

Downtown Guelph Businesses Meeting: Question and Answer Period Summary

August 9, 2021

8-9 a.m.

Webex Events

Project Team in attendance

Jayne Holmes (City of Guelph)
Reg Russwurm (City of Guelph)
Tracy Suerich (City of Guelph)
Mary Jo Milhomens (City of Guelph)
Patricia Halajski (City of Guelph)
Andrew McGregor (R.V. Anderson Associates Limited)
Connor MacIsaac (R.V. Anderson Associates Limited)
David O'Sullivan (R.V. Anderson Associates Limited)
Nick Paloma (R.V. Anderson Associates Limited)
Jim Faught (LURA Consulting)
Lauren Sooley (LURA Consulting)

City Councillors in attendance

Councillor Bell (Ward 1)

Downtown business representative in attendees: 24

Introduction

The Downtown Guelph Project virtual meeting with businesses was held on August 9, 2021, at 8 a.m. on the City of Guelph's Webex Events platform. A recording of the presentation is available on the [Have Your Say project webpage](#).

Jayne Holmes (City of Guelph) provided opening remarks and thanked participants for attending the session. A commitment to working closely with downtown businesses to find solutions during the planning and construction phases was made. Jim Faught (LURA Consulting) reviewed the meeting agenda and purpose. Reg Russwurm (City of Guelph) and Andrew McGregor (RV Anderson) provided an overview of the project, highlighting the project approach and timing. It was emphasized that the planning phase will take approximately two years, with construction anticipated to start no sooner than 2024. The presenters reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) processes for Wyndham Street and the Macdonell and Allan structures, discussing the detailed design phase, construction phase and communication and engagement for the project. Following the presentation, attendees were invited to ask questions of the City and project team. After the question and answer (Q&A) session, Jim Faught summarized the current opportunities to stay engaged with the project. Jayne Holmes closed the meeting by thanking participants for their time and participation.

Participant polls

During the meeting, participants were given the opportunity to participate in three Webex meeting polls. A summary of the results of each poll is included below.

First, participants were asked what service or business area they represented. As shown in Figure 1, the top four responses from poll participants were retail (16%), professional services (16%), specialty shop (9%) and restaurants, pubs, bars and nightlife (9%). “Culture sector” was an additional service area indicated in the meeting chat.

