

Vulnerable Social Infrastructure By-law Review

Public Consultations: What we learned

Public input concerning the protection of vulnerable social infrastructure during demonstrations



Emergency and Protective Services
Services de protection et d'urgence

What we learned

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Executive summary

The City of Ottawa conducted an online consultation concerning a potential by-law to protect access to vulnerable social infrastructure during demonstrations using a questionnaire on the Engage Ottawa platform. A total of 2,522 responses were received between August 27 and September 30, 2025.

The following analysis does not represent city-wide public opinion. This document only reflects the views of residents who chose to complete the Engage Ottawa questionnaire. Methodology is further explained on p. 5.

Support for a by-law

Of the 2,522 responses received, 1,181 were ‘strongly opposed’ and 189 were ‘somewhat opposed’ to the development of a vulnerable social infrastructure by-law (54 per cent) compared to 913 that were ‘strongly supportive’ and 135 that were ‘somewhat supportive’ of creating a by-law (42 per cent).

Types of facilities

Responses indicate the following support for a by-law to protect various types of facilities:

- Healthcare: 1,379 responses (55 per cent)
- Retirement homes and care homes: 1,189 (47 per cent)
- Faith based facilities: 1,140 responses (45 per cent)
- Cultural Facilities: 1,137 responses (45 per cent)
- Schools (Non-faith based): 1,120 (44 per cent)
- Faith based schools: 1,093 responses (43 per cent)
- Other facilities: 689 responses

Other facilities that respondents recommended for protection included transit, transportation facilities including highways, rail and airports, grocery stores and pharmacies, government services offices, daycares and housing shelters. There were 28 “Other” responses indicating that no facilities should be considered.

Acceptability of behaviours

The questionnaire asked about certain behaviours and if they were acceptable or unacceptable during a demonstration. Behaviours that the majority of respondents found **acceptable** include:

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| • Peaceful assembly/standing in groups | 90 per cent |
| • Holding signs/banners | 81 per cent |
| • Marching/parading | 74 per cent |
| • Distribution of leaflets/materials | 73 per cent |

What we learned

- Chanting/shouting (without amplification) 67 per cent

Behaviours that the majority of respondents found **unacceptable** included:

- Use of lasers pointed at individuals 88 per cent
- Intentional damage to property 87 per cent
- Intentional obstruction of emergency services 87 per cent
- Discriminatory or hate speech 85 per cent
- Issuing threats 85 per cent
- Behavior that is abusive, intimidating, or harassing 82 per cent
- Use of fireworks or smoke devices (without permits) 80 per cent
- Preventing individuals or workers from accessing or leaving the facility 68 per cent

The issue where responses were most divided was on the use of megaphones and loudspeakers without a permit, with 48 per cent supporting this activity and 41 per cent opposed.

What we learned

1. This issue is important to faith communities, frequent users of social infrastructure, and advocacy groups and politically active residents
2. This issue is contentious and polarizing among all impacted parties.
3. Common ground may be found in addressing specific problematic behaviours.
4. Respondents are divided on the use of megaphones during demonstrations.
5. There is no consensus on the appropriate size of a protective zone around facilities.

Detailed analysis for each of these conclusions begins on page 12 of this report.

Introduction

The City of Ottawa is developing a by-law to provide for safe access to vulnerable social infrastructure during demonstrations. Places of worship, schools and daycares, health clinics and care homes are all examples of vulnerable social infrastructure. Deciding what types of facilities a by-law would apply to is one of the key policy questions facing Council.

Another key question is “What does ‘safe access’ mean?”. Does it simply mean physical security, or the ability to come and go, or should it also include consideration for things like mental health and wellbeing?

Determining appropriate rules to provide for safe access also requires the City to consider impacts on rights and freedoms protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and whether the benefit of a by-law outweighs the possible harm on freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful public assembly.

A report with recommendations is scheduled to be provided to Council in early 2026.

To give members of the public the opportunity to express their opinions and contribute to the development of a by-law, the City launched an online questionnaire on Engage Ottawa (<https://engage.ottawa.ca/vulnerable-social-infrastructure-by-law-review>) between August 27 and September 30, 2025.

