

OUR CITY. OUR FUTURE.



# Downtown Pedestrian Mall

What we Heard from Public Engagement  
October 2020

ST. JOHN'S

# Disclaimer

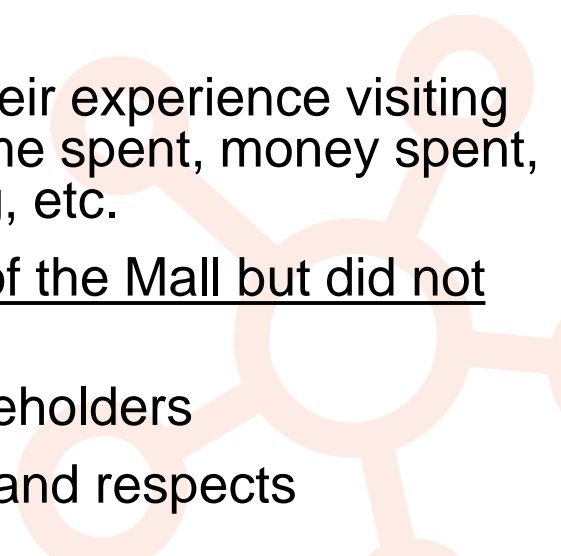
- This document aims to provide a summary of what was heard from participants during the public engagement process. It is not meant to reflect the specific details of each submission or conversation word-for-word.
- The City produces a What we Heard document for every city-lead project where public engagement is used to share back with the community the commentary collected and to ensure we heard you correctly.
- The full scope of commentary is used by the project team, city staff, and Council to help inform recommendations and decisions.



# Context and Background

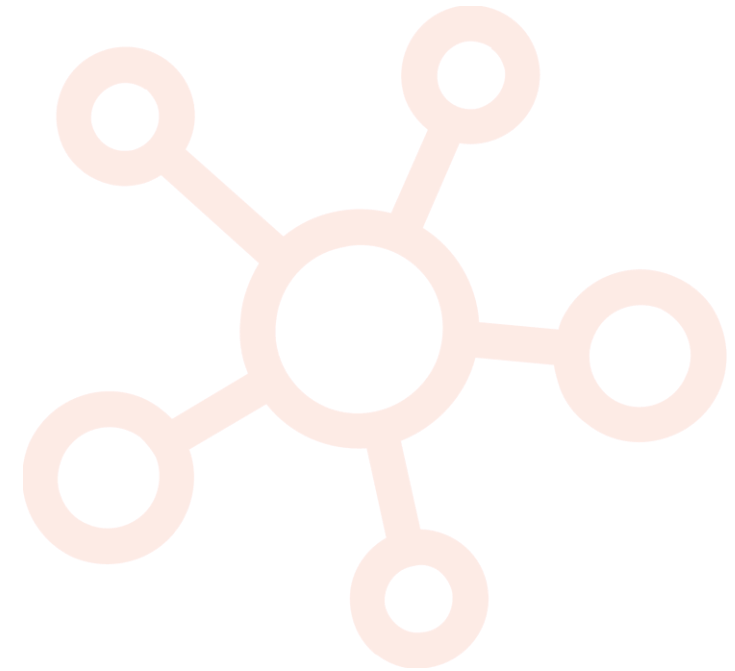
- The Downtown Pedestrian Mall (the Mall) was developed in response to, and as a means of, providing a stimulant to the downtown economy and to create space for residents to enjoy the outdoors in a safe, public health guided way.
- Timelines were tight; feedback from the business community prior to and throughout the process was facilitated by Downtown St. John's.
- The section of Water Street closed to traffic to create the Mall included four blocks from Adelaide St. to Prescott St.
- Deliveries and essential traffic were allowed through the street before noon each day and by exception on an as-needed basis.
- Businesses within the Mall space were able to extend their footprint to increase capacity by way of permit process .
- Businesses in the Downtown but outside the Mall space were able to avail of parklettes.
- The Mall was one of few actual “events’ happening in and around St. John's in summer 2020.
- Accessibility concerns were raised early in implementation in relation to access to sidewalks and patios.
- Some businesses in the Downtown expressed concerns about the Mall throughout the implementation.