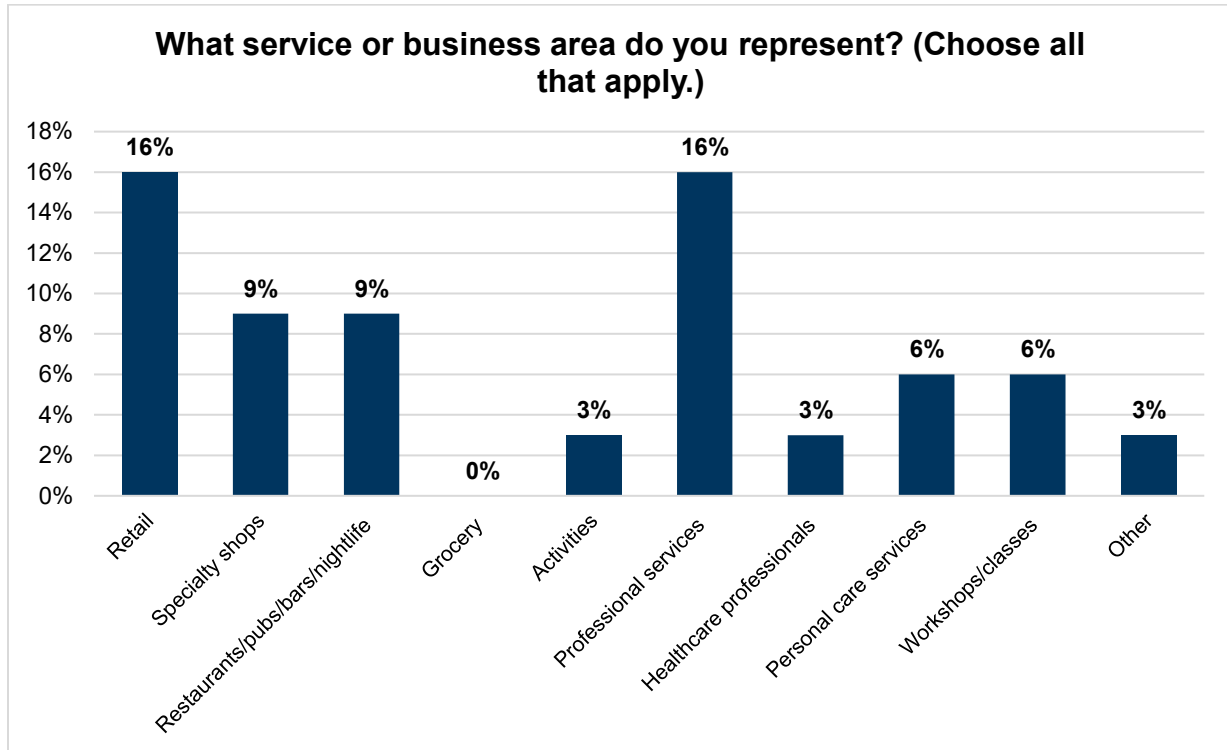


Figure 1: Poll results for “What service or business area do you represent?” n=17

Next, participants were asked to select the concerns they have when planning for construction. As shown in Figure 2, the top four answers provided were restricted access to brick and mortar businesses (47%), reduced customer foot traffic (41%), loss of parking (38%) and detours (25%). An additional concern noted in the meeting chat was the collective impact of the Baker District Redevelopment construction.

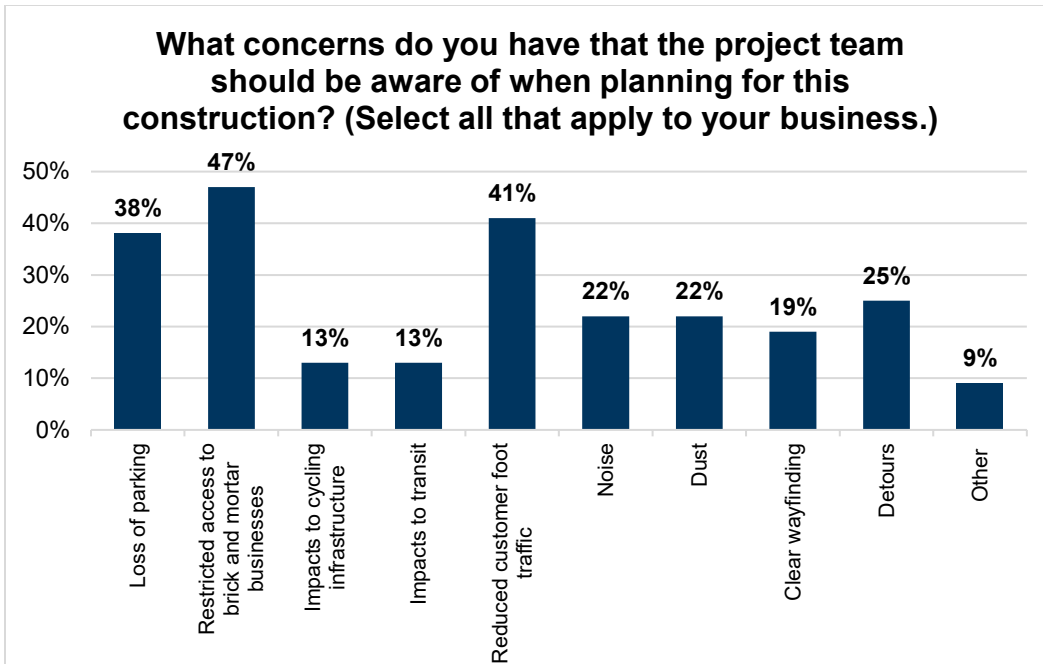


Figure 2: Poll results for “What concerns do you have that the project team should be aware of when planning for this construction?” n=15

Lastly, participants were asked about how they wanted the City to communicate and engage with them about the Downtown Guelph Project in the future. As shown in Figure 3, the top four responses were email or e-newsletter (50%), specific virtual meetings with downtown businesses (41%), updates on the project webpage (25%) and online surveys (25%).