This document provides a summary of the opinions and comments offered by members of the public as well as staff’s interpretation of the results. Staff understand that these results do not represent city-wide public opinion and only reflect the views of members of the public who chose to participate.

This online public consultation is part of a broader public engagement plan that has included outreach and engagement with faith groups, service organizations, and advocacy groups. A survey of social infrastructure owners and operators has also been conducted, as well as public opinion research. The public opinion research was conducted by Ekos Research Associates Inc. (Ekos) and is available on [Engage Ottawa](#). A full summary of consultation outcomes will be included in the future staff report.

Methodology

Consultation with members of the public was conducted primarily through an online questionnaire and email correspondence.

The online questionnaire provided an avenue for residents to express their opinion in a structured way that is helpful for staff to process and understand. The information

What we learned

collected is used to inform staff's understanding of resident views and concerns, but it should not be considered as representative of city-wide public opinion.

The online questionnaire could be completed anonymously. Staff's experience with other by-law review consultations has shown that people are often more comfortable sharing honest feedback when they don't have to identify themselves or create an account. Requiring online registration can discourage responses, especially from those less familiar with online tools or less trusting of government. Allowing anonymity makes it easier for residents to voice their true opinions, particularly on sensitive or divisive issues. Because the questionnaire was quick and easy to complete, it attracted input from a wider range of residents.

While the Engage Ottawa consultation tool was open for everyone in this case, staff audit metadata to identify possible patterns of abuse. The Engage Ottawa platform creates a session ID which can be used to identify when a person fills out the questionnaire more than once during the same visit. This helps staff identify whether someone may have answered multiple times, while still keeping everything anonymous. The Engage Ottawa platform vendor also has tools and processes in place to detect and prevent abuse such as hacking and the use of bots. No such occurrences have been detected in this consultation.

Of the 2,522 responses collected during the period from August 27 to September 30, 2,482 unique contributors were identified. Of the 40 records where a duplicate submission was detected, 5 were attributed to a staff member manually transcribing results from paper-based resident submissions. Staff note there could be multiple reasons for a session ID to include more than one response. This includes multiple people in the same household sharing their opinion using the same computer or a person changing their mind on a particular issue or making a correction or addition to their original input. In most cases where duplicate submissions were detected, there were only two submissions made and the most made by a single session ID was 4 responses. Staff identified no instances where identical submissions were made using a single session ID. In total, submissions by duplicate Session ID accounted for 1.3 per cent of responses.

There were also 61 instances where duplicate comments were made. Staff identified 2 distinct messages, one repeated 32 times and another repeated nine times. This could be due to multiple submissions from the same individual or multiple individuals supporting a specific campaign. In either case, these responses accounted for 2.4 per cent of all responses.

The online questionnaire did not limit responses to those sent within City boundaries. Staff recognize that residents may wish to contribute while travelling for work or on vacation and note that virtual private networks make it possible to spoof an Ottawa

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location from anywhere. However, staff did monitor traffic flow to the Engage Ottawa site and found the geographic distribution of responses to be consistent with other online consultations conducted by the City.

Staff manually reviewed 1,371 written comments to consider each individually, as well as to identify common themes and messages and to assess tone. Summaries are provided in Appendix A.

Assumptions

Staff's analysis of the comments relied on the following assumptions:

1. Ottawa residents attend faith services at rates consistent with Statistics Canada's Canadian Social Survey.
2. Ottawa residents tend to participate in demonstrations at rates consistent with the Angus Reid Institute's [2024 Survey on Protests and Policing](#).

Errors and omissions

In the English language survey, Q12 was incorrectly coded to list "Cultural-based facilities" twice. This displaced "Daycare" in the list of options. To remediate this issue, responses that voted twice for "Cultural-based facilities" were only counted once. Staff could not provide a reliable count of responses supporting "Daycares" as a type of infrastructure to be protected, so data from the [Ekos public opinion research](#) was used to fill this gap in knowledge.

Analysis

Support for a by-law

Of the 2,522 responses received, 1,181 were 'strongly opposed' and 189 were 'somewhat opposed' to the development of a vulnerable social infrastructure by-law (54 per cent) compared to 913 that were 'strongly supportive' and 135 that were 'somewhat supportive' of creating a by-law (42 per cent).

