



GASTOWN PUBLIC SPACES PLAN

PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

GATHERING PUBLIC FEEDBACK ON GASTOWN'S STREETS AND PUBLIC SPACES

Land Acknowledgment

Gastown is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh). Local Nations have stewarded these lands since time immemorial.

In 2022, City Council endorsed the City of Vancouver's [UNDRIP Strategy](#) (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). The Gastown Public Spaces Plan is an opportunity to advance this reconciliation work.

One of the project's draft objectives is to "make local Nations xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm, Skwxwú7mesh and səlilwətaɬ visible on their lands". In Gastown today, there is a notable absence of representation or recognition of the local Nations' continuous presence, history and ongoing relationship to these lands.

The City has partnered with local Nations to do this work. These partnerships are not captured in this engagement summary, but we will share learnings throughout the Plan development and implementation.

There are a number of resources available to learn more about the ongoing relationship the Nations have with the land which is now known as the City of Vancouver:

Musqueam Indian Band: musqueam.bc.ca

Squamish Nation: squamish.net

Tsleil-Waututh Nation: twnation.ca

Please visit our website to learn more about Vancouver's designation as a City of Reconciliation:
vancouver.ca/people-programs/city-of-reconciliation.aspx

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Engagement Overview

This report summarizes the feedback that we gathered over the many engagement activities that took place in the first phase of engagement between August 2023 and January 2024. Following early conversations with stakeholders, the project launched to the public on [Shape Your City](#) on October 15, 2023. The online survey closed on November 19, 2023. A detailed summary of responses received from the survey can be found in the [Appendix](#).

These findings will help finalize the guiding objectives for the Public Spaces Plan, plan for the pedestrianizing of Water Street and develop ideas and approaches for Gastown's public spaces that will be shared with the public later this year for further feedback.

Key takeaways from phase one

- We heard a lot of **excitement**, as well as some **concern** about the pedestrianization of Water Street. Key considerations for pedestrianizing Water Street included **increasing safety and cleanliness, reduce/ban/limit vehicles, add public washrooms; and activate and program Water Street.**
- **Most** (68%) survey respondents indicated that the **draft objectives captured** what they would like to see for Gastown's Public Spaces "**very well**" or "**fairly well**". We heard that **safety** and **cleanliness** should be included in the project objectives.
- We received many comments related to the **wider context of Gastown** including people's discomfort with open drug use; the increase in people living on the streets and the lack of services for people experiencing homelessness and mental illness.
- The look of **historical streets**, the feeling that you are in a **unique place** in the city, **trees** along the streets; and the **lighting** and **atmosphere** were **important aspects** of the look and feel of Gastown's public spaces.
- **Walking** was the most common way respondents travel to and/or through Gastown followed by driving. If it was more convenient, **walking and cycling** would be the **preferred way** of getting around Gastown.
- The top three **common barriers** to moving around Gastown were concerns about **vehicle traffic, lack of cycling infrastructure** and **condition of streets and sidewalks**.
- The top **improvements** desired for Gastown's public spaces were: make them **cleaner**, provide more **lighting**, more **plants** and **greenery**, **reduce conflicts** between people driving, walking and cycling; and make it **safer to walk, cycle, use a mobility device**.
- We also heard that it was important to make public spaces for **low-income residents** more **welcoming**.

"Pedestrianizing" means limiting vehicle access, making a street car-free or car-light, so it's a more people-friendly space for walking or gathering.



WE HAD OVER 3,500 TOUCHPOINTS WITH PEOPLE WHO LIVE, WORK, VISIT AND OWN BUSINESSES IN GASTOWN.

2359 community survey responses

from Talk Vancouver and shortened paper survey respondents.*



35 business survey responses

from Gastown businesses and property owners to better understand loading, street access and street use needs.



172,000+ social media impressions

across Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter). Social media impressions are the number of times content was seen, including multiple views from individual users.

340 pop-up visitors at Woodwards Atrium over two days in November.



10 presentations to Civic Advisory Committees

including the Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee.

18 one-on-one meetings with Gastown businesses and property owners in coordination with Gastown Business Improvement Association.

150+ youth participants including two in-depth workshops and four speed round sessions as part of CityHive's Citylab program.



460 storefront visitors at 131 Water Street over six days in October and November.

5 in-person sessions in community gathering spaces

including the Binners' Project, the Dugout and common areas in low income and seniors housing.

3776 mail notifications to residents and businesses in the Gastown study area.

Over 80 businesses visited along Water Street and Maple Tree Square.

35+ meetings with stakeholders including local organizations serving equity-denied communities, industry partners and government agencies.

*We worked with Atira Women's Society to develop a shortened paper version of the Talk Vancouver survey. These shortened surveys were distributed to residents of the Gastown Hotel, Colonial Hotel and Dominion Hotel and were administered at in-person sessions at community gathering spaces.

Purpose of Engagement

The Public Spaces Plan will guide how Gastown's streets, plazas and laneways evolve over the next twenty years, including how Water Street will become a pedestrian-priority area. We engaged the public to ensure these places respond to the many different community needs, while continuing to support Gastown as a special place in the heart of Vancouver.

In the first phase of engagement, we focused on three questions to help us understand Gastown's public spaces today and ideas for how they could be enhanced in the future:

1. People's **experience** of Gastown's public spaces and how they could be improved
2. Feedback on the **draft objectives**
3. What we should consider as we plan for **pedestrianizing Water Street**



Engagement Approach

Engagement for the Gastown Public Spaces Plan focused on hearing from the **Gastown community**, those that live, work, operate businesses, provide services and commute through these spaces, who may be impacted by the project. We reached a diverse audience by hosting events in the community, using a **combination of in-person and online approaches**, to make it easy for people to participate.

