

June 6, 2022

Dear Members of the UBC Board of Governors,

The University Neighbourhoods Association (UNA) represents and provides services to the more than 15,000 residents of UBC's five neighbourhoods. In keeping with its formal role in advising the Board of Governors (BoG) during Campus Vision 2050, the UNA has surveyed its residents on neighbourhood development and prepared this letter in response to the draft Terms of Reference (ToR).¹ This letter represents the official position of the UNA, as approved by the elected Board of Directors at their meeting of May 31, 2022.

The UBC neighbourhoods are an integral component of the University campus. Already home to thousands of faculty, staff, and students, the neighbourhoods are critical to UBC's Strategic Plan goal to "attract, engage and retain a diverse global community of outstanding students, faculty and staff...[in] sustainable, healthy and connected campuses and communities."² If developed with attention to this goal, the neighbourhoods will enhance the University's academic mission and reputation. If badly conceived now, prioritizing short-term financial gain over innovative and sustainable stewardship, the neighbourhoods will be a detriment to the well-being of the academic community and the reputation of the University. In its oversight of Campus Vision 2050, the Board of Governors has the singular opportunity, and profound responsibility, to shape the long-term future of the University and its people.

UNA Consultation Process

Since January, the UNA has hosted a resident town hall; surveyed resident views of life and development in UBC neighbourhoods; and posed detailed questions about neighbourhood planning to Campus and Community Planning (C&CP) representatives. A remarkable 876 residents responded to the UNA's Community Engagement Survey, with residents expressing their appreciation (leavened with constructive critique) of existing neighbourhoods and trepidation about the intensity and character of future development.³ Respondents emphasized the following priorities, for both existing and future neighbourhoods: trees, green space, and community-oriented space; low-rise construction, and density without towers; the need for more retail, services, childcare, and schools, proportionate to the growing population; the need for more affordable housing with priority for those who work at UBC; emphasis on rental housing over market leasehold developments; and the importance of sustainability and sensitivity to local ecologies in current and future development.

Terms of Reference Feedback

We have noted that C&CP's own public engagement has yielded similar results – articulated clearly in C&CP's Engagement Summary Report⁴ – as the UNA has heard from its residents. Many of the "guiding principles and strategies" of the draft Terms of Reference reflect this engagement, including the emphases on putting people first, affordability, climate action,

¹ Revised version shared with the UNA Board on May 12, 2022

² UBC Strategic Plan, pp. 40 and 42. https://strategicplan.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2018_UBC_Strategic_Plan_Full-20180425.pdf

³ See Appendix A for a detailed summary of responses to the UNA's survey.

⁴ UBC Campus and Community Planning, "Needs and Aspirations: Draft Engagement Summary Report," Spring 2022. See Appendix B for key excerpts.

engagement with Musqueam, inclusivity and accessibility. We were dismayed, therefore, that the draft Terms of Reference did not take into account the feedback that was evidently well heard. In particular, the Terms deviate from what was heard during consultations in two significant and troubling ways:

- 1) Residents and other stakeholders have been very clear that short-term financial gain should not come at the expense of the University's broader goals and responsibilities in developing the remaining lands at UBC. The draft Terms of Reference hint at possible trade-offs and compromises involved in campus planning. But the Terms also prematurely position market leasehold housing as foundational to all other priorities, implying that selling more high-rise condos is necessary to fund everything from student housing and scholarships to a new stadium and the Sky Train extension, with few or no significant costs or downsides. This framing in the draft Terms of Reference will inhibit frank discussions about trade-offs, the transparent sharing and analysis of financial data and assumptions, and the pressure on the University to seek creative and innovative solutions to complex planning challenges.
- 2) Even more troubling, the Terms of Reference introduce a very specific proposal to increase development in UBC neighbourhoods by up to 2.75 million sq ft, a 20% increase to the 13.7 million sq ft of development envisioned in the current land-use plan. It's important to note that approximately 8.3 million sq ft have already been built in existing neighbourhoods, so the proposal represents an increase of up to 50% of the remaining development planned. It is also disingenuous to propose 20% as an upper bound when the full 2.75 million sq ft is already being incorporated into the development scenarios being advanced in the design charrettes. This additional development will necessitate densities and building heights far out of proportion with existing neighbourhoods, densities that would undermine other priorities for sustainability, green space, and healthy communities.