Staff identified a strong correlation between lived experience and support for creating a by-law. For example:

- Respondents who indicated that they have experienced behaviour that is abusive, intimidating or harassing while accessing social infrastructure are significantly more likely to support a by-law than those who have not (85 per cent compared to 19 per cent).
- Respondents who occasionally or frequently participate in demonstrations, indicated only 42 per cent support for creating a by-law, compared to 74 per cent support among those who 'never' demonstrate.

What we learned

Of the 100 respondents who indicated they frequently had difficulty accessing social infrastructure due to demonstrations or protest outside of facilities due to behaviour that is abusive, intimidating, or harassing, discrimination based on protected grounds, or obstruction of roads, sidewalks or entrances/exits:

- 92 were “Strongly supportive” of a by-law,
- 1 was “Somewhat supportive” of a by-law,
- 6 were “Strongly unsupportive” of a by-law
- 1 was neutral

Of the 1,120 responses indicating they had “Never” had difficulty accessing social infrastructure due to these concerns:

- 815 were “Strongly unsupportive” of a by-law (73 per cent)
- 86 were “Somewhat unsupportive” of a by-law (8 per cent)
- 31 were “Neutral” (3 per cent)
- 48 were “Somewhat supportive” of a by-law (4 per cent)
- 122 were “Strongly supportive” of a by-law (11 per cent)
- 13 were “Unsure” (1 per cent)

Of the 1,048 responses that were “Strongly supportive or “Somewhat supportive” of a by-law:

- The facilities most accessed on a daily basis included non-faith-based schools (26 per cent), faith-based schools (17 per cent) and daycares (13 per cent).
- The facilities most accessed on a weekly or monthly basis were healthcare facilities (61 per cent), places of worship (52 per cent) and cultural facilities (43 percent).
- The facilities rarely or never accessed included daycares (81 per cent), retirement homes (77 per cent) and faith-based schools (68 per cent).

Of the 1,370 responses that were “Strongly unsupportive” or “Somewhat unsupportive” of a by-law:

- The facilities most accessed on a daily basis included non-faith-based schools (33 per cent), faith-based facilities (22 per cent) and faith-based schools (15 per cent).
- The facilities most accessed on a weekly or monthly basis were healthcare facilities (59 per cent), cultural facilities (44 per cent), and places of worship (33 per cent).
- The facilities rarely or never accessed included retirement homes (85 per cent), daycares (82 per cent), and faith-based schools(70 per cent).

What we learned

Staff identified a limited correlation between the frequency with which people access facilities and their support for a vulnerable social infrastructure by-law. In general, the more a person uses a facility, the more likely they are to support protection for that type of facility. However, there is little difference in the overall patterns of use between supporters and opponents of the by-law.

Table 1 - Frequency of facility use and support for protective measures

Level of support	Supportive		Unsupportive	
	Monthly, Weekly and Daily or Near Daily Use (per cent)	Rarely, never use (per cent)	Monthly, Weekly and Daily or Near Daily Use (per cent)	Rarely, never use (per cent)
Frequency of Use				
Cultural Facilities	55	44	53	44
Places of Worship	60	39	55	44
Faith Schools	30	67	27	70
Healthcare	68	30	65	33
Care Homes	21	77	13	86
Schools	34	64	48	50

The data presented in Table 1 suggests that personal use of facilities was not a determinative factor in support for a by-law. However, within this data there are notable exceptions: Among respondents who visit faith-based facilities, support for the inclusion of faith-based facilities in a by-law is lowest among daily or near daily users (28 per cent) when compared to weekly users (56 per cent), monthly users, (43 per cent), rare users (42 per cent) and non-users (36 per cent). Among respondents who visit non-faith schools, support for the inclusion of non-faith schools was highest among people who never access these facilities (51 per cent), followed by daily or near daily users and rare users (both 43 per cent), monthly users (41 per cent) and weekly users (34 per cent). Types of facilities Staff asked residents to identify which types of facilities should be protected under a vulnerable social infrastructure by-law. Responses indicated the following support for various types of facilities:

- Healthcare: 1,379 responses (55 per cent)
- Retirement homes and care homes: 1,189 (47 per cent)
- Faith based facilities: 1,140 responses (45 per cent)
- Cultural Facilities: 1,137 responses (45 per cent)
- Schools (Non-faith-based): 1,120 (44 per cent)
- Faith based Schools: 1,093 responses (43 per cent)
- Other facilities: 689 responses

What we learned

Other facilities that respondents recommended for protection included transit, transportation facilities including highways, rail and airports, grocery stores and pharmacies, government services offices, daycares and housing shelters. There were 28 “Other” responses indicating that no facilities should be considered.

