



COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: January 17, 2024
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Meeting Date: February 7, 2024
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Standing Committee on City Finance and Services
FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services
SUBJECT: Gastown Summer 2024 Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot

Recommendations

- A. THAT Council direct staff to proceed with a pedestrian-first pilot on Water Street in July and August as generally outlined in Appendix B.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to report back in fall 2024 on pilot outcomes and how they will inform the Gastown Public Spaces Plan and the approach to future city programs, including seasonal pedestrian-first streets.

Purpose and Executive Summary

On May 10, 2023, Council passed the motion “A People-Focused Gastown” directing staff to continue with immediate repairs in the neighbourhood; initiate a “streets and public realm planning and design process for Gastown”; and, work with the Gastown Business Improvement Society (GBIS) and other community stakeholders to pilot a “car-free shut down of Water Street”. The intent of the pilot and planning process is to guide future street rehabilitation investment and develop a “bold vision to pedestrianize Water Street” that supports “a more vibrant, people-friendly destination and the enabling of ongoing activations including patios, music, events, festivals and active transportation opportunities”.

This report seeks Council direction on the approach to the summer 2024 Water Street pedestrian pilot. It details the pilot goals and proposed approach; summarizes what staff have heard so far and how we plan to respond; and, how the pilot could inform future investment in the neighbourhood and programs citywide.

Council Authority/Previous Decisions

- [Council Motion, “A People-Focused Gastown: A Bold, Forward-Looking Vision for a Vibrant and Prosperous Neighbourhood”](#) (May 10, 2023) provides direction to staff to initiate the process to develop the *Gastown Public Spaces Plan*.

- [2023 – 2026 Capital Plan](#) - The capital plan allocates \$10M for Gastown Streets, for urgent repairs in Maple Tree Square Plaza and sections of sidewalks throughout Gastown, restoration of Trounce Alley, and planning and design for Water Street.
- [City of Vancouver’s United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\) \(2022\)](#) - The strategy includes direction to prioritize projects related to Indigenous development; budget for capacity funding to engage with host Nations and diverse Indigenous populations living in the city; and to bring host Nations into strategies, plans and projects early on.

City Manager’s Comments

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

Context and Background

Following Council’s direction in May 2023, staff have progressed work in each area identified in the motion (see Appendix A), including implementing priority near-term repairs, completing Phase 1 engagement of the Gastown Public Spaces Plan, and are in process of selecting a consultant to bring an external lens and expertise on urban placemaking.

This work has also informed planning that is underway for the summer 2024 pilot.

In particular, through Phase 1 of the Gastown Public Spaces Plan staff have:

- advanced public space and transportation analyses;
- had in-depth discussions with local businesses, residents and community organizations;
- collected feedback from the public about how they experience Gastown today and what they would like to see in the future;
- continued discussions with the GBIS about short and longer term priorities of businesses in the area; and
- deepened relationships with Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations’ staff and have identified objectives and early ideas that will be incorporated into the future design of the streets and public spaces, as well as the more immediate programming and placemaking in the area.

Discussion

Engagement for Phase 1 of the Gastown Public Spaces Plan has demonstrated that there is enthusiasm in the community about the potential for a pedestrian-first Water Street. Staff have heard interest in creating a more vibrant place for people to socialize and gather, providing more space for people to walk comfortably at busy times, and supporting opportunities for local businesses and culture.¹

There are many different approaches to implementing a pedestrian-first street. The Gastown Public Spaces Plan will help determine a preferred approach for Gastown, considering the specifics of the place, and its history and context. Some concerns raised through Phase 1 engagement include potential impacts of changes to the transportation network, business

¹ A full summary of Phase 1 of public engagement for the Gastown Public Spaces Plan will be available online in February 2024.

access, tour bus pick up and drop off, cleanliness, sense of comfort and safety, and the challenges of realizing inclusive public spaces.

As proposed in this report, the summer 2024 pilot aims to test an initial approach to a pedestrian-first Water Street, building off previous work and public feedback.

In particular, the pilot aims to test:

- the experience of a seasonal pedestrian-first Water Street with two car-free spaces connected by two car-light blocks (see Appendix B);
- impacts of the removal of Water Street from the arterial roadway network while retaining Cordova Street as a one-way street;
- temporary changes to City programs to increase opportunities for local businesses and community organizations to use and activate the street, including simplified permit processes and more flexible options; and
- what City services, supports and community collaborations are needed to maintain a clean, comfortable, welcoming and vibrant space.

