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To: "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"

Date: 8/2/2024 12:20:45 PM

Subject: Memo - Updates on the Water St Pedestrian Zone Pilot

Attachments: ENG - Memo - Updates on the Water St Pedestrian Zone Pilot.pdf

Dear Mayor and Council,

Please see the attached memo from Jimmy Zammar, Deputy General Manager, Engineering Services.

- This memo provides early learnings from the Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot, with preliminary data from July 2024.
- More information will be distributed to Council on the near horizon, responding to Council recent questions about opening Water Street to vehicles at slow speeds, and with further information on timing of wayfinding and promotional rollout.
- Public feedback from early survey and intercept survey results is extremely positive: 94% positive or somewhat positive about Water St Pedestrian Zone and 88% would like to see something like this return in future summers.
- Business feedback is mixed: almost all appreciate the vibrancy in the neighbourhood, some businesses have told us they've seen an increase in sales and patrons, and some businesses have told us they've seen a decrease in sales due to challenges in accessing the neighbourhood.
- Staff are responding to this feedback by increasing promotions of the Water Street Pedestrian Zone, working with businesses to support better access in specific areas, and adding signage denoting access to Gastown; two of the full car-free days in August have also been canceled in response to requests from the Gastown Business Improvement Society (GBIS).
- Staff will be continuing to collect survey data, pedestrian counts and economic data, and will report back with this to Council in the fall.

All the best,

Karen

Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager (she/her)
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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm/Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh/Squamish and səliłwətaʔ/Tsleil-Waututh nations



ENGINEERING SERVICES
 Lon LaClaire, M.Eng., P.Eng.
 City Engineer/General Manager

MEMORANDUM

August 2, 2024

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager
 Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager
 Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager
 Sandra Singh, Deputy City Manager
 Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk
 Maria Pontikis, Chief Communications Officer, CEC
 Teresa Jong, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office
 Mellisa Morphy, Director of Policy, Mayor's Office
 Trevor Ford, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

FROM: Jimmy Zammar
 Deputy General Manager, Engineering Services

SUBJECT: Updates on the Water St Pedestrian Zone Pilot

RTS #: 16464

This memo provides early learnings from business engagement, public feedback and data collection for the Summer 2024 Water St Pedestrian Zone Pilot. There is an active, but divided discussion through media and social media regarding the pilot, with a mix of positive and negative sentiments. Staff will continue to monitor this coverage, collect data and the overall feedback from the public and businesses and will report back to Council in early October with a summary of learnings and recommendations for future pedestrian zone pilots (see Appendix A for a summary of the approach to data collection and monitoring).

Early feedback from businesses

Staff have received some early feedback from businesses via direct in-person conversations, ongoing discussions with the GBIS, and email correspondence. A formal business survey will launch in the last two weeks of August. This will be supplemented with an economic analysis of sales data with support from the consultant team.

So far, staff have heard mixed feedback from businesses in Gastown. Some businesses appreciate the vitality and positive image that the Pedestrian Zone has brought to Gastown and have benefited from: the increase in foot traffic and patrons to their business; the permitting changes that enable them to take advantage of expanded street space such as larger patios; and, the additional cleanliness and maintenance services in the area.

At the same time, some businesses have expressed concerns about the pilot impacts, including: declining sales; the perception that local customers are dissuaded from visiting their business because of lack of on-street parking or trouble accessing the neighbourhood, and the visibility of people experiencing homelessness or open substance use (see Appendix B for early themes from business feedback.)

Early feedback from residents and the public

The Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot public survey launched on Shape Your City on July 18. As of Sunday, July 28, we have received 126 responses. 94% of the 111 respondents who have visited the Water Street Pedestrian Zone said they had a positive or somewhat positive experience. 88% of all respondents said yes or probably yes when asked if they were interested in the Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot returning in future summers.

We have received over 60 3-1-1 cases and emails, and just over half of these were positive, mainly sharing that they enjoy the car-free areas, new seating areas and vibrancy of the Water Street Pedestrian Zone. Some residents shared that the lack of vehicle traffic has had a positive impact with less vehicular noise and air pollution.

We have also heard concerns about homelessness and open substance use in the area, tour buses idling, and increased vehicle congestion from the pilot detours. Some residents have expressed concerns about increased noise, particularly in Maple Tree Square, from patios and buskers in the evenings and weekends.

Early findings

Pedestrian counts: As with most summers, we have seen large numbers of people walking through and enjoying the space. On the car-free Steam Clock block, preliminary counts show 2734 pedestrians during the peak hour on a Saturday, which is a 12% increase from the previous year. On the car-light block between Carrall and Abbott streets, counts show 1972 pedestrians during the peak hour on a Saturday, which is a 27% increase from the previous year.

Intercept surveys: Staff are working with external consultants to administer intercept surveys to better understand how people are experiencing the pilot. So far, 600 people have completed the surveys, 60% locals and 40% visitors from outside the metro Vancouver region. When asked if the pedestrian zone makes it more appealing for them to shop and dine in the area, 83% of people agreed. Overall, 88% said that they are likely or very likely to return to Water Street Pedestrian Zone pilot again. (See Appendix C for early findings from intercept surveys.)

