



COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: January 28, 2025
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Meeting Date: February 25, 2025
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services
SUBJECT: Report Back: Gastown Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot Update

Recommendations

Option A.

THAT Council direct staff to implement a 2025 Water Street Pedestrian Zone pilot from June to September as detailed in this report, including:

- a. Improvements to the Water Street Experience;
- b. Implementation of two-way traffic on Cordova Street from Richards Street to Gore Avenue; and,
- c. Delivery of Pedestrian Zone weekends, the number to be directed by Council;

FURTHER THAT staff continue to advance the Gastown Public Spaces Plan and near-term investments, including Trounce Alley rehabilitation, brick sidewalk repairs, and the installation of a public washroom.

OR

Option B.

THAT Council direct staff to focus resources to accelerate a flexible design for Water Street and Maple Tree Square within the Gastown Public Spaces Plan that:

- a. Accommodates vehicles and expands the public realm;
- b. Can easily become car-free for special events or future Pedestrian Zones;
- c. Integrates cultural visibility of *x^wməθk^wəyəm*, *Skwxwú7mesh* and *səlilwətał*;

in order to guide infrastructure renewal in the next Capital Plan;

FURTHER THAT staff engage the community and work towards a trial of two-way

traffic on Cordova Street from the Powell Street Overpass to Richards Street in Summer 2026;

AND FURTHER THAT staff continue to advance near-term investments (including Trounce Alley rehabilitation, brick sidewalk repairs, and the installation of a public washroom) and support public realm improvements through existing programs, including:

- a. placemaking opportunities in existing public realm areas;
- b. expanded patios and other business-supporting uses; and
- c. immediate opportunities for local Nations visibility such as features or programming in the neighbourhood.

Purpose and Executive Summary

Following [Council direction in May 2023](#), the Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot ran from July to August 2024 as a key input into the Gastown Public Spaces Plan (PSP). In October 2024, staff reported back on key learnings from the 2024 Pilot. Council directed staff to proceed with a 2025 Pilot on weekends only, to explore two-way traffic on Cordova St to support local access to the neighbourhood, and to explore a flexible, multi-modal design for Water St. This report provides an overview of the scoping work completed since October 2024, an update on an interim design for a two-way Cordova St, and options to advance work in Gastown.

Since October, staff have been working closely with members of the Gastown Business Improvement Society (GBIS) and the external consultant team working on the Public Space Plan to understand how a 2025 Pilot can inform the PSP and guide infrastructure renewal in the neighbourhood. This work has resulted in two options for Summer 2025.

Option (A) would implement a Summer 2025 Pilot to test public realm design approaches on Water St in scenarios with minimal to moderate reductions in through motor vehicle traffic on typical days and with full Water St road closures during Pedestrian Zone periods. The pilot would also test how two-way traffic on Cordova St could support neighbourhood access while reducing vehicle volumes on Water St. In addition, staff would continue to progress the Gastown Public Spaces Plan and near-term investments.

Option (B) would focus resources on the process to develop a conceptual design for Water St and Maple Tree Square that could enable more significant infrastructure renewal in the neighbourhood in the next Capital Plan. In this Option, staff would also continue design work and engagement towards a trial of an extended two-way Cordova St from the Powell St Overpass to Richards St in 2026. Finally, staff would continue to support public realm improvements through existing programs and advance near-term investments.

Council Authority/Previous Decisions

- [“Gastown Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot Update”, October 23, 2024](#), directed staff to proceed with a 2025 Water Street Pedestrian Zone [on weekends and for special events](#) via a Council update to recommended action.
- [Report, Street Vending By-Law Amendments to Temporarily Waive Small Patio and Display Unit Fees to Support the Water Street Pilot, May 7, 2024](#) provides direction to

waive fees for all new or expanded patio footprints for the pilot, and to explore mechanisms for increasing patio capacities.