The updated draft Terms, released only in mid-May, advance these new development goals without meaningful public consultation, without a full consideration of multiple development scenarios and trade-offs, and without accompanying data on financing constraints and opportunities. **It is premature and inappropriate to insert a 50% increase in new development into the Terms of Reference.**

UNA Recommendations

Based on the UNA's consultations with its residents, and our hope that UBC will pursue bold and innovative solutions to UBC's planning challenges and opportunities, the UNA supports the following goals in the next phase of the Campus Vision process.

1. UBC should do more for housing affordability. The UNA supports calls to allocate a minimum of 60% of new campus development to affordable rental and ownership options for those who work and study at the University and within UBC neighbourhoods. We understand that "affordability" currently refers to the ability of residents "to rent, lease, or purchase without having to spend more than 30% of pre-tax household income on housing costs."⁵ The UNA endorses efforts to supply affordable housing across the full range of incomes and circumstances represented in the UBC community, including faculty at all career stages, staff

⁵ C&CP definition at <https://www.myuna.ca/campusvision2050/>

and local employees, students and post-docs with families and limited incomes, and residents with varying abilities and accessibility needs. Housing UBC faculty and staff and local employees in UBC neighbourhoods reduces the environmental and social costs of long commutes, builds community, and represents a long-term investment in UBC's academic and financial future.

2. UBC should place climate action at the centre of its neighbourhood development plan. UBC declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has set an ambitious course for its academic core. It should do the same for the residential neighbourhoods. Rather than a plan that commits the University to building dozens of new carbon-intensive concrete and steel towers, UBC should extend its innovative, more sustainable mass-timber construction to its neighbourhoods. And the University should prioritize safeguarding and increasing natural areas and greenspaces on campus as part of an integrated climate change adaptation strategy. The broader point here is that Campus Vision 2050 plans should facilitate the adoption of more sustainable construction and energy technologies, as well as green urban planning approaches, rather than foreclose or limit their use.

3. The University should strive to be a global leader in sustainable, affordable community planning. UBC should rethink its outmoded, revenue-driven model of development, which prioritizes short-term profit over long-term stewardship, and density over livability. How can it do this? **The University should take advantage of its world-renowned experts in urban planning, environmental engineering, sustainability, finance, public health, education, urban forestry, biodiversity, et al. to plan and build model communities.** The UNA urges UBC to mobilize fully the intellectual, social, and financial capital of its extended community of faculty, staff, students, and alumni to build balanced, livable, and sustainable communities. This includes neighbourhoods optimally and equitably provisioned with schools and child care; green spaces; social and health services; a wide assortment of retail outlets; recreational facilities; and diverse housing types and sizes, built to serve long-term environmental sustainability and community cohesion across cultures and generations.

UBC aspires to leadership in sustainable urban planning and has acknowledged climate and affordability crises. Both sustainability and affordability have a direct impact on its academic mission, as well as the well-being of its students and employees. UBC has effectively built a new, and still unconsolidated and under-provisioned, city on campus, currently home to 15,000 residents and growing faster than almost anywhere else in British Columbia. Balancing the University's obligations, aspirations, and principles will demand new levels of creativity and innovation for envisioning the urban fabric. The draft Terms of Reference premature emphasis on more square footage reproduces old, unsustainable formulas for neighbourhood development and inhibits bold and creative solutions for addressing the climate emergency, financing affordable housing, and building exceptional communities that model the way forward through the climate crisis and the crisis of affordability.

Sincerely,



Richard Watson
Chair, Board of Directors
University Neighbourhoods Association

Appendix A – Summary of UNA Resident Consultation

At the townhall in March, residents recognized that more development is coming, but they indicated strong support for the preservation of green spaces and the prioritization of community cohesion over growth. Townhall speakers also called for more attention to sustainability in present and future neighbourhoods; more opportunities for community connections across cultures; a greater emphasis on families in development of housing, schools, and services; and for UBC to demonstrably hear and respond to community voices.

