



Guelph Downtown Renewal

Public Open House and Have Your Say #1 Summary

February 2023

What We Heard Summary #1: Downtown Renewal

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Introduction

Background

The City of Guelph has a beautiful and vibrant downtown. The City also has 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, and there is an opportunity to modernize and upgrade the streetscape.

Improving this important infrastructure will allow the City to provide quality service and support the vitality of the downtown.

Work like this takes time. It takes years to research, engage with the community, plan, and replace the infrastructure. This important project will improve the downtown for all businesses, residents, users and visitors. The goal of this initiative is to create a place for everyone downtown.



Figure 1: Map of Study Area

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The primary project study area is north of the railway tracks. 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

Planning for Downtown Renewal began in the spring of 2021. During the planning phase, the City looks at the existing infrastructure and the future needs of downtown to determine what needs to be updated.

The City is completing two Municipal Class Environment Assessments (EAs) as part of the planning work. Environmental assessments involve collaborating with the community to support planning and decision-making for large projects.

The Wyndham Street EA will examine the function of the road for all users, including the number of traffic lanes and available options for active transportation.

The other EA will examine the Macdonell Street Bridge and Allan's Dam structures across the Speed River to confirm the required improvements and the preferred solution.

By the end of 2024, staff will present the EAs and get City Council endorsement on the overall Capital Implementation Plan to make the necessary infrastructure upgrades. Work on the final design will start in 2025. Construction will start as soon as 2026. The overall design and construction process is expected to last from eight to 10 years, depending on pace and capacity.

What we did

In November 2022, the City of Guelph hosted the first public open house for the Downtown Guelph Renewal. The open house followed a "drop-in" style, where materials were displayed in-person and online for public review. Project team members were available in person and online to provide additional context and answer questions.

After reviewing the display materials, members of the public were invited to complete a comment form (either hard copy or through Have Your Say). The form solicited thoughts about the goals and options for the Wyndham Street Corridor, the Macdonell Bridge and the Allan's Dam. As in previous rounds of engagement, participants were invited to identify potential issues and opportunities using a study area map. Some community members also submitted feedback to the project team via email. The mapping exercise and email feedback have been incorporated into the summary below.

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| Date | Engagement Type | Participation |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| November 2, 2022 | Open House (in-person) | 46 attendees |
| November 2, 2022 | Open House (virtual) | 31 attendees |
| October 27 – November 30, 2022 | Have Your Say webpage Main comment form/survey | 720 visitors to the website, of which 164 completed the survey |
| October 27 – November 30, 2022 | Emailed comments | Emailed submissions were received from 5 individuals and groups |
| December 1 – 18, 2022 | Have Your Say webpage Follow-up survey on Allan's Dam options | 281 visitors to the website, of which 140 completed the survey |

A meeting was held with the Downtown Guelph Business Association (DGBA) on October 18, 2022, to complement the feedback collected from the public.

The project team also received survey feedback from a downtown business that was taken in as part of our ongoing research.

Engagement purpose

The purpose of these engagement activities was to:

- Introduce Downtown Guelph Renewal
- Set the context for the Wyndham Street Class EA and the Macdonell Class EA
- Present problem and opportunity statements and a list of all options before choosing the recommended option
- Solicit public feedback, questions and concerns about Downtown Renewal

Who we heard from

Survey participants completed a series of demographic questions (optional). The following is a summary of who we heard from. Of the 164 main survey participants:

- 62 were residents of downtown Guelph, 94 were residents of Guelph (outside downtown), and 17 worked at a business downtown
- 59 noted their preferred method of travel was cycling, 50 preferred walking and 33 preferred driving

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What we heard

Downtown as a destination

Motivation to visit Downtown

Participants were asked what motivates them to visit downtown now. A summary of their responses is below.

- Children's activities and special events
- Attending festivals, cultural events and live music; visiting the cinema
- Shopping, eating, entertainment; visiting restaurants, cafes, and patios
- Visiting the library
- Visiting the farmers' market and independent, unique businesses
- Downtown is a good place to walk or cycle; it provides access to trails and the river
- Accessing professional services, doctors' offices, the post office, the bank, City Hall
- Sense of community experienced downtown; meeting with friends
- Accessing the GO Train
- Historical architecture

Others indicated that they live/work in or near downtown, making it a convenient place to visit. Many participants noted that they like the downtown atmosphere or find it a nice place to visit. Participants were very supportive of local businesses in the area, with a few noting they have personal relationships with shop owners.