- [Report, Gastown Summer 2024 Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot, February 7, 2024](#) provides direction to proceed with a two-month pilot over July and August 2024 using the car-free and car-light design proposed by staff.
- [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 and pilot a summer pedestrian-first Water St.
- [2023 – 2026 Capital Plan](#) allocates \$17.7M for Gastown Streets, for urgent repairs in Maple Tree Square Plaza and sections of sidewalks throughout Gastown, rehabilitation of Trounce Alley, and planning and design for Water Street.
- [City of Vancouver’s United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\) \(2022\)](#) 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

The 2023-26 Capital Plan identified Gastown as a priority neighbourhood, initiating a multi-year program of work with the overall goal of enabling much-needed major infrastructure investments. Following a May 2023 Council Motion, [“A People-Focused Gastown: A Bold, Forward-Looking Vision for a Vibrant and Prosperous Neighbourhood.”](#) staff initiated a planning and design process for Gastown’s streets and public spaces through the Gastown Public Spaces Plan (PSP)—a people-first plan being developed with the support of an external, multidisciplinary design consultancy team.

The May 2023 motion also directed staff to test the pedestrianization of Water Street to inform the PSP. As the City’s first pedestrian street, the 2024 Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot ran from July to August 2024— testing both car-free and car-light segments along Water St—and served as an important opportunity to test future potential changes to city-wide street use programs and build learnings for future pedestrian zones across the city.

In October 2024, Council directed staff to proceed with a Summer 2025 Water Street Pedestrian Zone pilot on weekends and for special events, and to report back on options for a multi-modal Water St that retains local vehicle access and considers cycling access. Staff were also directed to confirm if Cordova St could be made two-way prior to commencing with a 2025 Pilot. Council also directed staff to continue with the consultant-led PSP, now refocused on developing a flexible design for Water Street and Maple Tree Square that would allow the street to more easily adapt to host special events or pedestrian zones in the future but accommodate motor vehicles day-to-day.

Discussion

Since October, staff have worked closely with key members of the Gastown Business Improvement Society (GBIS) and the PSP consultant team to collaborate on a potential approach for a 2025 Pilot that would align with Council direction and address GBIS priorities and capacity. This collaboration with the GBIS and consultant team has aimed to build greater trust with the businesses in the area and ensure the pilot could be delivered within existing resources and timelines. This work has resulted in two options for 2025:

- A) Implement a Summer 2025 pilot to inform the ongoing planning and design work for the neighbourhood; or
- B) Focus resources on accelerating design work for Water St and Maple Tree Square, working towards an expanded trial of two-way traffic on Cordova St in 2026, and supporting public realm improvements through regular programs.

Option A – 2025 Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot

Through the collaboration with the GBIS and consultant team, staff have identified three key moves and learning opportunities for a 2025 Water St Pedestrian Zone Pilot. This option would test a Water Street experience with minor to moderate traffic reductions, a two-way Cordova Street between Richards Street and Gore Street, and full closures of Water Street to implement Pedestrian Zones.

Water Street Experience:

The everyday design, vibrancy and public realm experience on Water Street remain top priorities for the neighbourhood. A potential learning opportunity for 2025 would be to explore how the public realm could be expanded to better support public life and business uses while retaining through-vehicle traffic; balancing comfort and safety for pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles; and managing the costs and impact of temporary installations. The proposed approach for 2025 would include:

- Public realm design: the consultant team would lead and design three to four strategic placemaking nodes along Water Street, to test an expanded public realm alongside through-traffic.
- Business support tools: a refined set of permitting tools and services would be offered to local businesses in the pilot area, building on learnings from the 2024 pilot.
- Sanitation services: the existing enhanced street cleaning services in Gastown would continue during the summer.

See Appendix A for more details on the potential Summer 2025 Water Street experience.

Interim two-way Cordova Street and overall network approach:

Feedback from the 2024 Pilot highlighted that access and circulation to Water Street was a concern for the neighbourhood. Introducing two-way traffic on Cordova Street was identified as a key improvement for future pilots to support vehicular access and circulation in Gastown. Trialing two-way traffic on Cordova Street in Summer 2025 could serve as a learning opportunity to inform the overall Gastown Public Spaces Plan as well as future pilots.

Staff have worked with the GBIS on a preferred approach for two-way traffic on Cordova Street with a 2025 Pilot and the overall transportation network in the area. This approach would two-way Cordova Street between Richards Street and Gore Street and, through a series of interventions along Powell Street, encourage westbound traffic to divert to Cordova Street;

however, vehicles wishing to continue to travel westbound on Powell Street could continue to do so. This approach is expected to result in a minor to moderate reduction of vehicle volumes on Water Street as well as reduce pressure on Waterfront Road that was experienced in the 2024 Pilot. More details of this proposed approach can be found in Appendix A.