# Purpose of Public Engagement

- Gather feedback from businesses within the Mall about their experience from a planning, implementation, and future Mall perspective
  - Gather feedback from businesses in the Downtown but outside the Mall about their experience from a planning, implementation, and future Mall perspective
  - Gather feedback from other stakeholders impacted by the Mall including the transportation sector, inclusion community
  - Gather feedback and perspectives from users of the Mall about their experience visiting the Mall and Downtown generally including how they got there, time spent, money spent, types of businesses visited, what they liked, what was challenging, etc.
  - Gather feedback and perspectives from people who were aware of the Mall but did not use it, to better understand why they did not visit the Mall
  - Provide simple, easy to use tools to gather feedback from all stakeholders
  - Ensure the engagement is timely to capture real-time experience and respects businesses time
- 

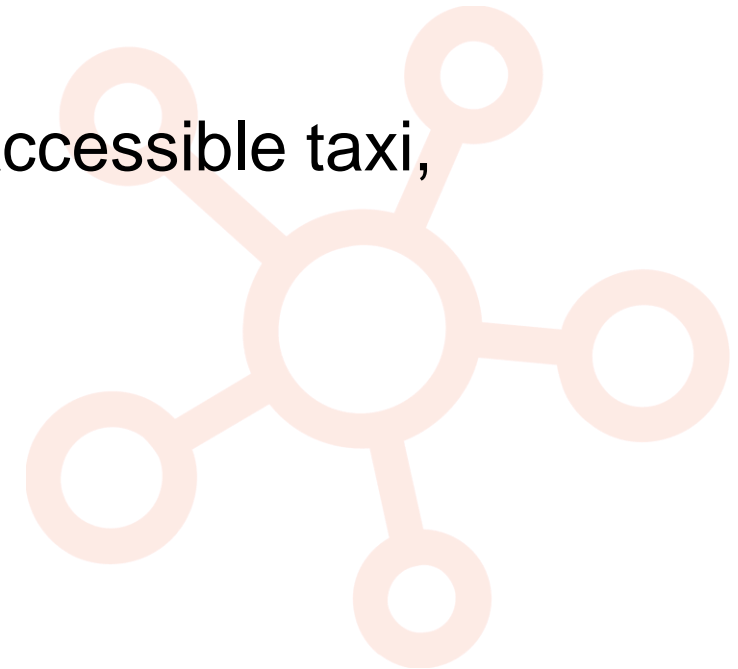
# Public Engagement Goal

- Be able to use the information gathered through public engagement in combination with technical assessments and feedback from the Special Events Regulatory Committee to make recommendations for future pedestrian malls.



# Stakeholders

- Businesses within the Mall
- Businesses in the Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA) but outside the Mall and those on the periphery of BIA
- Business Associations
- People who live Downtown
- Transportation Services – Public transit, Go Bus/Accessible taxi, taxis, couriers, delivery
- Persons with Disabilities
- Visitors/Users of the Mall
- Non-visitors of the Mall



# Public Engagement Tools

Tactic	Target Group
Engage Page with Ideas Tool and Stories (what worked well, what was challenging for you, what could we do to improve the user experience)	Users/non-users of the mall
Surveys	Business stakeholders  Public survey
Social media – Quick polls	Users/non-users
Focus groups – Key stakeholder groups	Businesses, Transportation Sector and Inclusion
Point in time feedback – on the street survey	Users
Email and calls to 311	Users/non-users and other stakeholders who are not able to use other tools provided



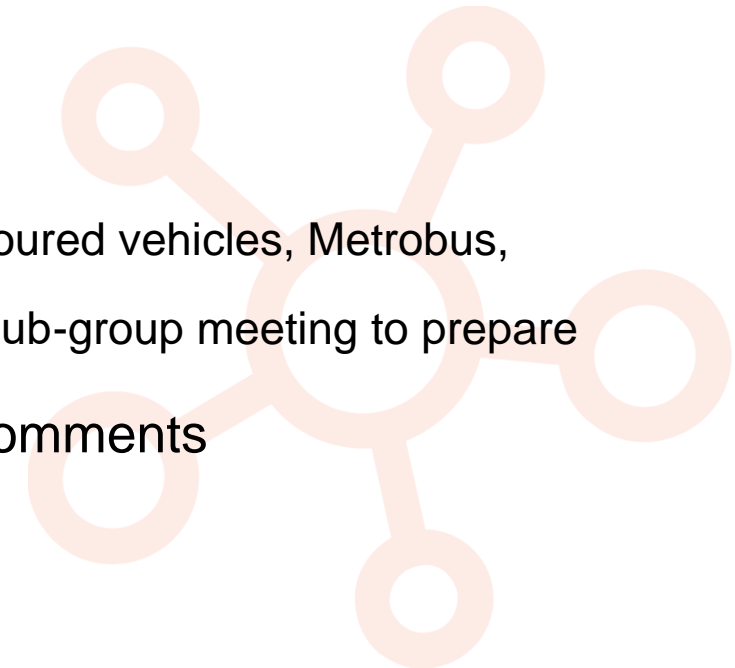
# Promotion of Public Engagement

- The City shared information about business stakeholder sessions and provided a link to the business survey via email with business associations who communicated directly with their members. This included: Downtown St. John's, St. John's Board of Trade, George Street Association, Destination St. John's, and Building Owners and Managers' Association. Promotion ran from Sept. 21 to Oct. 6.
- Public promotion began on Sept. 30 and ran until Oct. 11 and included a newsletter to over 2600 registered users of [engagestjohns.ca](http://engagestjohns.ca), social media posts (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), city website content and paid advertising in the Telegram and VOXM, and within City Community Centres.
- Other key stakeholder groups were sent direct invitations to meetings.



