



# **Car-Free Pedestrian Zone Pilot Project**

## **2021 Proposal**

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to provide further insight into the issues businesses of all industries faced with the Dining District of 2020, with the anticipation this insight will help City Council make a more informed decision and action plan regarding the Car-Free Pedestrian Zone pilot project as we advance.

## **Proposal**

It is proposed to the City of Guelph to consider reinstating the Car-Free Pedestrian Zone on the corner of Wyndham Street and MacDonell in Downtown Guelph, in the same capacity it was in 2020, for a 16 week in-depth analysis trial period, where information regarding traffic rerouting, parking trends and pedestrian trends are tracked and analyzed by a hired third-party company to provide information regarding accessibility, parking, and consumer trends and public health and safety to be used in comparison with data collected in 2020 for future years.

This amount of time will allow flexibility with implementing the program with potential lockdown restrictions to variant outbreaks. Additionally, the length of time will allow for sufficient data collection, as well as sufficient time to see if the improvements implemented from last year are having an affect on the concerns mentioned later in the report.

## **Methodology**

The data used in this report's comparisons came from the survey results submitted to city clerk and officials on March 25, 2021.

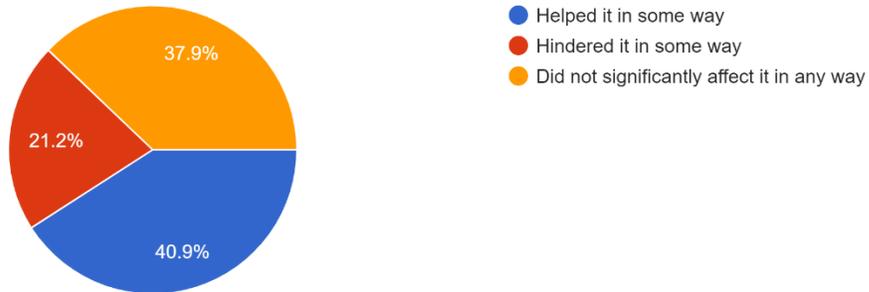
Further analysis has been made to depict better details not outlined by the general survey responses.

Note, the report presenter and business associated is not currently, nor will it after relocating, be on a property with adjacent parking stalls. As such, the final decision regarding the extended patio program does not directly affect this business operations, and the following report has been made with as much information and as little bias as possible.

1.

Do you feel that the Downtown Dining District helped or hindered your business last year?

66 responses



Hindered: 14
Helped: 27
Did not affect: 25

Of the total number of businesses that responded, only 21.2% stated they were hindered. The other 78.8% of businesses claimed it benefited or did not affect them. The number of businesses who benefited from the “Dining District” is nearly double those who were hindered. As such, it is worthwhile reinstating the district, a proven successful tactic, to support businesses

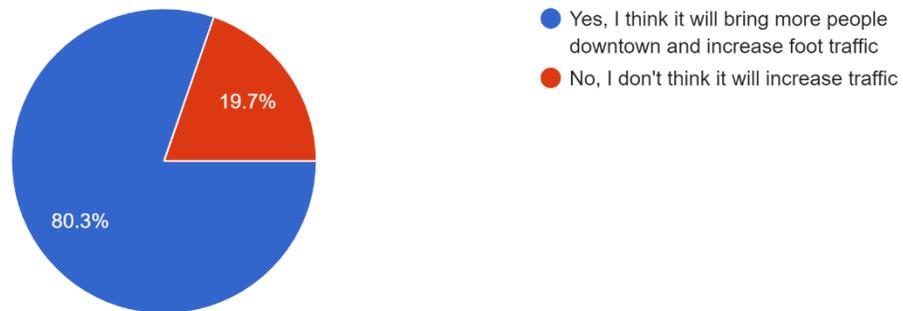
It is imperative that the problems of those businesses who were hindered are investigated and addressed to properly support all businesses downtown survive and recover from this time of crisis.