When staff reviewed support for various types of facilities from only respondents who indicated support for developing a by-law, responses indicated the following support:

- Faith based facilities/ places of worship: 981 responses (94 per cent)
- Healthcare clinics: 980 responses (94 per cent)
- Faith based schools: 963 responses (92 per cent)
- Cultural-based facilities: 938 responses (90 per cent)
- Retirement homes or care homes: 933 responses (89 per cent)
- Non-faith based schools: 925 responses (88 per cent)

Concern for behaviour

Staff asked about a variety of behaviours associated with demonstration activity to assess their level of acceptability.

Table 2 - Acceptability of behaviours

Behaviour	Acceptable (per cent)	Unacceptable (per cent)	Undecided (per cent)
Peaceful assembly/standing in groups	90	5	5
Holding signs/banners	81	12	7
Marching/parading	74	15	8
Distribution of leaflets/materials	73	16	11
Chanting/shouting (without amplification)	67	25	8
Use of megaphones/loudspeakers (without permits)	41	45	10
Preventing individuals or workers from accessing or leaving the facility	13	68	19
Use of fireworks or smoke devices (without permits)	6	80	13
Behavior that is abusive, intimidating, or harassing	5	82	12

What we learned

Intentional damage to property	3	86	10
Intentional obstruction of emergency services	2	88	10
Use of lasers pointed at individuals	2	87	10
Discriminatory or hate speech	1	85	14
Issuing threats	1	84	14

Staff assess that this data shows the broad range of views concerning demonstration behavior. Staff note the low level of opposition among respondents to behaviours that are protected by the Charter, such as peaceful assembly, holding signs, marching, distributing pamphlets, and changing/shouting.

Staff also note the number of responses indicating that offensive or illegal behaviours are acceptable to those respondents. These include obstructing access or emergency vehicles, intentional damage to property, hate speech, and threats.

Size of protective zones

When asked about the appropriate size of a protective zone around vulnerable social infrastructure, **10 to 20 metres** had the most support (558 respondents), followed by **50 to 80 metres** (476 respondents) and **20 to 50 metres** (201 respondents). Staff also note the high level of uncertainty on this issue, with 409 respondents indicating **I don't know**.

Among 913 respondents who were strongly supportive of the by-law, 409 (45 per cent) supported a distance of **50 to 80 metres**, compared to 106 (12 per cent) for **20 to 50 metres** and 21 (4 per cent) for **10 to 20 metres**. There were also 109 respondents (12 per cent) who were uncertain and 267 responses (30 per cent) that supported other options. Write in responses largely supported distances of 100 metres, with 11 responses indicated distances of 1 kilometre or more.

Of the 1,181 strongly opposed to the by-law, 398 (34 per cent) indicated **10 to 20 metres**. Support for other options was less than 2 per cent each. The 499 write-in responses (42 per cent) overwhelmingly indicated no support for the by-law regardless of distance.

What we learned

Staff have made the following conclusions based on analysis of consultation data collected through the online questionnaire:

1. **This issue is important to faith communities, frequent users of social infrastructure, and advocacy groups and politically active residents.**

Based on respondents' self-reported behaviours in the questionnaire, staff assess that the consultation results over-represent these groups:

Faith communities

According to Statistics Canada's 2024 General Social Survey on Community Life, approx. 11 per cent of Ottawa residents attend faith services "at least once a month". Respondents of the questionnaire self-reported attendance at faith services "monthly" (15 per cent), "weekly" (26 per cent) or "daily or near daily" (16 per cent).

This group was highly polarized in terms of support for a Vulnerable Social Infrastructure By-law, with 40 per cent "strongly supportive" and 46 per cent "strongly unsupportive".