# Points of Engagement


- Nearly 1,900 visitors to engage, 177 of whom were actively engaged – 779 interactions with the ideas tool
- Public surveys – 463 responses to the public online survey, 57 intercept surveys on the street during the Mall
- Business survey – 114 surveys completed
- Business stakeholder focus groups - five sessions – 16 business participated
- Business feedback via email or phone call – three submissions
- Public feedback via email – 12 submissions
- Other stakeholder sessions:
  - One session with transportation sector which included taxi, courier, armoured vehicles, Metrobus, Go-Bus
  - One meeting with City's Inclusion Advisory Committee who then had a sub-group meeting to prepare a response
- Social Media – reached 50,777 people, 1987 engagements, 13 comments



# What the Public told us about the Pedestrian Mall

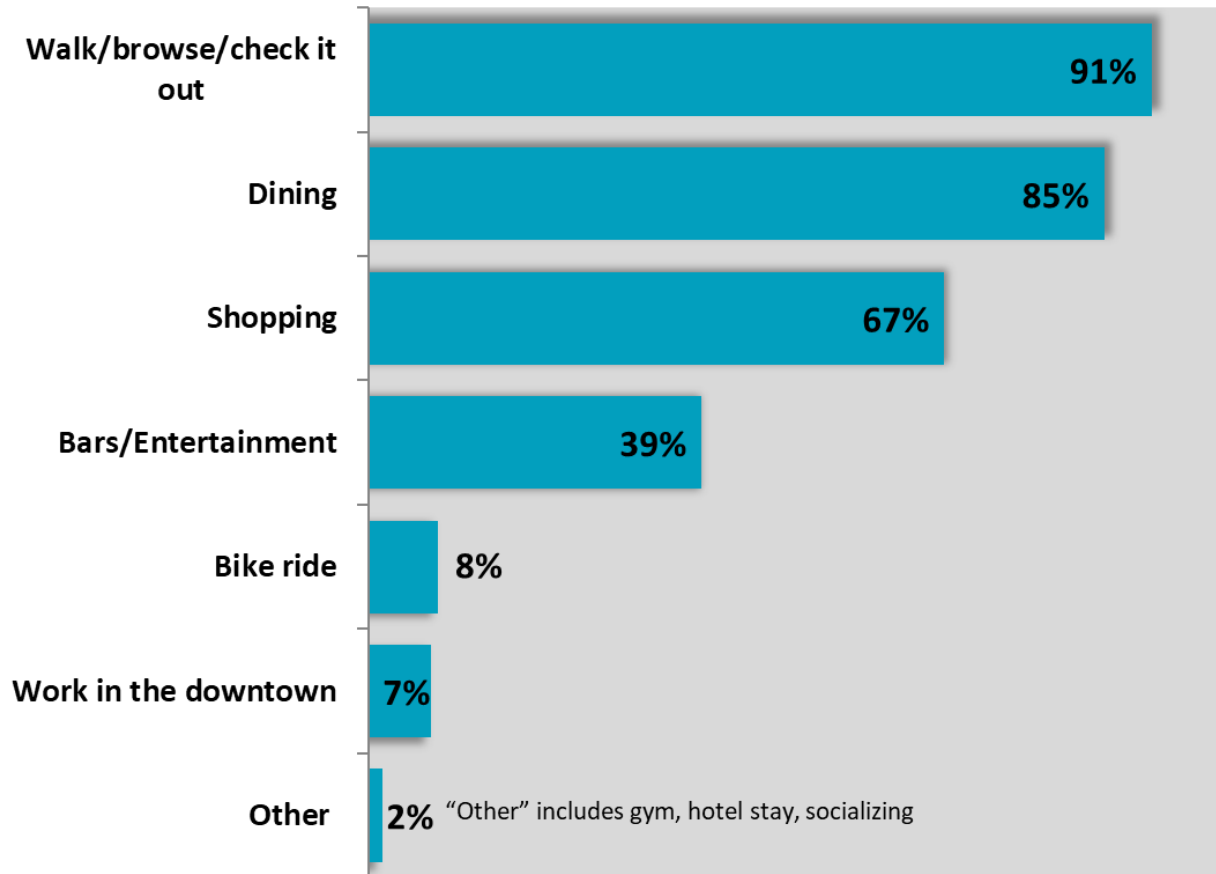
## What they liked

- Sense of community/family-friendly/safe
- Liked the “vibe” and energy created
- Able to support local businesses
- Discovered new stores
- Able to maintain space between other people
- Could walk, stroll, meet up with friends
- Eating outside/public spaces and business spaces
- Less noise
- Brought people to the Downtown who don’t normally visit
- Changed the character of the Downtown
- Downtown became a destination/attraction
- Felt European