There were 876 responses to the UNA's Community Engagement Survey's questions about current and future development in UBC neighbourhoods. Community members of the UNA's Land Use Advisory Committee did an extensive qualitative and quantitative analysis of the open-ended answers. Respondents emphasized the following priorities, for both existing and future neighbourhoods: trees, green space, and community-oriented space; low-rise construction, density without towers; the need for more retail, services, childcare, and schools, proportionate to the growing population; the need for more affordable housing with priority for those who work at UBC; emphasis on rental housing over market leasehold developments; and the importance of sustainability and sensitivity to local ecologies in current and future development.

The overwhelming majority of responses touched on the question of proportion: the need for development to balance the needs of affordability, a healthy social environment, safety, community cohesion, and environmental sustainability. Several responses were explicit in describing how they envisioned this balance: like the Hawthorn neighbourhood, with its mix of 4-6 story apartment buildings and townhouse communities; ample greenways, parks, community gardens, car-free courtyards, forests and fields; and a community centre with a restaurant and outdoor public space for casual and organized gatherings welcoming to residents of all ages and backgrounds.

Summary of UNA's Engagement

The Land Use committee engaged with residents and UBC to provide meaningful feedback on the needs and aspirations phase of CV2050.



Resident Virtual Town Hall



Resident Survey

- 3 open-ended questions
- 876 responses



Engagement with UBC Campus and Community Planning

Resident Survey: Responses

876 respondents, three open-ended questions



Q1

What are key elements of UBC neighbourhoods that should be preserved?



Q2

What do you hope does NOT happen in the Land Use Plan?



Q3

What would you want the UBC neighbourhoods to look like in 30 years?

Analysis of Resident Survey

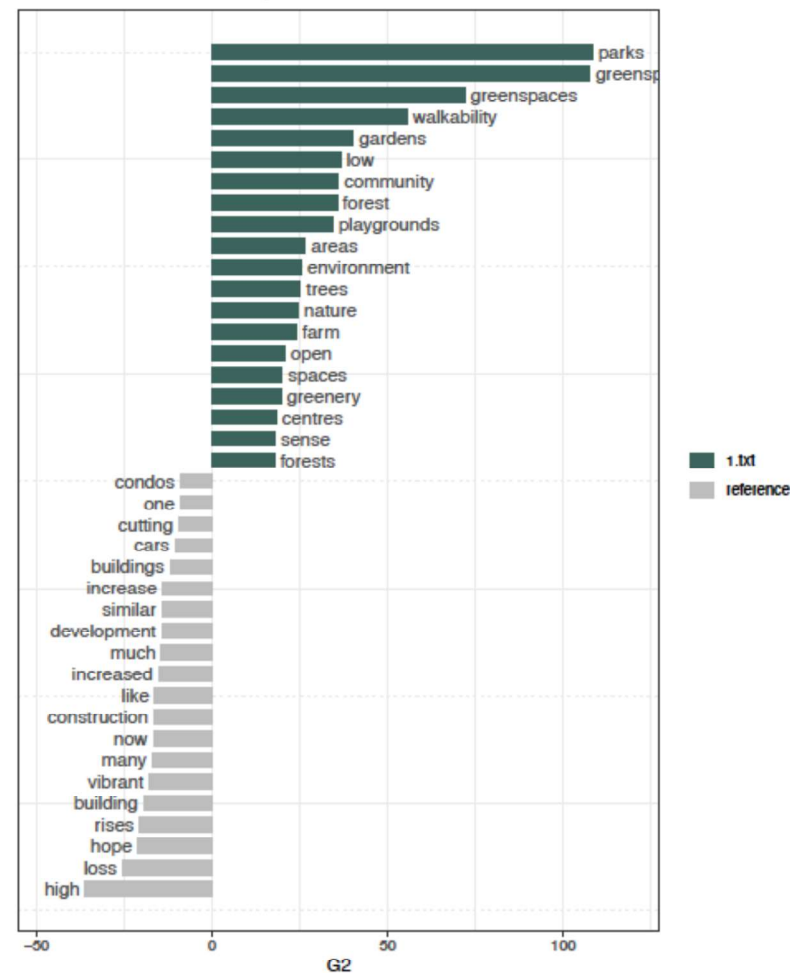
Methods. Analysis performed in R Statistical Analysis Software using the Quantenda package.

