



Guelph Downtown Renewal Spring Engagement 2024 Summary

April 2024

What We Heard – Spring Engagement 2024 Summary: Downtown Infrastructure Renewal

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Introduction

Background

Downtown Guelph is the heart of the city. A place where residents and visitors come to play, live, shop, and work. Let's make it even better and give new life to Downtown.

The City of Guelph has a great Downtown, and we want it to stay that way for years to come. There are aging water and sewer pipes, roads, and sidewalks that must be replaced—some underground pipes are over 100 years old! The City is replacing aging infrastructure and upgrading utility services; but before they put the roads back together, they will have an opportunity to improve and upgrade the streetscape.

Improving this important infrastructure is expected to have a significant positive ripple effect on the local economy, the environment, and the social well-being of people living, working, and visiting Downtown Guelph and the wider community.

Work like this takes time. It takes years to study, engage with the community, plan for, and implement a generational renewal of municipal downtown infrastructure. This important project will improve our Downtown for all businesses, residents, users, and visitors. Let's work together to create a vibrant place for everyone in our Downtown core.

The [Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program](#) is one of many projects under the overarching Downtown Renewal efforts. The [Downtown Renewal Program](#) will transform and revitalize how Downtown looks, feels, and functions — making it future-ready to support growth to 2051 and beyond.

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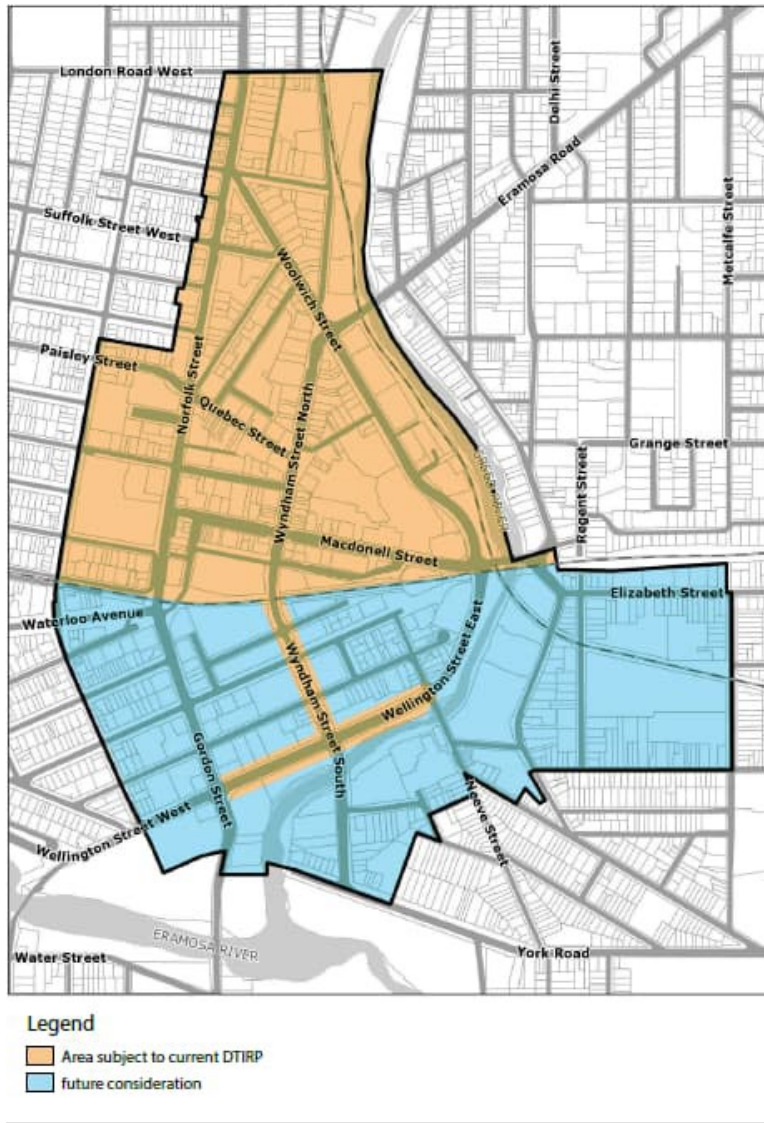


Figure 1: Map of Study Area

The primary project study area is north of the railway tracks that cross Gordon Street at Waterloo Avenue plus Wyndham Street South to Wellington Street and Wellington Street from Gordon Street to Neeve Street. Key streets include:

- Baker Street from Quebec Street to Woolwich Street (part of Baker District)
- Quebec Street from Wyndham Street North to Norfolk Street
- Wyndham Street from Carden Street to Woolwich Street
- Macdonell Street from Norfolk Street to Carden Street
- Woolwich Street from Macdonell Street to Norfolk Street
- Macdonell Street and Allan's Dam structures over the Speed River
- Wyndham Street South to Wellington Street
- Wellington Street from Gordon Street to Neeve Street

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Planning for Downtown Infrastructure Renewal began in the spring of 2021. During the planning phase, the study looked at the existing infrastructure and the future needs of Downtown to determine what needed to be updated.