**“I spent more time and money downtown this summer than I have in years.”**

# Purpose of visits - How they got there - Where they parked



Multiple responses permitted

85%

Visited the mall 3 or more times

50% +

Visited businesses outside the Mall

59% drove  
48% walked

How they got there

82% on  
street 42%  
paid parking  
garage

Where they parked

## Deciding to go downtown

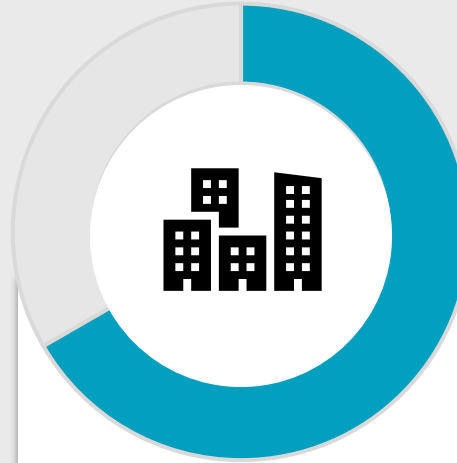


**89%**

**The availability of the Mall influenced the decision to go Downtown.**

n = 486

## Discovering new services

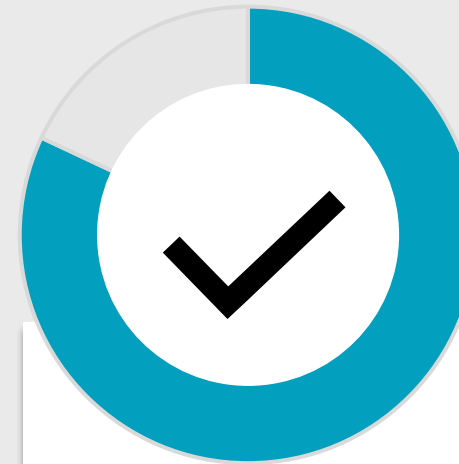


**63%**

**The Mall helped the patron discover new services or businesses in the Downtown.**

n = 486

## Choosing Downtown in the future



**82%**

**Experience with the Mall increased the likelihood the patron would shop/dine etc. in the Downtown in the future**

n = 476

**75%**

**Of respondents who were previously infrequent visitors to the downtown (yearly or never) indicated they were now more likely to choose the Downtown in the future**

n = 73

# What the Public told us about the Pedestrian Mall

## What was challenging/tricky

- Accessibility, especially blue zone parking, wheelchair access on the street
- Intersecting streets that were open to traffic created less safety, especially for kids
- Panhandlers
- Was called pedestrian but people allowed on bikes, scooters
- Decks connected to buildings created some challenges for some - funnels
- Too little public transit to and from the Downtown
- Parking
- Recycling bin access

“The Pedestrian Mall was not accessible to senior citizens especially those with mobility issues. Nor was it accessible to anyone with mobility or other health issues.”

6% of people surveyed did not visit the Mall. Reasons for not visiting included:

- Parking
- Public health concerns
- Not interested
- Accessibility concerns



# What the Public told us about the Pedestrian Mall

## What they want to see improved

- Include other areas such as Duckworth Street and George Street
- Extend the season/start earlier and go later into fall or consider year-round
- Opportunities to add buskers, food trucks, pop up/bring the stores outside
- More things for kids to do
- Signage – arrows on the streets, directional signs on the street and to other areas
- Beautification – more trees/greenery
- Fill the dead zones
- Promote alternative transportation like bus routes
- Flea markets
- More “doggy doo” bags
- Dedicated areas/lanes for skateboarders/bikes
- More bike racks
- Connect to a trail network to make it truly pedestrian/active transportation
- More places to sit outside of business spaces

- More cleaning
- Consider how the next phases of the Water Street project could support improvements for a Pedestrian Mall
- Make better use of the courthouse square
- Better/improved lighting
- Make use of parking lots inside the Mall to add to the Mall –use all the space
- Market the Mall as quality of life activity not just as a business/consumer activity
- Increase awareness of parking spaces – through signage
- Accessible Public Washrooms
- Booths at either end – think Tourism
- Christmas market
- Free Wi-Fi
- Angle parking on Harbour Drive to increase parking availability
- Trolley service to improve accessibility

“More, just more of everything!”