Keyness – terms that are most distinctive for responses to a question compared to all of the responses combined

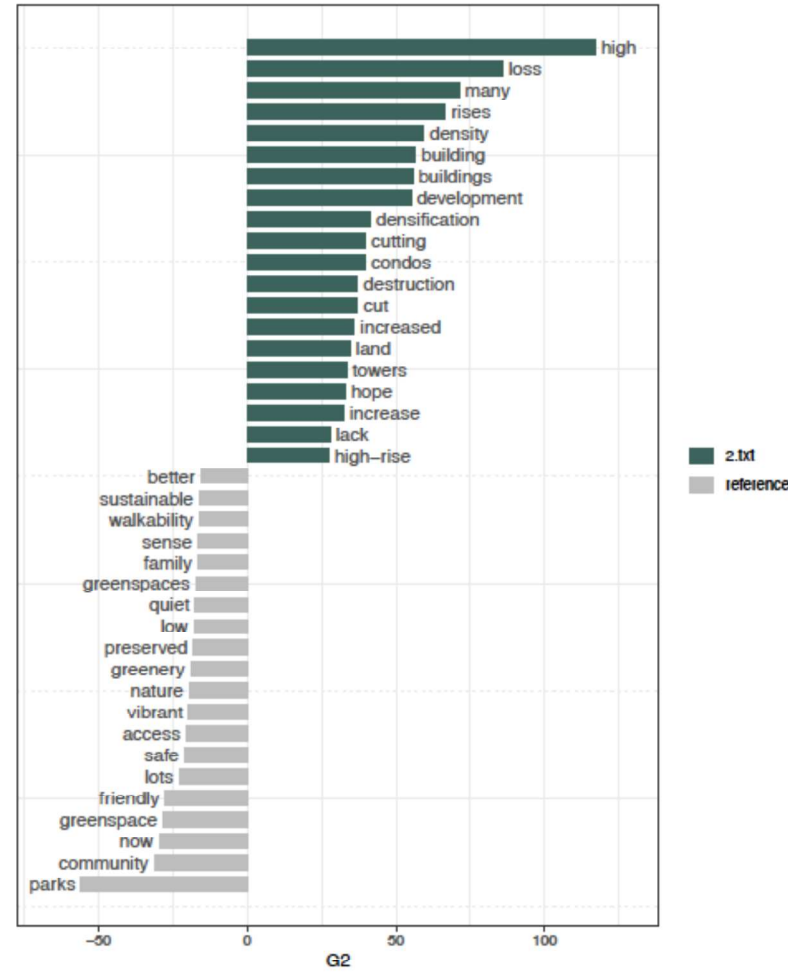
Green bars - words that are most distinct for that question

Grey bars – words that appear in responses to other questions and rarely in responses for the focal question.

