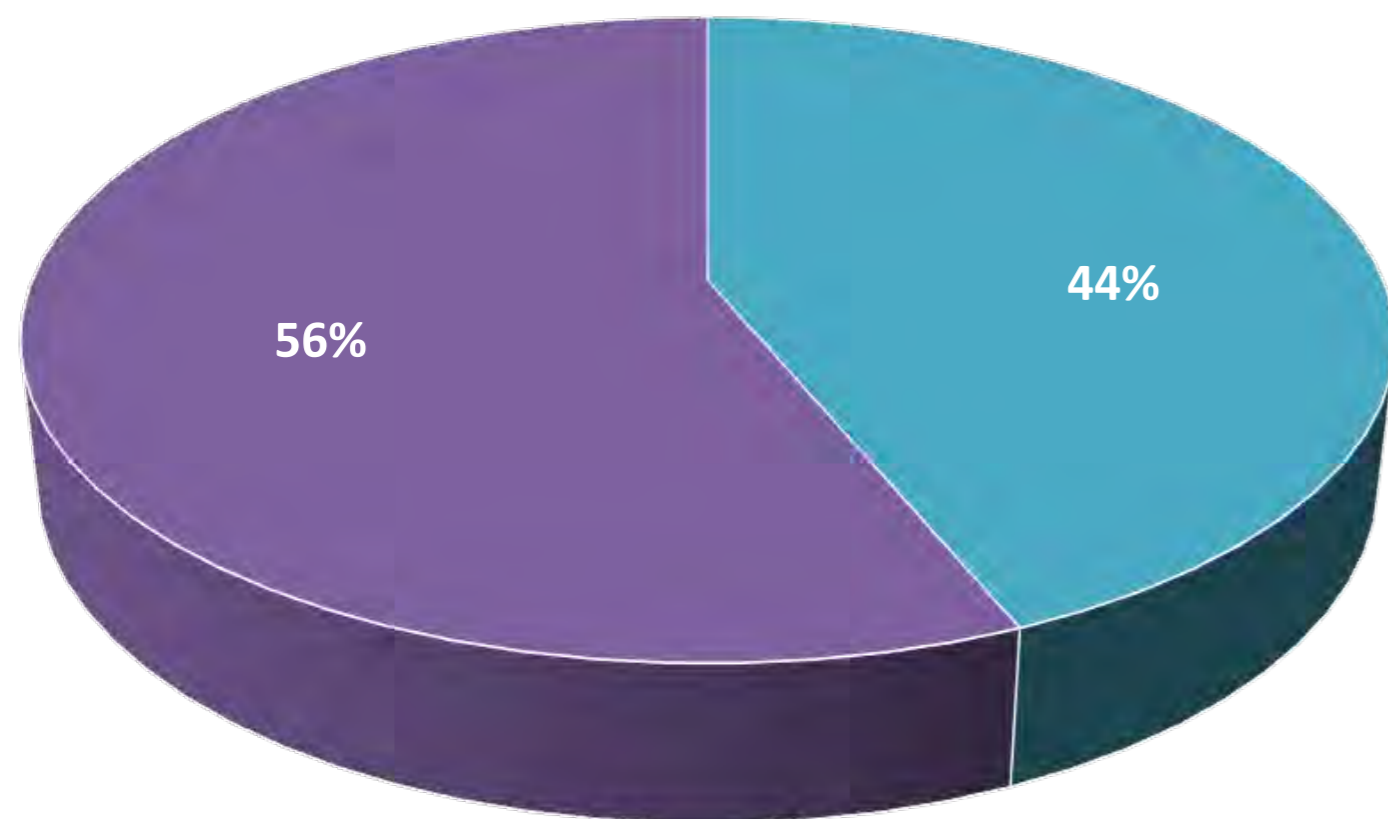
- 56% primarily work in other communities (50% or less of their projects are in Ladysmith)
- 44% can be characterized as primarily local, with (90% or more of their projects within Ladysmith)



