



Vancouver Art Gallery North Plaza Redesign: Consultation Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of what was heard during the consultations on the VAG North Plaza redevelopment. This summarizes results from the two Open Houses, online questionnaire and stakeholder meetings.

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Project Context & Goals

The City of Vancouver is redeveloping the North Plaza of the Vancouver Art Gallery. Currently the existing membrane underneath the North Plaza is degraded and water is leaking into the underground spaces of the Art Gallery. Because the plaza needs to undergo critical maintenance, the City is investigating how the space can be used before construction begins.

The main goals of the redesign are to:

- waterproof the underground portions of the VAG
- redevelop the plaza to meet current and future needs
- redevelop the plaza to be a positive attribute to the downtown and to the heritage courthouse building

The North Plaza is owned by the Province of BC and leased to the City for use. Activities on the North Plaza are currently coordinated by the City. The Province of BC must approve any changes the City proposes to make to the North Plaza and is responsible for the maintenance of the fountain and the area immediately around it.

In May 2013, the City selected Nick Milkovich Architects (NMA) in association with Hapa Collaborative, Matthew Soules Architecture, and Urban Forum Associates (UFA) as the primary consultants for the Vancouver Art Gallery Plaza redesign.

The consultant team created three design options for discussion based on:

- public feedback from the October 2012 Block 51 process where people were asked how they would use the spaces around the gallery;
- a detailed site analysis and;
- best practice review of comparable urban plazas.

Summary of Reach

The following information was made available during the consultation:

- The design team
- Results of the October 2012 questionnaire
- Objectives of the project
- Rationale and practical considerations
- What makes a great public space
- Precedent studies
- Site analysis
- Details on the 3 concept design options (Wet, Active Edge and PLALO Ring)

Public feedback was gathered on the three proposed design options through:

Consultation Activity	
Public Open Houses (Oct 1 weekday evening, Oct 5 weekend afternoon)	2 Open houses with ~270 participants
Online (and hard copy) questionnaires	914 completed responses
Stakeholder meetings	16 people, Vancouver Art Gallery and UBC Robson Square, DV BIA
Emails	2 received
Media	Tracking media commentary, reader comments

To spread the word about the open houses and online questionnaire, the following communication channels were used. The project generated significant media interest and every major news outlet in Vancouver (TV, radio and print) covered the story. See Appendix 1 for a list of media mentions.

Outreach Method	
City of Vancouver website	465 unique page visits
City of Vancouver Twitter	10 tweets between Sept 26 and Oct 22 with 50 retweets altogether
City of Vancouver Facebook	4 posts with a combined reach of 8,076, 119 likes, 22 comments and 47 shares
Email invitation to Talk Vancouver panellist	Sent to 1170 panelists
Email invitation to Block 51 participants	Sent to 256 people
Advertisements	2 ads: Vancouver Courier on Sept 27 and Georgia Straight on Sept 26
Media Articles	-12 articles, content pitches to local bloggers (VanCity Buzz, Spacing)

Summary of Consultation Feedback

During this phase of consultation, over 270 people attended the two public open houses and 914 people completed the questionnaire either online or in person.

Incorporating input

The public was asked what they liked, what they didn't like and what was missing for the three design options. This feedback will be incorporated by the design team to create a final single design option for the plaza.

Analysing the feedback

At the end of the two open houses, the staff and design team members present had a debrief session to capture commonly heard topics and questions. Participants were encouraged to fill out the questionnaire online or hard copy to ensure their ideas were recorded.

The questionnaire contained nine open ended questions with 914 data sets for each question. To summarize the feedback and distill the themes, a group theming exercise was conducted. This involved seven staff members who worked in three teams of two to process the data and a facilitator. When individuals saw a theme was emerging, they confirmed the theme with their team mate. If their team mate agreed, they wrote it on a sticky note which was collected by the facilitator. The facilitator clustered the proposed themes. In order for a theme to be declared a theme at least two of the three teams would have to put forward that theme. The entire process took four hours.

Key themes

Detailed feedback is available in Appendix A, the following summarizes overall learnings from the consultation exercise.

- Overall there was a sense of relief and excitement that something was going to happen with this space. People wanted to see a well-designed space that was unique where they could gather.
- The open plaza concept was well liked.
- There were relatively few comments suggesting a return to grass and gardens, however, more trees and greenery was suggested often.
- There was a desire for the design to fit in with the buildings on the site.
- Often the Wet concept seemed to be misunderstood, but there was a sizeable number who were concerned with the wetness and others who were concerned/happy (depending on their viewpoint) that the wetness could be controlled to discourage campers.
- The Ring concept had the greatest number of supporters, but it was still only half of respondents. Many of the individual elements were preferred in this scheme (extent of trees, openness of plaza, ambiance etc).
- All designs were deemed to need more seating.
- The provision of access to refreshments is desirable.
- Having an interactive feature (i.e. water fountain, lights, art piece) came up in the comments as an important feature.
- There was some desire to see a combination of elements from the three designs. The boldness of the Ring, with a water element, and greater attention to the edge condition.
- More design work will be needed to develop the final design; it could be based on a new design concept as long as it respects the guidance in the above points with respect to openness, trees/greenery, seating etc.

Wet (option 1) themes

- People liked that the Wet design (option 1) celebrated Vancouver's climate, however there was also sentiment that Vancouver was wet enough already. This design was not well understood and many people asked where the water would go or if it would always be on. There were also concerns raised about the potential to be a tripping hazard from slippery conditions, the need to have special footwear to be there or the worry that the water feature would impact the ability to use the space for large gatherings and protests. The playfulness and the greenery of this option were repeatedly raised as positive elements of the design.

Active Edge (option 2) themes

- The Active Edge design (option 2) was the least supported option. People did like the openness of the space, modern design and fountain but many people

found the design sterile and barren and that the design was missing a sense of invitation.