Activist communities

Rates of participation in demonstration activity are reported at significantly higher levels when compared to the Angus Reid Institute's 2024 Survey on Protests and Policing. Responses to the questionnaire indicated that 13 per cent participated in demonstrations "Frequently (more than 6 times per year)", 17 per cent indicated "Occasionally (up to 5 times a year)", and 31 per cent indicated "Rarely (a few times a year or less)". This compares to Angus Reid data, where the random sample identified 10 per cent of Canadians as having participated in a protest "in the last 6 months". Another comparator is found in the City's own Ekos public interest polling, which indicates that 12 per cent of Ottawa residents have participated in a demonstration within the past two years.

This group was largely opposed to a by-law with 60 per cent "Strongly opposed" compared to 23 per cent "Strongly supportive".

This over-representation reflects self-selection bias, where specific groups are more motivated to participate in a consultation than others, often due to the specific interests of that group and how the issue impacts them. This also helps to explain the difference between the aggregated data collected through the questionnaire and the results of the Ekos public opinion poll.

2. **This issue is contentious and polarizing among all impacted parties.**

The number of "Strongly supportive" and "Strongly unsupportive" responses (83 per cent) eclipsed moderate (13 per cent) and neutral (4 per cent) responses.

3. Common ground may be found in addressing specific problematic behaviours.

Responses to Question 9 regarding the acceptability of behaviours during demonstrations indicated that 61 per cent of respondents that have participated in demonstrations “Always” consider the impact of their activities on individuals accessing nearby facilities. A further 13 per cent “Sometimes” consider the impact on individuals accessing nearby facilities.

In addition, both supportive and unsupportive respondents indicated that the following behaviours are unacceptable during a demonstration:

- Use of lasers pointed at individuals
- Intentional damage to property
- Intentional obstruction of emergency services
- Discriminatory or hate speech
- Issuing threats
- Behavior that is abusive, intimidating, or harassing
- Use of fireworks or smoke devices (without permits)
- Preventing individuals or workers from accessing or leaving the facility

4. Respondents are divided on the use of megaphones during demonstrations.

Overall, 48 per cent of responses supported the use of megaphones or loudspeakers during a demonstration and 41 per cent were opposed. However, analysis of collected input suggests this is a highly nuanced issue. Support changed based on the level of noise, who is impacted, and the messages being conveyed. Multiple responses also indicated concern of bias in enforcement practices. Sample comments include:

- “Permits for megaphones are ridiculous because the noise of construction in the city is far worse than any noise from a good demonstration.”
- “The impact of noise is particularly important when it could negatively impact patients who *have no choice but to be there*. Same with kids in schools; they can't leave of their own accord.”
- “I have a right to safe, secure access to all public spaces without harrassment [sic], bullying, rabid screaming, name calling, belligerence, hostility, deafening noise, shouting, shaming, threatening etc. Nor do i [sic] have to expose my kids and grandchildren to such uncivilized barbaric behaviour!”

What we learned

- “I've noticed over the past few months that bylaws relating to demonstrations have been applied differently depending on the group. For example, whereas the trucker convoy protesters were permitted to make ridiculous amounts of noise, pro-Palestinian protesters were charged (and in some cases) detained for using megaphones at City Hall”

5. **There is no consensus on the appropriate size of a protective zone around facilities.**

When asked “what distance from the property line would allow for meaningful demonstration while ensuring safe access?”, overall responses indicated:

10 metres to 20 metres	23 per cent
20 metres to 50 metres	8 per cent
50 metres to 80 metres	19 per cent
I don't know	17 per cent
Other	33 per cent

Other responses covered a range in sizes from 0 meters (common among those strongly opposed to a by-law) to distances of up to 1 km.

Respondents that indicated they have previously avoided using social infrastructure due to a demonstration tended to support larger protective zones, with 44 per cent supporting zones from 50 to 80 metres. An additional 31 percent wrote in responses seeking zones larger than 80 metres.

What we learned

Appendix A Questions and responses

Question 1: How often do you use services at the following types of facilities in Ottawa?