#### APPLICANTS WITH DIFFERENT LEVELS AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

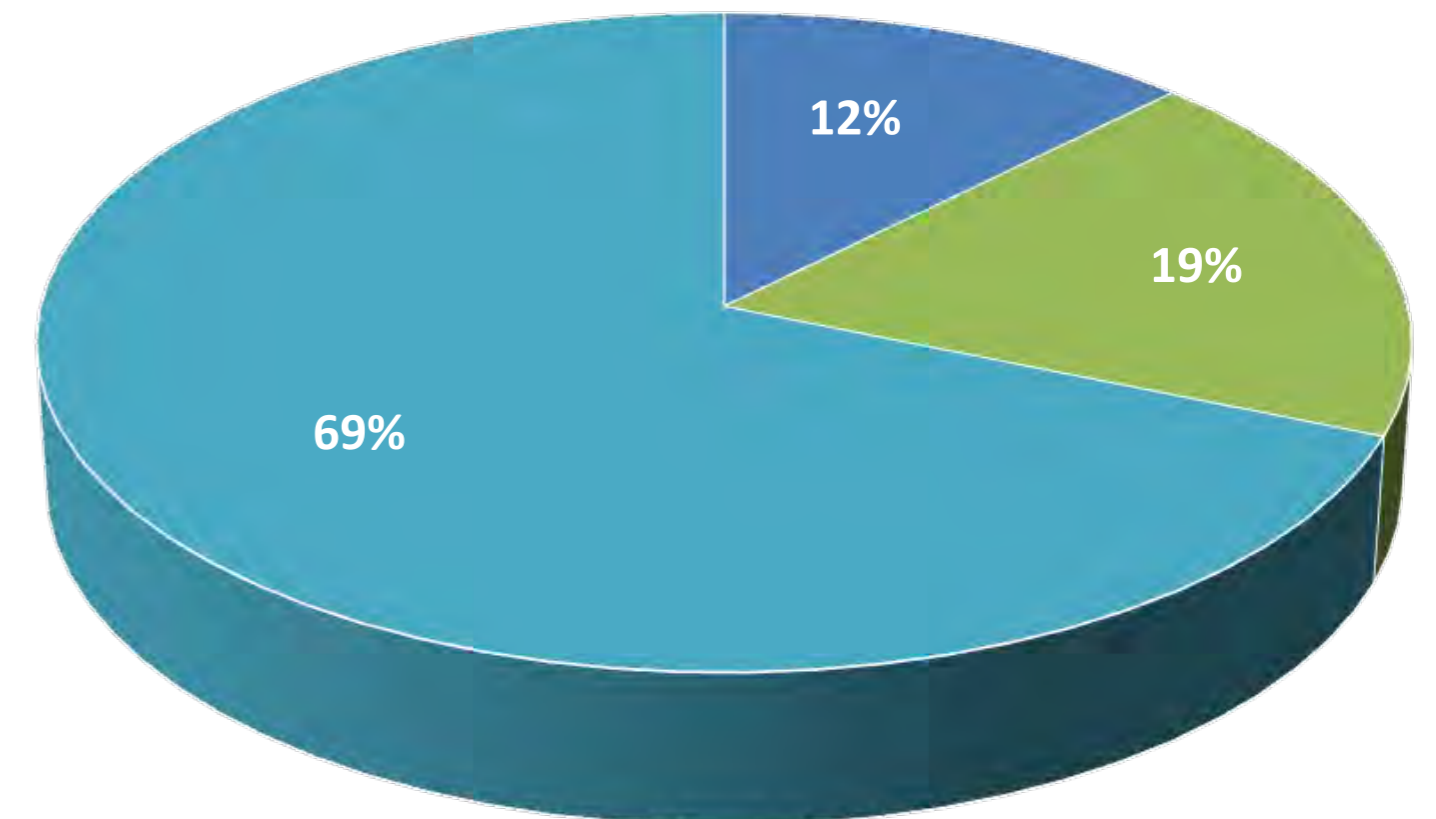
- 56% were full time developers or industry professionals (architects, planners, engineers, surveyors) who submit applications on behalf of owners.
- 44% described themselves as builders/developers with one or two projects on the go, or owners who are applicants developing their own property.

**APPLICANT CHARACTERISTICS – DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE**



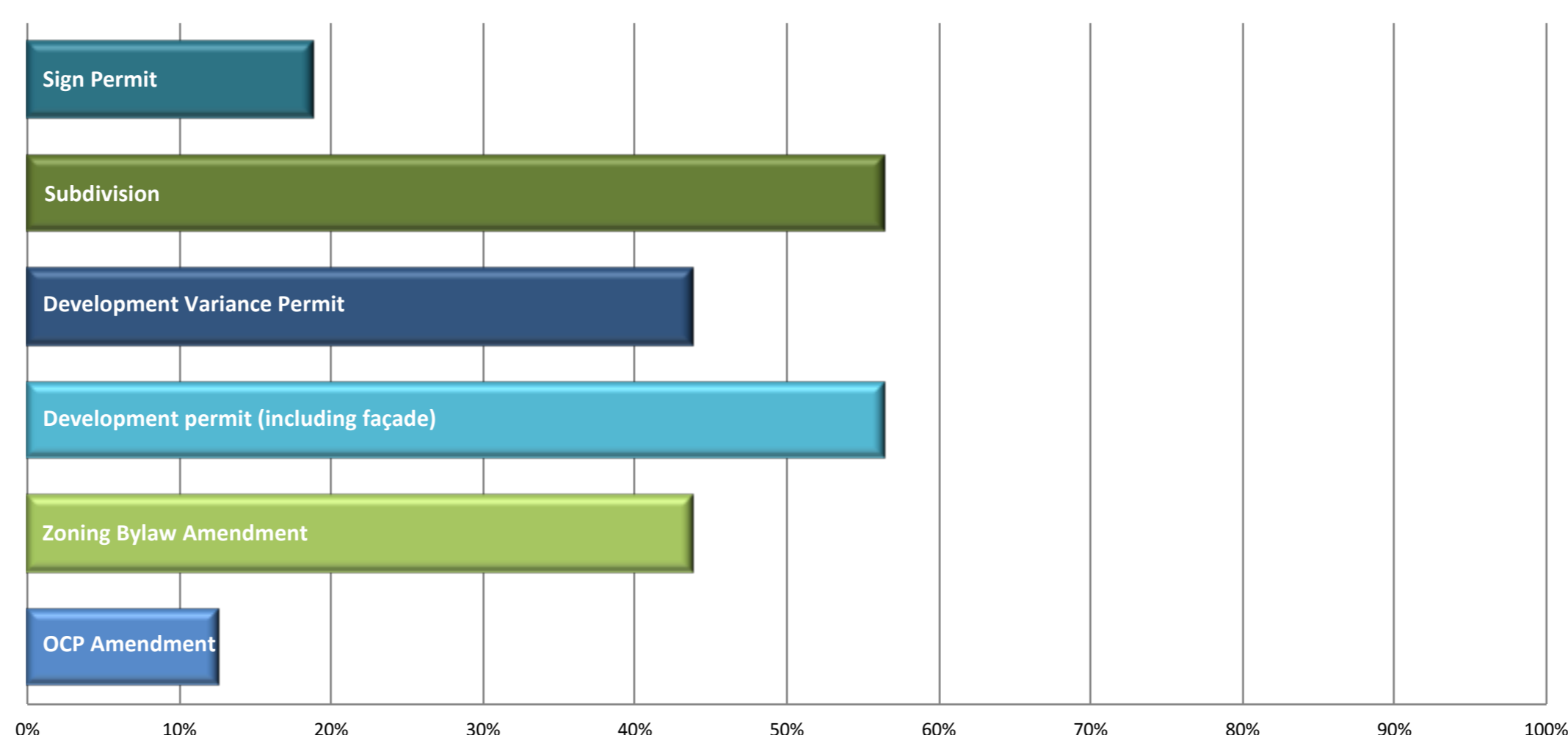
- Part-time developers and owner applicants
- Full-time developers and industry professionals