The project team has developed a preliminary construction implementation plan that separates the construction into nine phases. These phases are presented in the [What We Heard](#) section of this document. The recommended sequence of construction was determined with the following factors and considerations:

Economic Development and Capacity for Growth

Does the street provide for additional housing and room for growth? Does it support planned density increase in Downtown?

Watermain, Sanitary, and Stormwater Needs

What is the age and condition of infrastructure? Are there capacity deficiencies?

Utility Needs

Are there third-party utility upgrades planned for the street?

Transportation and Traffic Management

How will construction impact traffic flow? How many transit routes are on the street?

Construction Costs

How do construction costs align with the City's capital budget?

Construction Constraints

Are there special needs that may affect construction (e.g., additional time to acquire permits)?

Road Needs

What is the current condition of the pavement? How urgently does traffic capacity need to be addressed?

As part of the implementation plan, staff are also evaluating different options for the pace of construction. Completing construction at a faster pace could involve working on multiple sections at a time and closing roads fully to give contractors more room to work. This would require extra construction crews to meet expedited completion dates. A slower-paced construction approach could consider options including closing shorter sections of the road at any one time or having shorter work hours. This would provide contractors less room to work with and increase construction duration.

What we did

In March 2024, the City of Guelph conducted two main engagement activities – a public open house and a canvass of Downtown businesses.

[Public Open House and Survey](#)

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The City hosted the third public open house for the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program on March 27, 2024. Along with the project purpose and goals, the open house focused on sharing the construction implementation plan with the proposed nine construction sequencing phases, options for fast and slow construction paces, and mitigations for residents and businesses. The open house followed a “drop-in” style format, where materials were displayed in-person and online for public review. Project team members were available in person to provide additional context and answer questions.

After reviewing the display materials, the public was invited to provide feedback:

- directly on the display boards,
- through a hard-copy survey at the open house, or
- through the [Have Your Say webpage](#).

The survey solicited thoughts and feedback on the phases and pace of construction.

Business Canvass and Survey

In addition to the public engagement, the City provided a distinct opportunity for businesses to provide input. The City team met with the Downtown Guelph Business Association (DGBA) to share information and gather insights. The City distributed notices to 124 Downtown businesses inviting them to the open house, and sharing that City staff would be going door-to-door to hear their thoughts directly. The City prepared a business-specific survey that, in addition to phases and pace of construction inputs, solicited thoughts and feedback on the potential challenges businesses may face, and ideas on how to mitigate construction impacts.

Feedback from the open house and the surveys are incorporated in the summary below.

- The open house (in-person) was held on March 27, 2024. 62 individuals were in attendance.
- The Have Your Say survey was available from March 18 – April 14, 2024. There were 650 visitors to the website, of which 241 contributed to the survey.
- A meeting was held with the DGBA on March 21, 2024, to receive feedback on the construction implementation plan, ahead of the public open house.
- The business canvass was carried out between March 20 – April 17, 2024. During this period 28 businesses participated, however ongoing contact and follow-up conversations continue as a result the initial canvass period.

Who we heard from

At least 62 individuals that were in attendance at the public open house, and the 241 individuals who completed the survey. (Note that not all respondents answered all questions.) Most participants were Guelph residents (residing within or outside

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Downtown). A handful of business owners, students, and visitors also completed the survey.

Survey participants replied to the demographic questions as follows:

91 were Guelph residents living Downtown and 110 lived in Guelph outside of Downtown. 12 were students and 4 lived outside of Guelph. 6 selected “other.”