PLALO Ring (option 3) themes

- The PLALO Ring design (option 3) received strong support and strong opposition, but it did receive the most amount of attention and positive feedback. People identified the design as bold, unique and iconic. There were some concerns about safety (would it withstand earthquakes?), whether the design would get dated and maintenance concerns.

Next Steps

The design team will take the feedback on the three design options and create a final master plan as well as develop a plan for the work based on the available budget.

For the waterproofing work on the plaza only a building permit is required; for the redevelopment of the Plaza surface an amendment to the existing Development Permit is required; this will include additional public consultation. Depending on the priorities of the City and the building envelope assessment the work could be split into two parts.

Appendix A: Detailed feedback

This appendix includes details from the consultation, including a detailed overview of questionnaire responses.

Open Houses

Two public open houses were held to provide background information on the project, details of the site analysis and present the three design options. City of Vancouver staff and members of the design team were on hand to answer questions and collect feedback.

Date	Location	Time	Attendance
Tuesday, October 1, 2013	UBC Robson Square	5:30 - 8:30 pm	~ 70
Saturday, October 5, 2013	UBC Robson Square	12:30 - 3:30 pm	~ 200
Total		6 hours	~ 270 attendees

A number of media outlets came out to these events, including: CBC TV, CBC Radio-Canada (TV and Radio), City TV, CKNW, Omni TV, Global TV, and Langara.

Despite the heavy rain, approximately 70 people showed up at the first open house on Tuesday, October 1. On the Saturday, October 5, over 200 people attended.

Over 60 paper surveys were collected during the open houses. In addition, people were filling out the questionnaire on their smartphones or the iPad kiosks.

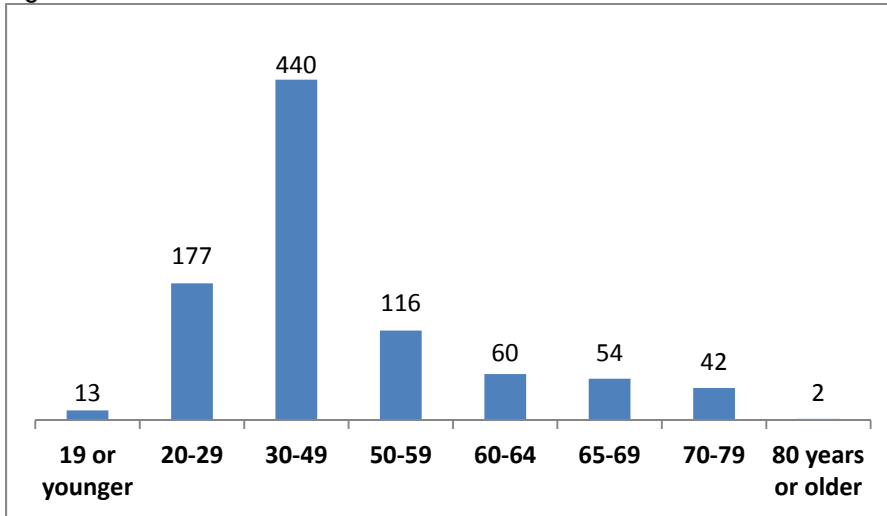


Questionnaire Results

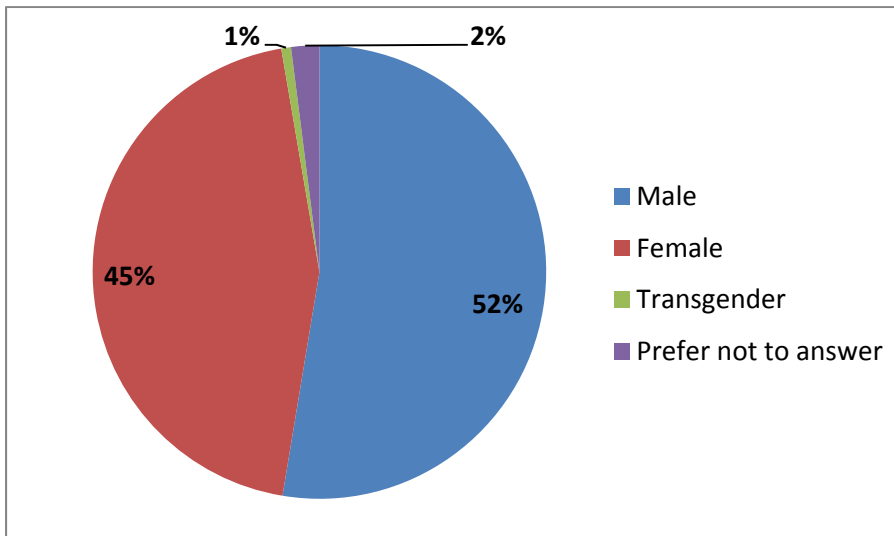
This was the first questionnaire launched with the city's online engagement panel, Talk Vancouver. It went to 1170 panel members. Of the 914 completed questionnaires, 511 were filled out by Talk Vancouver members, others were received as paper copies from open houses and through an open link on vancouver.ca.