**YEARS SUBMITTING DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS IN LADYSMITH**



- Less than 1 year
- 1 - 3 years
- 4 or more years

#### EXPERIENCE WITH DIFFERENT APPLICATION TYPES



## WHAT WE HEARD

### Survey Results – Development Application Process

#### POSITIVES

- 56% agreed or strongly agreed that the **application forms** are clear and easy to understand
- 50% agreed or strongly agreed that the **application process** was clear and easy to understand
- 69% agreed or strongly agreed that **application fees and requirements** were communicated early
- 56% agreed or strongly agreed that the **anticipated processing times** were clearly communicated early in the process
- 75% agreed or strongly agreed that if there was something they did not understand, they felt welcome to contact Town staff for assistance

#### ROOM TO IMPROVE

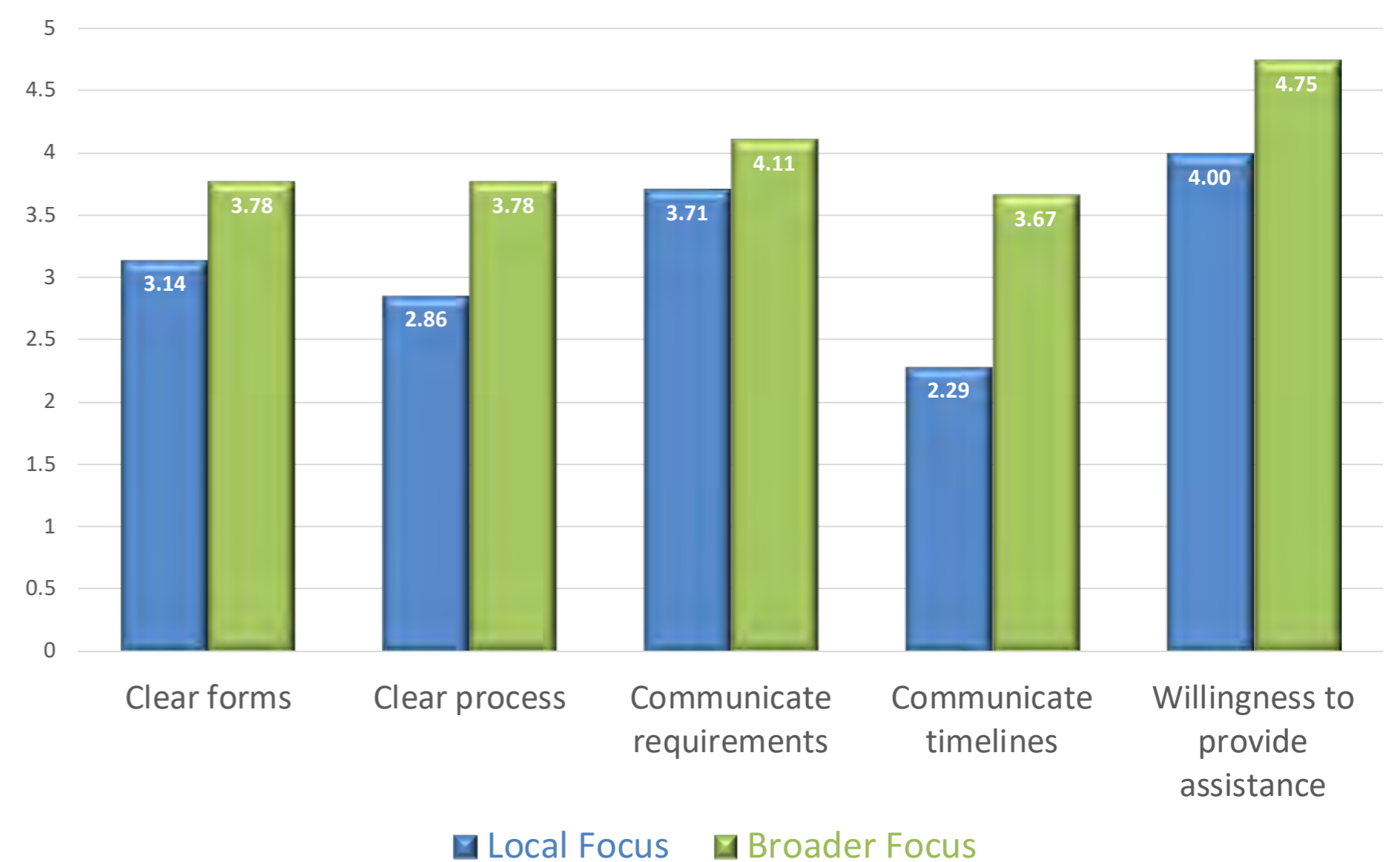
- 19% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the **application forms** are clear and easy to understand
- 25% disagreed or strongly disagreed the **application process** was clear and easy to understand
- 6% disagreed or strongly disagreed that **application fees and requirements** were communicated early
- 38% disagreed or strongly disagreed that **anticipated processing times** were clearly communicated early in the process

#### DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION PROCESS

SCALE = 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)



#### LOCAL APPLICANTS VS. THOSE ACTIVE OUTSIDE LADYSMITH



#### FULL-TIME DEVELOPERS & INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS VS. PART-TIME DEVELOPERS AND OWNER APPLICANTS



#### OBSERVATIONS

*Applicants who have the majority of their projects outside Ladysmith rated the Town's development application service higher than those who primarily or only develop in Ladysmith.*

*Full-time developers or industry professionals (planners, architects, engineers, surveyors) rated the Town's development application process higher than those who are part-time developers or owner applicants.*

## WHAT WE HEARD

### Survey Results – Customer Service

Applicants were asked to rate Town development application staff on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good) based on their most recent application. The following highlights focus on those who rated the Town either high (good or very good) or low (poor or very poor). Those who rated the Town “neutral” or “no opinion” are not referenced in the percentages below (but are taken into account in the charts).

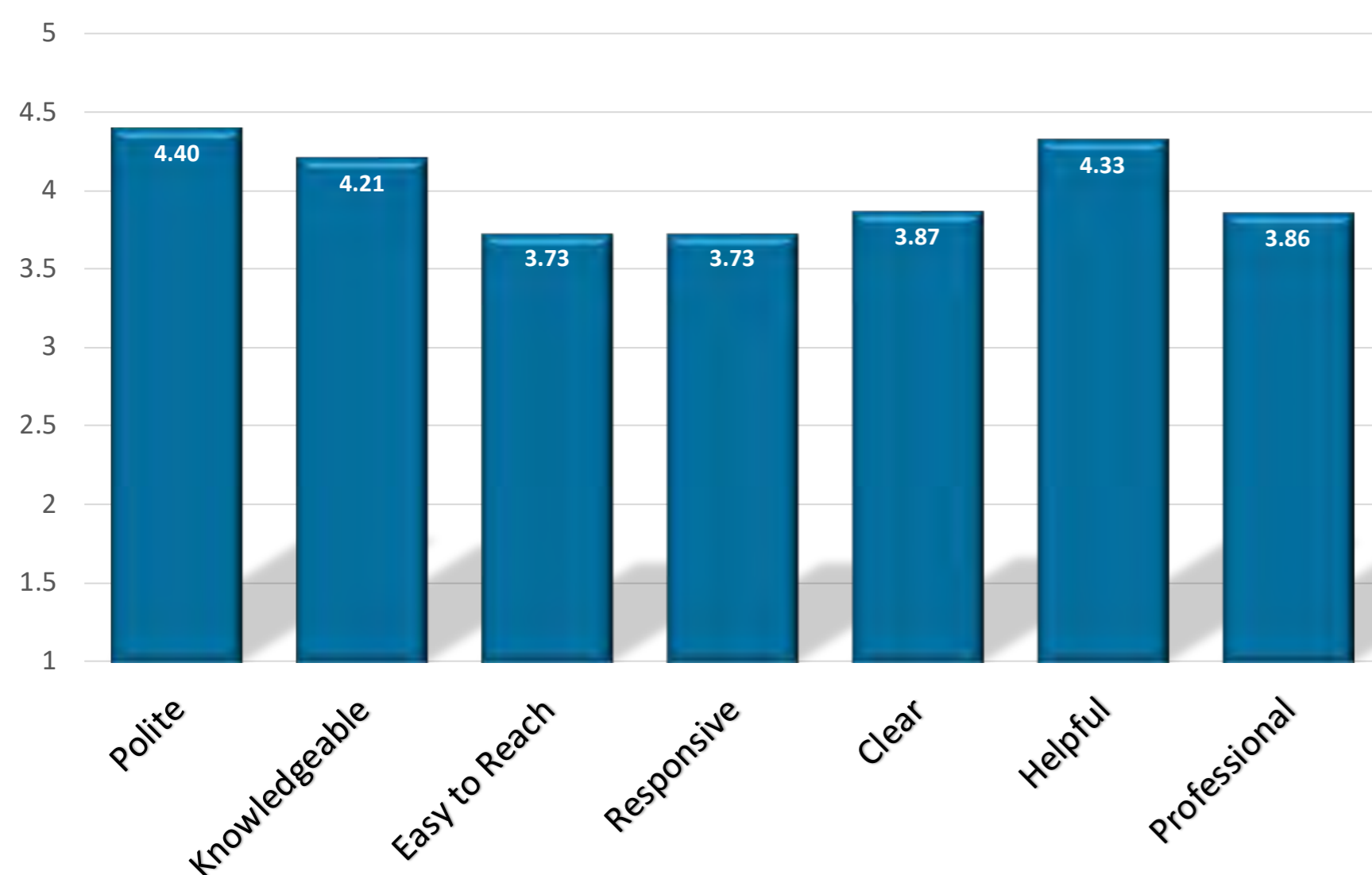
#### POSITIVES (GOOD OR VERY GOOD)