The various opportunities to get involved in the first phase engagement were widely promoted through:

- Mail notifications to 3,061 residents and 715 businesses in the Gastown study area;
- Community organization newsletters and listservs;
- The Gastown Business Improvement Society;
- News release;
- Posters in the community; and
- City of Vancouver's social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, X)

Prior to the public launch of the Gastown Public Spaces Plan, we reached out to many local organizations, many of whom serve equity-denied communities in the Downtown Eastside, to co-develop engagement activities and forums, including:

- Paper surveys available at all in-person events;
- An in-person session with low-income residents and seniors;
- In-person sessions with community members at the Dugout and Binners' Project; and
- Paper surveys distributed to residents of Gastown Hotel, Colonial Hotel and Dominion Hotel.

We also engaged with many of Gastown's diverse businesses ranging from retail, food services, offices and more through our business survey and one-on-one interviews. Targeted outreach was also conducted for the ground-floor storefronts along Water Street and within Maple Tree Square to build awareness of the project launch, survey businesses and provide business-specific opportunities to share feedback.

The results of the business survey "Tell us about your business's loading and access needs", which includes more technical loading and access information, are not included in this engagement summary, but will inform planning for the summer pedestrian zone pilot along Water Street. More general feedback from businesses and property owners about the plan itself are included.

Our "go to where the community is" approach included catching residents passing by at the Woodwards Atrium and visiting seniors during their afternoon coffee and board game events.

Our engagement approach focused on lowering barriers to participation – particularly for equity-denied community members.

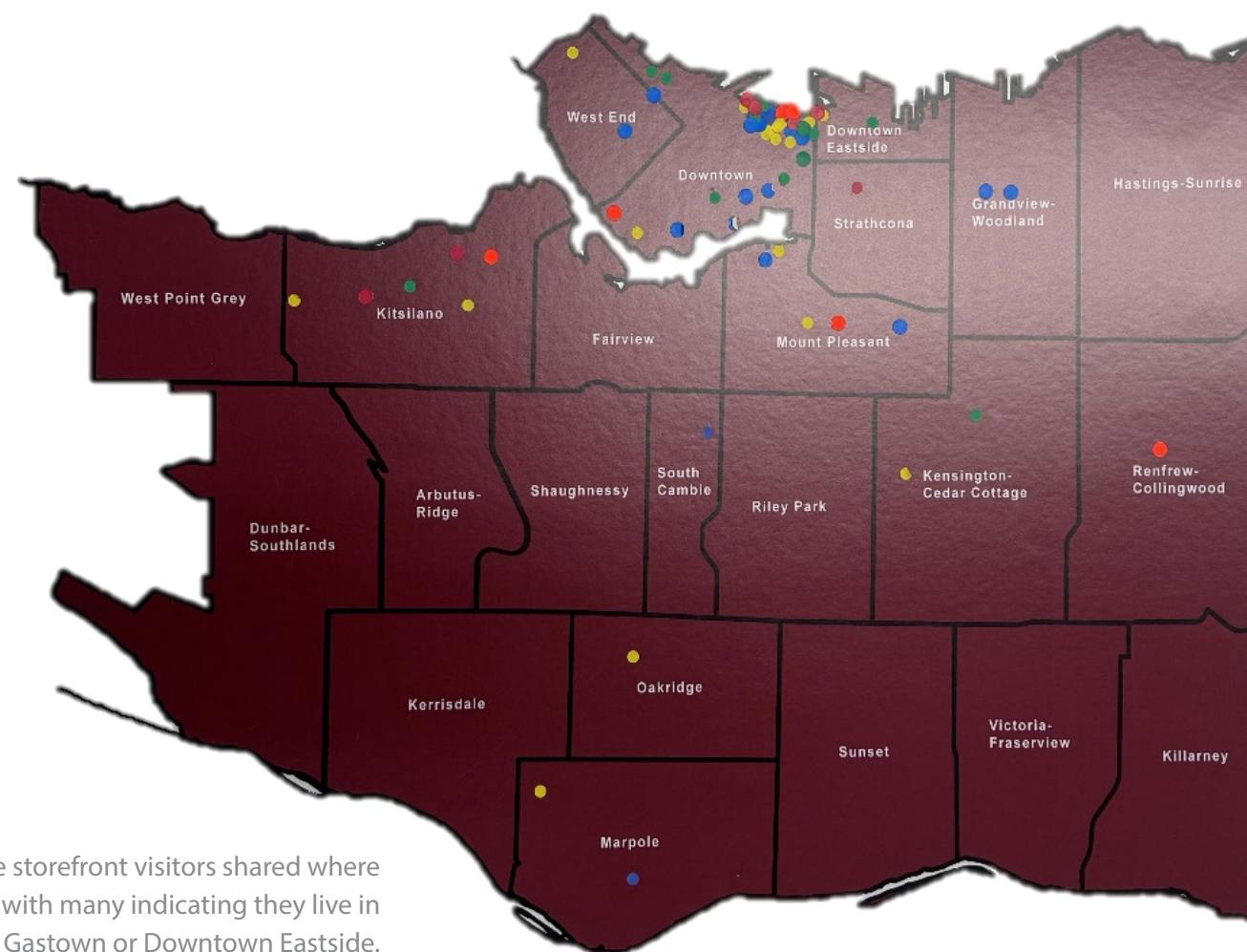
We coordinated with the Gastown Business Improvement Society to conduct targeted engagement with Gastown's businesses throughout the first phase.

Who We Heard From

Creating a network of public spaces that are safe and inclusive for a diverse range of communities requires hearing from those with different perspectives, experiences and needs. The following is a summary of who we heard from. A detailed demographic breakdown of the survey respondents can be found in the Appendix.

Geographic Spread

The majority of survey respondents live in the City of Vancouver, most commonly from Downtown, West End, Downtown Eastside and Mount Pleasant. At both our Water Street storefront and pop-up sessions at the Woodward's Atrium, we spoke with a variety of people from the Gastown community, many on their way to work or home nearby, as well as visitors to the area.