A few individuals indicated that they are not motivated to visit downtown due to challenges with parking and feel unsafe.

Downtown as a destination in the future

Participants were asked what would make downtown a destination for them in the future. A summary of their responses is below.

- More places for shopping, eating, and entertainment; more patios
- Increased safety and infrastructure for people who walk or bike; bike parking, protected bike lanes
- Pedestrian-only areas, wider sidewalks
- Fewer cars, less traffic; others called for more/cheaper parking
- Parks, greenspace, and gathering spaces accessible to all
- Activities for children
- Public events, live music, cultural festivals
- More visually appealing and vibrant, e.g., public art, more trees, more street furniture, less litter
- New library
- Accessibility and safety for all
- A grocery store
- Consideration for the needs of seniors

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Many participants emphasized a desire to make downtown a destination for *people*, reducing the focus on cars. As identified above, there is a strong desire to improve access, safety and vibrancy for the benefit of those who walk or bike.

Wyndham Street

The Wyndham Street study aims to identify recommendations that will:

- Enhance road safety, operations, and connectivity for people who walk, ride bikes, take transit and drive
- Improve how the Wyndham/Quebec/Douglas intersection (St. Georges Square) functions

Feedback on goals

Participants were asked if any other goals should be considered for the study. A summary of their responses is provided below.

- A pleasant streetscape and atmosphere, more green spaces and trees
- Increased safety for all road users, including those who walk and bike, aligning with the City's modal split goal
- Making downtown more pedestrian-friendly and family-friendly
- Considerations for accessibility and universal design
- Maintaining parking for individuals with accessibility concerns
- Dedicated loading zones for businesses
- Compassionate response for those experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges
- Reduce negative impacts on the environment; consider climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Consider connections within and outside of the downtown core
- Retaining the "village" or "small-town" feel of downtown; ensure downtown is a "destination"
- Consider the impact of winter weather in design
- Consideration of the needs/input of businesses in the process
- Addressing local crime

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Feedback on options

Participants were asked which option(s) best enhance road safety, operations and connections for the Wyndham Street study area. The results are shown in the figure below. Participants were able to select as many options as they liked.