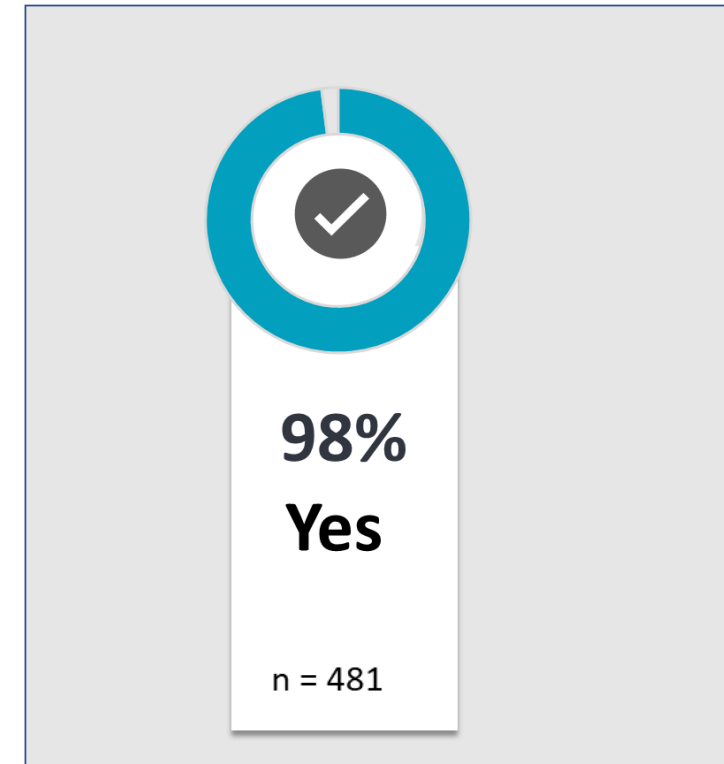
# From the public perspective

Survey respondents rated their overall satisfaction with the pedestrian mall on scale of 1 to 5 where 1 was poor and 5 was excellent



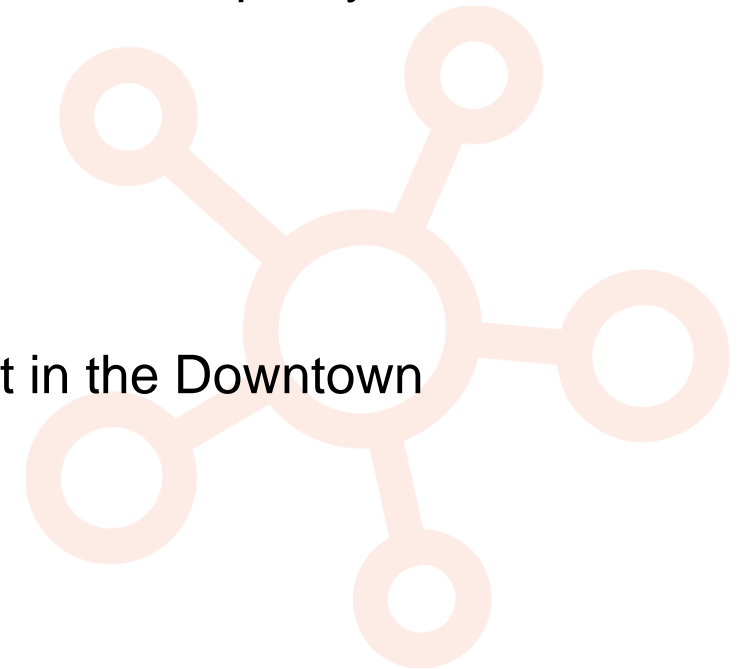
To read more about what the public said specifically through the survey, click [here](#).

Should the Downtown Pedestrian Mall be considered for the future?



# What we heard from the Inclusion Community

- They felt there was no consultation during the planning process and when feedback was sought there was not enough time to influence design.
- Blue zone parking inside the Mall was problematic; forcing people to drive through a pedestrian street. Other areas for blue zone parking were not well placed.
- Access to businesses was limited and when ramps were added to decks it did not always increase accessibility if the buildings were not accessible, i.e. washrooms; quality and standard of ramps not consistent.
- Signage an issue/no wayfinding
- Obstacles on sidewalks
- No calm/quiet areas
- No on street assistance for people with disabilities
- Creation of new barriers not removal of old ones that already exist in the Downtown
- Lack of curb cuts



# Recommendations from Inclusion Community

- Application of Universal design
- Simplify Mall: no need for raised decks
- Use technology to help people navigate the space, examples include Blind Square
- Adopt + Apply CSA B651-18 Standards
- Address broad spectrum of persons with disabilities
- Inclusion Education for business community Downtown
- Better timelines for communication and engagement
  - To inclusion stakeholders, include Inclusion Advisory Committee
  - To broader public
- Develop modular pieces by the city for synthesis of design
- See 'Mall' as total system and treat it like that
- Influence standards of design on the street with capacity for some aesthetic
- Focus on performance and evaluation of Water St. generally
- Know what standards will be reduced
- Come up with a comprehensive recipe to address needs and wants – must haves
- Research and implement best practices
- Develop colour consistency throughout mall
- Colour contrasting and cohesion
- Have people around to ask for help who are well-marked and trained in inclusion