Income

Most online survey respondents had a household income above \$80,000. Very few online survey respondents reported a household income below \$20,000. Hearing from lower income individuals is particularly important as Gastown and the wider Downtown Eastside consistently have low-income populations at a much higher rate than the city overall. To address this gap, we conducted focused outreach to Gastown's low-income and SRO (Single Room Occupancy) residents and received an additional 71 shortened paper surveys.

Most survey respondents had a household income above \$80,000.

Gender

Based on survey respondents who shared their gender identity with us, we heard from slightly more male participants than female participants. We also engaged with both the 2SLGBTQ+ Advisory Committee and the Women's Advisory Committee. Hearing from women, girls and gender diverse people's experiences and hopes for Gastown's public spaces is important to consider in the design and delivery of the public realm.

Half of survey respondents identified as a man, 41% as female, 4% as non-binary, gender diverse or other.

Age

Most survey respondents were between the ages of 25-44 years old. While youth (those 17 years old or less) were underrepresented in our surveys, we conducted targeted engagement sessions with high school students from Prince of Wales Secondary School and Vancouver Technical Secondary School to capture youth perspectives in designing Gastown's public spaces for all ages. We also engaged with both the Older Persons and Elders Advisory Committee and Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee.

Those between the ages of 35-44 made up the largest proportion of respondents (26%), followed by ages 25-34 (23%).

Persons with Disabilities

Some survey respondents identified as having a disability or medical condition that impacts their ability to move in and around the Gastown area. Lower-income survey respondents had a significantly higher proportion of those who identified as having a disability or medical condition. Hearing from those with diverse abilities is important in informing an inclusive design that will facilitate social inclusion for years to come.

7% of survey respondents identified as having a disability or medical condition.

What We Heard

We had over 3,500 touchpoints with people who live, work, visit and own businesses in Gastown. Through these conversations, it was clear that public spaces are an important community resource. The streets, plazas and laneways are well-used by residents, visitors, film crews, businesses, tour companies, service providers. All with an interest in how these spaces evolve over the next twenty years.

The following section provides a summary of what we heard in this first phase of engagement including:

- What aspects are important about the current look and feel of Gastown
 - Feedback on the project's draft objectives
 - Feedback on pedestrianizing Water Street
 - How people get to and through Gastown
 - Area-specific feedback:
 - » Water Street
 - » Maple Tree Square
 - » Cordova Street
 - » Laneways
 - » Gastown Streets
 - Diverse voices and perspectives

Throughout the sections, we have summarized what we heard into the following two buckets:

- 1. What we heard from the survey:** both the Talk Vancouver online platform and shortened paper surveys
 - 2. Other themes we heard through community conversations:** all other forums including storefront, pop-ups, in-person sessions, business interviews, stakeholder meetings

Throughout the report we reference percentages of survey respondents or use terms like "most", "many" or "some". Surveys, interviews and open houses are opportunities to talk to community members, to understand their interests and issues. They should not be taken as polling, referendum or vote. While we reached a significant and diverse amount of people, it is still a small representation of Gastown and the broader city. The emphasis is placed on reporting themes and specific comments to address in the next phase of work.



Photos from various touchpoints we had in phase one, including a pop-up at Meet Me in Gastown, sessions with high school students and our storefront.

Gastown Today

What we heard from the survey

Aspects of the look and feel of Gastown's public spaces that were most important:

- The look of historical streets
 - The feeling that you are in a unique place in the city
 - Trees along the streets
 - The lighting and atmosphere

What we heard through community conversations

These themes were echoed during our in-person sessions. We also heard that Gastown's heritage building facades, diverse community and unique mix of land uses make the neighbourhood special.

We also heard from our mapping activities and community conversations that the following places in Gastown were important:

- Water Street
 - Steam Clock
 - Woodwards Atrium
 - Cordova Street
 - Maple Tree Square
 - Blood Alley
 - Hastings Street
 - Powell Street
 - Carrall Street



"Show us the places in Gastown important to you" mapping activity at our Water Street storefront

Draft Objectives

We engaged on the following draft project objectives that will guide the Public Spaces Plan and asked if they resonated and if anything was missing:

1. Make local Nations, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Sḵwxwú7mesh and səlilwətaɬ, visible on their lands
2. Support a vibrant public life for residents, visitors and businesses
3. Support many different communities to use and enjoy public space, including urban Indigenous communities and low-income residents in the Downtown Eastside
4. Provide convenient access to homes, businesses and destinations
5. Improve accessibility and durability of the street materials
6. Evolve and deepen the unique heritage feel of the area

Most survey respondents felt that the draft objectives captured what they would like to see for Gastown's Public Spaces.

In particular, we heard that making local Nations visible on their lands was a priority as well as supporting businesses that have been hit hard by COVID-19. People also identified the importance of prioritizing active transportation modes, increasing vegetation/green space in Gastown and maintaining local access for residents.

68% of survey respondents indicated that the draft objectives captured what they would like to see for Gastown's Public Spaces "very well" or "fairly well".

We also heard from the community across our various engagement opportunities that **safety** and **cleanliness** should be included in the project objectives. It was shared that these are both issues in the community and are needed to support vibrant public spaces.

Based on this feedback, we will update the project objectives to include exploring ways to improve overall sense of safety, comfort and cleanliness in the neighbourhood.

"Safety is a huge issue, People don't feel safe in the neighbourhood."
- Survey Respondent

"Why no emphasis on public safety? Should be number 1 objective."
- Survey Respondent

"Public safety should be the number one priority above all."
- Survey Respondent

"Safety is a crucial component of having a vibrant space."
- Youth Participant

Vancouver and other cities in the region are struggling with acute crises, in particular a homelessness crisis and a toxic drugs crisis. These crises negatively impact many people and create additional demands on our streets and public spaces.

There were also many comments that were related to the wider context of Gastown including people's discomfort with open drug use; the increase in people living on the streets and the lack of services for people experiencing homelessness and mental illness.

While the Plan is focused on the public realm, this work must recognize and respond to the existing social context and concurrent challenges facing the neighbourhood. We will seek opportunities to embed programming, stewardship and management strategies into the planning process in partnership with local community organizations.