The observations, data and community feedback gathered during the summer pilot will provide key inputs into the Gastown Public Spaces Plan, and help shape future approaches to a pedestrian-first Water Street.

Coordinated approach and timing

The proposed summer pilot will follow the interim paver repairs in the roadway of Maple Tree Square.

In May 2023, Council directed staff to proceed with urgent repairs on Water Street and avoid a temporary “larger asphalt treatment plan”. As the Gastown Public Spaces Plan will inform the future redesign of the space, an interim repair is scheduled to begin in March 2024 on the most critical section of roadway in Maple Tree Square. The repairs will require Maple Tree Square to be closed to motor-vehicle traffic and they are expected to be complete by mid-June.

Staff have developed a coordinated traffic management plan for the road closure to support both construction and the pilot, which will divert traffic off Powell Street, while retaining options for access to the neighbourhood. The plan includes signal and laning changes on Powell Street at Main Street; conversion of Alexander Street to two-way; conversion of Cambie Street to one-way southbound from Water Street to Cordova Street; and conversion of Columbia Street to two-way between Powell Street and Hastings Street (see Appendix C). Cordova Street is planned to remain one-way, as significant investment in signals and infrastructure would be required to enable two-way traffic flow; however, the pilot will provide valuable data to inform future options for the street.

Staff will monitor the traffic impacts and adjust measures where possible to respond to issues as they arise. It is anticipated that it may take some time for new traffic patterns to be adjusted to in Gastown.

After construction is complete in mid-June, the summer pilot will launch in early July to run throughout August.

The planned approach includes two gateway, car-free blocks – Water Street from Richards to Cambie Street and Maple Tree Square (see Appendix B, C and F). The two interior blocks of Water Street – Cambie through Abbott to Carrall – would be car-light with the opportunity to be

car-free on select days or weekends. This would create an enhanced pedestrian experience along all blocks of Water Street, while also accommodating access to residential buildings, the Easy Park parkade, tour bus pick up and drop off, and loading and delivery for businesses. If approved, staff will continue to refine the details of this plan with the GBIS and other community stakeholders.

The GBIS has expressed concern about the overall duration of the traffic pattern changes in the neighbourhood, which would run from March to early September. Staff have considered alternative approaches to the summer pilot (see Appendix D) to reduce the closure duration.

In response to a specific request from GBIS, staff considered making the pilot concurrent with construction. Unfortunately this would mean trying to pilot a pedestrian-first street during off-peak months and while one of the primary public spaces, Maple Tree Square, is under construction. Staff do not believe this would set the pilot up for success.

Staff also assessed the possibility of a pedestrian-first summer pilot on weekends only. This approach would be much more expensive as it would require full installation and removal of the pedestrian street, traffic control, and key features on a recurring basis. Recurring weekend closures would also reduce the ability for businesses to create or expand patios. In addition, it would be more difficult to test both changes to the transportation network and the day-to-day use of the space, which emerges over time as people learn about the pilot and make the street a part of their daily activities.

Staff have also explored the potential for a shorter one-month pilot. As with the weekend-only approach, the shorter duration would provide less time to effectively test and monitor. The shorter pilot would likely discourage businesses from investing in innovative patios, merchandise displays or other creative uses in the pedestrianized street.

For these reasons, staff recommend a two-month pilot during peak summer and tourist season.

Response to detailed feedback

In addition to the GBIS's concern about the cumulative impacts of the construction and the pilot, staff have also heard questions from stakeholders and the public about how to:

- make the pilot a 'win' for businesses
- keep the area clean and feeling safe during the pilot
- retain access for tour buses
- attract tourists and other visitors to the neighbourhood during the pilot
- make a pedestrian-first Water Street feel lively, welcoming and vibrant
- mitigate impacts to the larger transportation network

The feedback has informed a number of planned pilot details:

Business Support. Staff are working to support businesses to easily and creatively use the additional street space. Many restaurants (27 to date) have expressed interest in new or expanded patios and several retailers (approximately 16) have expressed interest in new or expanded merchandise displays. To support these uses, staff are offering more flexible design options and simplified permitting processes, and are collaborating with the Province's Liquor and Cannabis Regulation Branch (LCRB) to explore options to facilitate licensing for temporary pilot patios. Through the pilot, businesses could benefit from:

- opportunity for restaurants to transfer up to 100% of indoor seats to a patio;

- more flexible design options for patios and merchandise displays;
- potential bylaw amendments to temporarily amend fees;
- potential for GBIS-led street vending opportunities; and
- opportunity to use and steward new public realm seating (ie. as an alternative to creating a small patio)

Learnings from this pilot will help to inform long-term changes to the City's patio, merchandise display and other street use programs, to better support businesses city-wide.

Safety and Cleanliness. Staff are developing an enhanced sanitation and stewardship plan to keep the area clean and inviting. This would include increasing service levels for micro-cleaning, litter pick up and power-washing. Planning is also underway to establish a peer program that would provide support to businesses and community members experiencing mental health and addiction challenges. Similar peer programs have been successful in other City public spaces. The overall approach to safety and cleanliness will require ongoing collaboration between City staff, GBIS, community organizations, and the VPD.

Tourism and Tour Buses. The pilot proposes to maintain access for tour buses on the block of Water Street between Cambie and Abbott during the pilot, allowing for direct access to the heart of Gastown. Staff have had early discussions with the GBIS, Destination Vancouver and the local Nations about how to generate excitement about the summer pilot and encourage locals and visitors to explore the neighbourhood. These discussions will continue over the spring and expand to include other tourism groups and community organizations in the area.

A lively, welcoming and vibrant Water Street. Staff will work closely with the GBIS, the local Nations, community organizations, event organizers and businesses to create a welcoming experience on Water Street that invites people to explore, linger and enjoy the neighbourhood at different times of day and week. In addition to enabling business use, a variety of furniture will be strategically placed for people to rest and gather, designed to support both community programming and placemaking. In addition, a range of activities from small activations to large-scale events will be encouraged. This includes collaborating with the GBIS to promote the use of the City's street entertainment permit, and promoting the new low-complexity event permit, which enables people host free events in public space.

Impacts to the larger transportation network. Staff have been developing the coordinated traffic management plan to facilitate changes in vehicle routing due to the closure. Additionally, staff are in the process of developing reactive measures that could be implemented to address issues in the Gastown area, should they arise.

Detailed planning for a successful pilot will continue throughout the spring. Once the pilot launches, staff expect that adjustments will need to be made in response to emerging requests and issues. This will require ongoing and close collaboration with our partners.

Future work and next steps

The proposed summer 2024 Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot would test one approach to pedestrianization. Staff intend to monitor the impacts to the transportation network (including numbers of people walking on Water St and changes to vehicle patterns in the area), build understanding of benefits and challenges for local residents and businesses, and learn about the tools, supports and collaborations needed to make a summer pedestrian street a success. Concurrently with the planning for the pilot, staff will develop different options for Gastown's streets and public spaces with the support of a multidisciplinary consultancy. During the summer

pilot, the public will be invited to learn and provide feedback on these options, as well as their experience with the pilot.

Staff will report back to Council in fall 2024 on learnings from the summer pilot, results of Phase 2 engagement on the Gastown Public Spaces Plan, and potential emerging approaches to a pedestrian-first Water Street and the supporting transportation network. This could include recommendations for a summer 2025 Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot and other quick-wins identified through the process.

In Phase 3 (2025), staff will continue to work through the details of the preferred approach and advance concept designs for key streets and spaces such as Water Street, Maple Tree Square and Cordova Street. This will also include developing an approach to the overall streetscape design with a focus on evolving and integrating the current heritage look and feel with designs and elements that establish local Nations visibility.

By the fall of 2025 staff intend to bring the Gastown Public Spaces Plan to Council (see Appendix E), with recommendations on:

- an overall approach to pedestrianizing Water Street, supporting changes to the transportation network and enhancing public spaces in Gastown;
- concept designs for key streets and spaces;
- a streetscape design strategy that integrates heritage, reconciliation, accessibility and operational objectives;
- programming and stewardship strategies to support a clean, inclusive, safe and vibrant public realm; and
- a costing and a phasing strategy to support implementation.

