



## **Downtown Pedestrian Mall Review**

*November 2020*

## **Project Description**

The Downtown Pedestrian Mall (DPM) project was developed in response to, and as a means of, providing

1. the business community expanded space from which to sell their goods and services, with the anticipated result of stimulating the downtown economy, and
2. a means to adhere to required public health physical distancing guidelines stemming for the Covid 19 pandemic.

Specifically, the area within the Mall sought to maximize the number of restaurants, retail and related businesses captured in the pedestrianized sections of road closure, while maintaining and offering:

- access to parking garages
- traffic detours
- emergency access
- accessibility

The intent of this report is to consider specifically the project within the footprint of the Downtown-pedestrian mall (Mall). Of note, there were related projects that complemented the Downtown Pedestrian Mall, that being the extension of some existing patios on George Street, adjacent to the Mall area and the Dine on Duckworth program.

The report considers:

- the experiences, garnered through the comprehensive engagement process, of businesses, public, consumers, and a range of stakeholders including those from the transportation, and inclusion communities gathered through surveys and stakeholder discussions,
- information on the resources deployed to close the section of Water St. to facilitate its pedestrianization,
- perspectives from social support sector and City's Special Events Regulatory Committee (and the agencies represented on that Committee) and,
- offers findings, insights, and recommendations.

## **Footprint and Timeframe**

On June 16, 2020 Council made the decision to move forward with the closure of the section of Water Street to facilitate the Mall concept for opening on July 3, 2020. In addition to the decision about the area and timing of Mall, Council had to consider that the Water Street infrastructure project was not completed until June 28 therefore influencing the earliest date for opening the Mall. This provided little time within which to execute a complex set of requirements ranging from public health requirements to life safety and business needs and operations. The decision was to operate the Mall until September 7, 2020. On August 31, Council, in response to demands from businesses

operating exterior spaces, agreed to allow the patio/parklette option until November 1, 2020 although Water Street was reopened to vehicular traffic.

The Mall stretched from Bishop's Cove/Adelaide Street to Job's Cove/Prescott Street. Traffic on Ayre's Cove and McBride's Hill was be one-way northbound. McBride's Hill was closed to southbound traffic. Southbound traffic on Prescott Street was detoured to Harbour Drive via Job's Cove.



## Resources

Creating the Downtown Pedestrian Mall was more than closing the street to vehicular traffic, various resources had to be deployed to make the space attractive, safe, and comfortable for businesses and consumers.

### Security/Project Staff

Shifting the Water Street area from vehicular to pedestrianization meant deploying barricades and security to assist with traffic flow (deliveries, couriers, and related transportation) and general support. To adhere to public health measures, staff were required to clean picnic tables, support garbage collection, and remind the public of social distancing.

### Amenities: Public Seating and Garbage

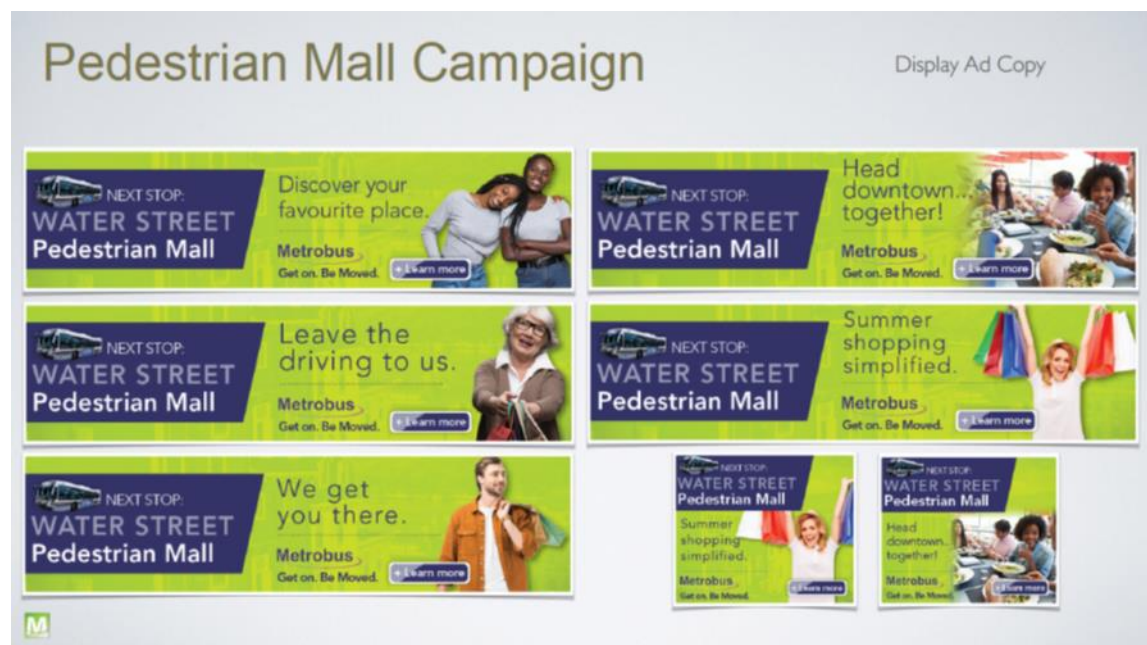
City of St. John's and Downtown St. John's installed chairs, tables, and additional garbage and recycling receptables.