Completed Questionnaires (includes paper questionnaires)	914
Median completion Time	15 Min 58 Sec

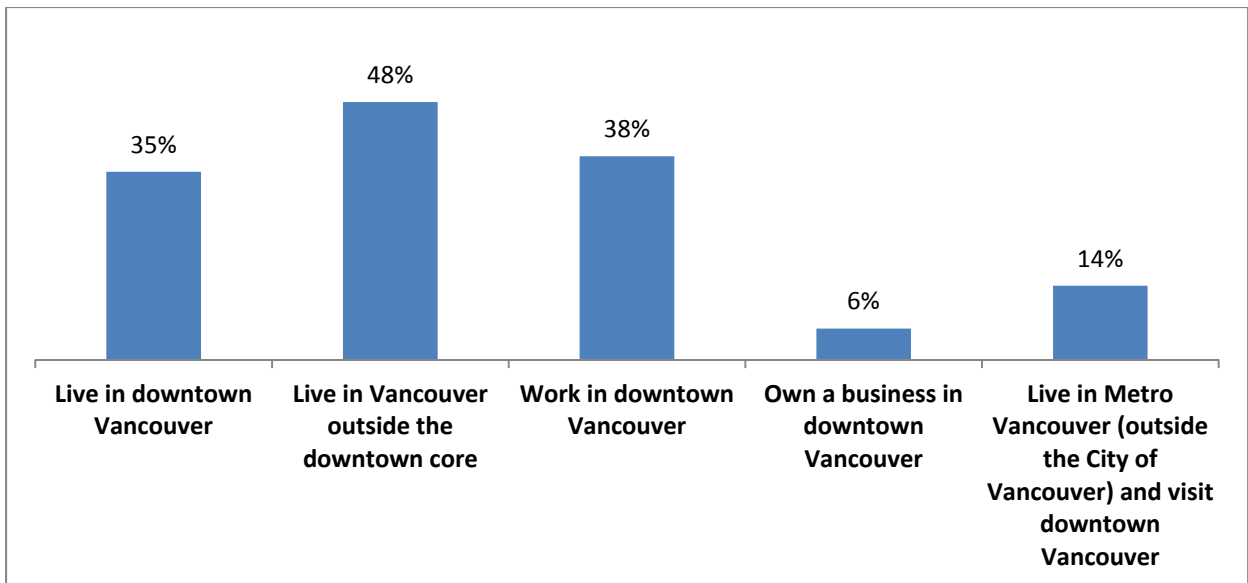
Age



Gender



What is your relationship with downtown?



Overall Conclusions from feedback:

- The open plaza concept is well liked.
- Trees and greenery are needed - a quantity between the Active Edge design and the Ring designs.
- Often the Wet concept seemed to be misunderstood, but there was a sizeable number who were concerned with the wetness and others who were concerned/happy (depending on their viewpoint) that the wetness could be controlled to discourage campers.
- The Ring concept had the greatest number of supporters, but it was still only half of respondents.
- Also, many of the individual elements were preferred in this scheme (extent of trees, openness of plaza, ambiance etc) the conclusion would be that water is not essential, but a big unifying idea could win broad support.
- All designs were deemed to need more seating.
- The provision of access to refreshments is desirable.
- More design work will be needed to develop the final design; it could be based on a new design concept as long as it respects the guidance in the above points with respect to openness, trees/greenery, seating etc.