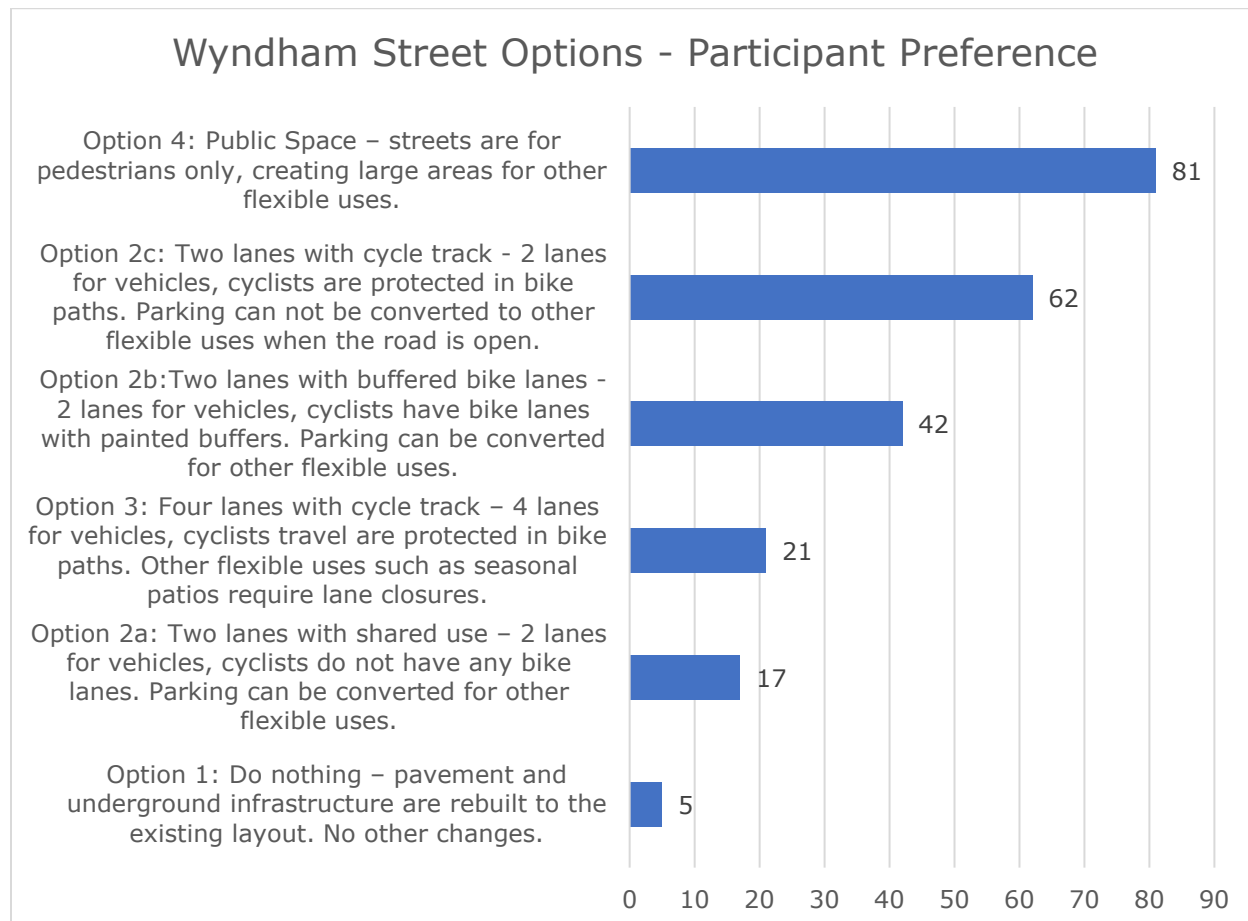


Figure 2: Participant preference for Wyndham Street options, n=158

As shown in Figure 2, Option 4 (public space) was the most popular option, followed by Option 2c (two lanes with cycle track) and Option 2b (two lanes with buffered bike lanes).

Participants felt that Option 4 provided the safest option for pedestrians. By creating a pedestrian-only area downtown, participants felt there would be greater opportunities for community-building, vibrant gathering spaces and increased foot traffic for local businesses.

While there was much support for Option 4 (public space), several participants commented that it might be too ambitious and/or more of a long-term goal. Some participants would like to see transit and cycling accommodated within the design. Others questioned if a lack of car access could negatively impact local businesses or those with accessibility needs. Option 4 also raised concerns about the lack of use during winter.

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Participants supported separated/protected bike lanes (Options 2b and 2c). Looking at Options 2b and 2c together, having two lanes with buffered bike lanes or a cycle track was the most popular option. Participants liked that these options offered a balance between uses (i.e., public space, parking, patios) while also focusing on safety for those who bike. Some participants liked the flexibility of Option 2b, while others preferred the physical separation offered by the cycle track (Option 2c). In addition, an email submission from an active transportation advocacy group indicated preference for a modified version of Option 2c (two lanes with cycle track). The group also recommended a pilot program and consideration for a hybrid option with a flexible zone.

Participants agreed that four lanes of traffic (Option 3) are not needed for this area. There was a desire to strike a balance for all modes of transportation. Participants liked the idea of slowing down traffic rather than having downtown act as a thoroughfare. Participants indicate mixed support for angled parking.

Comments on evaluation

Participants were asked what was important to them when evaluating these options. A summary of their responses is below.

- Safety and priority for those who walk or bike
- Decreasing the use of vehicles and associated noise
- The flexibility of uses; balance for all road users
- Vibrancy and attractiveness of downtown
- Provision for public space, green space
- Accessibility
- Maintaining a sense of community, increasing opportunities for interaction
- Considerations for the needs of businesses
- Efficiency
- The amount/location of parking
- Environment and climate change
- Health and wellness
- Cost to implement

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Wyndham / Quebec / Douglas Intersection and St. George's Square

Feedback on options

Participants were asked which option(s) best supported (s) their vision for the Wyndham/Quebec/Douglas intersection and St. George's Square. The results are in the figure below. Participants were able to select as many options as they liked.