Staff have begun early stages of engagement on this proposed approach with adjacent BIAs and key impacted stakeholder groups (see Appendix B for high-level feedback). Early findings highlight the need for continued discussions with stakeholders to balance trade-offs for successful implementation.

If Council directs staff to advance Option A, implementation of this approach will begin in spring 2025 so that two-way traffic on Cordova Street will be in place from June to September 2025.

Pedestrian Zone Weekends:

Learnings from the 2024 Pilot showed that the car-free Pedestrian Zones were well-received by the public and visitors, but that the corresponding road closures created challenges for some local businesses. Weekend-only closures in 2025 would allow staff to test the concept an intermittent Pedestrian Zone, including assessing the levels of activation required to make Water Street a vibrant and attractive space. The “Pedestrian Zone Weekends” would also offer an opportunity to refine traffic management processes to more easily support intermittent road closures in the future.

The GBIS has emphasized concerns around business impacts of full road closures, as well as their limited resources and capacity to deliver sufficient programming for multiple Pedestrian Zone weekends. Staff are seeking direction from Council on the number of Pedestrian Zone closures to proceed with if Option A is chosen for 2025. See Appendix A for details and considerations for potential approaches.

In addition to the three key moves above, staff would continue to advance near-term investments including Trounce Alley rehabilitation, brick sidewalk repairs and the installation of a public washroom in Fall 2025. Staff would also continue to advance the Gastown Public Spaces Plan, balancing staff capacity and resources with those needed for the 2025 Pilot.

Option B – Focus resources on PSP, trial two-way traffic on Cordova Street in 2026, and continue with near-term investments

In Option B, staff and the consultant team would continue to advance the Gastown Public Spaces Plan in order to guide infrastructure renewal in the next Capital Plan. This would include accelerating a flexible design for Water Street and Maple Tree Square that would accommodate motor vehicle traffic and expand the public realm, and could easily adapt to support special events and any future pedestrian zones. This work would also include ongoing community and stakeholder engagement, as well as partnerships with *x^wməθk^wəy^əm*, *S_kw_xwú7*mesh and *səlilwətał* to find meaningful ways to make their culture and presence visible in this important, historic neighbourhood. Furthermore, staff would work towards a trial implementation of two-way traffic on Cordova Street from the Powell Street Overpass to Richards St in Summer 2026. This would include further community engagement with key impacted stakeholders to understand trade-offs and inform the detailed design.

Staff would also continue to advance the delivery of near-term investments identified in the 2023-26 Capital Plan (e.g. Trounce Alley rehabilitation and brick sidewalk repairs). In addition, staff would advance the implementation of a standalone public washroom on Water Street.

Furthermore, staff would continue to support the neighbourhood by supporting public realm improvements through existing city-wide programs. These include placemaking opportunities in existing public realm areas and minor changes to curb use regulations to support patio expansions and other business uses. This also includes work with xʷməθkʷəyəm, Sḵwḵwú7mesh and səliwətał on immediate cultural visibility projects, including the Sḵwḵwú7mesh kiosk in Maple Tree Square, and other placemaking projects similar to the community boards and planter wraps installed during the Pilot in 2024.

Financial Implications

Option A – 2025 Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot

Staff expect the costs for a Summer 2025 pilot to range between \$1,980,000 and \$3,360,000 (10-20% of overall Gastown capital budget):

- Water Street Experience: between \$700,000 to \$900,000, including: public space design and streetscape improvements, and a continuation of existing enhanced cleaning services
- Two-way Cordova: between \$1,200,000 to \$1,500,000, including: interim traffic signal changes and street design; network impact monitoring and data collection
- Pedestrian Zone Days: between \$80,000 to \$960,000 for 1 to 12 weekends, depending on the number of weekends and extent of traffic management costs;
 - \$80,000 per weekend includes traffic management costs, budget for City support of light programming, enhanced cleaning and peer support.
 - This does not include GBIS costs for leading more intensively programmed Pedestrian Zone Days

Option B – Focus resources on 2026, near-term investments and design work

If Council were to direct staff to proceed with Option B, the \$1,980,000 to \$3,360,000 designated in the 2025 budget can be allocated towards advancing design work to guide infrastructure renewal in the next Capital Plan and two-way Cordova implementation in 2026.