Concept Design Option 1 - Wet

CONCEPT DESIGN - OPTION 1 - WET VANCOUVER ART GALLERY NORTH PLAZA REDEVELOPMENT

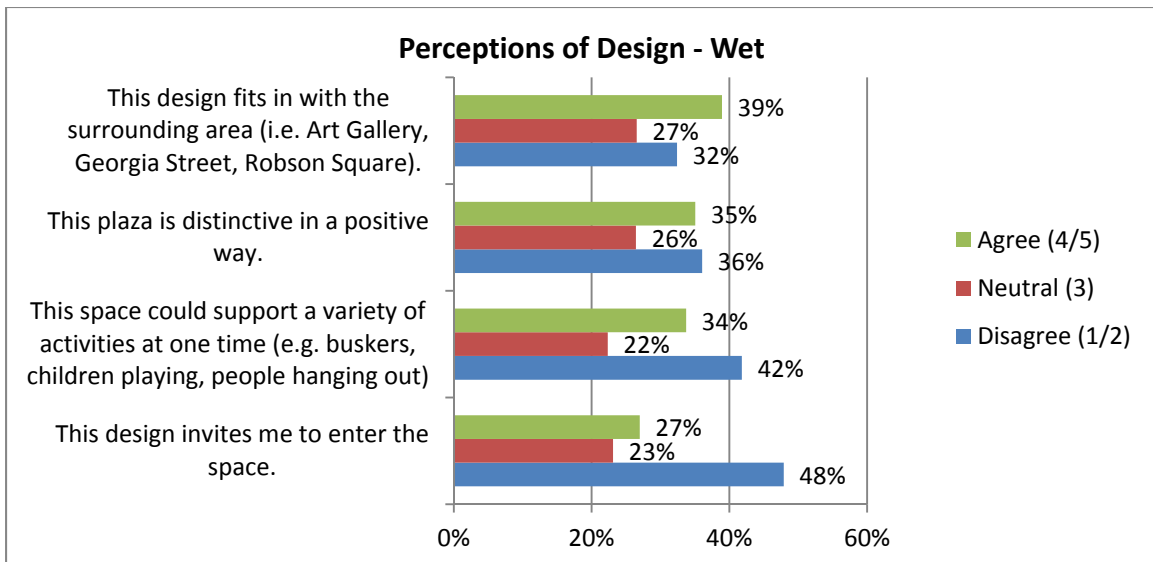
AERIAL VIEW

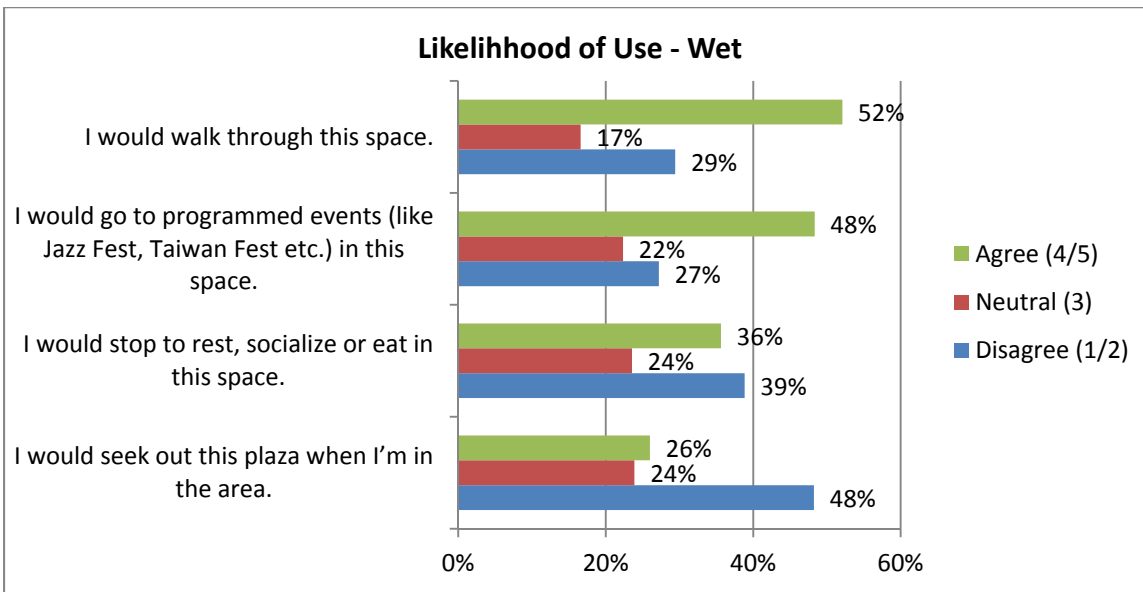
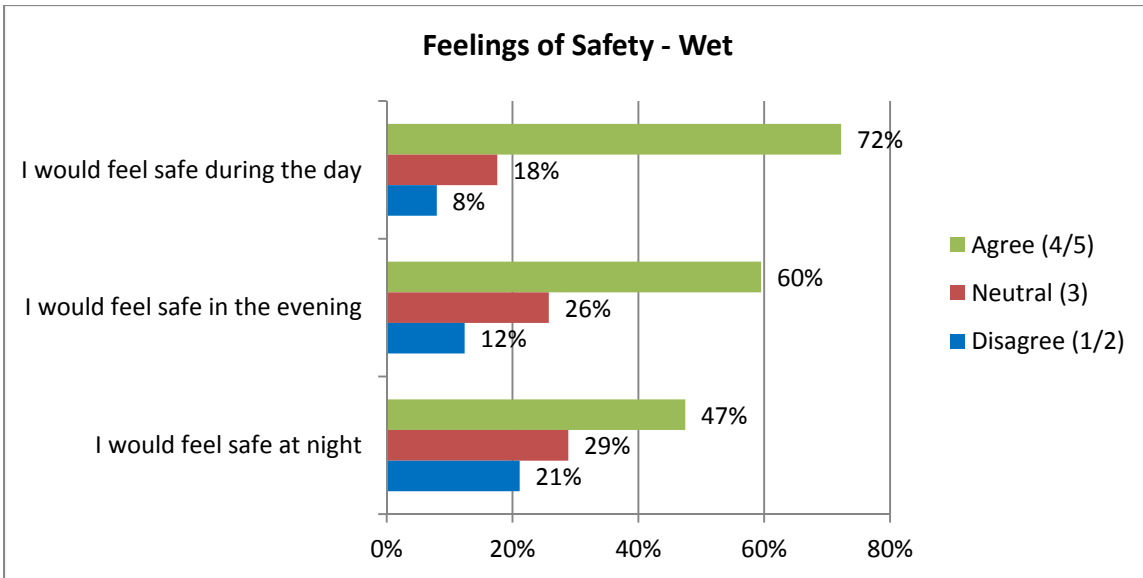


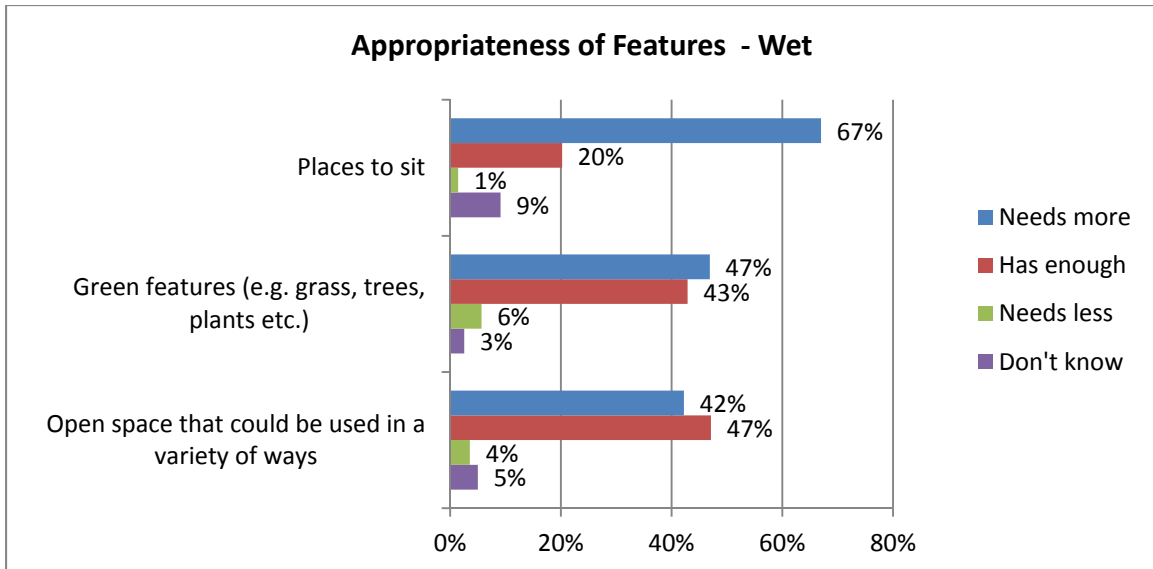
PROGRAMMING



STREET LEVEL VIEW







What do you like about this design?