Following endorsement of the Plan, staff would move directly into detailed design and implementation planning for the first phases of work, dependent on future funding.

Financial Implications

Staff expect the total cost of the 2024 summer pilot to be in the range of \$1,000,000-\$1,200,000, funded from the Gastown Capital budget and related program budgets. This includes transportation changes, furniture and planters, community programming supports, sanitation and stewardship supports, monitoring and data collection.

The current Capital Plan includes \$10M:

- \$4.5M for near-term repairs, including targeted sidewalk repairs, Maple Tree Square interim paver repair and Trounce Alley rehabilitation
- \$5.5M for the development of the Gastown Public Space Plan, including capacity funding and early projects with the local Nations, a multidisciplinary consultancy, the Summer 2024 pilot, public engagement and staffing.

Any future pilots or pedestrian summer streets will require additional funding, which can be considered at the Capital Plan mid-term update. Additional funding will also be required for implementation of the Gastown Public Space Plan, including the permanent reconstruction of Maple Tree Square.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report's recommendations.

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APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF PROGRESS ON COUNCIL'S MAY 2023 DIRECTION:

Near term repairs and improvements:

- In Fall 2023, the first round of localized paver repairs to sidewalks was completed. Localized sidewalk repairs will continue into 2024.
- New furniture was installed in Maple Tree Square, and staff supported GBIS to install decorative lighting.
- The newly constructed Blood Alley Square opened to the public in late 2023.
- Interim paver repair in the roadway in Maple Tree Square is set to begin in March 2024.
- Designs are underway to rehabilitate and integrate Trounce Alley with Blood Alley Square; construction anticipated in Spring 2025.

Gastown Public Spaces Plan:

- Staff continue to build partnerships with Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and provide regular updates to Musqueam Nation. This has included: site visits, meetings, workshops and a partnership dinner hosted by the GBIS.
- Building on previous work, staff have initiated public life and transportation analyses
- In Fall 2023, an RFP was released for a multidisciplinary design consultancy with expertise in heritage districts and car-free and shared streets to support this work. Kick off with the preferred consultant team is anticipated in early March 2024.
- In Fall 2023, staff launched public engagement for the Plan to learn more about how people experience Gastown's public spaces; what they'd like to see in the future; provide feedback on the Plan's draft objectives; and, what staff should consider when planning to pedestrianize Water Street. There were approximately 3,500 interactions through a storefront, public survey, a loading and access needs survey for businesses, 1-on-1 interviews with businesses, and meetings with community organizations, government agencies and Civic Advisory Committees.

Summer 2024 Pilot:

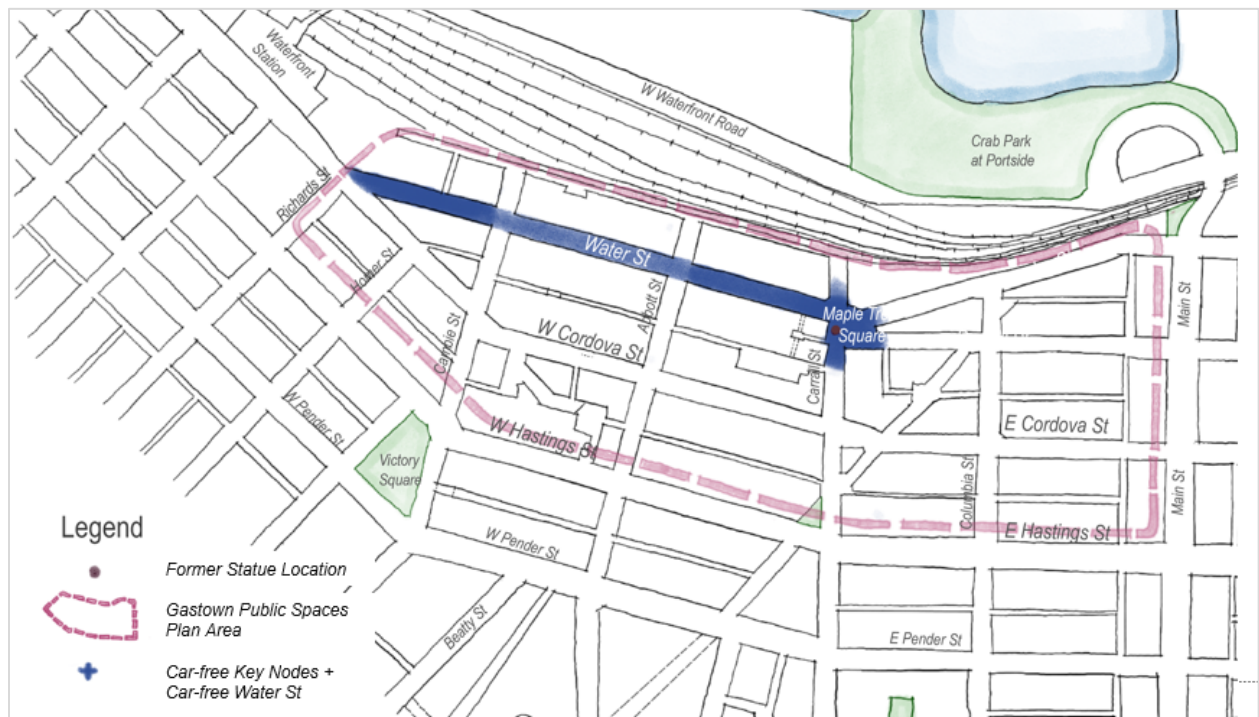
- Staff developed a general approach for the Summer 2024 pilot including two car-free blocks (Richards to Cambie and Maple Tree Square), with the possibility to close all of Water Street on select days or weekends.
- Work has begun with the GBIS, tour bus operators, Easy Park, businesses and managers of residential buildings to retain access needs.
- Work has begun to better understand the needs of individual businesses in the neighbourhood and unlock opportunities for improved patios and merchandise displays.
- Targeted signal and circulation changes are underway to support access to the neighbourhood during both the paver repair to Maple Tree Square and the Summer 2024 pilot.
- Initial procurement of furniture is underway.
- Discussions are underway about programming and placemaking opportunities with the local Nations, the GBIS, community organizations and event organizers.
- Planning has begun to support an enhanced approach to stewardship and sanitation.

APPENDIX B: SUMMER 2024 PILOT APPROACH

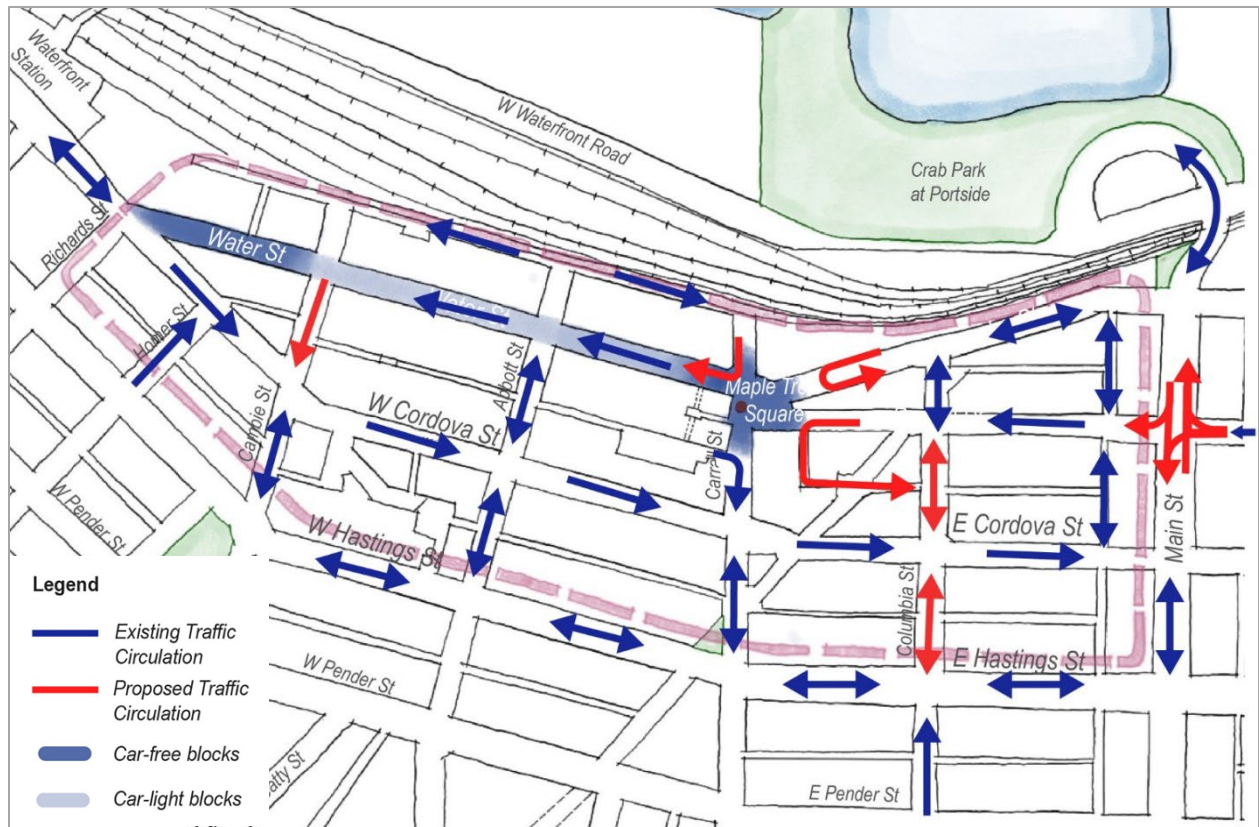
Water Street Pedestrian Zone – Recommended Approach