Independent of a 2025 Pilot, funding from the overall Gastown capital budget is allocated towards:

- Near-term investments in 2025-26: \$4,300,000; this includes brick sidewalk repairs and Trounce Alley rehabilitation.
- Remaining public space planning and design work: \$4,000,000; this includes creating opportunities for local Nations visibility, consultant fees, and further detailed design work.
- A potential 2026 Pilot: \$1,200,000-\$1,400,000, but would vary depending on length and scope.
- The capital cost for a standalone public washroom is estimated at \$300,000-\$350,000.

Legal Implications

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

APPENDIX A

Key moves for Option A – Summer 2025 Pilot

In collaboration with the Gastown Business Improvement Society (GBIS) and the PSP consultant team, staff have identified three key moves and learning opportunities for a 2025 Water Street Pedestrian Zone Pilot, testing:

- a Water St experience with minor to moderate traffic reductions,
- a two-way Cordova St between Richards St and Gore St, and
- full closures of Water St to implement Pedestrian Zones.

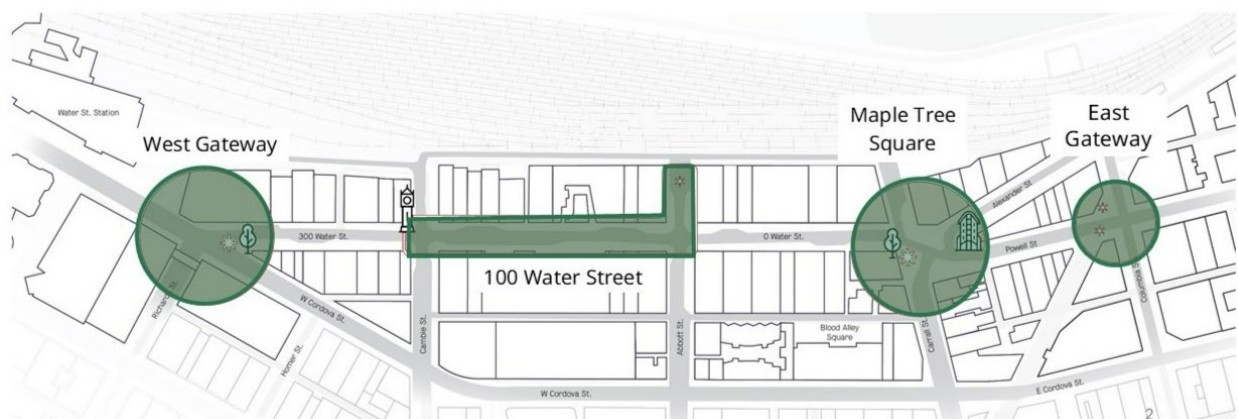
1. Water Street Experience

Learnings from the 2024 Pilot showed that the increased vibrancy on Water Street was a highlight, and that there was a continued desire to enhance the design of the public realm, prioritize permitting tools that support local businesses, and create a comfortable experience that draws both locals and visitors past the Steam Clock towards Maple Tree Square.

Public realm design:

The consultant team will lead the design of three to four placemaking nodes at strategic locations along Water Street. This will focus resources and capacity on targeted areas identified as priorities in 2024. These targeted nodes will be supported by smaller City-led public space areas (for example, with seating, storyboards and wayfinding) to help create a consistent look and feel along the length of Water Street. The team is exploring an eastbound bike lane to facilitate active transportation access to and through the neighbourhood.

Figure 1. Proposed placemaking node locations being explored



Business support tools:

To support local businesses in the pilot area, a refined set of tools and services will be offered, building on learnings from the 2024 pilot:

- i. New and expanded patio footprints where possible, and more flexible patio design guidelines;
- ii. Support for temporary licensing with the Liquor and Cannabis Regulation Board (LCRB);
- iii. Open Streets permitting to allow for shared market stalls, merchandise displays with point of sale, and live music adjacent to patios; and
- iv. Streamlined permitting and licensing processes; and waived fees for all summer patios in an expanded project area.