**2 Pedestrian Draw and Foot Traffic**

**2.a.**

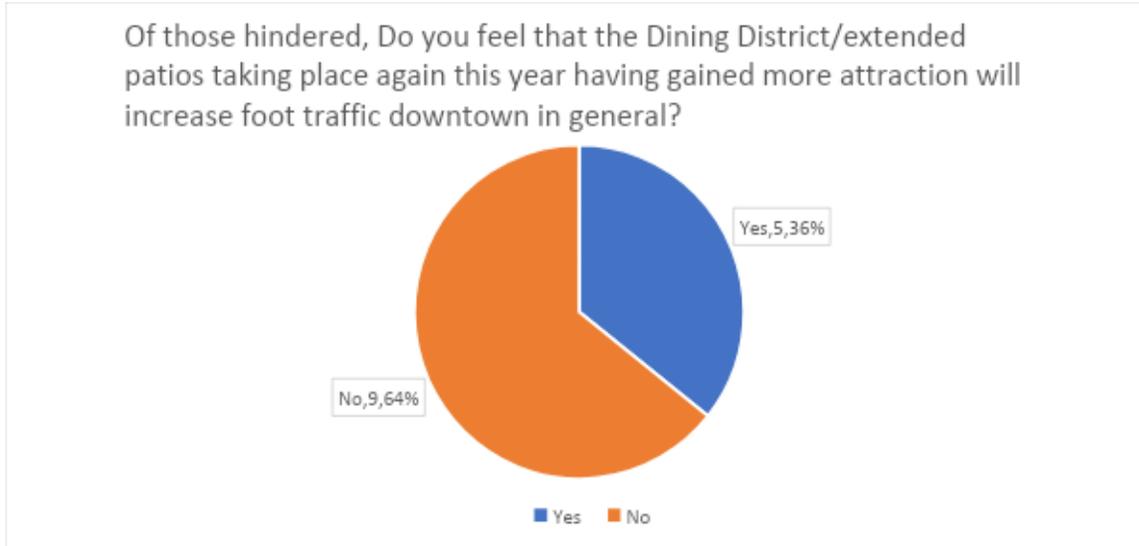
Do you feel that the Dining District/extended patios taking place again this year having gained more attraction will increase foot traffic downtown in general?

66 responses



Yes: 53  
No: 13

**2.b.**

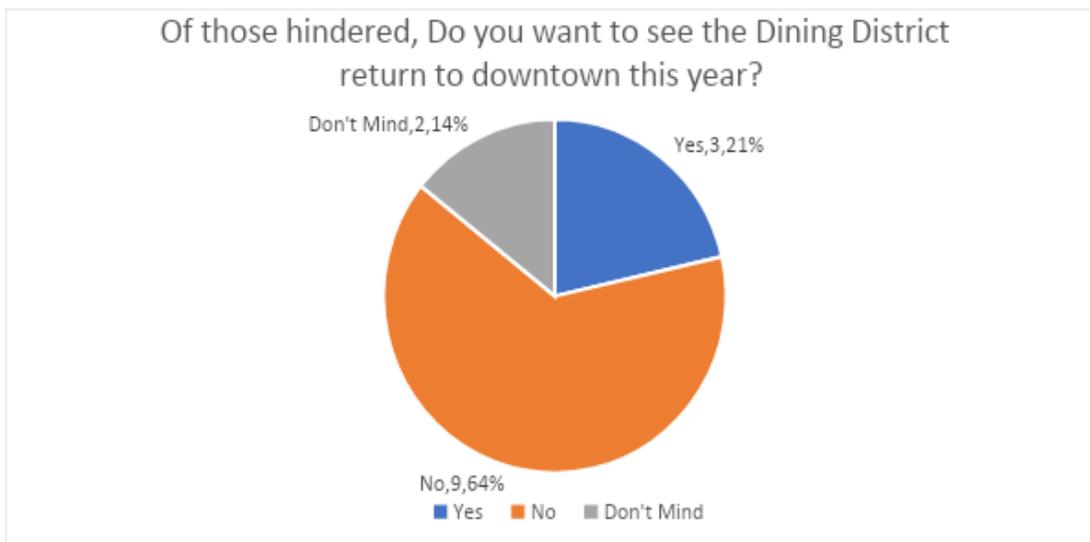


Thirteen of all businesses surveyed said they felt the district would not increase foot traffic in downtown in general. When analyzed more closely, only nine businesses surveyed said they were hindered and also that it would not increase foot traffic. These nine businesses represent 13.6% of the entire survey group. This means that of the businesses who claimed they were hindered, 38.5% still believe the district would increase foot traffic.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the hinderance they faced was not due to a lack of pedestrian exposure but rather some other circumstantial or logistical factor.