Water Street Pedestrian Zone – Recommended Approach for Events (Full Closure)



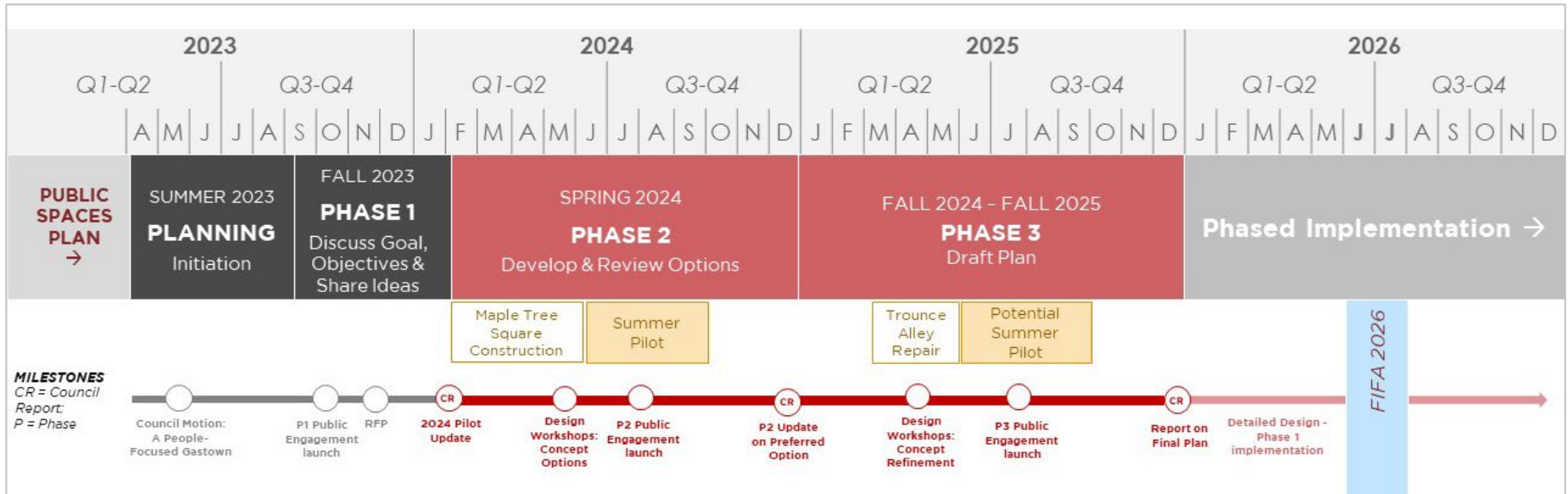
APPENDIX C: DRAFT SUMMER 2024 PILOT TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT PLAN