City of St. John's Picnic Tables	DTSJ High Top Table	DTSJ Chairs	Garbage Bins	Recycling Bins
47	11	25	14	13

## Marketing

City of St. John's, Downtown St. John's, and several other partners, such as Metrobus and Destination St. John's undertook paid and/or social media campaigns to raise awareness of the Mall project. For example, Metrobus developed a targeted Mall campaign to encourage ridership (see below).

Marketing investments aligned with how the public learned about the Mall. Social media, word of mouth and news were the primary ways in which the public heard of the project. {61% social media, 53% word of mouth, 52% news, 40% social media (multiple responses permitted)}. See *Pedestrian Mall Public survey* [on Engage St. John's](#).



## Financing

Public and private agencies financially supported to creation of the Mall. The City of St. John's incurred \$183,933 for the amenities, services, marketing and other items.

Category	Total Expenditures	Financing		
Marketing	\$6,089	City of St. John's	ACOA	TCII
Security/Staffing	\$163,068	\$ 63,933	\$60,000	\$60,000
Amenities	\$11,194			
Cleaning	\$3,581			

Downtown St. John's, the business improvement association, made investments by way of amenities and marketing on behalf of their members.

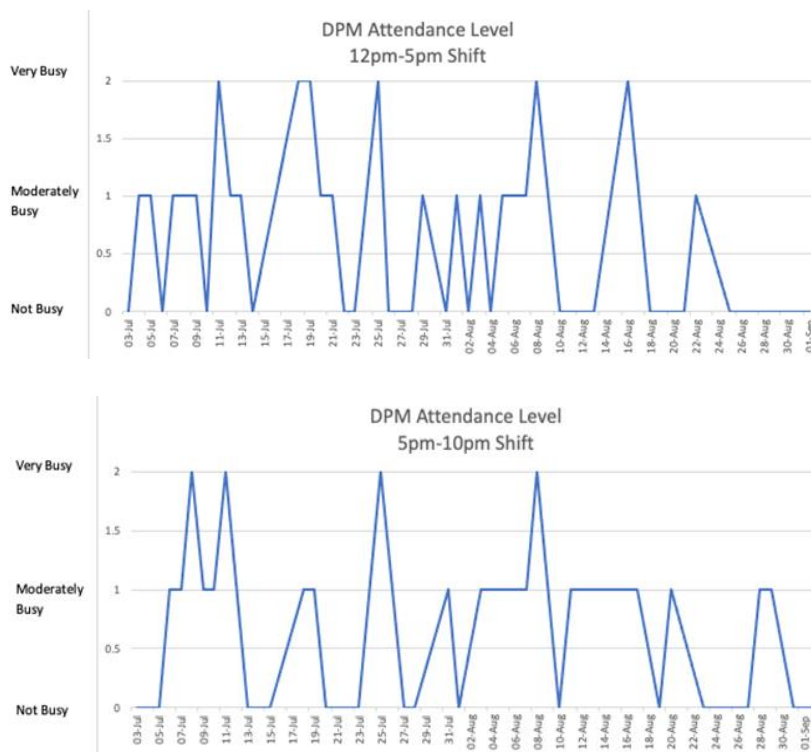
## Project Results

The engagement program was the primary means by which to gather perspective about the value, issues and recommendations about the Mall and future considerations. This was supplemented by gathering internal information on the resources deployed to facilitate the Mall, perspectives from social support sector and the regulatory agencies involved, and other findings, insights, and recommendations.