Primary themes:

- Was playful. Children would like this design
- Celebrated the climate
- The trees

Secondary themes:

- The openness
- Use of water to reflect the building
- Flexible - variety of uses, have a lot of different types of event
- Elegant, simple
- Unique and engaging

“The embrace of wetness in our wet city, including the diversity of play with the water element as a dynamic visual and textural feature. The broad “wet” area works with an excellent flexibility, occupying broad space as a sculptural element at times when the plaza has lesser traffic and draining to permit large programmed events to fill the generous open-space. This has the benefit of making the plaza feel right-sized at all times. Too many plazas feel desolate when not fully occupied or programmed and claustrophobic when used for large events. The flexible right-sizing will lend the plaza a much more comfortable, much safer, much more human-friendly feel.” [sic]

What don't you like about this design?

Primary themes:

- Vancouver is wet enough already
- Hazardous - concern that it could be slippery and be a tripping hazard (especially for seniors)
- You would get wet feet from walking through water - “will I need rain gear to walk through”?

- Too many puddles

Secondary themes:

- Not enough seating
- Not appropriate for business shoes
- What happens when it freezes in winter
- Impractical
- Confusion as to how it would work
- Upkeep/operating costs
- Bland/not unique
- Water feature too large, took up too much of the plaza
- Too empty and vacant
- Discourage gatherings -- Concern that there's the potential to flood out protests
- Too many trees on Hornby (made it dark with too much of the canopy, wouldn't be able to see the Hotel Vancouver as well)
- Not green enough
- Want more trees on Howe

I don't really understand it -- where does the water come from -- where does it go when the jazz festival is on?

Vancouver is wet enough as it is. Some people would say this design celebrates the rain, but personally - I think it would remind me how much I don't like the rain. I don't like feeling wet and cold. The only way I'd be able to participate in the wet 'puddle' activity was if I bought myself good rain gear. Rain gear is incredibly expensive, and I'm not able to afford good rain gear right now.

The north plaza is the key gathering spot for civil democratic gatherings in the downtown core. This function absolutely should be preserved. Deliberately allowing the area to flood would discourage gatherings and make it much less useful.

What is missing from this design?

Primary themes:

- Seating
- Art
- Circulation and crossing the space - concern that the design would cut off the natural desire lines in the plaza

Secondary Themes:

- Vegetation (planting, trees)
- Open space for gathering
- Food & beverage
- Way to define the edge -- through seating
- Covered space/shelter
- Smaller scale for interactions

