

From: "Levitt, Karen" <karen.levitt@vancouver.ca>

To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council"](#)

Date: 3/18/2025 12:25:24 PM

Subject: Update: Pilot Project, Graffiti Art Wall in 133 West Pender Street Laneway

Attachments: Memo - Update Pilot Project, Graffiti Art Wall in laneway of 133 West Pender Street.pdf

Dear Mayor and Council,

Please see the attached memo from Lon LaClaire. A short summary of the memo is as follows:

- The graffiti art wall pilot has successfully supported mentorship, skill-building, and community expression, bringing together diverse street artists. It has also contributed to well-being and safety by offering a legal space for art.
- The pilot has gained visibility and attracted more street artists as well as locals and visitors to the area.
- Concerns about noise levels, aerosol use and graffiti spread are being addressed by staff in collaboration with residents, businesses and lead artists.
- Staff will continue supporting graffiti artists in building community and will continue to monitor the wall and address issues that emerge.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lon LaClaire at 604-873-7336 or lon.laclaire@vancouver.ca.

Thanks,

Karen

Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager (she/her)
karen.levitt@vancouver.ca

MEMORANDUM

March 18, 2025

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: Lon LaClaire
General Manager, Engineering Services

SUBJECT: Update: Pilot Project, Graffiti Art Wall in laneway of 133 West Pender Street

RTS #: 14562

This memo provides an overview of the outcomes and learnings of the City's first graffiti wall pilot in the laneway behind 133 W Pender and staff's next steps to keep supporting this work.

Background

In 2022, Council directed staff to pilot a graffiti art wall as both a way to mitigate graffiti vandalism in the area and provide an opportunity for the street art community to engage positively in community building. Staff partnered with Vancouver Native Housing Society and lead artist Trey Helten and identified 133 W Pender to be the graffiti art wall location. The partnership now also includes artist Kyle Shipman. Since September 2022 many artists have been participating in the pilot and Graffiti Jams have been held in 2023 and 2024 over the BC Day long weekend.

At the end of its first year, staff evaluated the pilot with the support of an external researcher who conducted a series of interviews with individuals engaged in graffiti and street art (see Appendix A). The City also collected feedback from residents, businesses and property owners in the immediate area (see Appendix B).

Pilot outcomes and learnings

The evaluation process and ongoing conversations between staff and stakeholders, indicate that the graffiti art wall has had a positive impact on the street art community. Benefits, along with opportunities for improvement, are outlined below:

- *Mentorship and skill-building:* The pilot has brought together individuals, groups and emerging artists from different age groups, occupations, graffiti skill levels, racial/cultural backgrounds, life experiences and genders. Participants have benefited from guidance, mentorship and skill-building opportunities from recognized graffiti artists.
- *Community expression and community building:* The graffiti wall pilot has provided an opportunity for graffiti artists to engage in a legitimized form of street art that supports artistic expression and community building among street artists. However, neighbours have expressed a desire to keep noise to reasonable levels during community events.
- *Fosters well-being and safety:* The pilot presented an opportunity for emerging artists to practice street art legally and safely, while enabling social connections that have a positive impact in their mental health and well-being. Neighbours have expressed concerns about the impact of aerosols on air quality and health.
- *Increases interest and visibility:* The graffiti art wall has become an attraction for locals and visitors to Vancouver. However, due to the heightened interest of street artists in this pilot, the graffiti spread throughout the laneway.

Next Steps

Staff will continue supporting the art wall through programming that enables mentorship and skill-building opportunities, as well as community expression and community building. Staff will also continue monitoring the graffiti art wall pilot, and engaging with residents, businesses and lead artists to address the identified challenges:

- *Noise levels:* staff will co-develop programming guidelines to address neighbours' noise concerns.
- *Aerosols:* staff will conduct research on best practices and safe usage of aerosols.
- *Graffiti spread:* staff and lead artists are co-designing signage that shows the boundary of the pilot wall. Additionally, staff is working with neighbours to remove unwanted graffiti from adjacent buildings. Staff will continue exploring other alternatives as necessary.

Also, staff will continue identifying additional opportunities to support the graffiti artist community as outlined in the recent memo 'Enabling Murals and Public Art on Construction Hoarding'.