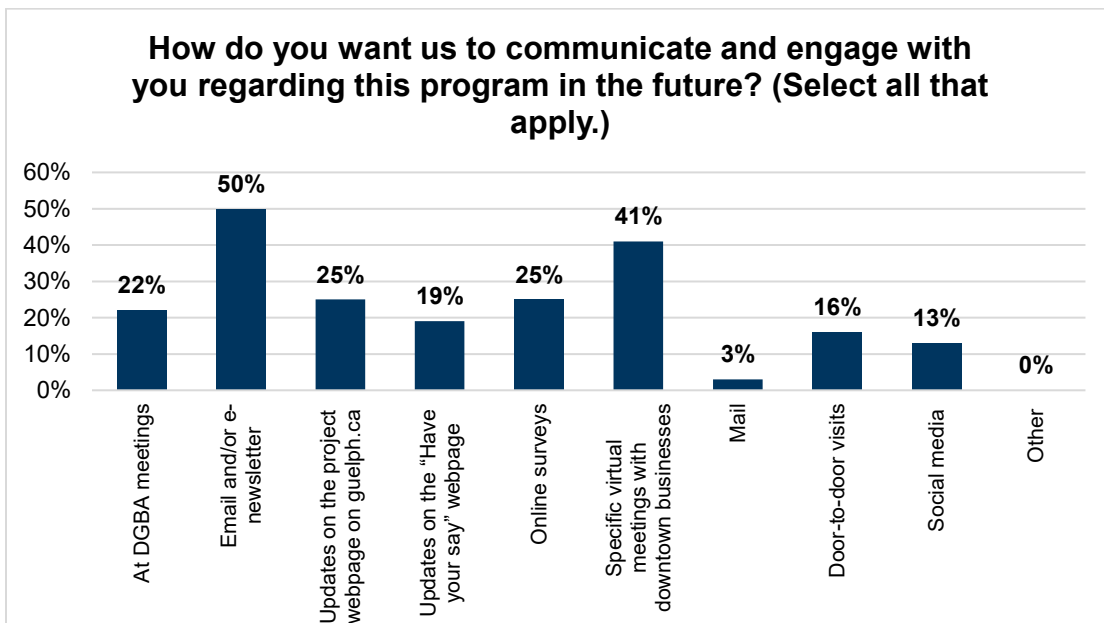


Figure 3: Poll results for “How do you want us to communicate and engage with you regarding this program in the future?” n=18

Question and answer (Q&A) session

The following is a non-verbatim summary of the Q&A session. Questions are marked with a 'Q' and answers are marked with an 'A'.

Questions relating to the Downtown Guelph Project

Q: How long will it take to complete construction on each street? Would the City consider starting construction on Quebec Street (a retail street) in January when foot traffic is at its lowest?

A: Construction will take several months for each street. The City is open to talking about timing and what works best with the businesses. This feedback can be taken into consideration when looking at the phasing for construction.

Q: How many years do you anticipate construction taking?

A: The timeline for construction depends on the aggressiveness of the construction. Preliminary planning by the City is a ten-year program.

Q: What considerations are there for the Streetscape Manual and changes like patios? Does an island on Macdonell make sense considering patios and deliveries?

A: We will look at that as part of the streetscape design and follow up with a response.

Q: What is the order of construction for each street?

A: The City has not determined the final order of construction yet. Work will begin at the bottom of downtown and follow the sewers uphill. There are proposed timelines in the Capital budget, but they are quite fluid. Once the consultant (R.V. Anderson Associates Limited) completes a detailed review of existing conditions, the City will develop an overall strategy. The City will have a better idea of construction timing in 2022.

Q: Are you planning to close only one block at a time or half a street at a time during construction?

A: The City is still looking for your input on this. Construction will take longer with shorter block closures. The City's goal is to complete one to two blocks during one construction season. The City will be looking to businesses to indicate their preference.

Q: With the recent exit of downtown businesses to other areas of the city, what incentives or funding help may be available to support downtown businesses during such a long disruption to this core area?

