



# Gastown Public Spaces Plan

COUNCIL REPORT | APRIL 22, 2026

# Agenda

1. Overview
2. Process and Learnings
3. Gastown Public Spaces Plan: Key Directions
4. Recommendations



# Staff Recommendations

- A. THAT Council approve the Gastown Public Spaces Plan, a holistic vision and framework to guide investment in Gastown, generally as outlined in this report and presented in Appendix A.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to advance design for Maple Tree Square in alignment with the Plan and neighbourhood context, including partnerships with local Nations, engagement with the Gastown Business Improvement Society and the public, and implementation planning.
- C. THAT Council direct staff to proceed with actions as outlined in this report, including:
  - i. Improvements to interim design on Water St;
  - ii. Continued support and regularization of Sunday pedestrian zones on Water St; and,
  - iii. Technical work and engagement on the potential extension of two-way vehicle traffic on Cordova St east to Powell St Overpass.



# Overview

# Previous Council Direction

## Original Direction (2023):

Council directed staff to initiate a Public Spaces Plan, including:

- Multidisciplinary **design** and **placemaking consultancy**
- A **bold vision to pedestrianize Water Street**, either on a seasonal or year-round basis
- **Summer pilot** pedestrian zones

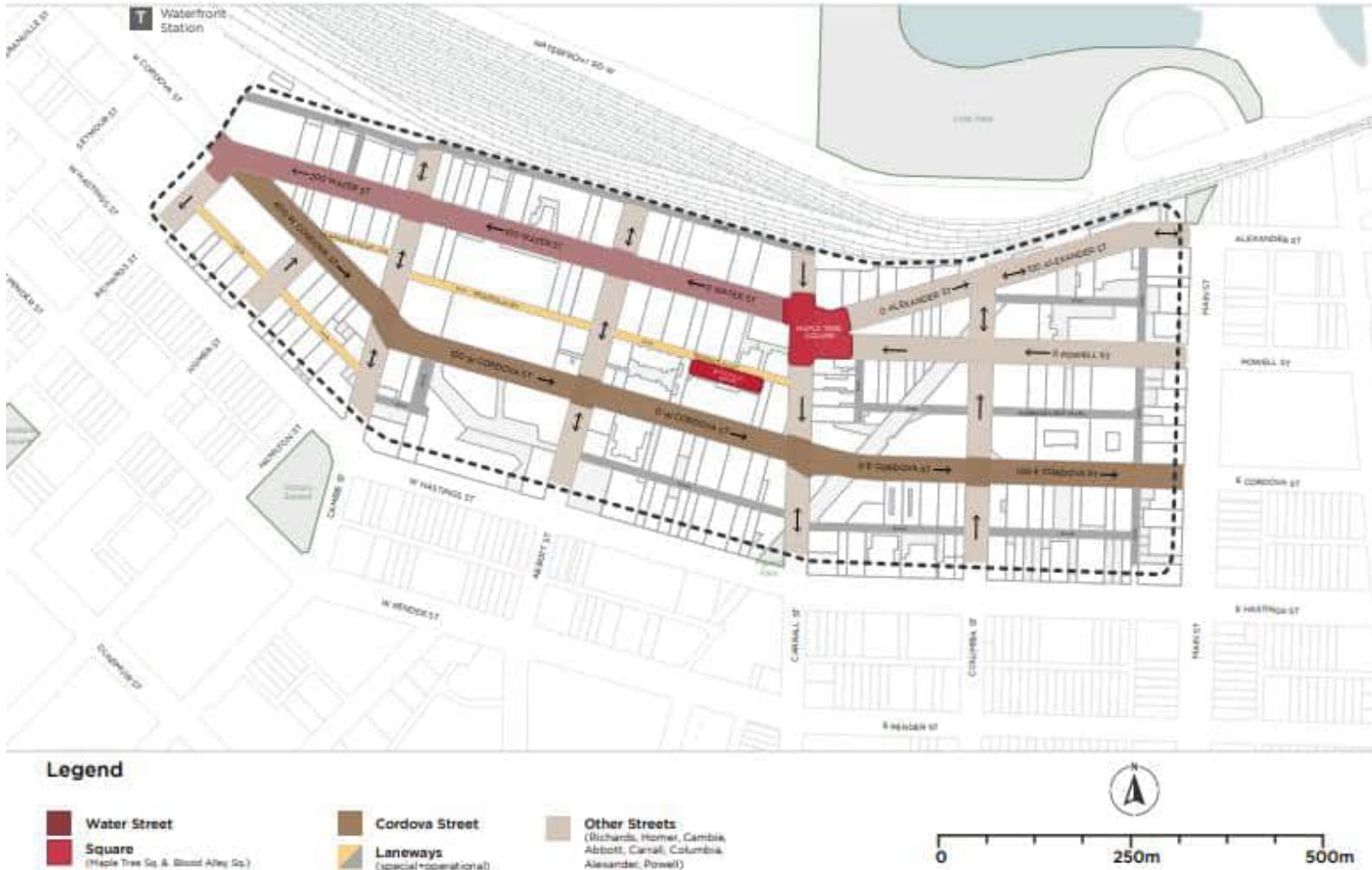
## Updated Direction (2024):