# What we heard from the business community within the Pedestrian Mall

## What worked well for them

- Many said it saved their businesses in a time when it was needed most – City staff very helpful and speed with which it was done
- Brought thousands of people to the Downtown and shone a light on the Downtown as a destination, new clients/customers
- Never heard issues about parking
- 7 days a week worked for consistency
- Created a buzz for use of empty spaces, apartments in and around the Downtown
- Access to extra space/ability to build decks, use sidewalks

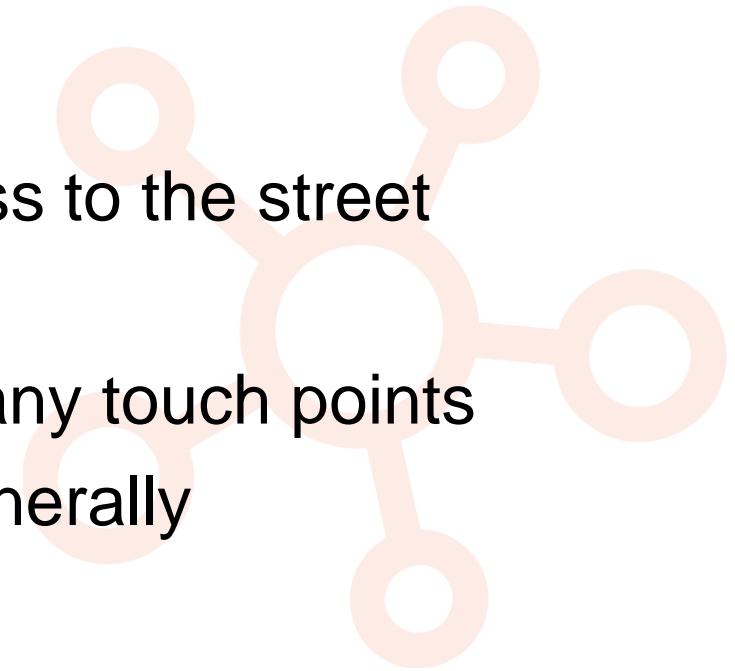




# What we heard from the business community within the Pedestrian Mall

## What was challenging or tricky for them

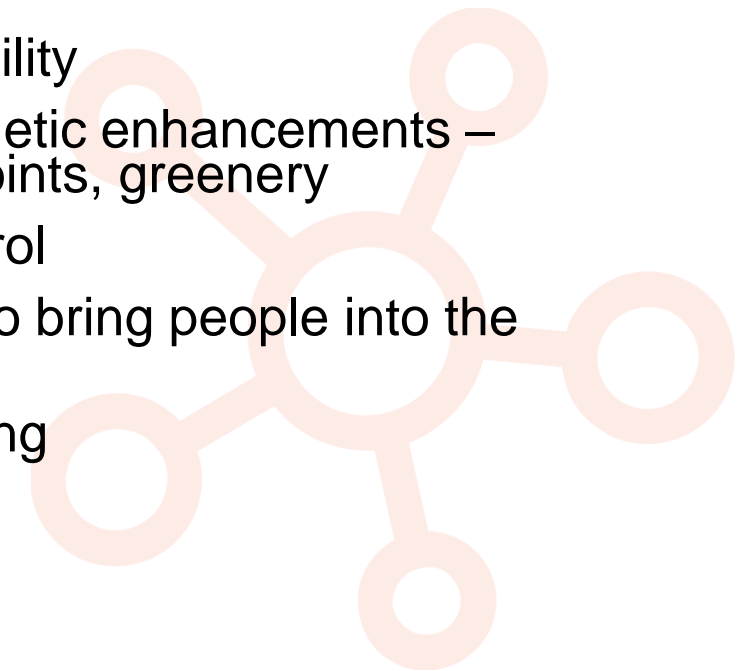
- Some vandalism but security on the street was appreciated
- Music from neighbours' decks and line ups for other businesses in front of their entrances
- Cigarette butts and smoking in general
- Some challenges with deliveries and getting access to the street
- Not extending it into the fall
- Some challenges with the permitting process – many touch points
- On bad weather days there were fewer visitors generally