Table 3 - Frequency of infrastructure use by respondents, by facility type

Frequency	Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or near daily	Not Sure	Total
Cultural-based facilities	253	863	600	489	242	61	2,508
Daycare	1,748	284	45	56	305	38	2,476
Faith-based facilities	458	595	388	642	408	22	2,513
Faith-based schools	1,296	436	114	210	391	48	2,495
Healthcare clinic or facility	22	776	1,254	246	172	45	2,515
Retirement home or care home	1,291	750	189	140	90	50	2,510
Schools (non-faith based)	784	625	147	148	750	49	2,503

Total responses = 2,522

Question 2: Have you ever avoided accessing one of the above facilities due to concerns about demonstrations nearby?

No 1,792

Yes 650

I don't recall 75

Total responses = 2,517

What we learned

Question 3: Have you ever changed your behavior while accessing facilities from question 1 (e.g., route, timing, choice of facility) due to concerns about safety or comfort near these sites?

No	1,669
Yes	763
I don't recall	80

Total responses = 2,512

Question 4: Have you ever had difficulty accessing the facilities for the following reasons?

Table 4 - Frequency of access issues, by type

Reason	Never	Rarely (a few times)	Occasionally (a few times a year)	Frequently (more than a few times a year)	Total
Demonstration or protest outside the facility	1677	379	263	194	2513
Behaviour that is abusive, intimidating, or harassing	1653	338	280	230	2501
Discrimination based on protected grounds	1670	304	262	272	2508
Obstruction of roads, sidewalks or entrances/exits	1313	596	352	242	2503

Total responses = 2,513

What we learned

Question 5: When you encounter a demonstration, how often do you think the following thoughts?

Table 5 - Respondent sentiment concerning demonstrations

Sentiment	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Not sure
I am appreciative.	514	246	384	608	598	75
I feel unwelcome.	914	501	319	273	358	58
I am engaged.	478	319	637	525	356	105
I am inconvenienced.	740	572	462	275	327	50
I learn something.	451	348	462	496	618	52
I am scared.	1,223	395	289	237	254	25
I am supportive.	330	311	666	633	408	75
I can't access services I need.	1,337	396	335	178	135	37

Total responses = 2,427

Question 6: How frequently do you participate in demonstrations in Ottawa?

Never	831
Rarely (a few times a year or less)	772
Frequently (6 or more times a year)	334
Occasionally (up to 5 times a year)	422
Not applicable / Prefer not to say	150

Total responses = 2,509

What we learned

Question 7: Have you helped to organize or mobilize a demonstration in the past 12 months?

No	1,390
I prefer not to say	167
Yes	118

Total responses = 1,675

Question 8: In the past 12 months, have you organized or participated in a demonstration at, or in close proximity to, any of the following types of facilities?

Cultural-based facility	183
Daycare	48
Elementary or High School (non-faith based)	110
Faith-based facility	137
Healthcare clinic or facility	78
Community and recreational centers	172
Retirement, long term care, or care home	40
Not sure	704

Total responses = 1,472

What we learned

Question 9: When you participate in a demonstration, do you consider the impact of your activities on individuals accessing nearby facilities?

Always	1,014
Sometimes	223
Never	49
Rarely	38
Not applicable / Not sure	336

Total responses = 1,660

What we learned

Question 10: Please indicate whether you believe the following activities are “Acceptable” or “Unacceptable” during a demonstration near vulnerable social infrastructure.

Table 6 - Acceptable behaviours near social infrastructure

Activity	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Undecided
Peaceful assembly/standing in groups	2,261	135	115
Holding signs/banners	2,042	292	175
Marching/parading	1,907	379	216
Distribution of leaflets/materials	1,830	411	266
Chanting/shouting (without amplification)	1,690	619	201
Use of megaphones/loudspeakers (without permits)	1,040	1,212	255
Preventing individuals or workers from accessing or leaving the facility	318	1,711	475
Use of fireworks or smoke devices (without permits)	163	2,020	319
Behavior that is abusive, intimidating, or harassing	119	2,072	311
Intentional damage to property	73	2,174	258
Use of lasers pointed at individuals	60	2,196	243
Intentional obstruction of emergency services	40	2,205	261
Issuing threats	27	2,129	349
Discriminatory or hate speech	21	2,136	348

Total responses = 2,513

What we learned

Question 11: Do you support Ottawa developing a by-law to protect safe access to the sites listed in question 1?