**3. Interest in the District Returning**

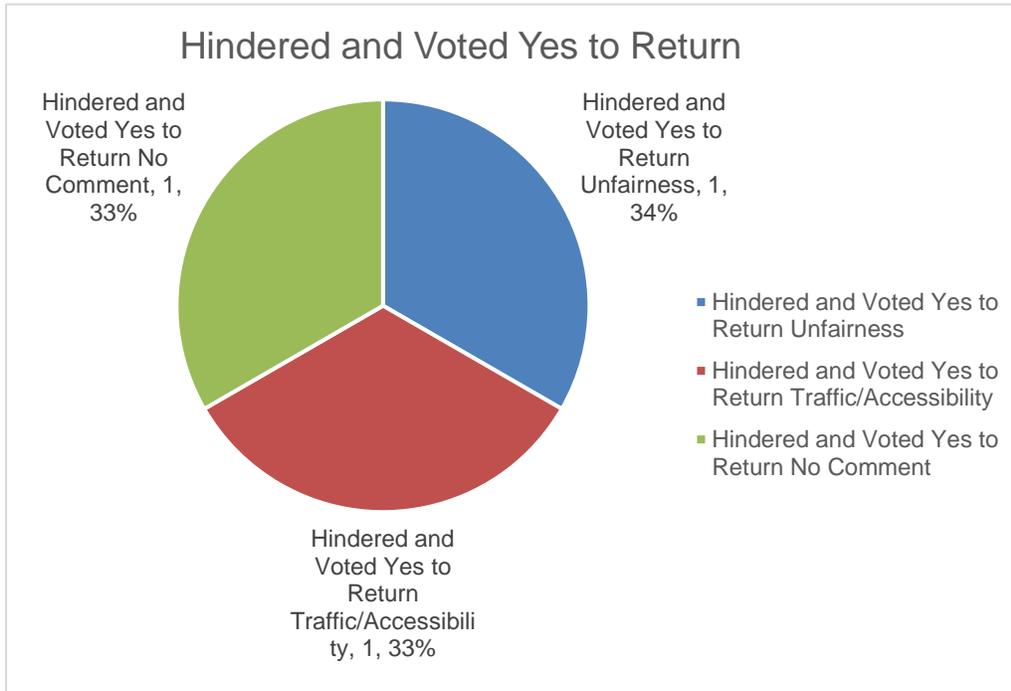
**3.a.**



Of those that were hindered last year, over one third would like to see the district return this year, and

The primary concerns mentioned by each voting group are as follows:

### 3.b.Voting 'Yes' (3)



“The dining district was a hindrance to our business only because not only were we excluded from it (and all of the free seating/patio barricades/promotion that came along with it) but we did not receive our extended patio until Labour Day Weekend. Up to that point, we were allowed 10 seats and spent the entire summer turning customers away as we watched the business we built being decimated by **favouritism and poor planning**. I support the dining district and I support the businesses within it. It was a callous decision by the City to not only exclude the surrounding businesses but offer no additional support to them during the toughest period our industry has ever faced. My business is surrounded by empty storefronts as a result of this decision and if the City has any interest in saving and rejuvenating the downtown then the time is now for an inclusive approach and new ideas.”