Based on Summer 2024 Pilot feedback, Council further directed staff to:

- Continue Gastown PSP and develop a **flexible multi-modal approach for Water St and Maple Tree Square**
- Implement the Summer 2025 pilot:
  - **Public space enhancements** on Water Street including cycling/multi-modal improvements
  - **Two-way Cordova Street** from Richards Street to Gore Street
  - **Sunday Pedestrian Zone** (10 am to 6 pm) with different levels of programming



# Project Scope

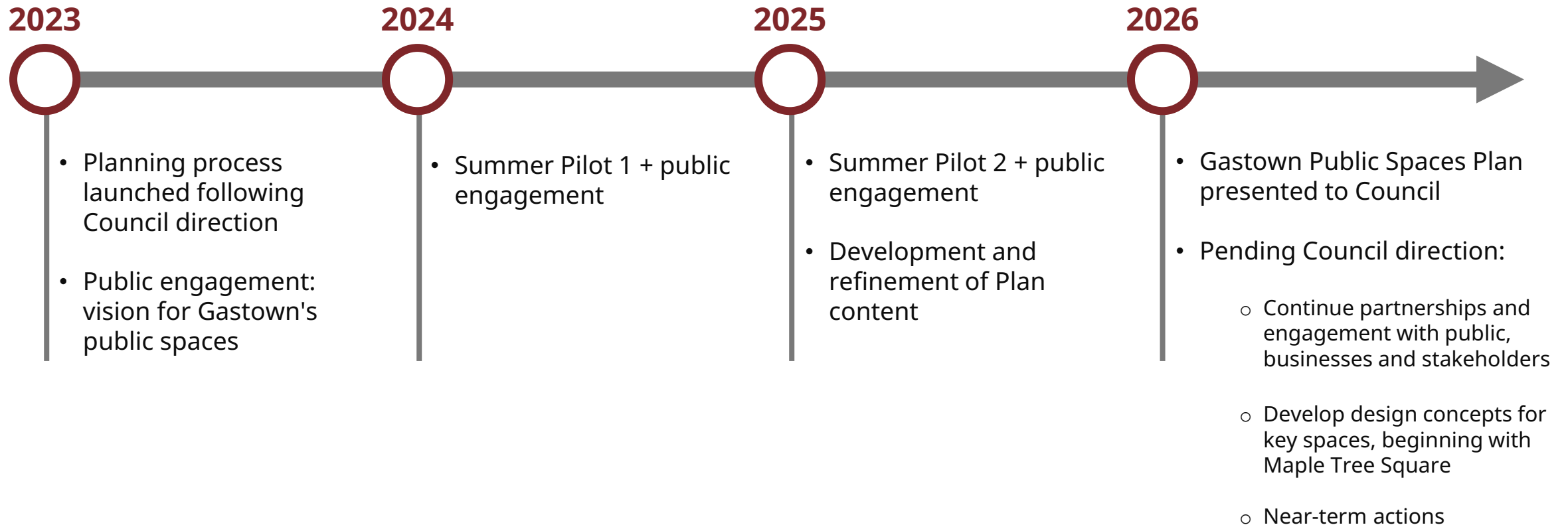


## Public Spaces:

### *Streets, laneways, squares and plazas*

- From Richards Street to west of Main Street and from the laneways south of the rail tracks to north of Hastings Street
- Particular emphasis on high-level vision to guide the renewal of Water Street and Maple Tree Square