Concept Design Option 2 - Active Edge

CONCEPT DESIGN - OPTION 2 - ACTIVE EDGE

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY NORTH PLAZA REDEVELOPMENT

AERIAL VIEW



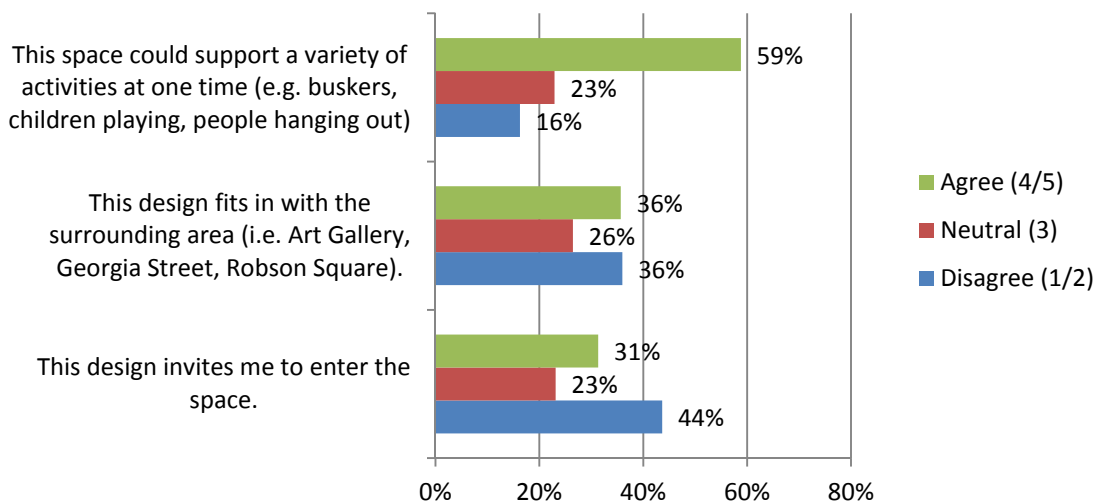
PROGRAMMING

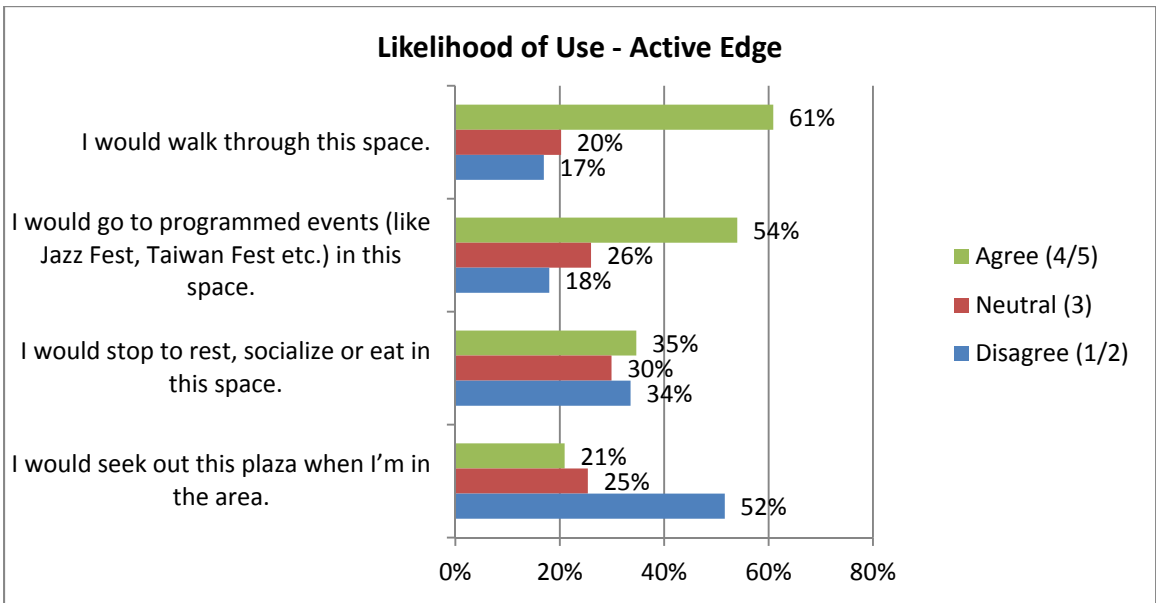
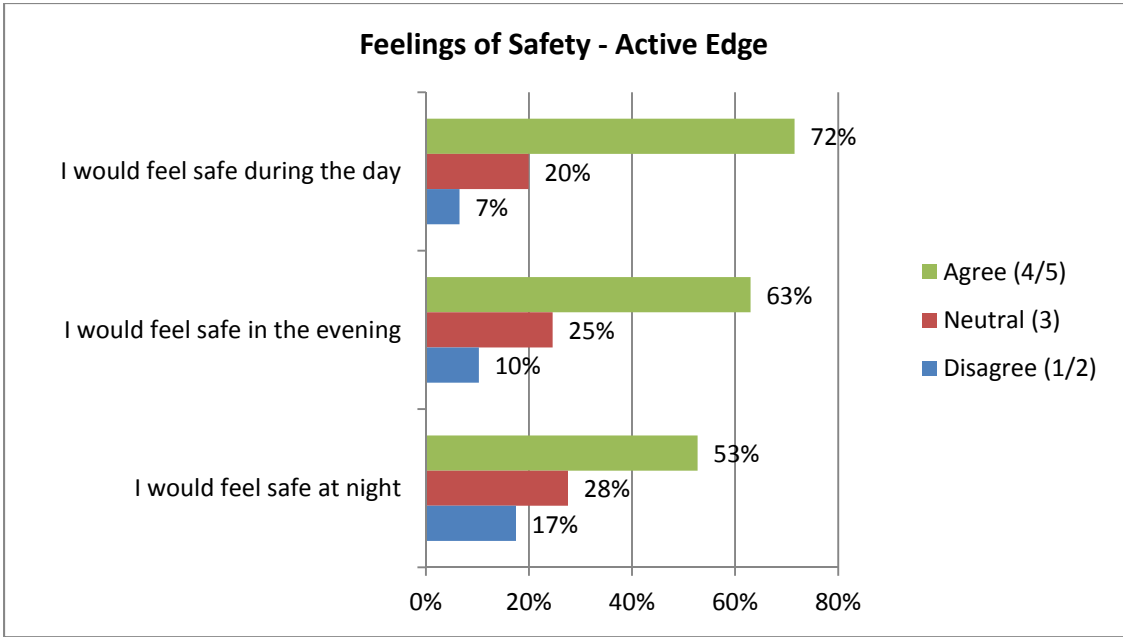


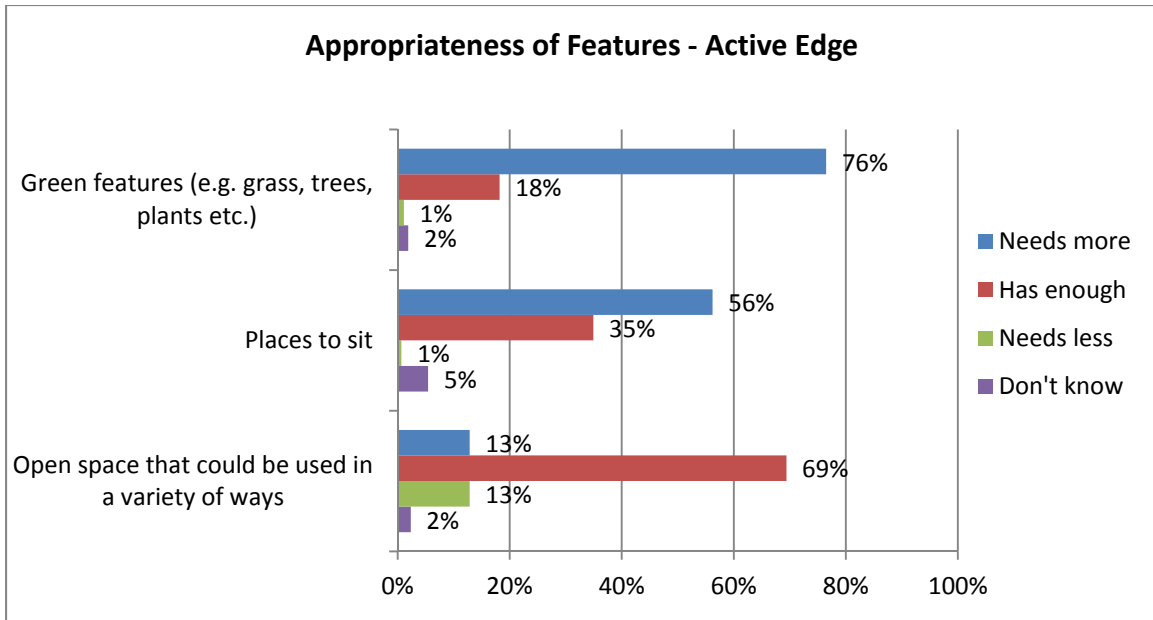
STREET LEVEL VIEW



Perceptions of Design - Active Edge







What do you like about this design?