A: The City is at the early stages of looking at the phasing for construction which will help determine impacts on businesses. The City is committed to supporting downtown businesses during construction. Funding is something the City can look at through this process.

The City is also looking at ways to communicate to customers about what is under construction and how to move around downtown through an “open for business” campaign. Flyers, social media and advertising are examples of potential communications methods that the City can use. The City plans to have a presence downtown in a staffed storefront or trailer as a resource to businesses and customers.

Q: Will a comprehensive report with information such as foot traffic and vehicular traffic be completed for the entire downtown area?

A: Yes, one of the first tasks of this project is to develop a model showing vehicular and pedestrian traffic. This model will show traffic patterns and where people are going. Other studies, such as archeological resources for heritage districts, will be compiled as part of the environmental assessment (EA).

Q: Will there be an opportunity for the City to work with the DGBA and others to ensure Ontario knows that “we are still open for business” during this long period?

A: Yes, absolutely. On any project of this size, the City has a comprehensive communication plan developed. The City is committed to ensuring that people know that businesses downtown are still open and how to navigate the downtown as construction continues.

Q: Does a street get completely closed during construction?

A: The most economical way to do construction is to close the road and give the contractor full access to a street. While the road is closed to vehicles, it will still maintain pedestrian access to properties. Pending feedback from businesses, closures may only occur a few blocks at a time.

Q: For businesses with a front entrance on Wyndham Street and rear entrances on Chapel Lane, can we ensure that Wyndham Street construction and Baker Street construction are not running concurrently?

A: The City will look to phase our project to make sure that both accesses to a property are not closed simultaneously. The City will also look at delivery accesses and the best way to maintain them.

Q: The 2014 Downtown Streetscape Manual and Built Form Standards is already seven years old and will be a decade old once this project commences. Will the City be doing a full review of the Manual?

A: One of the planning process phase goals for this project is to consider previous studies, including the Downtown Streetscape Manual and Build Form Standards and findings from the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) and the new Parking Master Plan. Council will consider options for cost reduction. The City has reviewed the Streetscape Manual with the consultant team and staff and incorporated lessons learned and changes so that the plan will be based on best industry practices. The TMP is currently being developed, and the Downtown Parking Review is going to Council in Fall 2021, and both will be incorporated. There is a lot of collaboration between those projects and this work.

Q: How do you address the impacts of COVID-19 on things like parking use?

A: Through EAs, the City will be undertaking traffic impact studies. The data being used in the models will be data collected before COVID-19.

Q: Can businesses be open during construction? If so, how do customers access the stores?

A: Businesses can be open while the street is under construction. Pedestrian access will always be available. Once the project is in the final design phase, the City will look at how individual properties will be accessed. Please let us know if there are unique access needs to your business.

Q: Are there any concerns building owners should have about the impact of digging and vibrations on the foundations?

A: There will be some pre-construction work completed to mediate these issues. The City can look at having vibration monitors installed in areas of construction.

Q: How close will construction come to the buildings?

A: Construction will occur from property line to property line. While the sidewalk is gone, there will be temporary pedestrian access to stores in the form of gravel pathways.

Questions relating to other City projects

Q: Why is the entire Baker Street parking lot being closed in October? Is it possible to close only part of it? Is there technology you can use that doesn't dig up the ground? Why was there no discussion with the DGBA on this closure?

A: The City is undertaking several studies (geological, hydrological, archeological, etc.) as part of the Baker Street redevelopment project. As part of this work, a decision was made to close the entire parking lot to complete the archeological study in line with the Provincial direction to complete a mechanical excavation. The only way to complete the archeological study is to dig test pits throughout the parking lot. The City did consider whether it was possible to stage the excavation work to allow some portion of the lot to remain open. Unfortunately, taking into consideration accessibility, snow removal, and drainage, and the need to provide space for staging and equipment storage for the excavation, maintaining lot access simply wasn't technically feasible. This was not a decision made lightly. The closure date was communicated publically following the July 21, 2021 Council meeting about the Baker Street Redevelopment. The City is committed to communicating with the DGBA and will continue to do so going forward.