# Timeline



# Gastown Public Spaces Plan

A **neighbourhood-level framework** that outlines vision and directions to guide future investments in Gastown's streets and public spaces

*The Plan builds on the collaborative work undertaken with key partners and stakeholders to date and includes:*

A **coordinated vision**, with character areas and supporting principles

**Six plan directions** that outline the big moves for the neighbourhood

**Vision drawings** to guide future design work, with a focus on Water St and Maples Tree Sq

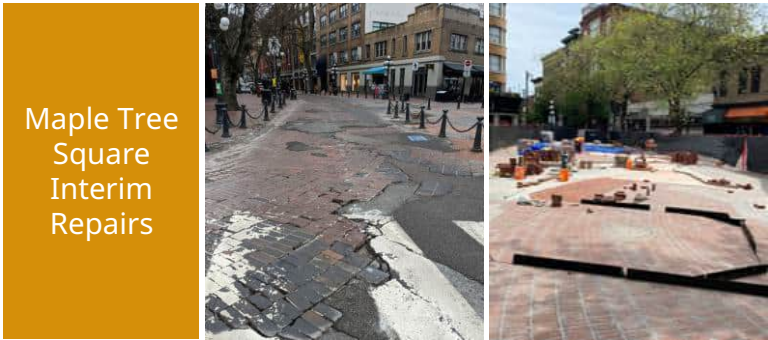
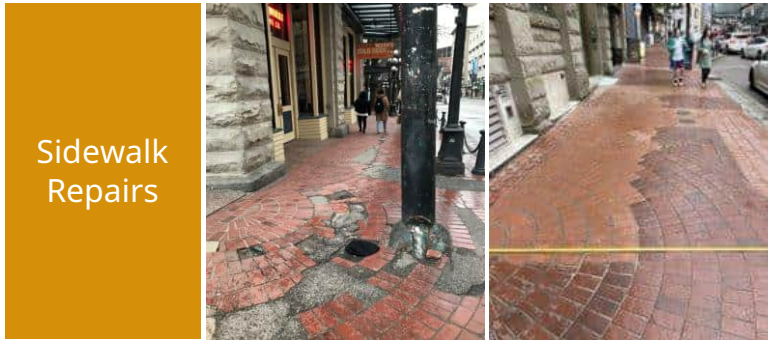
**Guidance on approach** for key topics such as materials

# Process and Learnings

# Gastown Program of Work 2023-26 Capital Plan



## 1 Deliver near-term investments (repairs, renewals)



## 2 Guide major future infrastructure investments



# Local Nations Partnerships Process

- From the outset of the project, staff fostered a **collaborative partnership** with xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw and səlilwətał
  - Early input into **project scope and process**
  - **Site walks** with staff from each Nation
  - Sharing of **knowledge and histories** to inform and shape the Plan
  - **Nation-led visibility initiatives** during Pedestrian Zone pilots



# Local Nations Partnerships

## What was heard

- Each Nation has expressed the importance of Gastown to their Nation and a deep interest in advancing visibility
- Key themes heard so far include:
  - **Past, Present and Future:** pre-contact history, colonial history, and aspirations for the future (renewal and healing)
  - **Culture, history, language and presence** through materiality, patterning, amenities and features such as storyboards
  - Potential for **public art** (e.g. welcome features, house posts) at key sites of significance like gateways
  - Opportunities for **history-telling, learning and programming**
  - **Welcoming the Nations back home, returning to the land** (e.g. practicing cultural activities, accessing cultural spaces)
  - **Equal representation** by all three Nations



# Develop a vision

## Fall 2023 Engagement



### What was learned:

- Highlighted there are many community needs and experiences of Gastown's public spaces
- That safety and cleanliness should be included in the project objectives
- There was a lot of excitement, as well as some concern about the pedestrianization of Water Street.