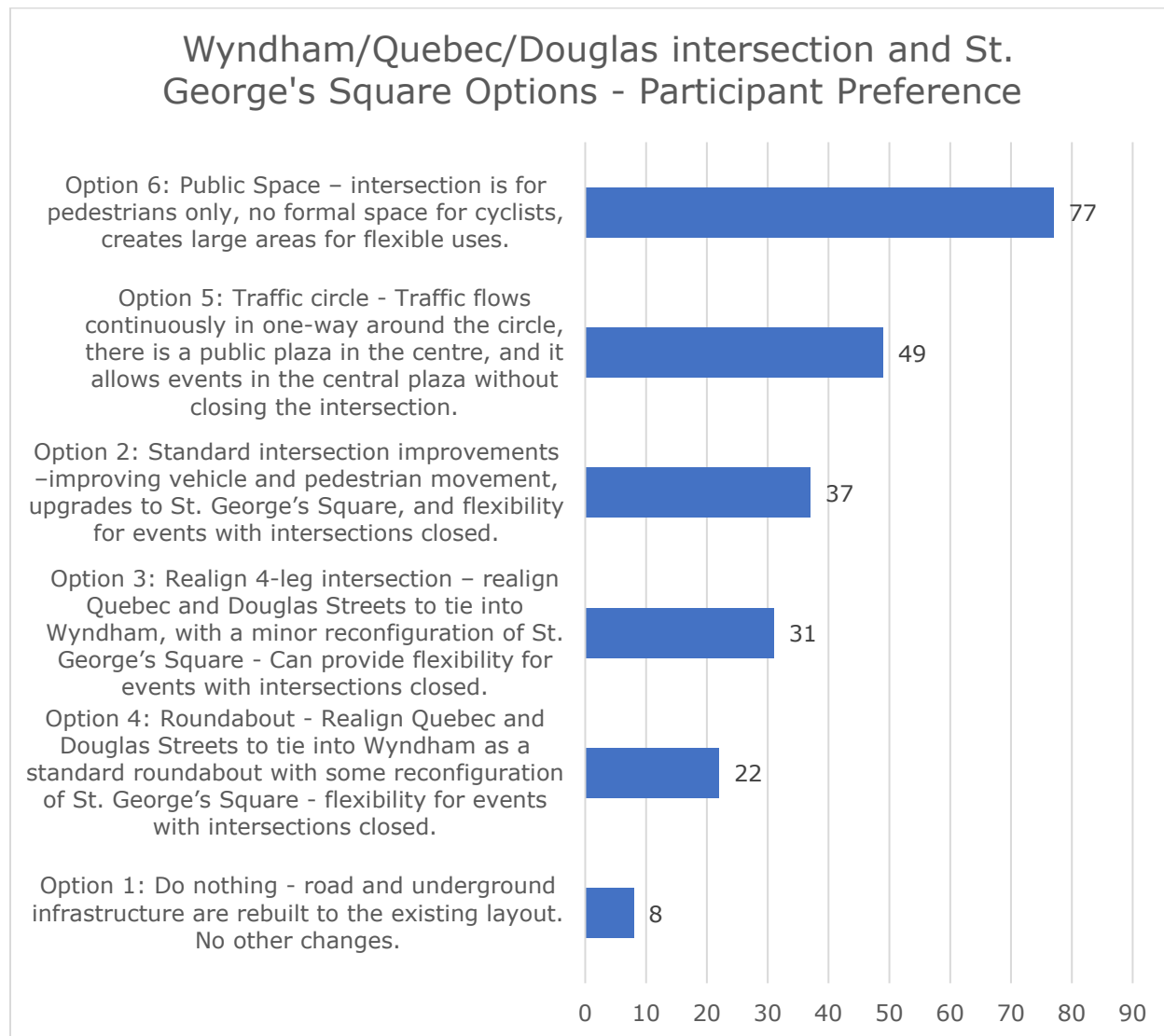


Figure 3: Participant preference for Wyndham/Quebec/Douglas intersection and St. George's Square options, n=154

As shown in Figure 3, Option 6 (public space) was the most popular option. Support was also shown for Option 5 (traffic circle).