Primary themes:

- Nothing
- Edge on Georgia
 - Separation
 - Sound buffer
- Openness
- Flexibility of space
- Open and modern

Secondary themes:

- Covered cafe seating -- kiosk
 - being out of the rain, having a space to gather
- Water feature

"This design is very flexible, it enables connections, and it has good scale. It's easy to gather and move through the space without impediments. I like the idea of public wifi here. It reinforces a focus on the art gallery building. The bench by the water feature is a nice length" [sic]

What don't you like about this design?

Primary themes:

- Sterile -- too corporate, office plaza, a parking lot
- Too barren
- Boring

Secondary themes:

- Not enough green space

- Not enough seating
- Don't like the water feature
- Little character, not inviting
- Separation from street -- couldn't see from the street
- We could do better

What is missing from this design?

Primary themes:

- Sense of invitation
- Seating

Secondary themes:

- Something unique
- Relief from the hardscape
- Art
- Greenery More trees along Howe street
- Areas for groups of people to hang out
- More covered area

*“Some relief from the relentless hardscape, a more interesting paving pattern, at least”
[sic]*

“something to draw you to the space” [sic]

Concept Design Option 3 - PLALO Ring

CONCEPT DESIGN - OPTION 3 - PLALO RING

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY NORTH PLAZA REDEVELOPMENT

AERIAL VIEW



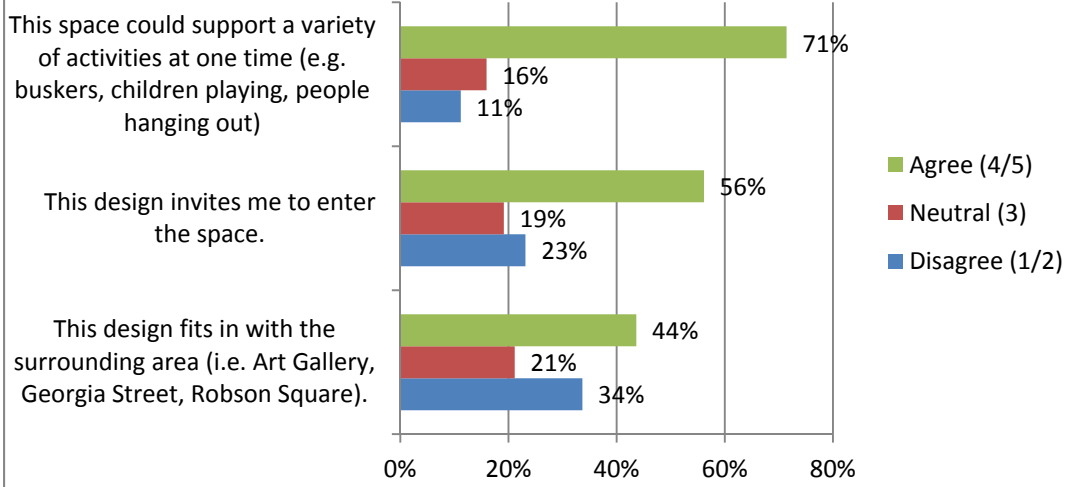
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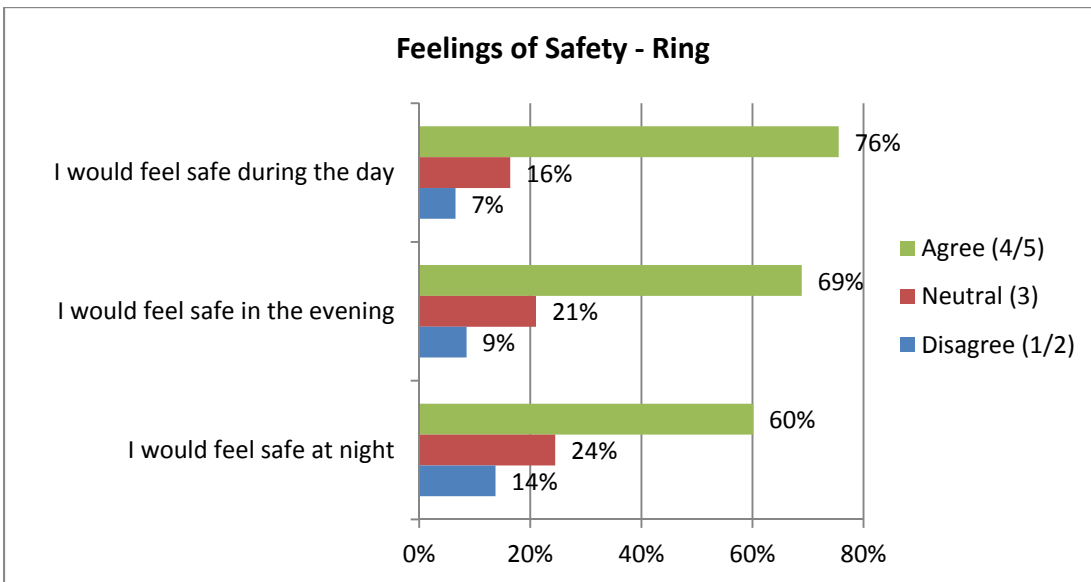
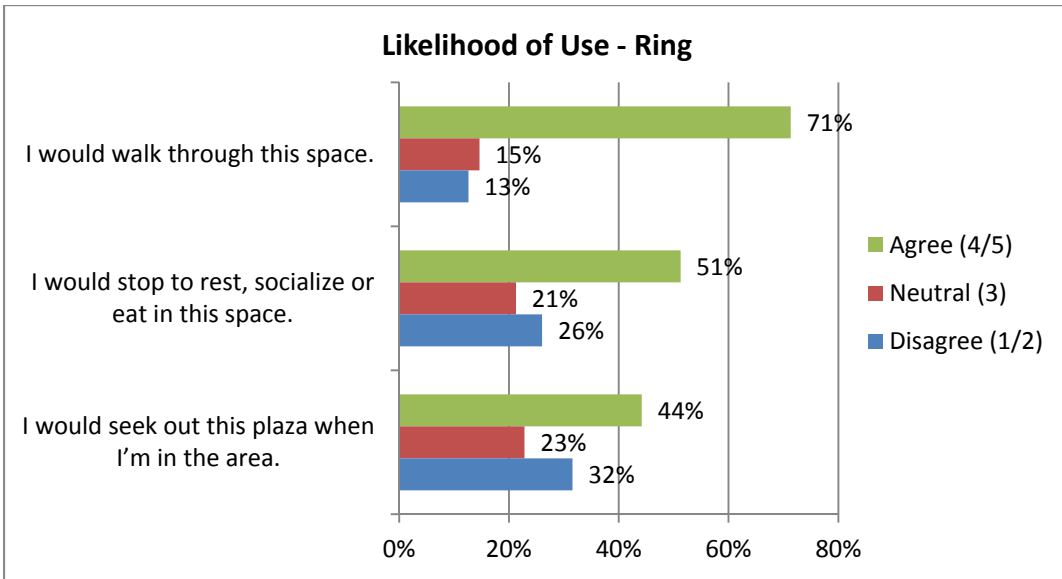