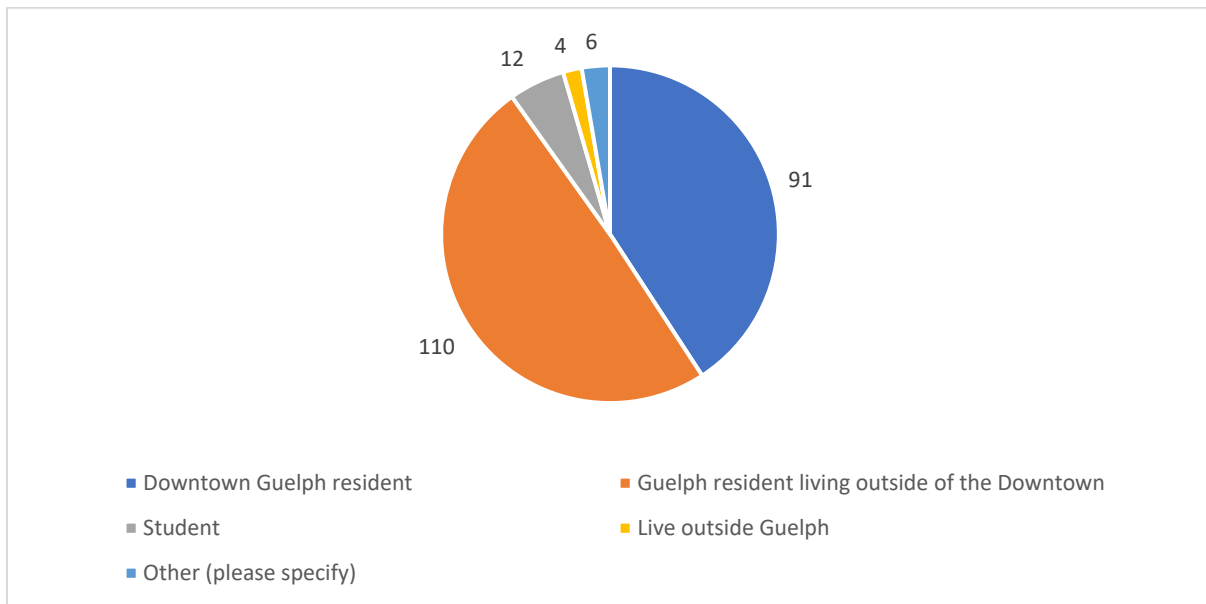


Figure 2: Share of participants who reside in Guelph inside or outside of Downtown, are a student, or live outside of Guelph (n=223)

31 respondents owned or operated a business in Guelph, with 14 of them being in the Downtown area and 17 outside of Downtown.

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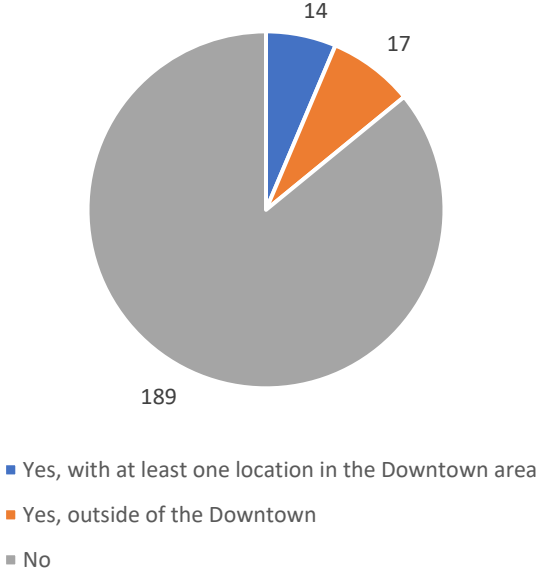


Figure 3: Share of participants who represent a business inside or outside of the Guelph Downtown area. (n=220)

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What we heard

Phasing order of construction Downtown

Proposed construction phasing

The preliminary construction implementation plan proposed splitting the construction into nine phases across Downtown. These phases are shown in the table and map below:

Construction Priority	Street
Phase 1	Wyndham Street North
Phase 2	Wyndham Street South Wellington Street East
Phase 3	Macdonell Street East Macdonell Bridge
Phase 4	Macdonell Street West Quebec Street
Phase 5	Woolwich Street Yarmouth Street Thorp Street
Phase 6	Cork Street East Douglas Street
Phase 7	Cardigan Street Norwich Street East
Phase 8	Norfolk Street Suffolk Street Commercial Lane Church Lane
Phase 9	Dublin Street North Northumberland Street Kent Street