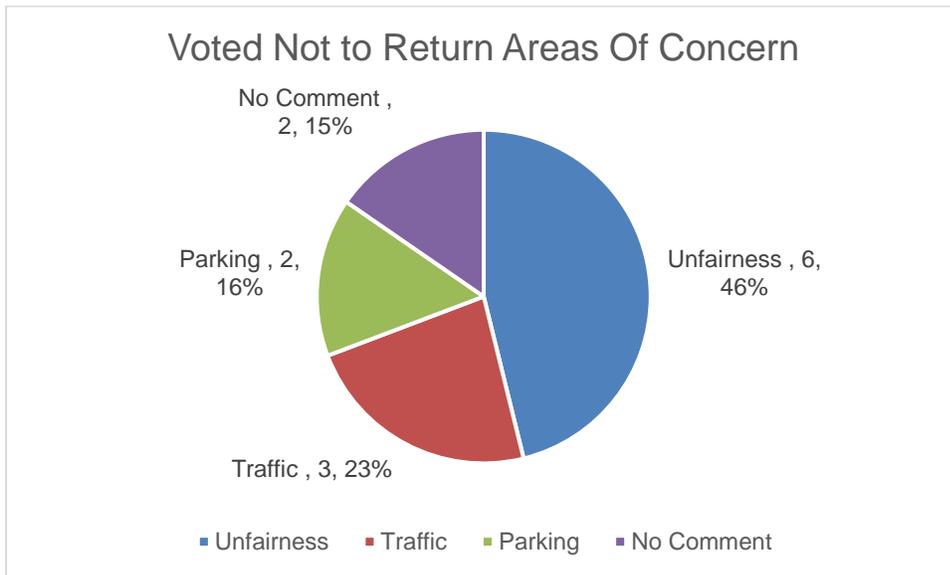
“We did notice a difference in traffic to the store trending negatively. There was a road closed sign at Macdonell and Woolwich which may have led drivers to think the Parkade was closed. Our delivery drivers were very upset about the roads being closed as it is not easy to reroute to the entrance off Macdonell if you are unfamiliar with the area. We believe the dining district is good for businesses in the area overall, **but the roads being closed is a huge negative for us.**”

**Unfairness: 1**

**Traffic: 1**

**No Comment: 1**

### 3.c. Voting No (9)



“Last year we had many customers complain about how long it took them to come pick up their food due to road closures. There were times when **customers wouldn’t pick up food due to parking issues. Because the main focus was on the dining district, small business restaurants on the other side of the streets were ignored.** Hence we had a huge loss in sales. I certainly do like the idea of trafficless downtown and dining district, i think it should inclusive of other restaurants, not just the main three bars.”  
(Parking, Unfairness)

“**Roads belong to public and please leave them open and running to be used by public.** Please don’t try to **help very few** against so many businesses.”  
(Traffic, Unfairness)

“Streets must stay open for **traffic flow.** The pandemic has made many businesses suffer, not just a few. Any decision made about the downtown dining district should benefit all downtown businesses and the needs of general public. Let a few businesses gain on the cost of many other surrounding businesses and the needs of general public, just like last year, is totally unfair and selfish. **The bottom line is all businesses and all citizens should be treated equally and fairly.**”  
(Traffic, Unfairness)

“There’s many other business than Dining. Extended patio (Free) on sidewalk is good enough for them. **Other business has no benefit at all.** Street close cause more festive feeling yet, we are in pandemic. Street close cause more night time problem that people cannot see.”  
(Unfairness)

“There is no option in the above question to get rid of this completely and not have extended patios. I’m not sure why that is not an option. How are you supposed to answer that if you are opposed to the idea. Anyway in my honest opinion I believe this should only be a weekend thing. Just leave the streets as they are now. I believe that is the best solution to satisfying both the **4 bars at the street corner that benefit only** and it helps the other businesses keep foot traffic throughout the week.”  
(Unfairness)\*\*\*

“If you are going to keep extending the patio season then it is imperative that the City provide free parking as **so much parking is taken up for patios** thus our Customers can find parking especially the elderly

Customers.”  
(Parking)

“Extended patios are good for downtown Guelph. **Closing streets to traffic is bad for downtown Guelph.** We want a **fair playing field equally distributed to all food and beverage establishments.** This was not the case at all during last year’s pilot project. Ideally, increased patio space would bring more people downtown and would help bring foot and vehicular traffic to all downtown retail and food and beverage establishments. I contend that extended sidewalk patio space with less red tape and a more festive atmosphere could accomplish what the road closures last year intended to do during the pilot project. We can have our cake and eat it too.

Downtown Guelph is going to change dramatically over the next 5 years because of the redevelopment of Baker Street and associated infrastructure improvements. I want to be clear that I am not opposed to creative ideas regarding outdoor dining and entertainment.

The ---, as a downtown business which includes retail, entertainment and food and beverage components, I ask for fairness for all players in the downtown business ecosystem. This fairness includes public transportation being able to run efficiently and not having impediments for people who may want to commute to the downtown.