Several participants indicated that they would like to see St. George's Square as a truly public space (Option 6), given it is the "heart of downtown". It was felt that Option 6 would provide a pleasant atmosphere and the most safety for pedestrians.

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Participants noted that accommodations need to be made for cyclists, those with accessibility concerns, emergency vehicles and deliveries.

Other participants liked the balance offered by Option 5 (traffic circle), providing flexibility for public space while also accommodating traffic flow through the area. The ability to access the public space without closing the intersection was seen as a benefit. Others noted that they would not want to attend an event with traffic around them. Participants note that the safety of pedestrian crossing and access to the public space will need to be considered.

In contrast, an email submission from an active transportation advocacy group indicated preference for Option 2 (standard intersection improvements) with modifications that include a pilot study, consideration of closing Douglas to vehicles and making Douglas bi-directional for bikes and remove on-street parking.

Comments on evaluation

Participants were asked what was important to them when evaluating these options. A summary of their responses is provided below.

- Safety for those who walk or bike
- Traffic flow for all methods of travel; balance the needs of road users
- Liveability, opportunities for gathering and placemaking
- Access to local businesses; business vibrancy
- Cost of improvements
- Accessibility
- Beauty and aesthetics
- The flexibility of public spaces
- Noise reduction and overall comfort for users of the space
- Environment and air quality
- Access to green space
- Degree of speed reduction or traffic calming
- Consideration of the fountain in the final design

Macdonell Bridge and Allan's Structures

The study aims to identify recommendations that will:

- Address structural deficiencies identified in recent bridge inspections
- Enhance road safety, operations, and connectivity for people who walk, ride, bike, take transit and drive to support the community-building goals of the City
- Improve traffic operations and safety at the Wellington / Woolwich / Macdonell intersection

Feedback on goals

Participants were asked if any other goals should be considered for the study. A summary of their responses is provided below.

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- Consideration of a dedicated/protected crossing to increase safety for people who walk or bike across the structures and those with accessibility needs; reduce focus on cars
- Connections of existing trails across the structures
- Aesthetics and attractive design of the structures; opportunity for creating a "gateway" to downtown and acknowledge local history
- Reducing environmental harm and protecting/naturalizing the Speed River, support/enhance local wildlife and fish; consider the river's history and possible future use
- Considerations for climate change and flooding risks
- Consider hydro-electric power generation

Participants were generally not supportive of the "do nothing" options or the options to remove the bridge(s). Some participants, including the correspondence from the active transportation advocacy group, asked for an option for a walking/cycling underpass.

Feedback on options

Many participants requested additional information about the structures, the options presented, and their potential impacts to make an informed response.

Participants wanted to know more about the traffic flow through the area, existing connections and usage, and how this might be impacted by removing the bridge(s) and/or closing them to car traffic. Participants also wondered about the environmental implications of dam modifications and the potential impacts on the river and wildlife. There were also requests to learn more about the costs and trade-offs of various options. Participants also encouraged the project team to consider the downtown as a whole, including, for example, the [Ward to Downtown](#) pedestrian bridge.

Participants were asked which option(s) they preferred for the Macdonell Bridge, Allan's Dam Bridge, Sluiceway, and Spillway. The results are in the following figures.