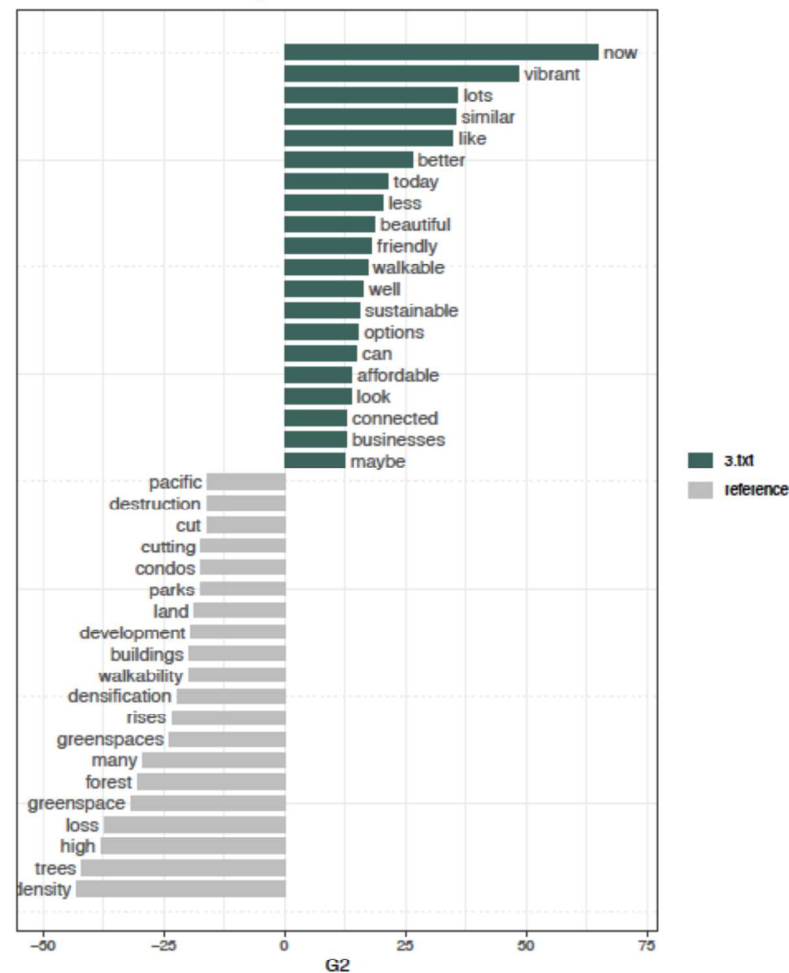
Question 1 Keyness terms



Question 2 keyness terms

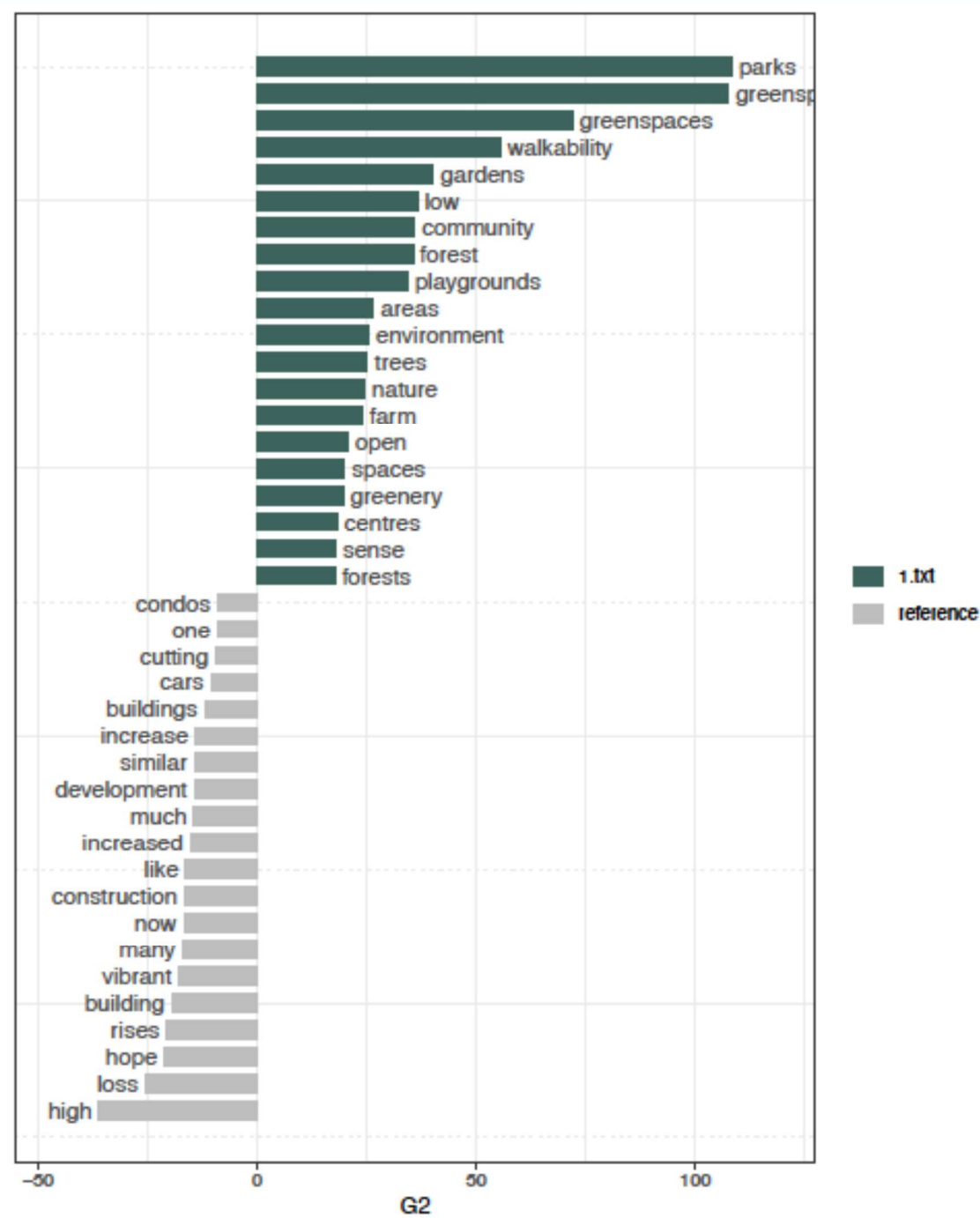


Question 3 keyness terms



Q1: What are key elements of UBC neighbourhoods that should be preserved?