I live just south of The University of Guelph and talk to my neighbours about their perceptions of downtown. Last year, many of them expressed dissatisfaction with so many of the **roads being blocked** off to traffic. We want a holistic city. A city where residents feel comfortable going from area to area with as few impediments as possible to facilitate ease of movement.

If you have any other questions, you are welcome to contact me.”  
(Traffic, Unfairness)

**Unfairness: 6**

**Traffic: 3**

**Parking: 2**

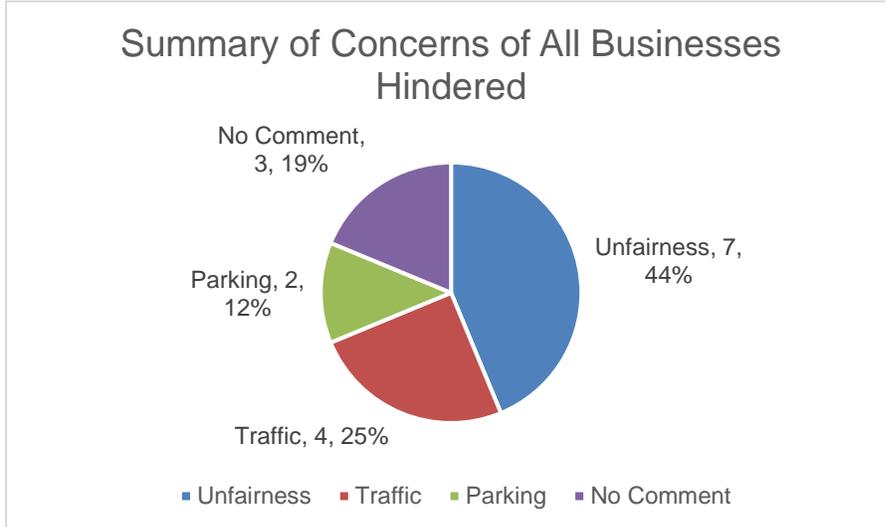
**No Comment: 2**

\*\*\*Of all businesses who said they were hindered last year, only one business explicitly stated they do not wish for the district to return in any capacity. This opinion represents 1.5% of the survey results. Therefore, 98.5% of all businesses who responded to this survey either were positively or neutrally impacted, or are in favour or indifferent of some extended patio program, with improvements from last year.

### **3.d Vote Don’t Mind (2)**

No Comments, therefore not visual representation is necessary.

### 3.e. Summary of Concerns



#### 3.e.i. Unfairness, Mentioned in 7 Comments

The unfairness of last year's "Dining District" has been mentioned the most often, and by both those who do and do not wish to see the district return.

Note, businesses did not state that it was unfair which road sections were closed.

The unfairness that is mentioned is the unfairness of support towards one particular industry, in such a timely manner, and primarily regarding LCBO related sales, which logically happened in a location in downtown that had the largest shared square footage of commonly used space, which consequently happened to benefit 4-8 establishments primarily directly.

#### Solution

Identify ways to support or promote other industries also affected by closures due to COVID, ideally, in co-operation with venues in the dining district to encourage unity and equal representation.

#### Marketing Suggestions

Last year, several businesses in and out of the dining district collaborated to host workshops and various markets through the pandemic, COVID compliant. As the dining district will likely have the highest consistent foot traffic due to the hyper-local tourism marketing draw, it is an excellent way for other businesses to have products, business cards, or pop-up features to sell or promote services and products.

It has been suggested that industry-specific maps could be shared on social media, and businesses could send them to customers or regularly share them on their accounts.

Work in co-operation with already existing tourism features. An interactive experience, like “Driftscape,” an app highlighting historical features in downtown Guelph, could feature historical information about buildings currently occupied by retailers or service providers. It has also been suggested that sales incentives could be included to encourage engagement, such as a discounted product for customers who engage with all destination points. This would boost sales for businesses, provide free marketing for businesses along the walking route and other destination points, and create an experience for the downtown visitor, capitalizing on the hyper-local tourism mentality forecasted for the coming summer.

Paid advertisements on Downtown Guelph social media accounts.

Newspaper or radio ads, demographic and industry-specific.