"The history of the First Nations peoples needs to be more recognized in the area told by the First Nations community and artists."
- Survey Respondent

"More opportunities to learn of the history of the area prior to colonialism."
- Storefront Visitor

"As a visitor from Boston, MA, USA this project sounds great! Love the idea of pedestrian streets and the focus on equity. Also a huge fan of outdoor dining!" - Storefront visitor

"Deal with the real issues on opioid and homelessness. Pedestrianization is NOT a priority!" - Pop-Up Visitor

"We need to provide housing, rehab, mental health assistance and freedom of choice to unhoused people in the area without destroying their property pushing them to another area of town." - Survey Respondent

"What about considering ways to provide employment opportunities to vulnerable folks in these new developments (e.g., washroom attendants etc)? Our vulnerable neighbours have every right to be part of our community."
- Storefront Visitor

Pedestrianizing Water Street

We heard a lot of excitement, as well as some concern about the pedestrianization of Water Street.

Many people, including those who live, work, visit or own a business in Gastown, were excited about pedestrianizing Water Street, often referencing their personal experience with pedestrianized streets in other countries. Some of the opportunities highlighted included:

- Space for people to walk
- Places for people to gather outside
- More programming for events of different scales
- More activity on the street
- More public seating areas and patios
- More bike parking

We also heard from people concerned about pedestrianization in various forms. Some felt comfortable with pedestrianization through a seasonal summer program or on weekends, some did not feel comfortable with pedestrianization at all. Reasons shared included:

- The sense that cars provide a layer of safety “eyes on the street”
- Fear of encampments
- Concerns around access
- Concerns around on-street parking loss and less business as a result
- Feeling that other priorities for the neighbourhood should be prioritized first (e.g., housing, mental health resources)

Photo taken on August 31, 2023 during the Meet Me in Gastown event where sections of Water Street were car-free.



“Pedestrianizing Gastown would be a huge win!”
- Survey Respondent

“Please be ambitious in the creation of a pedestrian only street. Businesses might be skeptical, but a well designed pedestrian Street will encourage more visitors to the area and will help businesses thrive.” - Survey Respondent

“Water St open to cars is important to me.”
- Storefront Visitor

“Concerns around encampments if Water Street is closed down.”
- Storefront Visitor

We asked the community **“As we plan for pedestrianizing Water Street, what should we consider to make it a success?”**

What we heard from the survey

- **Increase safety and cleanliness:** Echoing the feedback we heard on the project objectives, safety and cleanliness were important considerations for a pedestrianized Water Street. Increased security, as well as more frequent street cleaning was desired for the summer.
- **Reduce/ban/limit vehicles (except emergency services, delivery service, etc.):** Many were excited about a car-free or car-light Water Street with a focus on the pedestrian experience and safety while ensuring access for emergency services. We also heard the importance of making Water Street safer for people riding their bikes.
- **Add public washrooms:** The need for public washrooms was mentioned frequently, particularly from businesses and equity-denied community members.
- **Activate and program Water Street:** Many mentioned the importance of having activations and programming during any proposed street closures. We also heard from youth that Gastown needs more youth-friendly spaces.

What we heard through community conversations

The themes above were echoed throughout our community conversations. But we also heard that it was important to make public spaces for low-income residents more welcoming. Some community members feel stigmatized and unwelcome in Gastown’s public spaces and have been asked to leave public spaces.

“Cleanliness and safety, don’t feel comfortable walking, especially with small children.” - Pop-Up Visitor

“Please just get rid of cars except for transit and taxis. The streets are narrow and the drivers are often angry, in a hurry and aggressive, especially during peak times and late at night.”
- Survey Respondent

“Plan a lot of activities that will bring clients to all the shops and restaurants.”
- Survey Respondent

“Big kickoff event like music festivals/concerts. More public basketball areas or ping pong.”
- Youth Participant

“Very little public spaces are available. Most times, I’ve been asked to leave for loitering or just from sitting out enjoying the weather. Gastown is a huge part of the local city, yet it feels like those who live on the streets are not welcome.”
- Community Member

How People Travel To and Through Gastown

What we heard from the survey

Walking (including running or an assistive device such as a wheelchair/walker) was the most common way respondents travel to and/or through Gastown followed by driving (including as a driver or passenger). People who live in Gastown tended to walk and drive more and vulnerable community members were more likely to use transit. Both cycling and transit were used less common while very few indicated they use a micro-mobility device.

When asked about their preferred ways of getting around Gastown, if it was more convenient, the most popular option was walking (including running or an assistive device such as a wheelchair/walker) followed by cycling (including Mobi, e-bike).



2 days or more a week...

29% of all survey respondents and 89% of Gastown residents **walk**



8% of all survey respondents and 18% of Gastown residents **transit**



10% of all survey respondents and 22% of Gastown residents **cycle**



17% of all survey respondents and 47% of Gastown residents **drive**

If it were more convenient...

62% of all survey respondents said they would prefer to **walk**

22% of all survey respondents said they would prefer to **transit**

35% of all survey respondents said they would prefer to **cycle** with 6% mentioning **micro-mobility**

14% of all survey respondents say they would prefer to **drive**



The most common barriers that Talk Vancouver respondents indicated were preventing them from using their preferred method to get around Gastown were:

- Concerns about traffic/congestion on the streets/should be car-free zone
- Lack of/not enough cycling infrastructure (e.g., bike lanes, bike parking)
- Condition of streets and sidewalks (e.g. too narrow, cracks, uneven surfaces)
- Safety concerns
- Discomfort and safety concerns over presence of homelessness

The top barriers preventing survey respondents from using their preferred method to get around Gastown were concerns about vehicle traffic, lack of cycling infrastructure and condition of streets and sidewalks.