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Macdonell Bridge Options

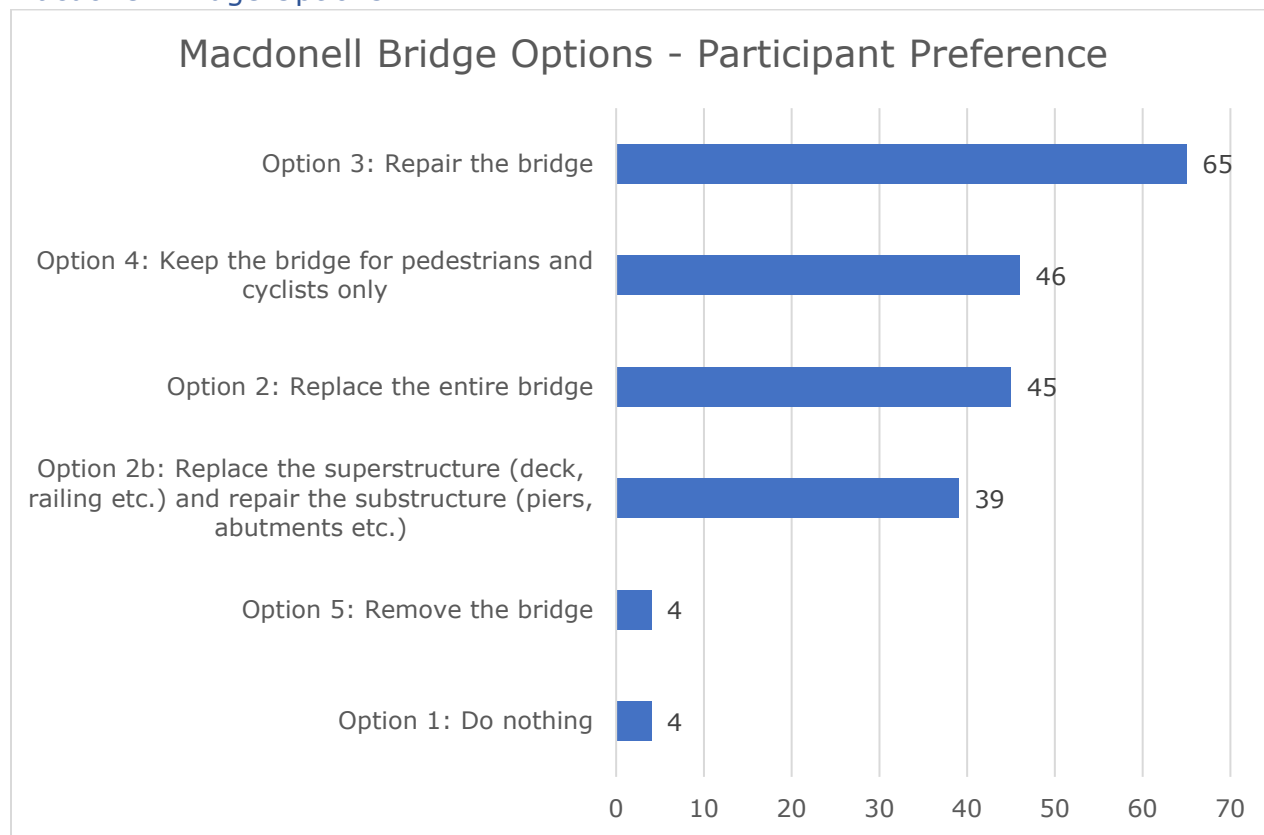


Figure 4: Participant preference for Macdonell Bridge options, n=139

Participants most favoured Option 3 (repair the bridge), with support for Option 4 (keeping the bridge option for pedestrians and cyclists only) and replacing the entire bridge or the superstructure (Options 2 and 2b).

While some participants indicated a desire to keep the Macdonell Bridge open for all road users, there was a widespread call to accommodate better the safety of those who walk or bike. There was a concern about removing the bridge in terms of traffic flow and access for emergency vehicles.