# What we heard from the business community within the Pedestrian Mall

## Recommendations for a future Mall

- Open earlier - extend the season – some suggested year-round could work
- Some would like to have permanent structures
- Would like to see a Christmas event
- Have a designated location outside the Mall but close to businesses that need to offer curb side pick up
- Better security and cleaning
- Extend to include other areas such as Water Street to Waldegrave, Duckworth, Harbour Drive
- Post-Covid, more activity on the street, music, buskers, etc.
- Some restrictions on bikes and skateboards
- Do not close sidewalks in front of restaurants, ensure access to restaurants/decks is from the street, not the sidewalk
- Improve accessibility
- More visual/aesthetic enhancements – entry and exist points, greenery
- Better traffic control
- Shuttle services to bring people into the Downtown
- More public seating



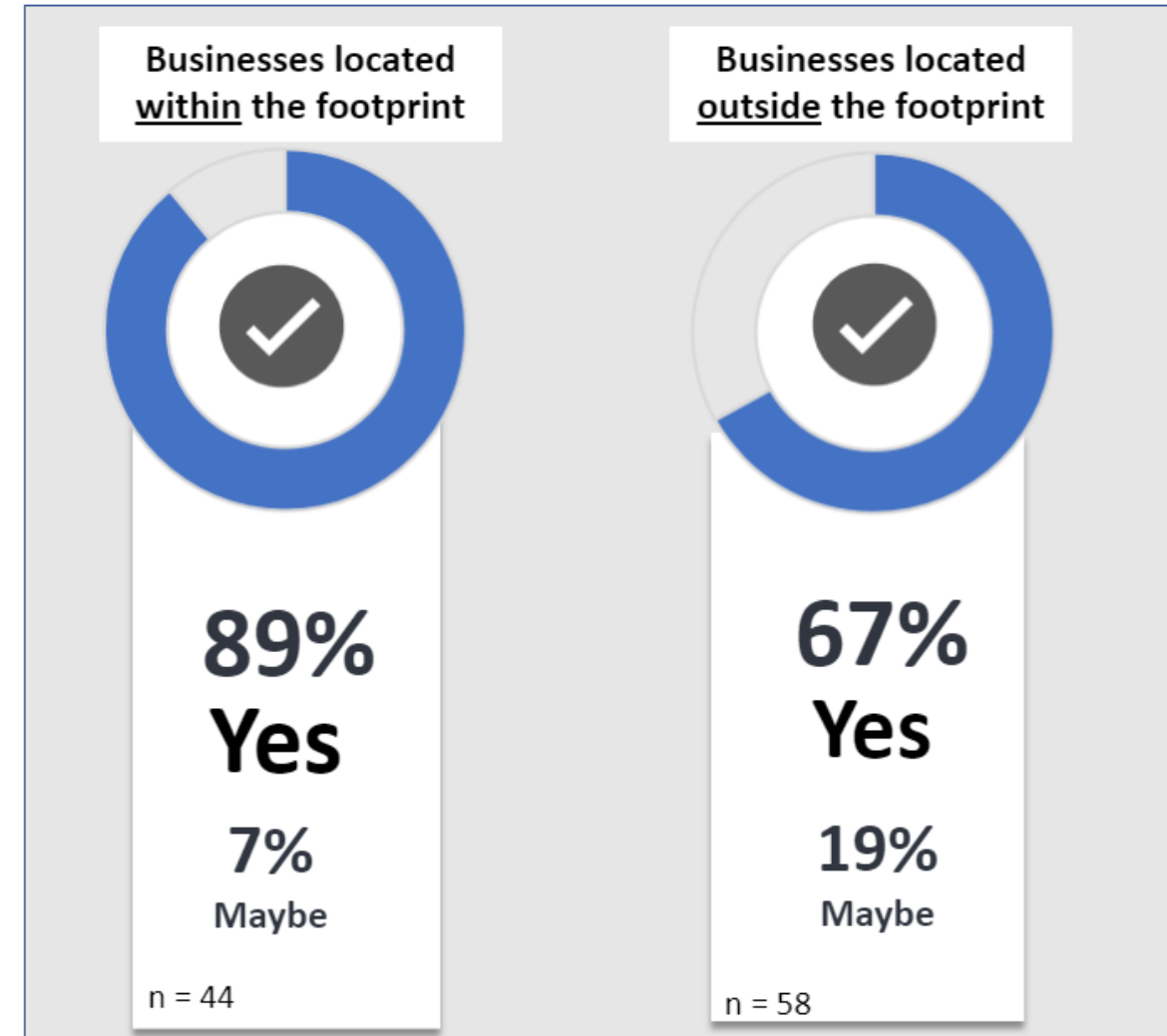
# What we Heard from Businesses outside the Pedestrian Mall