- 81% rated Ladysmith’s staff as polite
- 80% rated Ladysmith’s staff as knowledgeable
- 63% rated Ladysmith’s staff as easy to reach
- 56% rated Ladysmith’s staff as responsive
- 63% rated Ladysmith’s staff as clear and easy to understand
- 81% rated Ladysmith’s staff as helpful
- 69% rated Ladysmith’s staff as professional

#### ROOM TO IMPROVE (POOR OR VERY POOR)

- 13% rated Ladysmith’s staff as not easy to reach
- 19% rated Ladysmith’s staff as unresponsive
- 6% rated Ladysmith’s staff as unclear or not easy to understand
- 6% rated Ladysmith’s staff as unprofessional

CUSTOMER SERVICE RATINGS

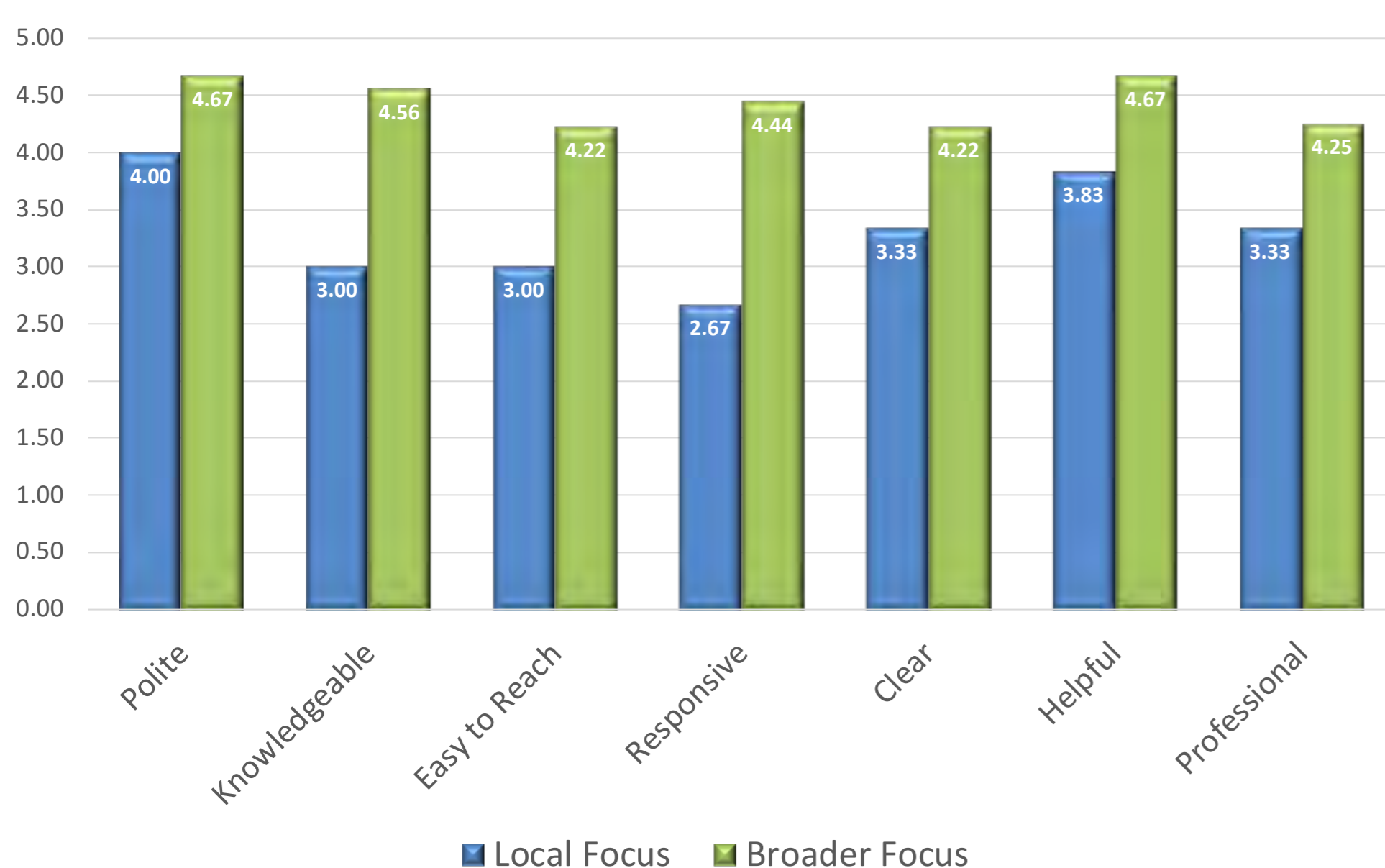


#### OBSERVATIONS

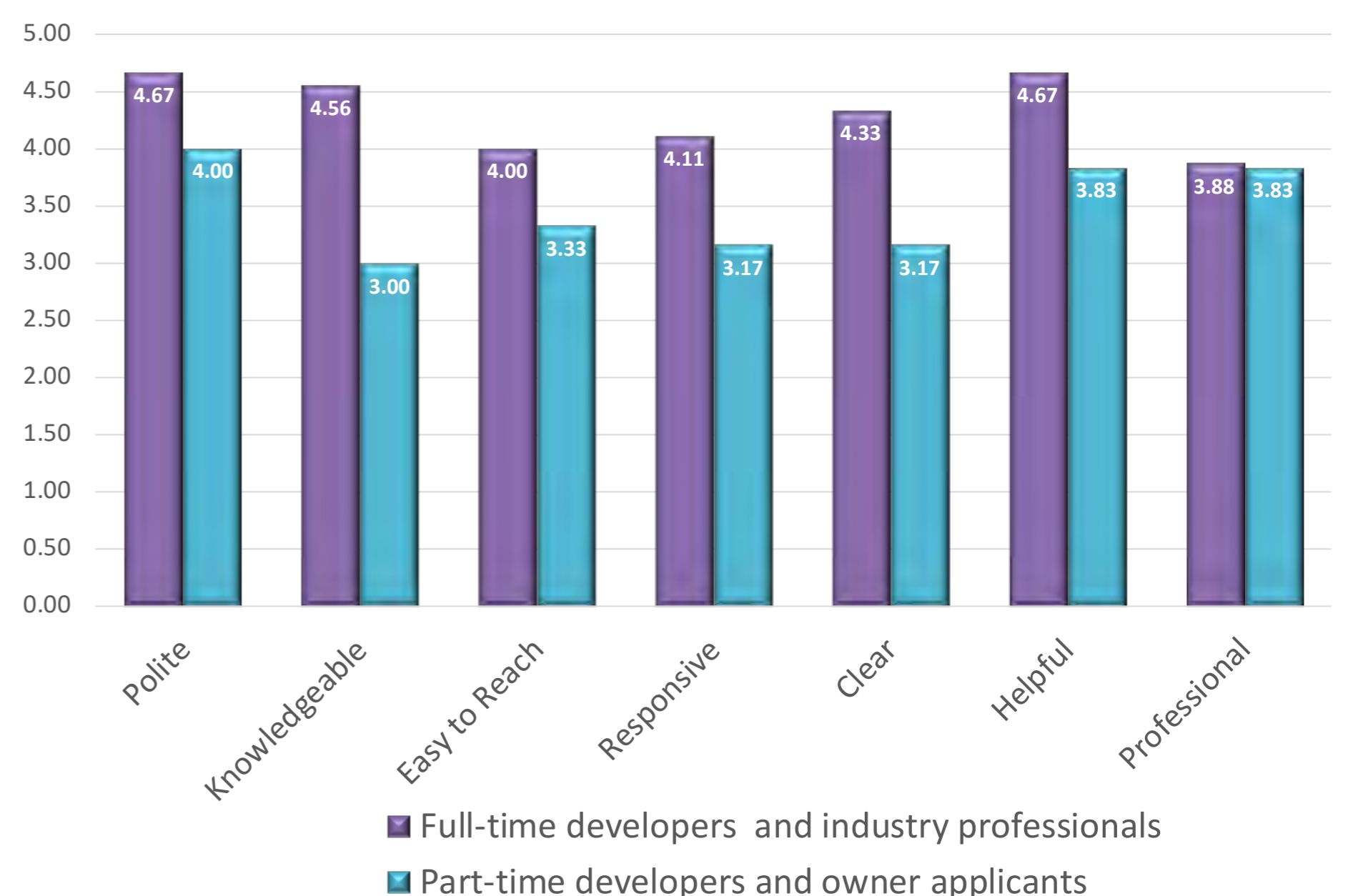
*Staff customer service levels were rated higher by applicants with development projects outside Ladysmith than those who primarily had development projects inside Ladysmith.*

*Staff customer service levels were rated higher by applicants who are full-time developers or industry professionals than those who are part-time developers or owner applicants*

LOCAL APPLICANTS VS. THOSE ACTIVE OUTSIDE LADYSMITH



FULL-TIME DEVELOPERS & INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS VS. PART-TIME DEVELOPERS AND OWNER APPLICANTS



## WHAT WE HEARD – SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

The following quotes and comments are from the survey and the interviews with individual applicants. Applicants were asked to identify what went well, what areas needed improvement, and what suggestions they had for improving the Town’s development application process.