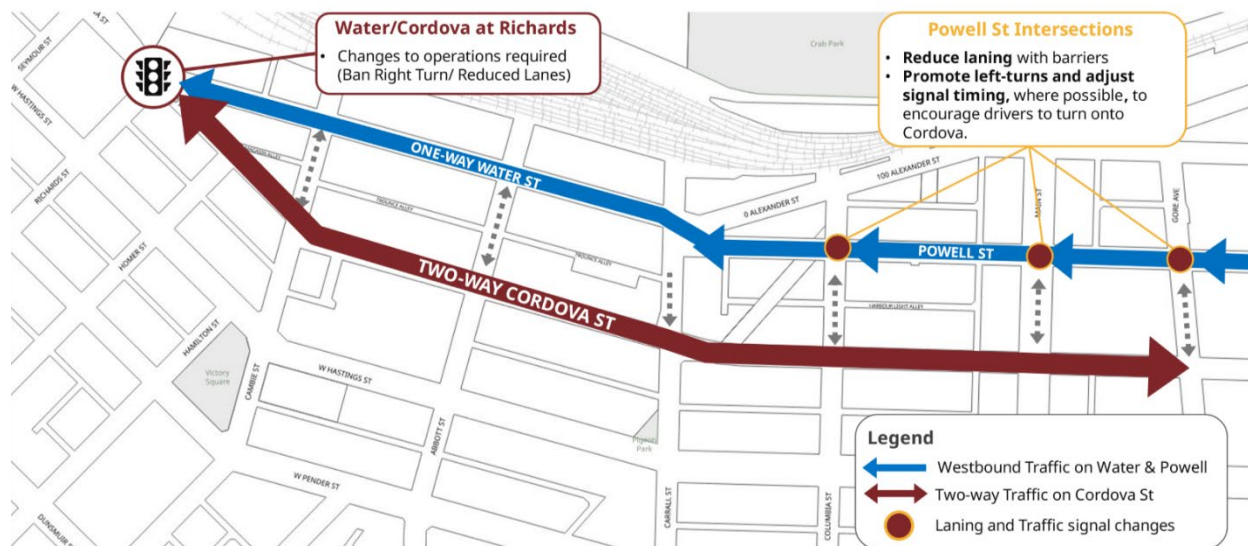
Sanitation services:

To further support the perception of comfort and safety in the neighbourhood, the existing enhanced sanitation services currently offered in Gastown will continue through Summer 2025. This includes manual litter collection and sidewalk cleaning, nightly flushing and sweeping, daily micro-cleaning, and feces collection. Additional cleaning and peer services would accompany any Pedestrian Zone weekends to support increased activity in the neighbourhood.

2. Two-way Cordova Street and Overall Network Approach

The diagram below describes the key components of the proposed interim two-way street design for Cordova Street, along with supportive traffic measures on Powell Street.

Figure 2. Proposed interim design for a two-way Cordova Street



This approach includes implementing signal modifications and lane adjustments on Powell Street that encourage commuter vehicle traffic to divert to Cordova Street instead of using Water Street. With this design, access to Water Street will remain open, but vehicle volumes would likely reduce by 20-60% compared to current daily trends. Due to short implementation timelines and resource constraints for 2025, the current scope extends from Richards Street to Gore Avenue. There are limitations to the benefit of making Cordova two-way between Richards

and Gore Street, which could be resolved by trialing a full pilot from Richards Street to the Powell Street overpass. This larger pilot could be implemented in 2026.

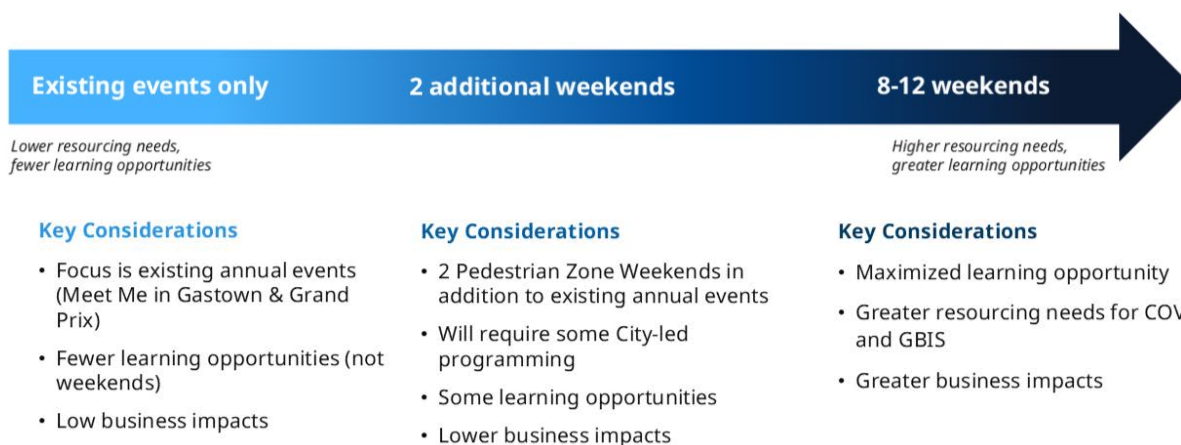
To inform the detailed design, staff are in conversation with the GBIS, resident groups, and other impacted BIAs and stakeholders to discuss detailed trade-offs and priorities for curb use, parking and loading within a two-way Cordova Street. See Appendix B for feedback from initial stages of targeted outreach with stakeholder groups.