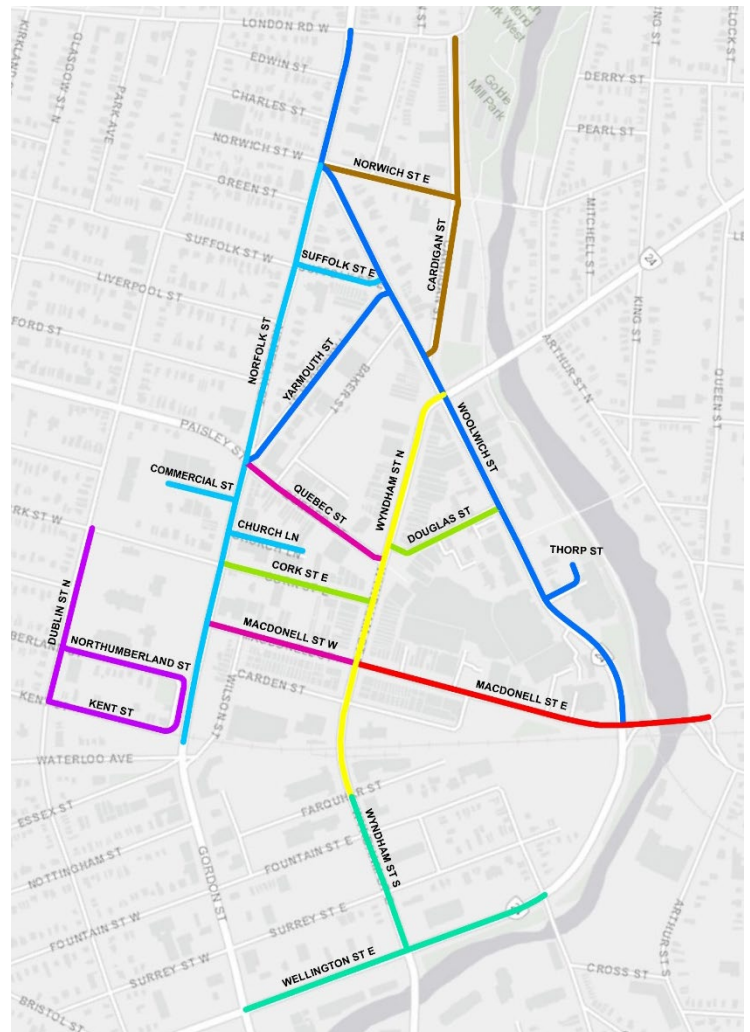


Figure 4: Proposed implementation plan for Downtown Renewal.

Feedback on the proposed construction phasing

Participants shared comments and ideas for what to consider when determining the phasing order of construction, as well as ideas to enhance the recommended order. One hundred and twenty-one (121) individuals responded to this question through the public and business surveys. A few visitors at the open house provided comments with sticky-notes. All feedback from different engagement opportunities have been captured.

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Overall feedback supported the proposed phasing of construction and was centred around access, or lack thereof, to businesses and other destinations in the Downtown area. Respondents hoped that impacts to transit would be minimized, parking access maintained, pedestrian access prioritized over cars, and coordination with other construction and events would be considered.

The responses have been summarized into themes below:

- **Transit** – Many participants highlighted the importance of minimizing impacts on bus routes. When detours are necessary, the bus schedules should still be on time, delays should be avoided, and access to Guelph Central Station should be maintained.
- **Parking** – Participants acknowledged that parking spots would be lost and displaced in construction areas. Many participants consider parking as vital to Downtown businesses and that alternative ways to provide parking should be considered. In addition, a few participants stressed that the underground parking garage as part of the Baker District redevelopment new central library project should be completed before other parking is removed.
- **Pedestrian access** – There was strong support for constant pedestrian access in the affected construction areas. These participants explained that they also supported a pedestrian-first downtown and that this could be a “trial” of a car-free zone. Safety and accessibility were expressed as an important consideration as well, particularly for people who are disabled, visually and/or hearing impaired, wheelchair users and seniors. Participants wanted to ensure that if we were only maintaining pedestrian access, it would be unobtrusive and fair.
- **Cycling access** – Several participants supported maintaining cycling access alongside pedestrian access. Multiple participants suggested considering providing bicycle storage and parking.
- **Traffic management** – Many participants were concerned about the impact of detoured traffic on quieter, local streets. They suggested measures for traffic calming and ensuring bigger trucks do not go on small streets.
- **Businesses** – Several participants acknowledged the impact on businesses and stressed the importance of maintaining full access to them and providing clear signage to guide the public. Some participants considered the impacts of construction during peak summer seasons when businesses may depend on patios.
- **Social services** – A few participants emphasized the need to ensure vulnerable populations, including the unhoused population, can still access the services they rely on and are included during the process.
- **Coordination** – Several online and in-person participants wanted the new library and parking lot on Baker Street to be completed before any construction starts to lessen the intensity of construction in the area and allow business access from the back. A few participants also noted that

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construction should consider “seasonal” events, such as recurring sporting events and fairs, and access to those events. In addition, one participant suggested the opening of Conestoga College’s Downtown location should be considered.

- **Cost** – A few participants wanted costs to be kept as low as possible, with one participant wondering why the project was necessary.

There was no feedback provided specifically about the order of the phasing or the areas selected in the phases. A few participants expressed that the construction should not be executed as it was in recent road reconstruction projects, where they felt like it was disruptive and experienced many delays.

Construction pace

In the survey, respondents could identify whether they would prefer fast or slow construction on the proposed Phase 1 – Wyndham Street North. With 205 responses, the majority of participants responded, and 127 of them provided a comment explaining their choice. A further 86 responded with ideas on how to improve the option they selected. It was observed that respondents who identified as a downtown business owner or operator provided responses that were similar to those provided by the general public. The comments and ideas are summarized below.