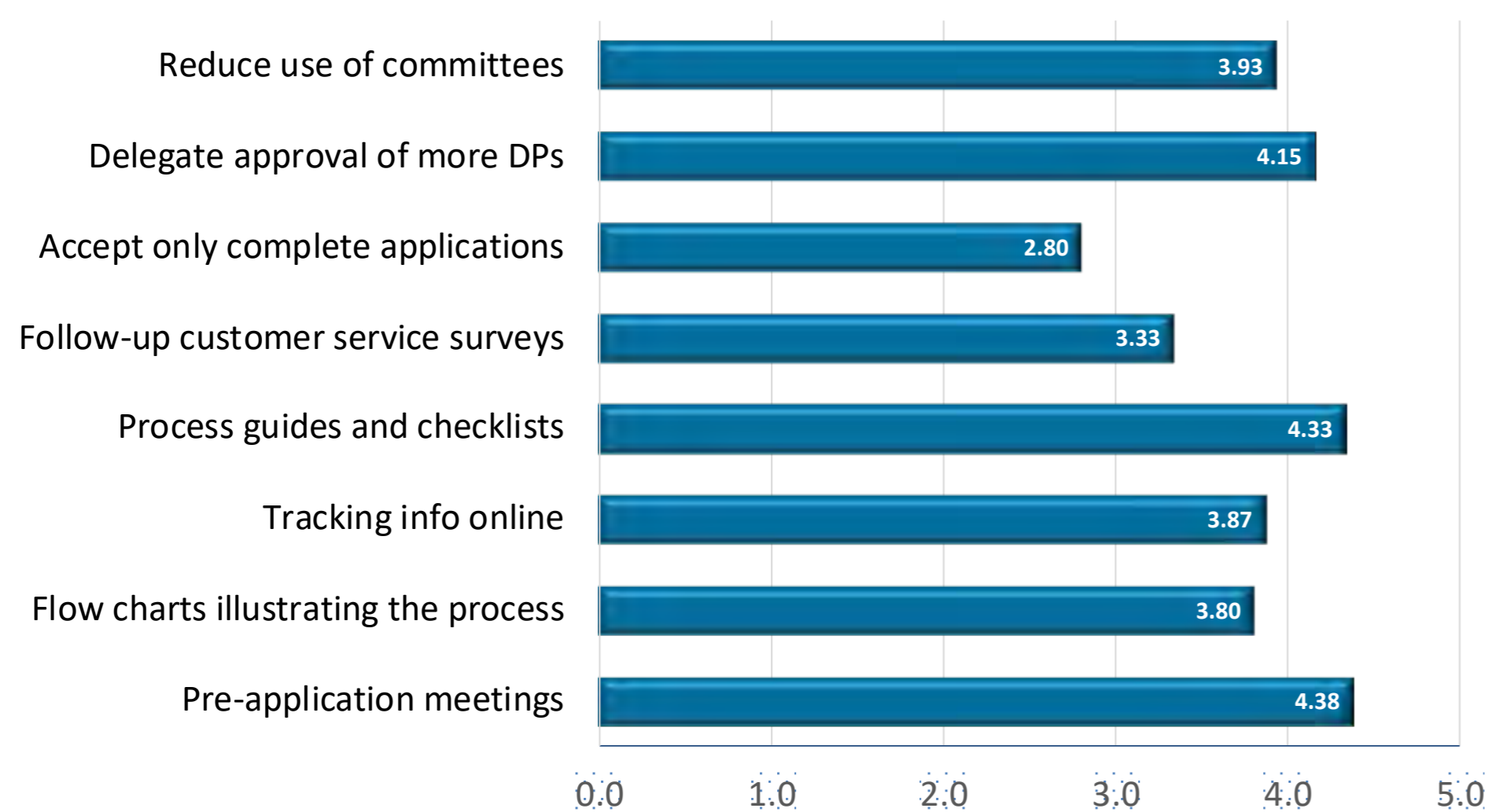
### WHAT IS GOING WELL?

