

BACKGROUND

The Special Areas Board recognizes the value of engaging with the public as a part of the municipal decision-making process and is committed to creating opportunities for meaningful public participation.

Special Areas ran the 2025 Resident Satisfaction Survey from May to September to learn how residents feel about life in the region, priorities for investment, and satisfaction with services. The survey also gathered perceptions of public safety, levels of satisfaction with staff interactions, representation by elected officials, and perceived value for taxes. Feedback collected through this engagement would then be able to be used to help shape strategic priorities, services and programs moving forward.

WHAT WE DID

An online survey was created to collect feedback from residents in the Special Areas region. This survey was hosted online at www.surveymonkey.com. Multiple collectors were used to help identify how respondents heard about the survey, including an online link (social media), local ads in newspapers, signage at district offices, information inserts in grazing lease notices, and a popup link on website. Survey collectors were configured to prevent multiple responses.

The survey gathered 85 complete responses from rural residents, residents from towns and hamlets in the region, and some residents living outside the Special Areas. The majority of responses came from residents in Special Area No. 2, 3 & 4 (76% of responses); one-fifth of respondents lived in towns/villages in the region. Generally, respondents were more likely to be working-age adults and be employed in agriculture; there were more female than male respondents.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on survey findings, we heard that Special Areas provides many services that residents value - especially emergency services and water management - but that daily, high-use services like roads and waste management are a source of concern. While overall resident satisfaction is fairly strong, it hasn't translated into enthusiasm for recommending the region (Net Promotor Score = -26). Residents turn to social media and email for information, but those channels aren't widely used or trusted for two-way service requests.

With only 85 complete responses, the survey provides valuable insights but lacks the statistical robustness of larger, externally administered surveys. Findings should be viewed as general insights or considerations.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Quality of Life:** 83% of respondents rated quality of life as "High" or "Very High." However, the Net Promoter Score (NPS) was -26, indicating limited enthusiasm for recommending the region.
- **Overall Service Satisfaction:** 78% were satisfied (9% Very Satisfied, 69% Satisfied). The highest-rated services included Fire & Emergency Services (90%) and Water & Wastewater (80%). Road Maintenance (49%) and Waste Management (50%) received the lowest satisfaction scores.

- **Governance & Representation:** Staff interactions were rated positively, but effective representation by Advisory Councillors received the lowest agreement among governance-related statements.
- **Value for Taxes:** Special Areas had an average score of 63 out of 100.
- **Resident Priorities:** Top strategic priorities identified by respondents included local healthcare access, road maintenance, lower municipal taxes, and education.
- **Engagement & Communication:** 70% of respondents wanted more opportunities to influence decision-making, while only 36% felt current opportunities were sufficient. Social media was the most preferred method for receiving information (56%) but was rarely used for contacting Special Areas.

THEMES FROM OPEN RESPONSES

Respondents were asked if they had any additional comments for Advisory Council. A quarter of respondents left comments that showed clear priorities: improve roads and healthcare, strengthen governance and transparency, and boost community engagement. Residents wanted more proactive communication, targeted investments, and inclusive decision-making which reflected the region's diverse needs.

- **Healthcare access:** need for local and emergency care capacity and staffing.
- **Road maintenance:** concerns about road condition, snowplowing, access to gravel, and resource scheduling.
- **Governance and transparency:** requests for clearer communication from Advisory Councillors and more visible decision-making.
- **Community facilities:** desire to invest in and maintain halls, recreation and public spaces.
- **Environment and land use:** some frustration with weed control, land maintenance, and the impacts of renewable energy projects.
- **Economic development:** calls to support local business and agricultural innovation.

HOW FEEDBACK WILL BE USED

The goal of this public engagement was to better understand the issues facing residents in the Special Areas region, and to provide an opportunity to give feedback to Advisory Council using an online anonymous survey tool. Survey findings will be shared with Advisory Council late 2025.

Feedback collected through this engagement will be used to help shape strategic priorities, services and programs moving forward.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

For more information on this report, or on public engagement by the Special Areas Board, please visit <https://specialareas.ab.ca/about/public-consultation/> or contact Maeghan Chostner, Communications Officer, at public.input@specialareas.ab.ca / (403) 854-5611.