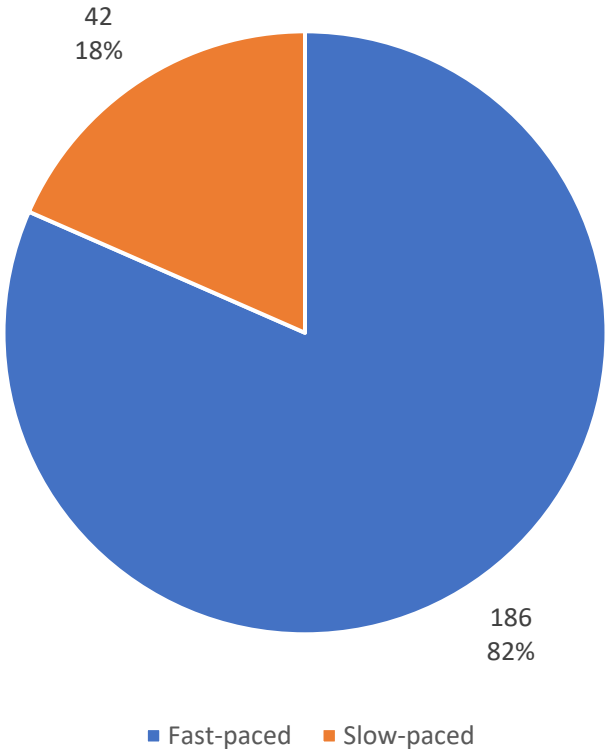


Figure 5: Survey responses on construction pacing options (n=205)

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With 186 responses, most participants support the fast-paced construction option, representing 82% of the total responses. 42 respondents or 18%, supported the slow-paced construction option. 73% of the 33 respondents who identified as downtown businesses preferred fast paced as well.

Reasoning for the preferred pace of construction

Most participants who supported the fast-paced option commented that it needs to be completed quickly to make the construction impacts and disruptions as short as possible, lessening the harm to businesses. Responses are summarized below.

In support of the fast-paced option:

- Most participants likened the fast-paced option to “ripping off a band-aid.” They acknowledged that the impacts of the slow-paced option would be similar since people tend to avoid construction areas in favour of convenient options. Therefore, construction may as well be done fast.
- Many participants highlighted that a fast-paced option would present cost savings due to inflation and the rising cost of labour and materials.
- Some participants stressed that the result of the construction would be great for businesses, so getting there faster would be worthwhile.
- Several participants expressed that Downtown is already pedestrian-centric and that there is no need to accommodate cars with the slow-paced option. Many elaborated that fully closing the street may make the Downtown more walkable. They commented that there is already plenty of parking Downtown and the street grid is connected enough that a traffic detour wouldn't be too inconvenient.

In support of the slow-paced option:

- Most participants who support a slow-paced option want to keep Downtown more accessible for cars, emphasizing their importance in supporting businesses. Similarly, a loss of parking with a fast-paced option would force residents in the area to compete with customers for parking in other nearby areas.
- A few participants believed that a slow-paced option would ensure more patios during the summer.
- Finally, a few participants noted that delays are inevitable, even in well-managed projects. They believed that slower-paced construction will be more careful, thought-out, and have less risk of delays.

Ideas and considerations to improve construction pacing and reducing impacts on businesses.

Participants shared many ideas on how their preferred option for construction could be improved, as well as how to reduce impacts on businesses. While these ideas were solicited in separate questions, many participants suggested similar ideas in

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both questions and sometimes referred to their previous answers. They are grouped into themes below:

- **Accelerated shifts** – Many participants supported longer construction shifts to complete the phase quicker. Some suggested that the work be done 24/7 while others supported “hybrid” pacing, where regular day shifts are scheduled on weekdays, and 24-hour work is conducted on the weekends. Several participants expressed concern for people living Downtown if longer shifts are in place and noted that noisier overnight work should be done away from residential areas.
- **Parking** – Anticipating the loss of parking spots, many participants suggested ideas to make driving and parking Downtown more attractive. The most popular suggestion is to reduce or eliminate parking fees at certain locations or during certain times, such as weekends. Another participant emphasized the need to ensure access to parkades is always maintained so people can walk to their final destination.
- **Pedestrian and vehicle mobility** – Several participants emphasized ensuring pedestrian access is prioritized and unobstructed. Signage should be clear, and surfaces should be predictable to avoid hazards. A few participants suggested further removing on-street parking on routes where traffic is detouring around a construction site to ensure smoother traffic flow. One participant suggested the City find creative ways to improve accessibility over short distances in areas affected by construction, such as golf cart or bike taxis. Finally, another participant suggested having weekends where more of the Downtown core is pedestrianized to make the area under construction more seamless.
- **Transit** – Many participants strongly supported improving and incentivizing transit to offset traffic impacts during construction. Ideas included having dedicated drop-off points Downtown and reducing transit fares during construction. One participant suggested providing a transit route to connect students from post-secondary schools to Downtown directly.
- **General construction mitigation** – Several participants want to see scaffolding and barriers to mitigate noise and dust from construction. A few suggested limiting construction during peak patio season. Finally, many emphasized the importance of constant communication with residents and businesses about what is happening, and what will happen.