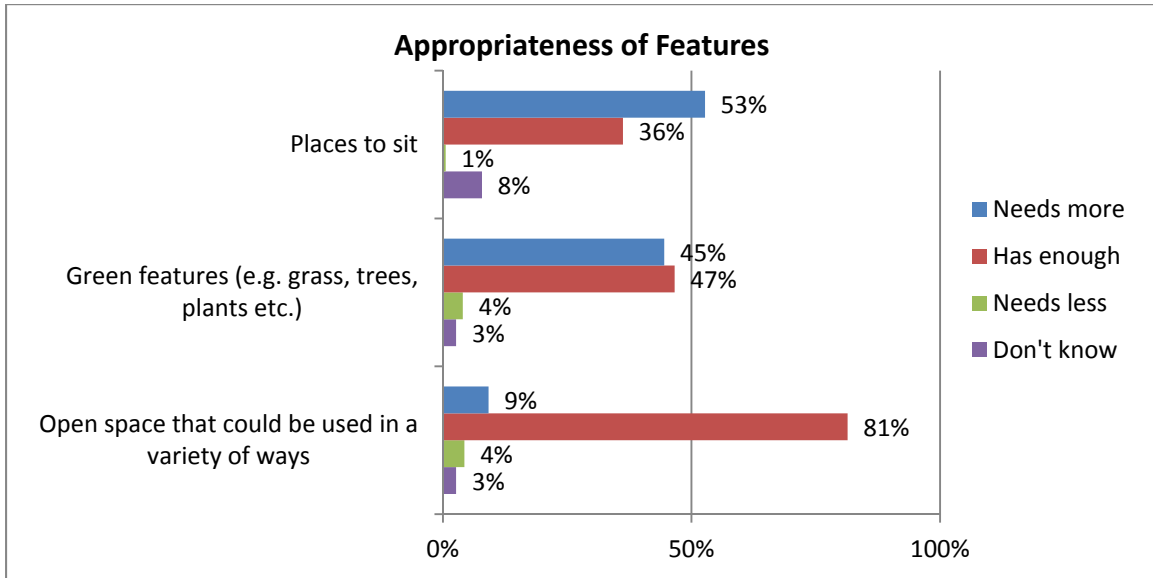
STREET LEVEL VIEW



Perceptions of Design - Ring







What do you like about this design?

This option received the most positive and enthusiastic responses.

Primary themes:

- The Ring - dramatic, unique, artistic feature, recognizable,
- Distinctive - sense of notoriety
- Iconic design

Secondary themes:

- Playfulness
- Trees
- Openness
- Balance between the hardscape and greenery
- Versatility
- Lighting
- Warm, inviting, accessible

“The ring ...at first I wasn't sure however it's grown on me. Very unique ...it would really set us apart locally & internationally! Makes it more night friendly too! I think it makes it a destination space such as the Laughing Statues on English Bay. It would make people smile!” [sic]

What do you like least about this design?

Primary themes:

- The Ring - worried it would look tacky, gimmicky, tired, too trendy,
- Safety - what happens in high winds? earthquake? ice?
- Concerns that it does not fit with the existing site and the Art Gallery building

Secondary themes:

- Maintenance
- Cost/expense
- Little seating
- Too many trees
- Birds
- Would get dated

“Very unsafe having a floating structure above you at all times, in all weather, winds, storms. Takes away from facade of the Art Gallery Building” [sic]

Is there anything missing from the design?

Primary themes:

- Seating
- Greenery

Secondary themes:

- Edge definition - especially along Georgia Street
- Water feature
- Shelter
- European feel
- Cafe
- Patterns in the plaza
- Natural materials

“I think it lacks some low lying, interspersed greenery/landscaping along the Georgia street boarder, simple to define the boundary and provide some relief from all the paving (street to sidewalk to plaza). In addition to purpose-built benches, landscaping elements/retaining walls, etc can be used to accommodate seating for events, activities, picnics etc. Having less formalized seating can attract the casual observer.” [sic]