Staff will keep Council updated on this work, and if you have any questions in the meantime please contact me directly.

Lon LaClair, M.Eng., P.Eng.
General Manager, Engineering Services
604.873.7336 | lon.laclaire@vancouver.ca

Appendix A

Graffiti Wall Interviews Summary

The following feedback was gathered by a UBC student researcher. Nine interviews lasting 30-45 minutes were conducted via phone, WhatsApp or in person; these participants were compensated with \$50 gift cards to a local Vancouver art supply store. Feedback was also collected from six individuals (including 1 organization, *VIVA Alliance*) by text message.

Who we heard from:

Research participants were composed of graffiti artists and local graffiti appreciators.

What we heard:

- The graffiti wall users are a diverse range of individuals and groups in terms of: age, occupation, graffiti skill level, racial/cultural background, life experience and gender.
- The legal wall has importance as a site for artists to practice their craft, and in a community.
- The wall's current neighbourhood can make it feel unsafe for feminine-presenting folks as well as younger artists; considering other locations and improving amenities could help abate this accessibility concern.
- Participants mentioned that safety could be improved by improving lighting, working to reduce the number of needles and having less police surveilling the area.
- Many participants expressed the opinion that the city should support something similar to the Vancouver Mural Festival (VMF), but for graffiti art and murals.
- Continued support of graffiti jams and competitions would help bring artists together and allow informal mentorship to happen.
- Building off from the feedback that skateparks should be legalized, other types of free-standing structures such as empty shipping containers or wood paneling could be placed near skateparks or laneways as relatively low-effort additions to surface area for painting.
- Future locations could consider the paint smell which some residents near the current wall are bothered by, and that perhaps industrial areas would be better suited locations.
- Clearly delineating the parameters of the wall to clear up ambiguity.

Sample remarks from participants:

"[Doing graffiti] is a way to connect even if you don't speak the same language, graffiti allows you to connect beyond words"

"The wall has brought people together"

"[The graffiti community] helped make me feel like Vancouver is my home"

"The wall was the only place that I could go to express this art form that I've been cultivating since I was 13."

Appendix B

Area Survey and Feedback:

A varied approach was used to distribute a survey to the properties within the same block as the graffiti art wall to maximize response given the small sample size (fewer than 60 locations). It was mailed to property owners and occupants via Canada Post and it was hand-delivered to the buildings to reach staff working or managing businesses.

The survey asked for feedback and input on the graffiti art wall, and asked if people would support the continuation of the project.

Who we heard from:

The City received 11 responses; 4 respondents support the project, 7 do not.

What we heard:

Resident feedback included:

- Health concerns around air pollution from spray-paint.
- Some loss of quiet enjoyment of their homes.
- Lack of consultation prior to project initiation.

We also heard some positive feedback about the art from local businesses.

Sample remarks for residents and businesses:

"A continuous graffiti workshop, which is what the alley graffiti wall project evolved into, is unfair to the residents who live directly at 133 West Pender many who have disabilities and health concerns, and little or no access to the cities poor complaint process who must succumb to the toxic air pollution as a result of the days long graffiti festivals, as well as the noise disturbance and lane blockages -general loss of quiet enjoyment."

"It was an amazing couple days that brought the whole community out to appreciate art and each other and left a lasting legacy of beauty in an area of the city sorely in need of it."

"I support artists expressing themselves legally in a public space. The alley where this project is proposed is not a public space where citizens can enjoy the artwork. The alley is dirty, dangerous, extremely busy with delivery, service and construction vehicles as well as residents needing the alley clear so they can access and exit their homes in their vehicles. Putting a public art space in this location in its current condition is unsanitary and unsafe."

"They treated residents like they were secondary to the "needs" of the painters. They left garbage strewn about. My building's stairwells were filled with excessive levels of VOC pollution. My building's appearance was not enhanced."

"I was approached by the people from the graffiti project. They were very considerate of our building and prior to talking to us had informed all participants to leave our building alone. After

discussing it with them I decided to give our permission to add the graffiti to our building. The participants in the graff-jam were very happy about this and added our building to a larger picture theme with the neighbouring buildings. I was pleased with the results. The artwork was in good taste, but still a bit edgy, consistent with the street vibe. We have decided to leave the work in place for the indefinite future."