Keyness

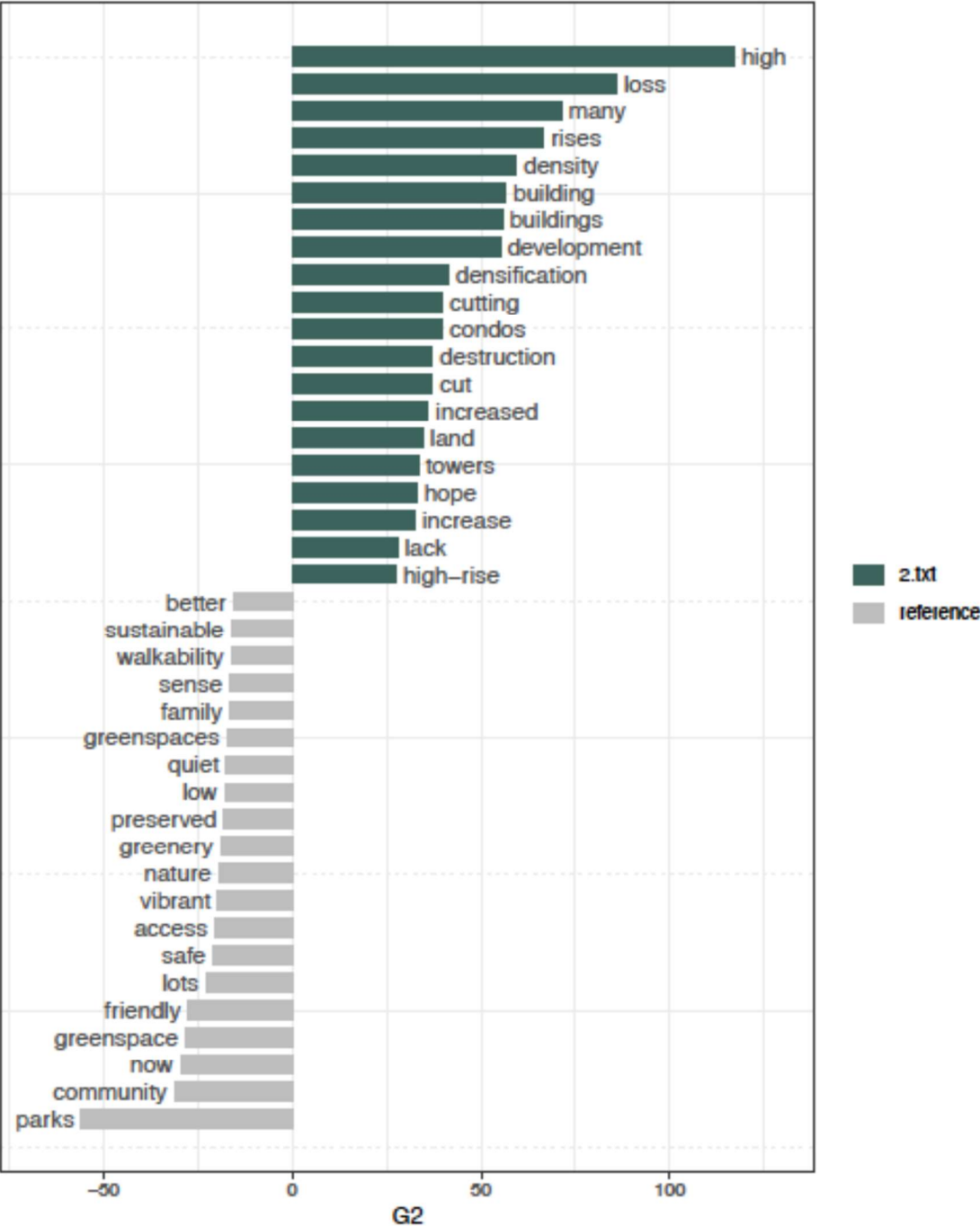


Sample responses

- “**Sense of belonging, community engagement**, family friendly spaces, community gardens, communal gathering spaces, playgrounds outdoor spaces, walking paths”
- “I am very concerned about **degradation of forests and parks** as population density increases”
- “We need **more affordable housing for students, staff and faculty** without harming the forest and surrounding green space”
- “You can’t just add people without adding **greenery**”
- “**Balance between nature and human development**—preserving green space, strong climate action, livable communities”
- “**Green space**, trails, parks, mixed-use open areas, community gardens, trees”

Q2: What do you hope does NOT happen in the Land Use Plan?