### **3.e.ii. Traffic, Mentioned in 4 Comments**

As discussed in the Meeting of the Whole on March 1, and as also represented by the businesses surveyed, there is consensus that there was a significant lack of road closure and wayfinding signage, which confused vehicular traffic to navigate to their intended destination or through the core.

Additionally, public transit efficiency.

### **Recommendation**

As motioned by Councillor Salisbury, an Information Items Report regarding traffic should be presented in Q1 of 2022 to inform the pilot project plans better going forward regarding road closures and traffic rerouting. Rerouting and detour signage needs to be placed on roads leading to downtown or other locations deemed essential for traffic routing. Public transit must also be notified before closures to make adjustments.

It was mentioned that the rerouting costs of public transit would accumulate a maximum cost of \$1.2 million over the three-year initially proposed pilot project. Temporarily disbanding the BIA during this time of crisis and reallocating those funds towards a strategic data collection and improvement development program would allocate over \$2 million over the same three-year term, according to the 2021 BIA Budget as shown on the City of Guelph’s website, assuming the same budget as this year for the additional two following. This would leave \$800,000 in surplus for further marketing and improvement initiatives in addition to budgeting the City has already planned for this initiative and others associated with COVID-19 recovery.

### **3.e.iii. Parking, Mentioned in 2 Comments**

Primary concerns regarding parking address decreasing parking counts, not having available parking for quick pickup customers when they arrive, and the proximity of the parking space to the service provider or retailer.

### **Recommendation**

Consider angled parking on Wyndham St N with the Baker St Development changes to provide additional parking for service and retailers in the area.

Consider changing the green space proposed in Baker Street Development to be relocated to the intersection of MacDonell and Wyndham, if it is deemed applicable after this year's traffic study results. Change the initially proposed Baker Street green space into 30-minute max parking or curbside pickup if that is a service intended to continue post-COVID-19. Additionally, this will help discourage the homeless from setting up semi-permanent shelters in vacant lots adjacent to the available green space, as currently shown in GCT.

Post Green P parking signs along major traffic roads to indicate parking for vehicular traffic as is done in any major city.

Include parking maps and highlight all three parkades available for public use in printed media to specifically target older demographics, to whom nearby parking is the most important. Also circulate this via social media for businesses to pass to customers.

#### **4. Further Recommendations**

If the BIA is to be seriously considered for temporary dissolution, it would still be recommended to maintain specific initiatives currently in place. Welcoming Streets Initiative is one that will benefit the entire downtown community in the long run. Additionally, further community engagement could be fully utilized to achieve this agenda. Such engagement could include planting community gardens in place of flower beds for the DGBA beautification initiatives. The produce grown could be donated to feeding the homeless or other food donation services. Schools could participate by having groups of students plant the planters or start seeds in classrooms. Such engagement would encourage a different demographic apart from the 19+ dining district demographic to feel ties and involvement with the downtown community while also providing a safe and practical educational skill to students, who have also faced immense difficulties in education because of the pandemic. Hopefully, this would encourage families to come to the downtown area, again following suit with the hyper-local tourism and outdoor-related activities predicted for this summer.

Regarding COVID compliance concerns, it is recommended that we turn to our police enforcement to make sure citizens are abiding by government set regulations, not the business themselves. It is recommended that police enforcement continue to be increased in the district, same as 2020. Additionally, enforcement towards parking violations would help ensure that business owners or staff members do not regularly take up parking spaces for lengths at a time, allowing customers to use this space instead.

For the benefit of all navigating through this time, it is recommended that a new, unbiased, third-party position be appointed to mediate between various businesses, industries, and City Council going forward.

#### **Conclusion**

From the in-depth analysis of this report, it is evident that the overall issues related to the Dining District from 2020 were a simple matter of logistics and communicating necessary information to affected parties.

As we are beginning on our 13<sup>th</sup> month of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the second year of considering if a Car-Free Pedestrian Zone is the right fit for downtown Guelph, it is safe to say that further data collection is necessary for immediate and long-term planning for our city.

This concept presents an opportunity to truly market Downtown Guelph as a vibrant, thriving, and cohesive community. This objective will only be achieved with properly informed leadership, which can only be achieved with a continuous ongoing open dialogue with those who are facing the implications of these decisions daily from a front line perspective.