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Allan's Dam Bridge Options

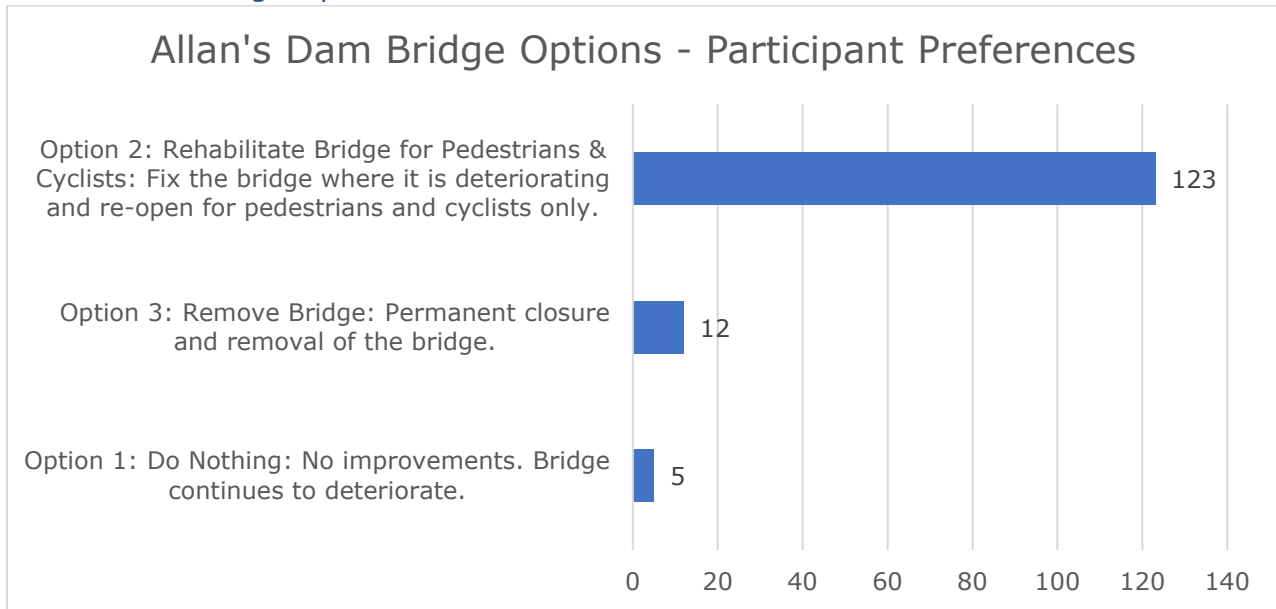


Figure 5: Participant preference for Allan's Dam Bridge Options, n=137

As shown above, there was significant support for Option 2 (rehabilitating the bridge for pedestrians and cyclists). Participants felt that rehabilitating the bridge for pedestrians and cyclists would provide a safe connection for these road users and encourage more residents to walk or cycle downtown. Participants note the historical importance of the bridge and would like to see it maintained.

A few participants were concerned that creating a pedestrian and cycling bridge would be a duplication of the Ward to Downtown bridge located nearby and, therefore, not a good use of City funds. Participants encouraged the project team to examine all the bridges downtown holistically.

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Allan's Dam Sluiceway & Spillway Options