Keyness

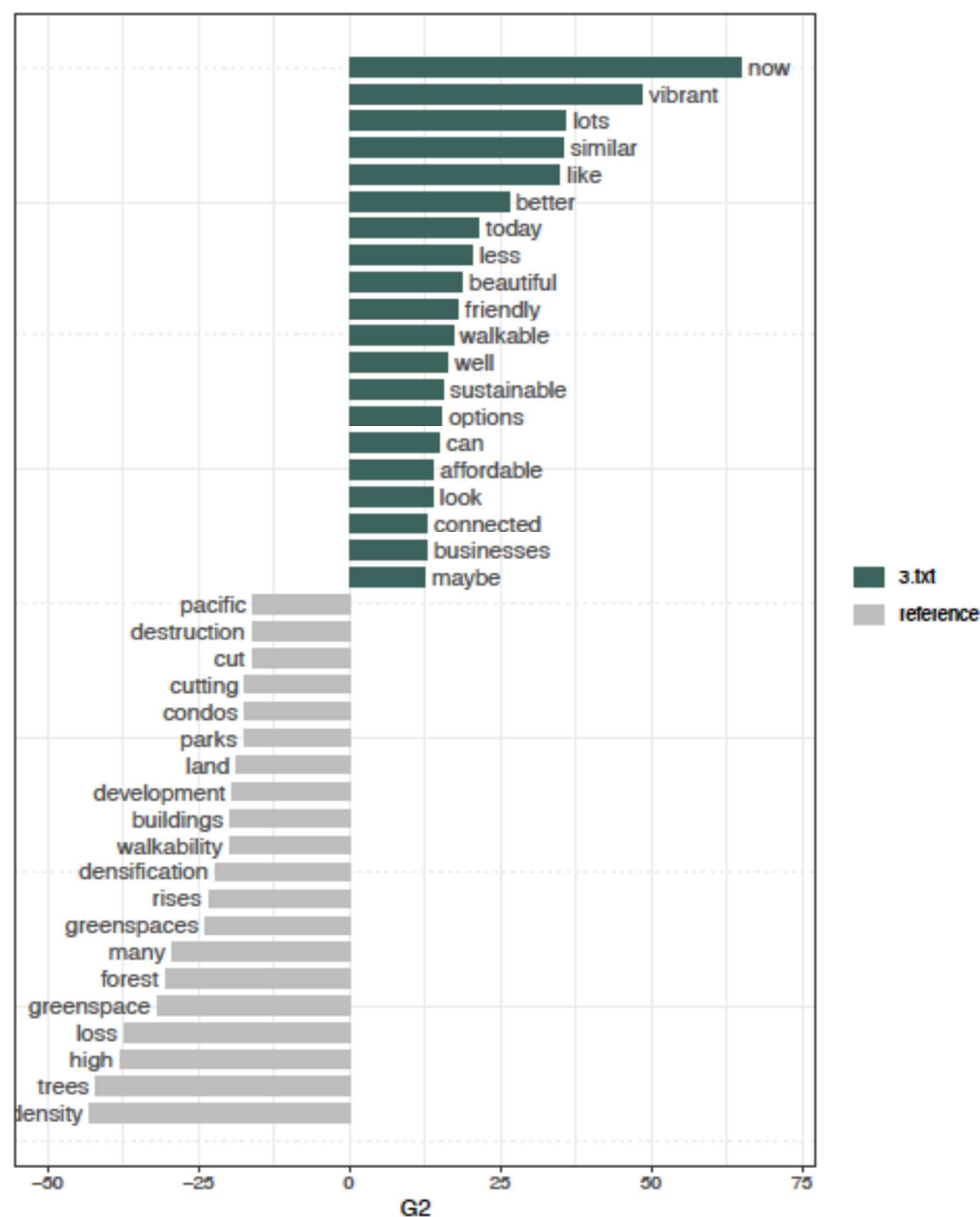


Sample responses

- “**Ultra high density**, destruction of green/natural spaces, poor traffic planning, lack of services such as school spaces, **not addressing sustainability**”
- “**Density without enough shops, services, schools**, community garden spots, post offices, without awareness that those with mobility needs still may need to use a car on campus”
- “Don’t want more high end luxury condos and townhomes. **Housing needs to be more affordable with plans for long term residency**”
- “Further rapid development without adequate planning or consideration of our **ecosystem**”
- “Prioritization of money and profit over community and **services for UBC-affiliated residents**”
- “Increased development and densification at the cost **of liveability, climate resilience and biodiversity**”
- “We need **family housing that is affordable** and sized for 3-5 people (many people are squeezing kids into “dens” [windowless small spaces])”

Q3: What would you want the UBC neighbourhoods to look like in 30 years?

Keyness



Sample responses

The themes are similar to responses on Q’s 1 & 2:
green spaces, affordable housing, services & amenities, a sense of community linked to nature.

“A place where **people can live during various life stages** (play in childhood, studying, being a a single adult, family raising children, retirement.

Diverse mix of **AFFORDABLE housing** that caters to a variety of resident/family needs - **faculty/staff/students need to be prioritized** as the university cannot function without them, lots of greenspace and natural wildlife habitat, more amenities.

A number of respondents said they want the future to be “**the same as now**”.

Hawthorn was frequently mentioned as a ‘**balanced neighbourhood**’.

Resident Survey: Word Cloud



A visualization of the most common words used in response to survey questions.

- Question 1: red text
- Question 2: blue text
- Question 3: green text

Appendix B – UBC’s Needs and Aspirations Engagement Summary

The preferences and concerns expressed by UNA residents closely track with the responses coming out of the Campus Vision 2050 engagement process to date, as summarized in the recent “Needs and Aspirations Engagement Summary”.⁶ We’d like to quote, and endorse, key elements of that summary, with a reminder that “campus” refers both to the academic lands and to the neighbourhoods represented by the UNA.