Business feedback

Supports for businesses

Participants provided a wide range of ideas on how to support businesses during construction. Several suggested that the City facilitate business pop-ups in other locations such as at Market Square or Farmers Market spaces. Similarly, one participant recommended that the City promote “shop local” events with gift cards and discounts. A few recommended the implementation of designated curbside pick

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up areas and temporary locker pick-ups, to allow visitors to support businesses without needing to enter the construction area. One participant proposed that deliveries to businesses should be consolidated into scheduled times and designated delivery areas, and that delivery by bike should be incentivized. Finally, several participants suggested different forms of financial support for affected businesses, whether it's through tax breaks, rent relief, stipends, or direct compensation.

Businesses also identified which types of supports or activities they would like to see offered by the City or a partner. Participants were able to select more than one option. With 25 answers, the most popular support selected by businesses was signage and wayfinding, followed by parking options and coordination, and information about finances, grants contributions and loans. In the "other" option, one participant asked the City to continue supplying city maps for shops to give to clients. The results of this question are shown in the graph below:

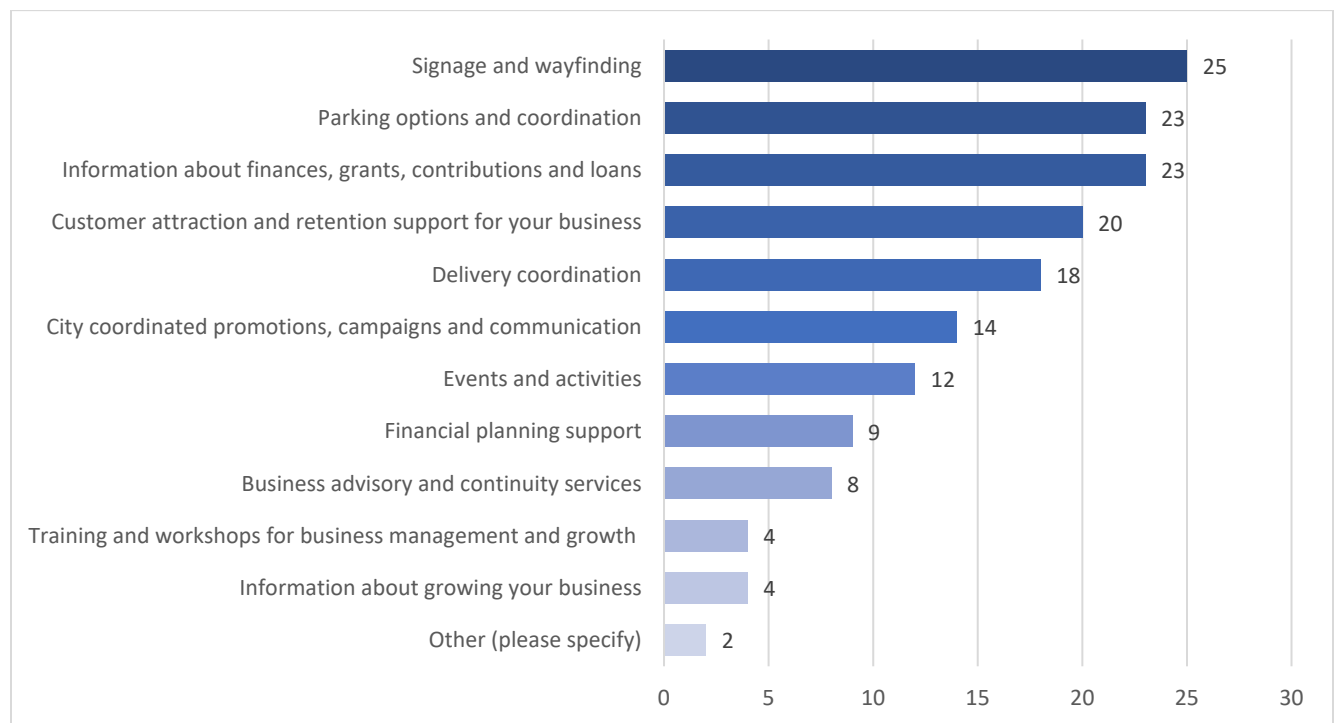


Figure 6: Interest from businesses in supports and activities during construction.