**APPENDIX D:
SUMMER 2024 PEDESTRIAN ZONE PILOT TIMING AND DURATION OPTIONS ANALYSIS TABLE**

APPROACH AND DURATION	Safety & Comfort	Traffic	Tourism	Programming	Patios & Merchandising	Timeline	Learnings for PSP	Public Life & Weather/ Seasonality	Operating Costs
	Perceived	Disruption to transportation / circulation	Alignment with peak seasons	Opportunities for events	Ability to expand and test relaxed guidelines	For planning / execution	Ability to provide appropriate data for the PSP	Vibrancy of public realm	
During Construction (winter/spring)			Duration would not align with peak times	Duration would not align with peak times	Duration would not align with peak times	Duration would not align with peak times	Staff would be unable to learn and measure changes from both seasonal approach to pedestrianization of Water Street and related traffic impacts	Duration would not align with peak times	
Summer: Weekends Only (full closure)		Limited days of impacts but confusion over traffic circulation pattern	Limited days for tourist visits	Street furniture would not be able to be installed/removed regularly without significant operating costs. Limits the amount and types of programming that could take place	Restaurant patios would not be able to expand beyond existing footprints		Staff would be unable to learn and measure changes from both seasonal approach to pedestrianization of Water Street and related traffic impacts		The need to close and re-open the street would increase cost and logistical challenges for traffic management
Summer: One Month (August)		Limited days of impacts but confusion over traffic circulation pattern			Restaurant patios would be unlikely to expand or test beyond existing footprints for only one month		Limit staff's ability to understand and measure changes from both public life and traffic perspectives as these behaviours take time to adjust in response to change		Duration would create gap between the MTSQ construction and the pilot leading to traffic management challenges and increased costs to close and re-open street
Full Summer: Two Months (July and August)				Duration would maximize opportunities for seating, furniture installation and programming	Duration offers maximum benefit for businesses utilizing patios and merchandising	Flexibility of wrapping up in July or extending to Labour Day	Ideal time to test behaviour changes for both public life and traffic/circulation to best inform the Gastown PSP		

APPENDIX E: GASTOWN PUBLIC SPACES PLAN SCHEDULE



APPENDIX F:
TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE, JANUARY 17, 2024
GASTOWN PUBLIC SPACES PLAN MOTION

MOVED by Michael Feaver
SECONDED by Caryn Duncan

WHEREAS

1. The Gastown Public Spaces Plan proposes to:
 - “Establish a vibrant, people-focused Gastown with enhanced gathering places, streets, and laneways to support a range of activities.”
 - “Pedestrianize Water Street, seasonally or year-round, starting with a pedestrian pilot in summer 2024”;
2. Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan Big Move 2 is that by 2030, two thirds of trips in Vancouver will be by active transportation and transit;
3. Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities includes Objective 1: Vibrant and Diverse, with specific direction under "A. Create vibrant public spaces" to invest in Gastown, bring Vancouver’s public space to life;
4. Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities includes Objective 5: Safety and Security, with specific direction under "E. Enhance the safety of our transportation network" to incorporate zero traffic-related fatalities and to use a data-driven approach to make capital investment;
5. The City's Transportation 2040 has a hierarchy of transportation modes that prioritizes walking, cycling and transit, with private auto as the lowest priority;
6. The City's Transportation 2040 identifies an ultimate safety goal of eliminating all fatalities from the transportation system;
7. Transportation 2040 identifies Water Street as a Potential Pedestrian-Priority Street; and
8. Transportation 2040 includes a policy (W 2.1.1) to “expand special event and public space programs (such as VIVA Vancouver) to enable and encourage creative street uses, for example through pilots, competitions, and funding partnerships.”

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT the Transportation Advisory Committee (TRAC) urges the City to undertake a bold rethinking of Water Street. To that end, TRAC is supportive of a pilot project that includes a car-light people-focused Water Street with two car-free hubs at Maple Tree Square and the first block of Water Street at Cordova;
- B. THAT the Transportation Advisory Committee recommends ensuring that the space is permeable and safe for active transportation including by people walking, cycling and using other mobility devices;
- C. THAT the Transportation Advisory Committee encourages the City to collect robust data during the duration of the 2024 pedestrian pilot program and requests that this data be shared with the Committee to inform next steps for the Gastown Public Spaces Plan.;
- D. THAT the Transportation Advisory Committee recommends that the pilot car-free street be designed to encourage people to visit and enjoy the space, including by considering adding patio space, public benches, and other street furniture and by programming the space through regular events to enliven the space.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

(Stephanie Mak absent for the vote)