Specific to the visibility of people experiencing homelessness, or engaged in open substance use, staff teams and partner organizations continue to observe little change in the neighbourhood. Most people sheltering in place overnight are packing up by mid-morning.

Additional measures for the remainder of the Pilot:

- We are installing wayfinding signage throughout the neighbourhood to help drivers access Gastown, and we've been working with businesses on circulation and curbside changes to better support access.
- We are launching a promotions campaign targeted at local residents to encourage people to visit the Water St Pedestrian Zone pilot and shop and dine in the neighbourhood. This campaign will also provide information on how to get to Gastown.
- We have canceled two of the full car-free days in August. One car-free day will be on August 31st. Further, staff will support the Meet Me in Gastown event on August 15th which is primarily focused in Maple Tree Square.
- Homeless services staff will continue to visit Water St regularly.

Please contact me directly if you have any questions.



Jimmy Zammar, M.A.Sc., M.Sc., PMP
Deputy General Manager, Engineering Services

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Appendix A: Approach to data collection and monitoring plan

Staff have developed a comprehensive data collection and monitoring plan that includes public life observations, intercept surveys, pedestrian counts, a public (online) survey, economic impact study, as well as a survey targeted to Gastown businesses. Next steps for each tool are summarized below:

- **Public feedback:** The Shape Your City survey will be live until August 31 and will be promoted through the City's social media channels, community pop-ups, community notification letters to Gastown residents and businesses, and project mailing list.
- **Business feedback:** A business survey will be conducted between August 19 to August 31, which will gather business input on their overall experiences of the Pedestrian Zone Pilot, as well as the value of specific tools offered by the City, including new and expanded patios (with additional seating), facilitated permitting processes, merchandise displays, live music and market stalls. Staff will also continue to be on-site visiting businesses in-person a minimum of twice a week until the end of the Pilot.
- **Public life analysis:** Staff and external consultants will continue collecting public life data, including who is visiting the space and how people are using the space through observation methods and intercept surveys.
- **Pedestrian counts:** Staff will continue to collect and analyze pedestrian counts on Water Street and the adjacent "gateway" streets to the pedestrian zone. The monitoring on Water Street is happening seven days a week to give staff a full picture of travel patterns on the street while the monitoring on nearby streets is from Thursdays to Sundays.
- **Economic study:** In the coming weeks, an economic consultant will be receiving and analyzing sales data for the summer pilot and comparing this with other relevant areas such as downtown Vancouver. In addition, the economic impact study will include international precedent research and recommendations for mitigating any potential economic impacts and suggested improvements for future pedestrian pilots. Staff will report back to Council with preliminary findings from the economic impact study in October.

Appendix B: Prominent early themes from business feedback:

- **Business revenue impact:** Some restaurants and food service businesses with new or expanded pilot patios have noted an increase in customers and revenue. Several other business types have expressed enthusiasm for merchandise displays, market stalls and live music, which offer them more visibility and engagement in the Pilot. In contrast, some businesses have shared that they are experiencing declining revenues, citing vehicular access and circulation changes that make it difficult for some of their customers to visit; reduced number of tour bus stop locations; and challenges accessing convenient pick-up and drop-off locations.
- **Cleanliness & perception of safety:** Staff have heard feedback from some businesses that the increased foot traffic in the area has positively impacted their staff's perception of safety getting to and from work. The additional micro-cleaning and sanitation efforts have also been welcomed by most businesses. However, some businesses continue to highlight an increase in street involved activity in the area, including sleeping on furniture at night and open substance use. Mission Possible's peer ambassadors continue to be active from 8am to noon, 7 days a week, and have not observed a significant increase in social needs and have noted that by mid-morning unhoused people are no longer sleeping on the furniture. The City's Homelessness Services Outreach team has also added additional visits to Gastown to their route and continues to monitor the area closely for any escalations.
- **Powell Street:** Businesses on Powell St have voiced additional concerns about their limited benefit from the pilot. Businesses on the 100 block of Powell in particular have highlighted significant challenges with access due to the circulation changes that have been in place since Maple Tree Square repairs began in March. Staff have since reviewed the circulation plan and have made the 100 block of Powell two-way to mitigate some of these challenges, and have added additional signage directing foot traffic to businesses on Powell.

Appendix C: Early intercept survey findings:

- To date, intercept survey findings show that out of all participants, **40%** walked to get to the neighbourhood, **36%** took transit and **13%** got there by vehicle (including both personal vehicles and taxi/ride-share).
- **83%** of survey participants agreed with the statement, “The pedestrian zone makes it more appealing for me to shop and dine in the area, with patios, merchandise displays and market stalls.”
- **83%** of survey participants agreed with the statement, “The pedestrian zone creates a destination that draws me to visit Gastown more.”
- **87%** of survey participants agreed with the statement, “The pedestrian zone creates a comfortable outdoor place for me to stay, socialize, meet friends, hang out, and people watch.”
- Early analysis shows that **80%** of respondents were planning on visiting a Gastown business during their trip:
 - 20% were planning on going to a restaurant,
 - 39% were planning on going to a cafe or coffee shop,
 - 23% were planning on visiting a souvenir shop, and
 - 20% were planning on going to a retail store.