Challenges and concerns from businesses

Businesses identified their biggest challenges and concerns during construction. Participants were able to select more than one option. With 32 answers, the most frequent concern was restricted access to brick-and-mortar businesses. The second most frequent concerns was a three-way tie with 25 answers between reduced sales, parking, and internet outages. The results on how participants answered is shown in the graph below:

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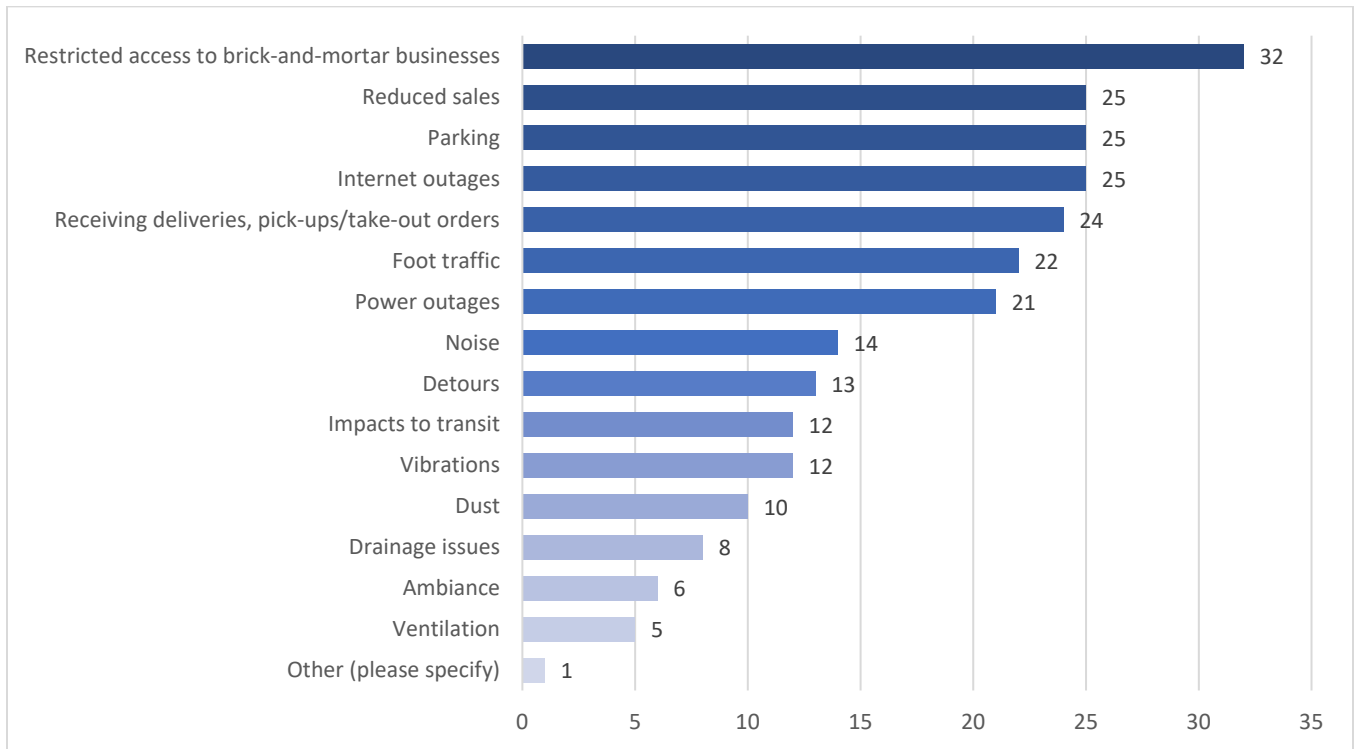


Figure 7: Concerns and challenges from businesses during construction

Types of businesses

Participants identified the type of business they represent. The most common business type is retail, followed by professional services. This is summarised in the chart below:

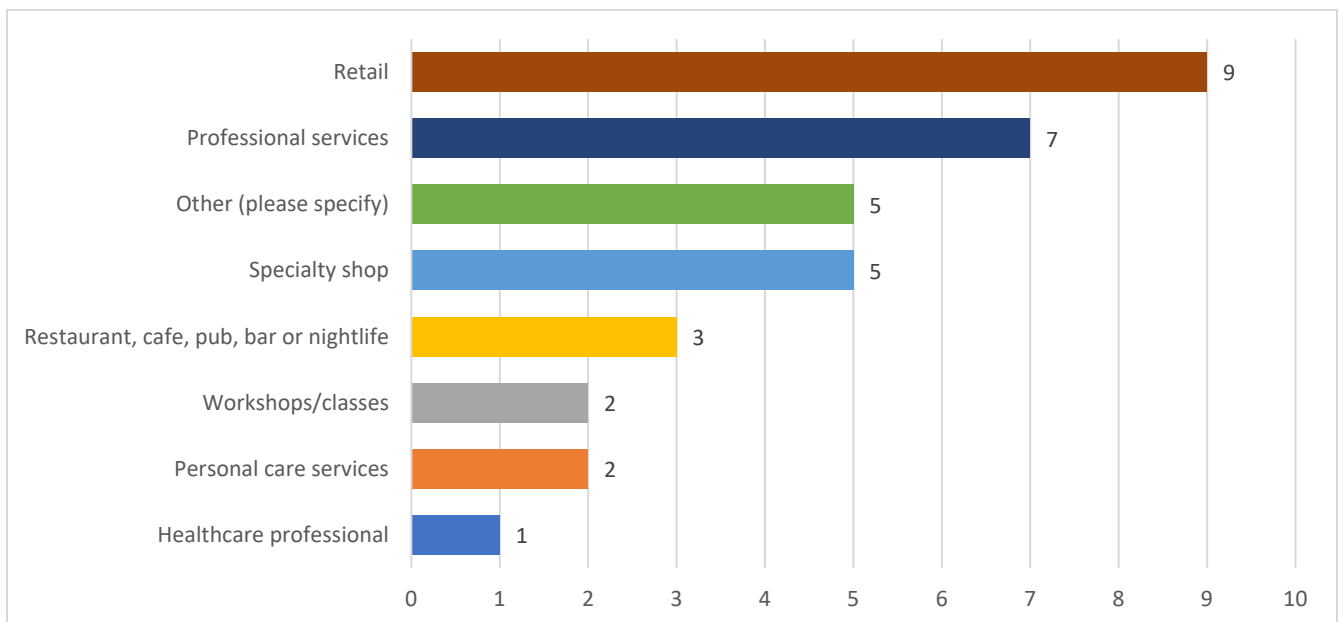


Figure 8: Type of business that participants represent

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Feedback from business canvass

Between March 20 and April 17, staff canvassed businesses in the Downtown area to be able to get in-depth feedback from business owners and managers on the construction implementation plan. During this period, 28 businesses, mostly on Wyndham Street North, participated in the discussions. A summary of these discussions is captured in themes below:

- **Welcoming and accessible** – Nearly all businesses were concerned about construction making Downtown less welcoming and accessible due to closed roads. Even with pedestrian access maintained, most businesses were worried that closed roads and blocked pathways would make navigation on foot difficult and discourage visitors to Downtown. They urged the need to make Downtown as welcoming as possible with signage, pathways, and creative ways to hide construction and mitigate noise, dust, and vibrations beyond plywood hoarding. Finally, a handful of businesses are worried that they will not have repeat customers if they decide that Downtown is too much of a hassle to return to during construction.
- **Parking** – Most businesses were concerned with loss of nearby parking for customers. Some felt that there is already not enough parking and that maintaining proximity to parking would be really important for their businesses. Many suggested expanding the availability of 2-hour free parking.
- **Safety** – Many businesses raised existing concerns with customer safety and comfort when navigating Downtown, specifically at parking facilities, pedestrian pathways, and on sidewalks. They are worried that construction can exacerbate these safety concerns by creating darker, isolated areas, blind corners, and longer pedestrian detours. In addition, some businesses were concerned that fewer people in the Downtown area due to construction would make it feel unsafe due to having fewer “eyes” on the street.
- **Disruption to logistics and operations** – Most businesses were concerned about the impact to their day-to-day operations, such as being able to receive their supplies, make deliveries, access loading spaces, and put out their garbage. There is a variety in how businesses handle these operations. Many only have a front door and need to access road space directly in front of their business. Some have a backdoor and laneways.
- **Variety of businesses** – Many owners and managers of the businesses understood the nature of how their customers visit their store and their needs to do so. Many rely on walk-in customers who spend smaller amounts more frequently. Others describe themselves as “destination” businesses where customers plan their visits and travel longer distances to shop.

Feedback received relating to other City initiatives

During the engagement, some comments were received that were beyond the scope of the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal project. These comments are

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captured and will be shared with respective City departments to inform other projects and initiatives. Several survey participants expressed concern for those experiencing homelessness, including in encampments, and finding solutions to support those in need.

Next steps

The City and its consultants will use all input from the Open House, the Have Your Say survey, meetings with the DGBA, and business canvasses, to inform the final draft of the Capital Implementation Plan along with other research and a scan of best practices among comparable projects in other municipalities. Additional opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement will be available in the fall and winter of 2024.