### Attendance and Response

Responses gathered through the engagement process indicated a very positive response to the Mall with 98% of the public indicating there should be future Malls, giving a 4.5 out of 5 average rating, and businesses within the Mall rated it 4.3 out of 5 with 89% indicating there should be future Malls. 67% of businesses outside the footprint indicated there should be future Malls. [\*{What We Heard Report, Engage St. John's}\*](#)

As expected good weather was better for public attendance although not always. Security/event staff would provide daily metrics on volumes of pedestrian traffic and record type of weather. While not precise it does provide some perspective as to the public's attendance and there were some sunny days when the traffic may have been moderately busy.





### **Businesses Within Mall**

A total of 24 businesses took the opportunity to extend their presence in some manner outside their interior space with the primary business type being restaurants.

<b>Business Type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Restaurant	17
Bar/Lounge	4
Retail	2
Other	1

In addition to the public investment and the investment by Downtown St. John's, many businesses within the Mall footprint made their own investments whether by increasing employment, advertising, purchasing materials or equipment therefore generating some economic spinoffs in addition to their product/service offerings.

Businesses within the Mall indicated, (79%) that the Mall had a mostly positive impact, with 7% indicating a mostly negative impact. Ninety-five percent of businesses within the Mall and 66% of businesses outside of the mall footprint indicated that they would like to participate in future pedestrian malls.

Positive impacts included new customers, and increased exposure translating into improved financial returns. Conversely those businesses citing a negative experience noted customer access concerns and no increase in customer base.

Given the objective of the project to provide businesses with the platform/opportunity for increased economic activity, the project can conclude that this was achieved. [{See Business Survey Results, Engage St. John's}](#)

### **Parklettes/Patios/Business Outdoor Expansion – Outside Mall Footprint**

After a public advertising period, on July 6, Council gave approval to allow businesses outside the immediate Mall footprint the option of expanding their space to adjacent areas. A total of 24 businesses took advantage of this option.

Thirty-one percent of businesses located outside the mall footprint who completed the Business Survey had applied to extend their premises or make modifications to their outside footprint.

Of the businesses outside of the mall footprint who completed the Business Survey, 50% experienced new customers, 46% benefited financially, and 46% felt the overall viability of their business during the pandemic was improved because of the increase in customer flow from the mall.

<b>Business Type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Restaurant	16
Bar/Lounge	6
Hotel	2

## **Findings, Insights and Suggestions**

The results from the engagement process form a separate document. The Findings, Insights and Recommendations reflect the engagement results as well as insight from staff, and ancillary stakeholder discussions. Projects in process will support enhanced functionality and space animation noted from the engagement results these are noted in the findings.

### **Continuous Improvement**

From the perspective of both the businesses who availed of the expansion options (both within the Mall and outside the Mall footprint) and the City of St. John's and other regulatory agencies (St. John's Regional Fire, Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, Service NL, Newfoundland Liquor Commission, St. John's Ambulance), there is a recognition that there are opportunities for enhanced communications, and possible streamlining of processes.

Depending upon the activity, businesses had to deal with several agencies for a number of approvals. The pedestrian mall event/regulatory process will become a Continuous Improvement (CI) Project. The CI process has a defined methodology with a proven set of tools and techniques that are applied to make processes better and more efficient.

### **Pedestrian Mall Team**

The results from the engagement processes suggest that there is a myriad of interests that need to be considered in the design of future Mall projects. Public health and

safety are paramount and must be met, additionally suggestions from the City's Inclusion Advisory Committee need to be considered. A variety of perspectives and suggestions were also offered in terms of improving the functionality and aesthetics of the Mall. The downtown is dynamic and functions as a unique area of the City, it is a business district, a residential neighbourhood, an entertainment zone and a visitor destination. Meeting all the many and specific needs is complex.

An internal City Pedestrian Mall Team, with perspectives from a variety of City units covering events, business, arts and culture, recreation, inclusion, regulatory, transportation, traffic, waste management and parks should guide Mall design and programming. Decisions about the location, length and hours of operation, functionality of any future Malls should be recommended to St. John's City Council by this Team.