1. **Addressing the affordability crisis** — we heard that life on campus is unaffordable for many, and getting worse, and that more housing needs to be built for the UBC community.
2. **Accessibility and safety of campus** — we heard that campus can be inaccessible to some, difficult to get around and unsafe at times.
3. **Meeting the needs of our diverse communities** — we heard a strong call for more amenities and services (e.g., grocery stores, daycares and schools) to enable thriving communities.
4. **How UBC uses land to finance campus needs** — we heard concern that market housing is outpacing housing for students, faculty, and staff, and that it is coming at the expense of livability, campus character and green space.
5. **xwməθkwəyəm and Indigenous campus presence** — we heard strong interest from the community in honouring and celebrating xwməθkwəyəm and Indigenous ways of knowing.
6. **UBC’s mission** — we heard a strong desire to emphasize UBC as a university and place of learning above all else.
7. **Climate emergency and campus resilience** — we heard calls for UBC to lead climate action by example and to build more climate-adaptive and green infrastructure... we heard a call for stronger language and targets to demonstrate institutional commitment to this principle, as well as support for climate adaptable and resilient buildings.
8. **Managing growth and the preservation of green space and biodiversity** — we heard strong calls to protect campus green space and to consider the capacity of the campus to grow.
 - **Campus ecology, livability and funding UBC’s priorities** — we heard strong feedback that funding and housing development does not fit within considerations of ecological stewardship, and that green spaces and forested areas should be preserved on campus.
 - **Strengthen campus and regional connectivity** — we heard support for the arrival of SkyTrain to UBC and concern around potential impacts that result from new transportation infrastructure investment. We also heard support for more cycling infrastructure on campus, and a call for ecological connectivity and biodiversity to be considered under this principle.

⁶UBC Campus and Community Planning, “Campus Vision 2050 Needs and Aspirations Engagement Summary,” spring 2022, pp 5-6.