3. Pedestrian Zone Weekends

Should Council direct staff to advance Option A, staff are seeking Council direction on the number of Pedestrian Zone Weekends for a Summer 2025 Pilot.

High-level tradeoffs and considerations for three possible scenarios are described below. All options have a shared fixed cost of approximately \$80,000 per weekend (2 days) for road closures, traffic management, budget for City support of light programming, enhanced cleaning and peer support. This does not include GBIS costs for leading more intensively programmed Pedestrian Zone Days.

Figure 3. Range of possible Pedestrian Zone closures



Existing events only

With this approach, Pedestrian Zone closures would focus on supporting two key annual events in Gastown (Meet Me in Gastown & the Gastown Grand Prix); these are currently scheduled as weekday events and would not provide learning opportunities around full weekend closures. This scenario would require the fewest resources, but there would be fewer learnings as the road closure processes for supporting these standalone special events happen annually and follow existing city-wide procedures. The level of impact on businesses would be lowest in this scenario.

2 additional weekends

With this approach, 2 weekend closures would be scheduled in addition to the two existing events noted above. This would allow for additional learnings from weekend-specific road closures and provide some more learning opportunities to inform planning in the neighbourhood. Different levels of programming and activation could be tested on each weekend. Staff would work with the GBIS to schedule exact dates and timing. The level of potential negative impact on businesses would be low in this scenario.

8-12 weekends

Eight to twelve consecutive Pedestrian Zone Weekends would allow staff to maximize learnings from Summer 2025. With this approach, the weekend closures would be scheduled consecutively, allowing the neighbourhood to plan ahead for weekend versus weekday configurations, and would allow for clear communication with residents and visitors about the regularity of the Pedestrian Zone. The GBIS shared that they feel that the level of impact on businesses would be higher in this scenario.

GBIS Feedback on Pedestrian Zones

The GBIS has indicated that their preferred approach to Pedestrian Zones in Summer 2025 is to align Pedestrian Zone road closures with existing large-scale events on weekdays (like the Gastown Grand Prix or Meet Me in Gastown) and either have no additional Pedestrian Zone closures, or consider adding 1-2 additional closures (on weekends or standalone days) with smaller, community-led activations enabled through City support. With limited timelines for planning and marketing large-scale events and the fixed cost of each road closure, this approach addresses capacity and resourcing concerns, leverages more established, successful events in the neighbourhood, and limits the impact of additional closures on local businesses.

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APPENDIX B

High-level feedback from stakeholder conversations

Staff have begun early conversations with the following stakeholders to share the proposed high-level approach to a two-way Cordova St and to identify key interests and concerns.

- **Surrounding BIAs** (Hastings Crossing, Chinatown and Strathcona) were interested in increasing access and circulation in the area. They also had concerns about loss of on-street parking and loading along Cordova St.
- **Cordova residents** from the Gastown Residents Association, Woodward's and Koret Lofts strata council and **Westbank staff** shared concerns around the loss of on-street parking and loading, increase in noise pollution and congestion, and a potential increase in eastbound traffic along Hastings Street.
- **TransLink/Coast Mountain Bus Company** representatives wanted to ensure there was consistent routing summer-long to ensure transit services are reliable and easy to understand while maintaining access to Gastown as best as possible.

Further detailed discussions on transit services, curbside uses, trade-offs and the overall Cordova St experience will be undertaken to ensure the final design for a two-way Cordova St addresses stakeholder priorities.

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