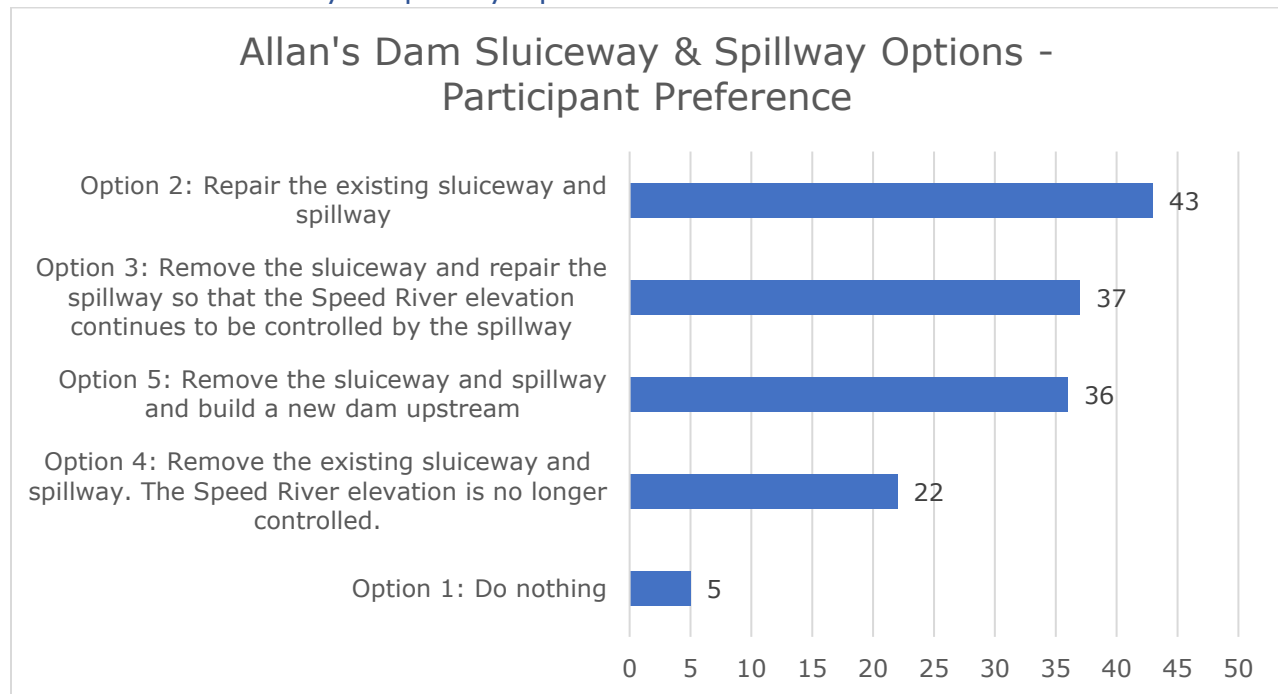


Figure 6: Participant preference for Allan's Dam sluiceway and spillway options, n=115

Participants most favoured Option 2 (repair the existing sluiceway and spillway). There was also support for Option 3 (remove the sluiceway and repair the spillway) and Option 5 (remove the sluiceway and spillway and build a new dam upstream).

Participants noted the importance of flood control. More information was requested on how these options would impact flood protection. Several participants wanted to see the river return to its natural state.

Comments on evaluation

Participants were asked what was important to them when evaluating these options. A summary of their responses is provided below.

- Safety for those who walk or cycle
- Maintaining connections for all road users, particularly those who walk or cycle
- Maintaining the flow of vehicle traffic
- Environmental considerations; flood protection
- Wildlife, biodiversity, and ecosystem health; river protection and restoration
- Cost; impact on taxpayers
- Aesthetics and beautification as a "gateway" to downtown
- Protecting the heritage or character of the area
- Livability
- Accessibility

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Additional feedback

Participants provided the following additional feedback for consideration.

- Be bold, forward-thinking and approach Downtown Renewal holistically
- Consider the needs of local businesses in the process
- Ensure those who live downtown are included in the process, and key stakeholders, such as cyclists, to achieve a balance of perspectives
- Focus on the needs of those who walk or cycle rather than solely on the movement of cars
- Look to other cities that have had success in renewing their downtown cores
- Consider climate change, sustainability and the City's net-zero goals
- Ensure equitable access and accessibility for all
- Consider a pilot of a pedestrian-only area
- Consider future transportation uses (e.g., micro-mobility)
- A desire for traffic calming and speed reduction downtown
- Concern for the safety of pedestrians and cyclists at the Quebec / Norfolk intersection and Norfolk Street between Church Lane and Cork Street East
- Pavers used on Carden Street and Wilson Street should be replicated elsewhere downtown

Feedback received relating to other City initiatives

During engagement, some comments received were beyond the scope of the Downtown Renewal project. These comments are captured and will be shared with respective city departments to inform other projects and initiatives. Comments were received on the following topics.

- Services and support for those experiencing homelessness
- Crime and police presence
- Preference for certain types of stores or services
- Programming for downtown spaces
- Heritage and preservation of architecture
- Improvements to public transit
- Housing and density

DGBA feedback

Highlights of the feedback provided at the meeting with DGBA are provided below.

- Desire for this project to improve and enhance the economic vitality of Downtown Guelph
- Importance of downtown as a commercial district, which addresses the needs of the business community
- Importance of placemaking; solutions for the downtown need to create a feeling of destination

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Next steps

Feedback from the Open House and Have Your Say will be used by the City and its consultants along side research and best practices to inform the information gathering studies (i.e. Capital Implementation Plan, Environmental Assessments of the Macdonell Street bridge and Wyndham Street). Additional opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement will continue as the project progresses.