- Staff are courteous and easy to deal with
- Timely approvals
- Planning staff are extremely polite, helpful, and responsive
- Initial subdivision application meeting, and subsequent meetings to review requirements were helpful and informative
- Staff reviewed some specific challenges ... and modified the process to make it work. Very impressed
- Defined rezoning/subdivision process, with helpful staff input
- My application processing time was cut in half because I had all my information submitted
- Time was taken to explain the process and provide timelines; there have been no unexpected requirements, no delays
- On-site pre-application meeting with engineering and planning was an excellent opportunity to have questions answered
- Pre-application meeting was helpful in identifying very clear expectations for required information, and all went smoothly
- Town staff are extremely responsive and professional to deal with – applications are often processed more quickly than anticipated. I had a rezoning that took just 3 months and that is unheard of in the industry. Many of my DPs and DVPs are processed in around 3 months, which is impressive
- I have projects in 6 communities. On a scale of 1 to 10, Langford is the best; Ladysmith is about an 8

### AREAS AND IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Allow staff to make more decisions and grant approvals instead of going to Council for everything
- Simplify the forms. Variance application form was daunting
- Remove bottlenecks in subdivision application process and improve response and turnaround times
- Provide more information upfront. Flow charts, checklists and timelines would be helpful
- Work as a team with other departments
- Expedite projects that are actually going to happen and quit prioritizing and wasting time and resources on projects that may never happen
- Establish processing timelines. Timeliness with PLAs is critical
- More staff to address backlogs and improve responses to emails and phone calls
- Have Council more involved in the development application process (attend public meetings) so that they are more informed about the decisions they are making
- Reduce fees
- Provide one staff person to contact who is responsible from beginning to end. There is no single point of contact, no champion for me
- Guidance in what committees are looking for in advance
- Make sure there are pre-approval meetings to figure out what is needed at the outset
- Submission of incomplete applications creates delays for everyone.
- Flexibility with some landscaping requirements to recognize impracticality of planting in winter
- Delegate more authority to staff for DPs to expedite processes
- The specifics of any application should be reviewed before providing the standard or average processing timeline
- Full-time working families can’t attend in-person meetings during regular working hours.
- Online tracking of applications would really help
- Staff are way too focused on process, there’s not enough judgement and decision-making
- Sustainability vision filter is a huge delay

### HOW COULD THE TOWN IMPROVE ITS DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION PROCESS?



## OPTIONS TO IMPROVE

Throughout the process several opportunities are identified for improvement, based on:

- Practices in other communities
- Identified best practices
- Suggestions from surveys and interviews with applicants, staff and Council

The following are some **suggestions**. Help us identify which ones could work or have the greatest impact in Ladysmith!

### Communication

- ✓ Pre-application checklists
- ✓ Re-designed forms (focus on simple forms)
- ✓ Process guides including:
  - Process flow charts, sample drawings such as site plans
  - Tips on common pitfalls
  - Overview of everyone's role (applicants, staff and Council) to increase understanding of the process
- ✓ Formalize the Town's existing staff customer service/response policy (48 hours) to emphasize its importance
- ✓ Feedback form AFTER the process is complete (how did we do? How can we improve?) to provide continual feedback loop
- ✓ Tracking information online
  - Viewing of application summary and where it is in the process
  - Provide applicants, public and Council with a sense of how many applications type and volumes in process
  - Help applicants and the public understand what projects are proposed in their neighbourhood



## OPTIONS TO IMPROVE

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### Process

- ✓ Pre-application meetings for all applications
  - Provide verbal guidance and review checklist items prior to submission
  - Applicants ask questions, staff identify issues in advance
  - Communicate timelines based on identified issues
- ✓ Require complete applications
  - Best practice identified by home builder municipalities
  - Assistance on applications is provided during application process
  - Applications do not receive a file manager to processing until they are complete
- ✓ File manager assigned as single point of staff contact
- ✓ Continue to have applications reviewed by inter-disciplinary staff committee. Adjust schedule to ensure regular meetings to respond to application volumes.
- ✓ Council consider delegating authority for additional development permit approvals (e.g. Riparian, Hazard Lands, Industrial)
- ✓ Council consider whether there is flexibility to remove requirement for public information meetings in some instances
- ✓ Consider streamlining advisory committee process
  - combine advisory planning and design panel
  - consider exempting signs from heritage review

Complete applications are processed much faster, resulting in significantly reduced approval timelines





## OPTIONS TO IMPROVE

### Relationship and partnership culture

Good relationships take time, effort and support. Creating trust between the development community, Council and the Town is key to providing good service.

The following options are intended to continue fostering a relationship where everyone is respectful, listens and works together to continually improve the process.

- ✓ Create a development liaison committee
  - Industry representatives and engineering and planning staff
- ✓ Host regular development forums
- ✓ Create a feedback form (online and paper) to solicit feedback after each application is complete
- ✓ Measure progress & report back to development community and Council annually on how the Town is doing
  - Volume of applications (type and complexity)
  - Process timelines (measure parts of the process the Town controls)
  - Accomplishments and successes
  - Highlight other long-range initiatives
  - Ongoing improvements
- ✓ Formalize and emphasize Town customer service protocol/response policy
- ✓ Council protocol (use of liaison committee) to deal with process complaints
- ✓ Council commitment to prioritize application processing over strategic projects



### Other (long term) Improvements

- ✓ Move development services/engineering into one location (one stop shop for all application types)
- ✓ GIS and development tracking software