"Walking can be challenging because of the width of sidewalks and obstacles."
- Survey Respondent

"Create a streetscape that enables comfortable and convenient walking, biking and rolling. Provide a AAA active transportation connection linking Alexander Street, Carrall Street, Richards Street and the Seawall in Coal Harbour. Making Water Street a bike permeable car-free street would go a long way in achieving this." - Survey Respondent

"Don't always feel safe to leave my ebike or bike or e-scooter anywhere outside a shop or restaurant in Gastown, which is how I get around. I always fear there's no safe bike parkades or secure lockup spaces." - Survey Respondent

"Hard to navigate along the broken pavers and uneven pavement." - Senior Participant

"Car traffic can be dangerous and congested, especially around Maple Tree Square. Many motorists are not aware of the speed limits and do not properly keep to their lanes. It discourages me from walking and biking in this area." - Survey Respondent

Water Street

What we heard from the survey

Top things people enjoy along Water Street:

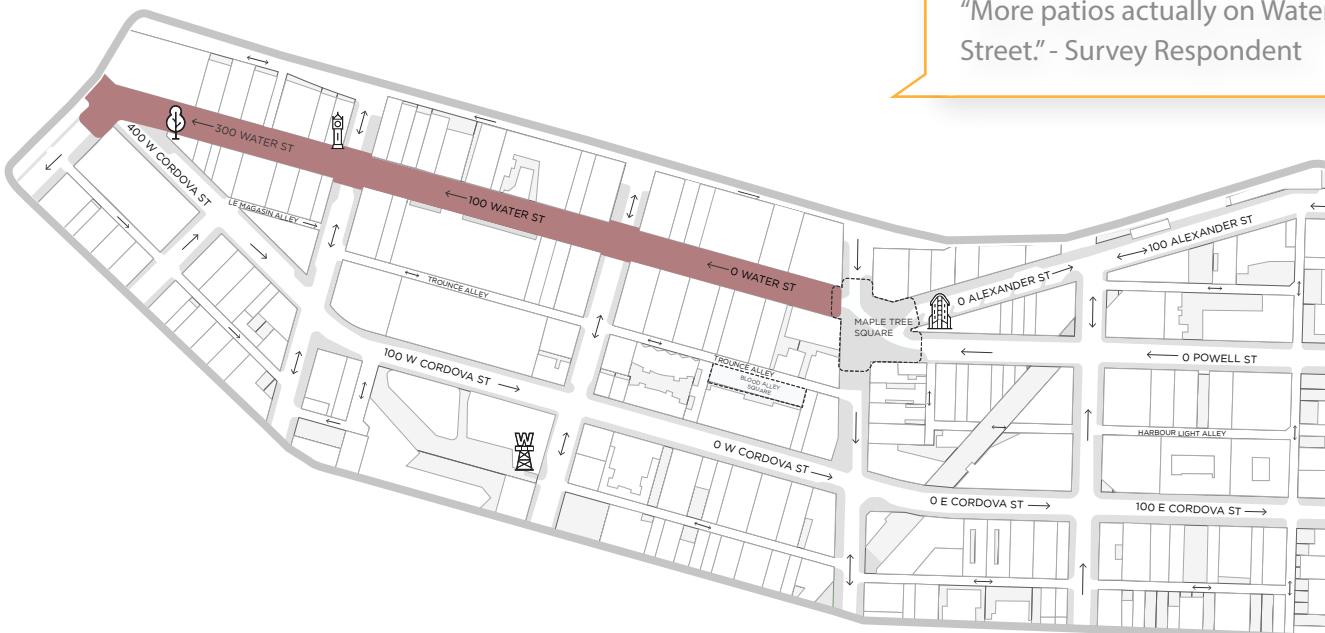
- Heritage look and feel (brick pavers, lamplight, street trees)
- Walking around
- Dining out at restaurants
- Sitting at a patio
- Shopping opportunities

Top improvements that could improve the experience of Water Street:

- Make it cleaner
- Make it feel safer
- Reduce conflicts between people driving, walking and cycling
- Make it safer to walk, cycle, use a mobility device
- More space to walk

What we heard through community conversations

- Concerns around vacant storefronts
- Encourage boutique or local-serving retail
- Desire for more mid-block crossing opportunities
- Consider Water Street's role in Vancouver's film industry
- Ensure convenient drop-off and pick-up for tour buses in close proximity to attractions



Maple Tree Square

What we heard from the survey

Top things people enjoy in Maple Tree Square:

- Historical look and feel (brick pavers, lamplight, street trees)
- Restaurants near the plaza
- Walking around
- Sitting at a patio
- Meeting friends/hanging out

"Develop covered areas - too much rain!"
- Survey Respondent

"I would love more public places (not private businesses) to chill out and sit, ideally under and around trees and greenery."
- Survey Respondent

Top improvements that could improve the experience of Maple Tree Square:

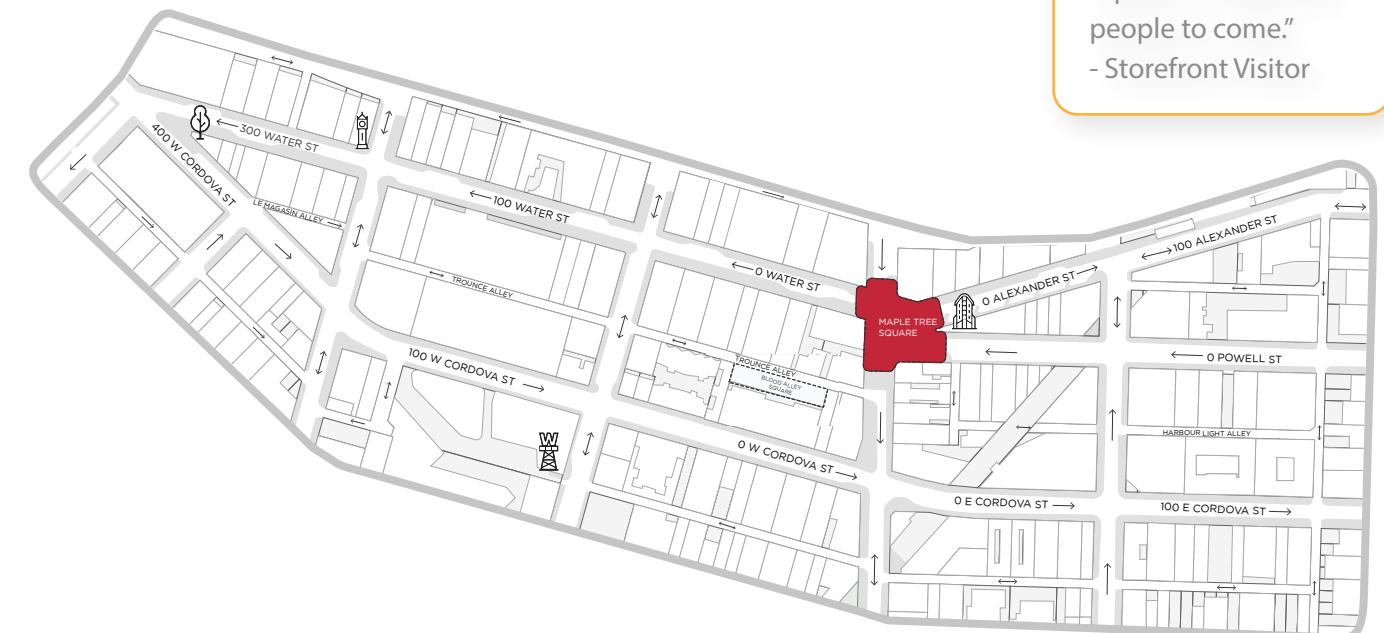
- Make it cleaner
- Improve safety
- More greenery/plants
- Reduce conflicts between people driving, walking and cycling
- Make it safer to walk, cycle, use a mobility device

"For those of us who live in Gastown without balconies, Maple Tree Square is our 'backyard'. It should be welcoming to residents at all times, not just for events."
- Storefront Visitor

What we heard through community conversations

- Pedestrianize Maple Tree Square
- Concern that expanded patios privatize too much of Maple Tree Square's public spaces
- Include public spaces that are welcoming or tailored to residents
- Host events of different scales (e.g. markets, jazz fest, art, murals)

"Provide a point of interest at Maple Tree Square. A reason for people to come."
- Storefront Visitor



Cordova Street

What we heard from the survey

Top things people enjoy along Cordova Street:

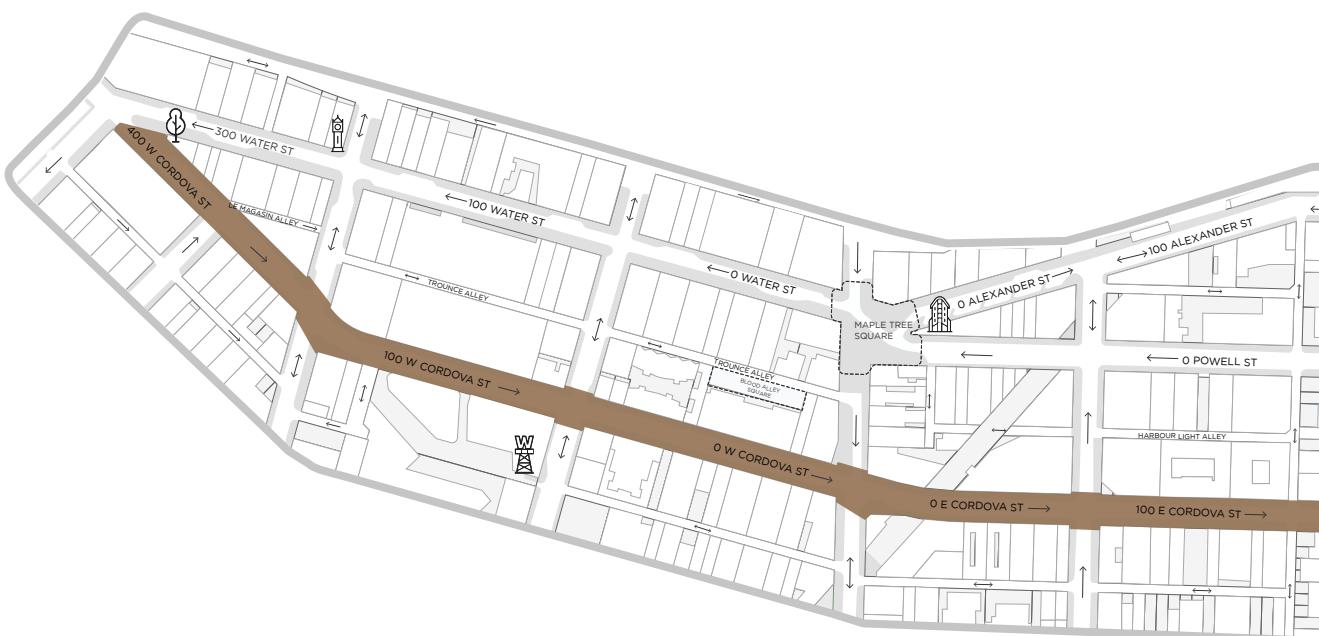
- Dining out at restaurants
- Walking around
- Shopping opportunities
- Provides convenient access to work, services, home
- Meeting friends/hanging out

Top improvements that could improve the experience of Cordova Street:

- Want to feel safer
- Make it cleaner
- More greenery/plants
- Make it safer to walk, cycle, use a mobility device
- More space to walk

What we heard through community conversations

- Concerns around losing on-street parking on Cordova
- Experiencing congestion on Cordova
- Concerns around two-way Cordova
- Some see Cordova as a transportation corridor not a destination



Laneways

What we heard from the survey

Top things people enjoy about laneways:

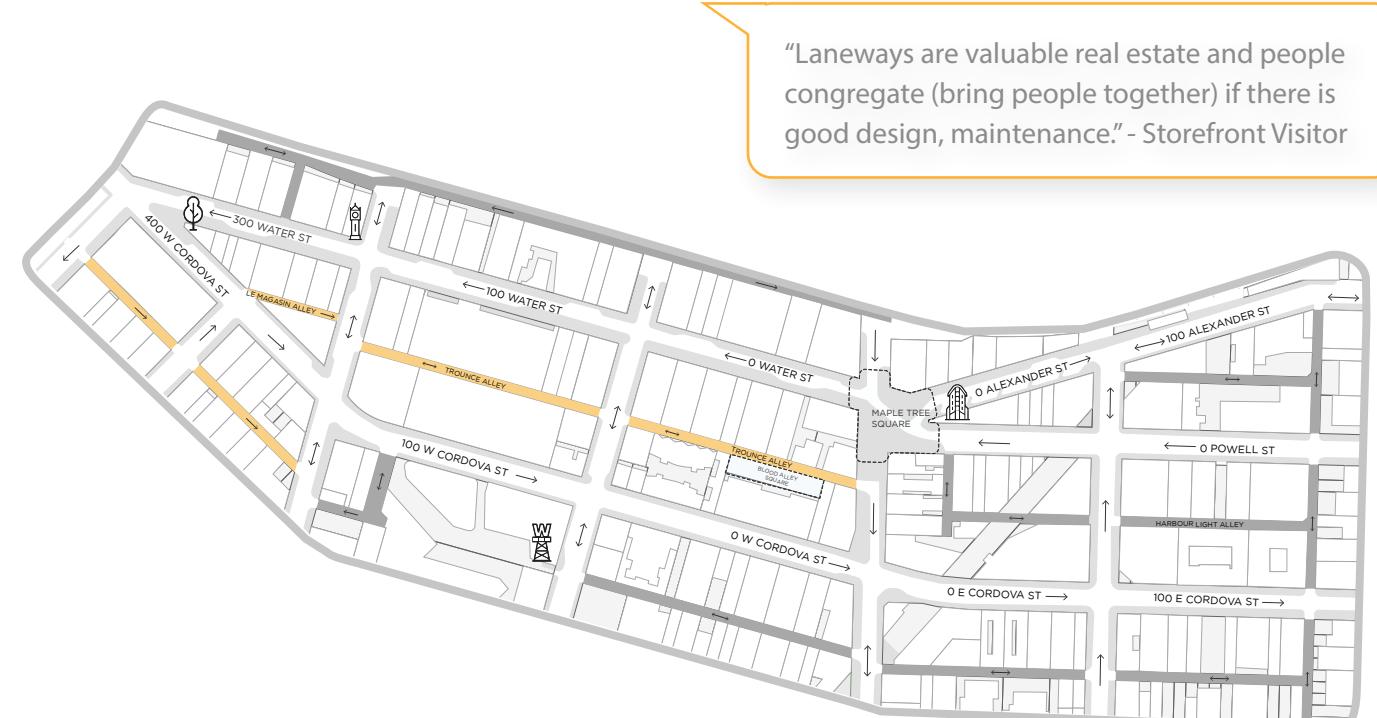
- Hidden patios and restaurants
- Murals and art
- Use when sidewalks are too crowded
- Provides convenient access to work, services, home
- Privacy, place of refuge

Top improvements that could improve the experience of laneways:

- Make them cleaner
- Provide more lighting
- More plants and greenery
- More art
- More shops and patios

What we heard through community conversations

- Desire to create intentional gathering spaces in laneways
- Better optimizing garbage collection at coordinated times by one service operator
- Getting rid of garbage bins in the laneways



"It is the only place where they prefer homeless to hang without being bothered."
- Survey Respondent

"Lanes/alleys do not feel safe. No one wants to go through them currently. More lighting and keeping them clean and clear would be essential."
- Storefront Visitor

Explore new models for local waste management to free up laneways. - Storefront Visitor

"Laneways are valuable real estate and people congregate (bring people together) if there is good design, maintenance." - Storefront Visitor

Gastown Streets

Gastown's public life is also supported by Alexander, Powell, Columbia, Carrall, Abbott and Cambie streets.

What we heard from the survey

Top things people enjoy about these streets:

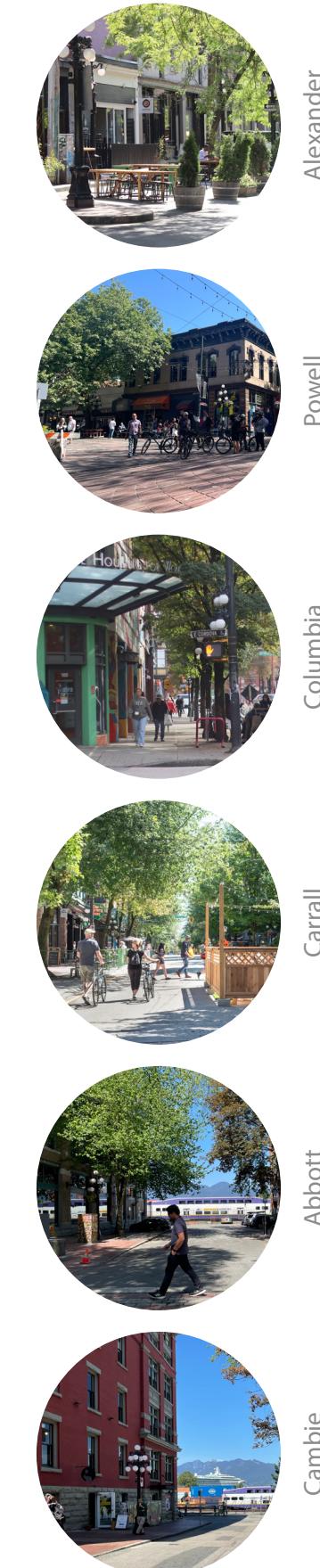
- Places to eat
- Strolling/walking around
- Provides convenient access to work, services, home
- Meeting friends/hanging out
- Shopping opportunities