Strongly unsupportive	1,181
Strongly supportive	913
Somewhat unsupportive	189
Somewhat supportive	135
Neutral	66
Unsure	29

Total responses = 2,513

Question 12: Which types of facilities do you think should be included as vulnerable social infrastructure?

Healthcare clinic or facility	1,379
Retirement home or care home	1,189
Faith-based facilities	1,139
Schools (non-faith based)	1,120
Faith-based schools	1,116
Cultural-based facilities	1,008
Other	703

Total responses = 2,513

What we learned

Question 13: If a by-law established a protective zone around vulnerable social infrastructure, what distance from the property line would allow for meaningful demonstration while ensuring safe access?

10 metres to 20 metres	558
50 metres to 80 metres	476
20 metres to 50 metres	201
I don't know	409
Other	814

Total responses = 2,458

Question 14: Are you responding on behalf of an organization or interest group?

No	2,461
Yes	45

Total responses = 2,506

Of the responses indicating they were submitted on behalf of organizations, 24 indicated affiliation with faith groups, seven with advocacy organizations, three with community service organizations and one with a labour union.

What we learned

Additional comments

Strongly unsupportive

A total of 811 write in responses were provided by individuals who indicated that they were 'Strongly unsupportive' of developing a by-law. This included one duplicate entry that was submitted, with minor variations, more than 30 times:

“A bubble by-law is unwarranted, severely damaging to the rights of Ottawa residents, and presents a significant legal risk for the City of Ottawa. Existing by-laws of this nature are being challenged by groups including the Canadian Civil Liberties Association due to their violation of Charter rights. There is no legal protection against being made to feel uncomfortable, and this is an essential aspect of expressing dissent. The City must not proceed with any kind of bubble zone legislation, and should also express this position to higher levels of government that have also expressed interest in this repressive policy.”

Common themes of comments in this category included:

- The proposed by-law violates Charter rights. (482 comments)
- This by-law is unnecessary, either due to existing laws or a lack of evidence of harm. (196 comments)
- This by-law will cause harm to marginalized communities, by suppressing their voice and by uneven enforcement. (109 comments)
- The consultation process is biased or flawed. (94 comments)
- This by-law will result in a chill on free expression. (84 comments)

There were also 28 comments that provided constructive feedback, including additional research or policy options for consideration.

Overall, the tone of messages was critical.

Somewhat unsupportive

A total of 37 write in responses were provided by individuals who indicated they were somewhat unsupportive of developing a by-law. Responses reveal a tension between the fundamental right to protest and concerns about public safety, peace, and order. The overall analysis shows a strong, overarching concern that the proposed by-law would be an overreach that infringes on Charter rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. This viewpoint is often expressed with the argument that protests are inherently meant to be disruptive and inconvenient.

Common themes and key concerns

The most common themes revolve around the sufficiency of existing laws, the uneven application of law enforcement, and the vagueness of key terms.

- **Targeting and context of protests:** 14 responses emphasized that the context and objective of a protest matter. They argue that while protests that target specific, truly vulnerable groups (like anti-abortion protests with graphic signs or anti-trans protests near schools) should be restricted, those protesting the actions of the institutions should be protected. They also raise the need to exempt lawful labour picketing (e.g., striking workers) from any by-law.
- **Priorities and vulnerability:** 12 comments referenced what respondents feel are more pressing priorities for the city, such as homelessness in the downtown core, arguing that these issues represent the "truly vulnerable" and should be addressed before restricting democratic rights
- **Vagueness and scope of the by-law:** 9 comments cited concerns with the ambiguity of the proposed by-law's language. Specifically, the terms "vulnerable," "intimidating," "harassing," and "abusive behaviour" are repeatedly cited as being too broad and subjective.
- **Reliance on existing laws:** 5 comments expressed a belief that new legislation is unnecessary because current laws already address illegal or disruptive behavior like harassment, assault, vandalism, and noise violations

The consensus among these somewhat unsupportive respondents is not that all protest activity should be unregulated, but that any new law must be extremely precise and minimally impairing to fundamental democratic rights, be applied equally and fairly, and not as a tool to silence dissent that makes certain segments of the population "feel uncomfortable."