## **Stakeholder Insights in Mall Design**

### ***Business Community***

The Pedestrian Mall Team will be responsible for connecting with relevant stakeholders to ensure concerns and recommendations as identified through the engagement process are considered in future Malls. Downtown St. John's as the Business Improvement Association for the downtown should play the key liaison/conduit role with the business community within its precinct.

### ***Vulnerable Population***

Opportunities to work with businesses, and consequently their patrons, to increase understanding and misconceptions about panhandling need to be considered. Education initiatives can be delivered during the "off season" with the objective of creating awareness and generating solutions.

### ***Transportation***

While some parking garages indicated an increase in use there is an opportunity for generating increased awareness of parking options and opportunities to encourage a range of transportation options. Access to the areas for business related deliveries and services need to be considered. Therefore, a specific transportation focused stakeholder group will need to be consulted by the Pedestrian Mall Team.

### ***Inclusion***

Before recommendations on design of future Malls are made the City's Inclusion Advisory Committee should be consulted.

## **Water St. Infrastructure Project Considerations**

If future Malls are recognized as economic generators, then consideration needs to be given as to the impact the next phase of Water St. infrastructure project will have on potential timelines and opportunities for enhancement of the design. Current planning for the next phase of the Water St. infrastructure project is underway and construction timelines will be for the period of April to end of June 2021.



## **Post Pandemic and Placemaking**

During the Covid 19 pandemic summer 2020, with out of province and out of country travel restrictions, and with the inability to deliver festivals and events, the introduction of pedestrian mall afforded primarily residents (82.2%) an experience and activity and there were few competing events. However, there was also little tourism activity therefore it can be expected that when travel restrictions are relaxed and tourism activity regains, the Mall will also be an added attraction. The Tourism Destination Development Plan for the North East Avalon identifies downtown St. John's as an anchor in the tourism product and the Mall project reinforces this from a tourism development perspective. Engagement responses recommended selection of ideas to enhance the space from a visitor perspective.

## **Animating the Mall**

Buskers and gatherings were not sanctioned as there was need to adhere to public health guidelines, several animations from poetry on the street to live statutes suggest opportunities for street art and animation. Businesses within the Mall also developed new approaches to showcase their products thus enhancing and demonstrating the potential for more interactive elements to the Mall concept. There are opportunities to develop programming in support of the Mall project that enlivens the space, creates interest and encourages return visits and expenditures.

## **Wayfinding/Signage**

The *What We Heard Report* notes that signage could be improved on the street and could also be used to increase awareness of parking spaces. The City's wayfinding and signage program currently in development will aid in creating awareness of destinations and parking, and aid pedestrian movement in the downtown area. However, additional investments may be needed to improve the quality of the signage pertinent to this particular activity.

## **Lighting**

Council is considering replacing the existing decorative globe HPS fixtures with new LED fixtures that meet the aesthetic requirements developed by the Downtown Decorative Street Lighting Working Group in partnership with Downtown St. John's once funding for the project becomes available.

## **Changes to Business Profile**

The business portfolio is a changing one. With the effects of the pandemic, shifts in business product and service delivery, different work patterns and the downturn in the oil industry, the size and type of businesses operating in the downtown may change. As new Malls are designed consideration will need to be given as to the business offerings within the footprint as well as opportunities to consider the introduction of temporary businesses. City of St. John's and Downtown St. John's can work with property owners to understand, support and facilitate a business mix to support the Mall experience.

## **Investment Considerations**

The cost to deliver on the Downtown Pedestrian Mall project was in the order of \$183,000 . Much of this cost is variable and will have to be expended on an annual basis. These costs being Mall security, cleaning supplies and marketing. These costs are directly related to the footprint of the Mall and the timeframe for which it operates, i.e., a larger area will require additional security and/or an extended timeline will require security. Other improvements may also require additional funds.

The investments in tables and chairs and related amenities are capital costs and should not require reinvestment unless a larger footprint is considered. The temporary street barricades could be replaced with a more aesthetically pleasing, durable and functioning barricade system. This would be a capital cost.

## **Conclusion**

The What We Heard Report on the engagement around the Downtown Pedestrian Mall documents the feedback from the public and businesses about their experiences from a planning, implementation, and future Mall perspective.

This report presents supplementary information on the additional facets of delivering this project to form a more complete picture of the aspects for consideration for future malls and implications for planning and stakeholder engagement.