- The biggest concern was parking for businesses outside the footprint as they felt Mall patrons used Duckworth Street as a parking lot and there was not enough enforcement of the two-hour parking limit; parking issues in the east end of Duckworth were mentioned numerous times.
- Some businesses on Duckworth/periphery of Mall on Water, George Street wanted to be included; a few are not interested and do not feel it would be beneficial for their business and have concerns about Duckworth losing traffic flow
- Process for extending premises seemed more restrictive; streamlining is necessary
- Concerns raised about the number of parkettes possible in the future and how that would impact parking on Duckworth Street especially for destination businesses
- 70% of businesses outside the Mall who completed the survey said Duckworth Street should be included in the future; 17% said George Street and 73% said Water Street
- Some suggestions to alternate between Duckworth Street and Water Street throughout the season or year-to-year

# General comments from the business community

- The options presented to the business community during planning phase and what was put in place were different; needed to respond quickly once decisions were made.
- There was some confusion about what the noon to 10 p.m. hours of operation meant; some thought cars would be allowed on the street after 10.
- Desire to have a simple/one-stop shopping experience for regulatory process such as permits for decks, etc..
- 89% of businesses inside the Mall agreed it benefitted the Downtown as a whole; 71% of businesses outside the Mall agreed

## Should the Downtown Pedestrian Mall be considered for the future?



# General comments from the business community about the impact of the Mall

## Within Mall

- 79% mostly positive
- 7% mostly negative
- 9% both positive & negative
- 5% no impact

n = 43

## Outside Mall

- 18% mostly positive
- 37% mostly negative
- 21% both positive & negative
- 24% no impact

n = 62

To read more of what we heard from the business community through the survey process click [here](#).





# What we Heard from the Transportation sector

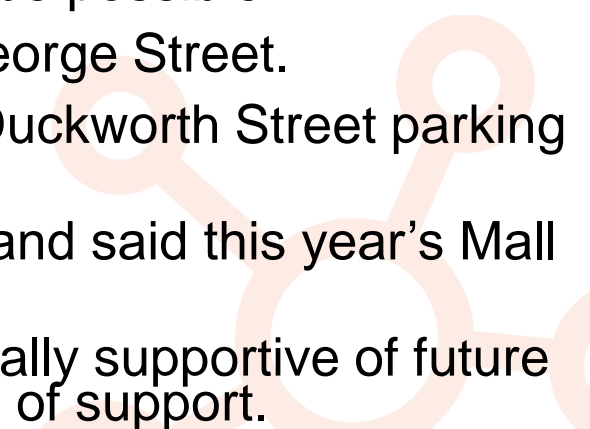


Generally they felt they were able to work with city staff to adjust where needed and were generally supportive of the Mall.

Areas for improvement:

- They need more time to plan especially armoured vehicles which are impacted by various security and bank guidelines.
- They want to help identify the stops they would use; in some cases there were challenges getting access to the street after 12:00 p.m.
- Consider implications for taxi layby for all taxi companies
- Consider safety, especially of bar staff who had to walk longer distances to vehicles/taxis late at night/early morning
- GoBus pick up/drop off location was challenging – need better options to avoid reversing – heard from passengers there were other accessibility challenges
- If any further extensions to the footprint of the Mall are made Metrobus would need to be consulted early in that process.
- Promote other modes of transportation to the Downtown such as public transit, taxi not just parking locations.

# Highlights of what we heard

- Everyone recognized the tight timeframes but noted it was generally good to bring more people into the Downtown and shine a spotlight on Downtown.
  - There needs to be more time for planning, apply an inclusion lens, and more people need to be included in that process.
  - There were differing views on whether all or some of Duckworth Street or other sections of the Downtown should be included in the future and what could be possible.
  - Extending to Waldegrave St. was a popular suggestion as was George Street.
  - There were concerns with parking primarily related to the use of Duckworth Street parking spaces and lack of enforcement.
  - The public were supportive of future Downtown Pedestrian Malls and said this year's Mall created a good sense of community.
  - Businesses inside the Mall and those outside the mall were generally supportive of future pedestrian malls but the location of businesses impacted the level of support.
- 

# Next Steps



Share What was Heard with the public, business community and other stakeholders, staff, and Council



Complete the review and make recommendations for future pedestrian malls



Present a final report with recommendations to Council



To stay  
informed


Follow the project page or sign up to receive notifications at [engagestjohns.ca](https://engagestjohns.ca)

ST. JOHN'S [Home](#) [Citizen Committees - Members page](#)

[Home](#) » [Downtown Pedestrian Mall Pilot Project](#)

## Downtown Pedestrian Mall Pilot Project

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [e](#)



The City of St. John's opened the Downtown Pedestrian Mall on July 3. The purpose of the Mall was twofold:

1. to allow the business community to expand their space thereby stimulating the downtown economy, and
2. as a means to allow people to use public space while adhering to required public health physical distancing guidelines stemming for the Covid 19 pandemic.

**Public Survey**



**Downtown Business Survey**