Overall, the prevailing tones of messages in this group were skeptical or cynical.

Neutral

A totally of 29 write in responses were provided by individuals who indicated they were "Neutral" about developing a by-law. While there is a near-unanimous rejection of violence, hate, and extreme disruption (frequently citing the "truck convoy" as a clear example of unacceptable behavior), respondents are deeply worried that the by-law would have a chilling effect on fundamental democratic rights, particularly freedom of speech, assembly, and the right to protest.

What we learned

Key themes and concerns include:

- **Protecting rights:** Twelve respondents voiced concern that the by-law would overly restrict the right to protest. Comments emphasized that protest inherently involves disruption and that small inconveniences are not the same as Charter violations.
- **Need for clarity:** Eight responses criticized the lack of precise definitions for key terms like "harassment," "vulnerable," "inconvenience," and what constitutes acceptable "blocking access," fearing this ambiguity would lead to biased and arbitrary enforcement.
- **Sufficiency of existing law:** Six respondents believe that current laws, regulations, and police powers are already sufficient to handle violence and major threats, rendering the new by-law unnecessary.
- **Exclusions:** Three respondents specifically argued that labor actions and strikes outside workplaces should be explicitly excluded from the scope of this by-law.

The overall tone is skeptical, with respondents indicating they want the City not to impede on their rights to demonstrate for political and social causes and suggestions that any legislation should be applied consistently without political bias.

Somewhat supportive

A total of 51 write in responses were provided by individuals who indicated that they were 'Somewhat supportive' of developing a by-law. Common themes of comments in this category included:

- Demonstrations must be reasonable and within enforceable limits (17 comments)
- Enforce existing laws and by-laws (9 comments)
- Exclude a specific Vulnerable Social Infrastructure (6 comments)
- Consider Charter implications (4 comments)
- Eliminate hate symbols and hate speech (3 comments)
- Protect Vulnerable Social Infrastructure (2 comments)

The tone of these messages tended to be thoughtful and neutral, expressing opposition to unreasonable disruptions caused by demonstrations and support for a by-law that considers Charter implications, existing enforcement tools and the impact that demonstrations can have on vulnerable populations.

Strongly Supportive

Three hundred and sixty-four (364) write in responses were provided by individuals who were strongly supportive of developing a by-law. There were two (2) duplicate entries.

What we learned

Common themes centred on the need for reasonable limitations to be placed on demonstrations with police enforcement when limits are exceeded, noting that access to social infrastructure must be protected and the need for protection from hate and hate speech.

“I am scared for the first time in my life. I am afraid to go to my culture, based institutions for fear of being assaulted, threatened, injured. I’m even afraid to go to my place of worship because of this. I have been to my culture based institution when there’s a demonstration, demonstrators became aggressive, preventing egress. “

Most respondents who are strongly supportive of a by-law support the right to demonstrate but with conditions. Some of these conditions included peaceful protest, ensuring that all residents feel safe while in public, avoidance to traffic disruption, and limits to times of day with zero tolerance for intimidation. Many responses also supported exemptions for labour protests.

Some respondents referenced the trucker convoy protests as examples of what should not be permitted or expressed frustration with the lack of police action whenever protests exceeded reasonable limitations, which included the permitting of hate in some cases.

Lastly, some respondents highlighted the importance of permitting lawful labour action at facilities while balancing access by the public.

The tone of messages was critical when discussing the actions of protest groups and appreciative when discussing the prospect of municipal intervention to address their concerns.

The Israel-Hamas War

The Israel – Hamas War was referenced often in respondent comments in the questionnaire, with responses indicating affinity with Palestine and opposition to Israel: Staff reviewed 194 comments addressing the current conflict. Of these, 102 were supportive of the pro-Palestinian movement, 75 were supportive of the Jewish community and 12 were neutral.

In terms of support for a by-law, 102 comments referencing the Israel-Hamas war were from people strongly unsupportive of a by-law and 12 somewhat supportive. There were 72 comments from respondents strongly supportive of a by-law and 3 somewhat supportive. Responses expressing affinity for the Jewish community were 92 per cent “strongly supportive” of a by-law and responses expressing affinity with Palestine were 89 per cent “strongly opposed”.