Top improvements that could improve the experience of these streets:

- Make it cleaner
- More greenery/plants
- Reduce conflicts between people driving, walking and cycling
- Wider sidewalks
- More space to walk

What we heard through community conversations

- These streets play an important role in ensuring convenient resident access to their homes
- Desire for safe walking, cycling and rolling connections between Gastown, Chinatown and Railtown
- Desire to improve Carrall bike lanes to prevent cars from driving or parking in the bike lane
- Desire for making Columbia Street two-way
- Desire for a more direct and convenient pedestrian connection to Crab Park



Diverse Voices and Perspectives

Over the first phase of engagement, we heard from stakeholders who shared insights into the diverse needs and experiences within Gastown's public spaces. Below is a summary of what we heard from Gastown's businesses, residents, social service organizations and the City's civic advisory committees. Each group brings a different viewpoint and within each group there are often a range of perspectives. Understanding these helps us make better decisions and appreciate the complexities of delivering spaces for a diversity of community needs.

Businesses

Some businesses expressed enthusiasm for pedestrianizing Water Street, citing positive experiences and increased sales due to higher foot traffic. Many businesses are interested in expanded patios and merchandise displays and potential increased activity on the street. Other businesses were concerned about loss of parking and vehicle access for their clientele, citing historically lower sales during programmed events. Citing tourism as a vital source of revenue, some businesses emphasized the importance of retaining tour bus access in the area. The top concerns raised by businesses included vandalism, safety, cleanliness and ensuring loading and access.

During discussions on the pedestrianization of Water Street, many businesses highlighted the significant economic impact brought by tourists, particularly those arriving via walking tours, cycling tours and hop-on-hop-off buses. Convenient access for tour bus pick-up and drop-off near popular landmarks and destinations was important. Walking and cycling tour operators said car-free areas in Gastown would make it safer for tour groups to gather, noting that Water Street sidewalks were crowded in the summer months and protected areas to walk and cycle was important to promoting visitors to the area. Some tour companies also noted that supporting the visibility of local Nations would be helpful, as they are weaving these stories into their tours already. Additionally, in considering Water Street's role in the city's film industry, we heard it was important to retain the heritage feel of the area with flexible seating and fixtures.

There is a wide variety of businesses in Gastown from restaurants, coffee shops, boutiques and retail shops to offices and art galleries. Gastown also serves as a destination for many tour operators and a backdrop for many filming locations.

Residents

Many residents were excited about an enhanced pedestrian experience in their neighbourhood. There was particular interest in increased public seating and gathering opportunities, as well as a desire for more local-serving vendors, gardens and green areas for pet owners. However, some residents raised concerns about the potential of an increase in noise and some were worried about expanded patios encroaching too much onto public space. Additionally, some were apprehensive that investment in Gastown could contribute to gentrification and displace lower-income residents from the area. Some residents also said they felt unsafe in the area, especially in the evening when stores were closed. Many were concerned about growing homelessness and open drug use in the area and the perceived lack of social supports for people who needed them.

Social Service Organizations

We heard that it is difficult to make all public spaces for everyone, so it's important to ensure some spaces cater to the needs of under-served communities, especially low-income communities. We heard concerns about gentrification and pushing people out of much needed public spaces. One key takeaway was the need to improve public spaces east of Carrall and co-develop and co-manage these spaces with the community. We also heard that it is important to explore economic opportunities for low-income residents in the area, in addition to cleaning. We heard that many people don't feel comfortable in many of the existing public spaces closer to the centre of Gastown. Amenities such as public washrooms, seating, drinking fountains and cheaper goods and services, like coffee, would help people feel more welcomed.

Civic Advisory Committees

Safety emerged as a prominent theme across many of the City's civic advisory committees who wanted the Public Spaces Plan to consider safety from different perspectives including women or gender-diverse community members, as well as families with young children. Additionally, several committees inquired about the possibility of renaming Gastown as part of the project's collaboration with local Nations. Some civic advisory committees highlighted the importance of including cycling improvements and wanted the project to be bolder in its approach and make all of Water Street car-free.

Gastown is a neighbourhood within the Downtown Eastside that is home to many low-income residents and social services. For many people, public spaces are a living room, especially for those living in SROs or who are unhoused.

Next Steps

The first phase of engagement illustrated there are many community needs and experiences of Gastown's public spaces. In the next phase, we will continue to work with the diverse representation of community members to develop a plan to enhance Gastown's public spaces, in a way that responds to these diverse needs and experiences.

The feedback from the first phase of engagement will help develop design ideas for the laneways, plazas and streets within the study area, including how Water Street could be pedestrianized in the longer term.

We will re-engage the community in the summer to talk about ideas and approaches for Gastown's public spaces, focusing on Water Street, Maple Tree Square and Cordova Street.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the first phase of engagement. We are very grateful for the time and feedback you shared!

Stay up to date on future engagement opportunities for the Gastown Public Spaces Plan by visiting vancouver.ca/Gastown.



AS WE PLAN FOR PEDESTRIANIZING WATER STREET, WHAT SHOULD WE CONSIDER TO MAKE IT A SUCCESS?

"PEDESTRIANIZING" MEANS LIMITING VEHICLE ACCESS,
MAKING A STREET CAR-FREE OR CAR-LIGHT, SO IT'S A MORE
PEOPLE-FRIENDLY SPACE FOR WALKING OR GATHERING.

OF NOISE
FUMES THAT HURT
THE ENVIRONMENT



WHEN PEDESTRIANIZED

DON'T FORGET
THE 100 BLOCK.

RESIDENTS TELL
DESERVE BENEFITS SO-

Alleyways are
public space.

Activate these

Example
Montreal
They way are
public spaces

Patios

look at it is important

More private
infrastructure

More sunlight

- Not big constraints
- low budget

Maple Tree Sq

Market Stree

Small size

To patios only

Micro Mobility

How do we

7-WAY



CITY OF
VANCOUVER

GASTOWN
PUBLIC SPACES