### People liked:

- The look of historical streets
- Feeling that you are in a unique place in the city
- Trees along the streets
- The lighting and atmosphere

### People wanted:

- Enhanced cleanliness
- More lighting
- Plants and greenery
- Less conflicts between people driving, walking and cycling

### Engagement Metrics:

- ✓ 2359 community survey responses
- ✓ 460+ interactions at 6 open house sessions
- ✓ 340+ interactions at 2 pop-up events
- ✓ 150+ youth participants at 2 workshops
- ✓ 5 in-person sessions in gathering spaces
- ✓ 35 business survey responses
- ✓ 88+ interviews/door-knocking with businesses
- ✓ 35+ stakeholder meetings

# Test and learn

## Summer 2024 Pilot



### What was tested:

- Two car-free spaces on Water Street (300 block) and in Maple Tree Square
- Two car-light blocks on Water Street (100 and 0 block)
- Car-light cycling connection on Water Street
- Public space enhancements (incl. seating, bigger patios, planters)

### What was learned:

- Mixed feedback about the pilot, with overall positive feedback from the general public, including Gastown residents
- People thought the area felt more vibrant, lively and welcoming
- People had concerns about access and circulation challenges in the neighbourhood
- Businesses had divergent perspectives about the pilot, noting business impacts

### Engagement Metrics:

- ✓ 1824 community survey responses
- ✓ 250+ interactions at 4 pop-up events
- ✓ 89 business survey responses
- ✓ 100+ interviews/door-knocking with businesses
- ✓ 2 design workshops
- ✓ 1 accessibility walkshop
- ✓ 140 emails and 311 cases

# Test and learn Summer 2025 Pilot



## What was tested:

- Weekly Sunday car-free Water Street with different levels of programming
- Traffic-calmed Water Street with public space enhancements
- Cycling connection on Water Street
- Two-way Cordova Street between Gore Avenue and Richards Street

## What was learned:

- People liked the Sunday programming, while some preferred the extent and duration of the summer 2024 pilot
- Businesses showed an increase in support this year and some expressed concerns around access and circulation

Some elements of the summer pilot were **extended** into the fall including two-way Cordova Street, cycling connection on Water Street, and some placemaking elements.

## Engagement Metrics:

- ✓ 718 community survey responses
- ✓ 50+ interactions at 3 pop-up events
- ✓ 64 business survey responses
- ✓ 50+ interviews/door-knocking with businesses
- ✓ 66 emails and 311 cases

# Share and refine Fall 2025/Winter 2026: Draft Plan

- **Collaborated with Gastown Business Improvement Society (GBIS):** series of workshops to develop and refine Plan content, directions, and conceptual visions
- **Met with x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm, Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw and səlilwətaʔ:** presented emerging directions and plan content and gathered feedback
- **Met with Civic Advisory Committees (CACs):** presented draft emerging directions and gathered feedback
  - *Advisory Committees:* Transportation, Persons with Disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+, Urban Indigenous Peoples, Arts and Culture, Women's Advisory Committee, Children, Youth and Families, Racial and Ethno-Cultural Equity, Older Persons and Elders
  - Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee
- **Met with key Gastown stakeholders:** presented draft emerging directions and gathered feedback
  - Gastown Residents Association, Hastings Crossing BIA, HUB



# Plan Directions

# Plan Directions

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**1**

**Partner with local Nations - xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) - to weave their histories, cultures, uses and aspirations into Gastown**

**2**

**Enhance Gastown's public space network, including key Gateways and Maple Tree Square, to center daily public life and support vibrant local businesses, gatherings and celebrations**

**3**

**Make Water Street a people-first, safe, multi-modal retail corridor with a flexible design that can enable events and pedestrian zones**

**4**

**Make Cordova Street two-way to improve its overall experience and improve the transportation network for Gastown and beyond**

**5**

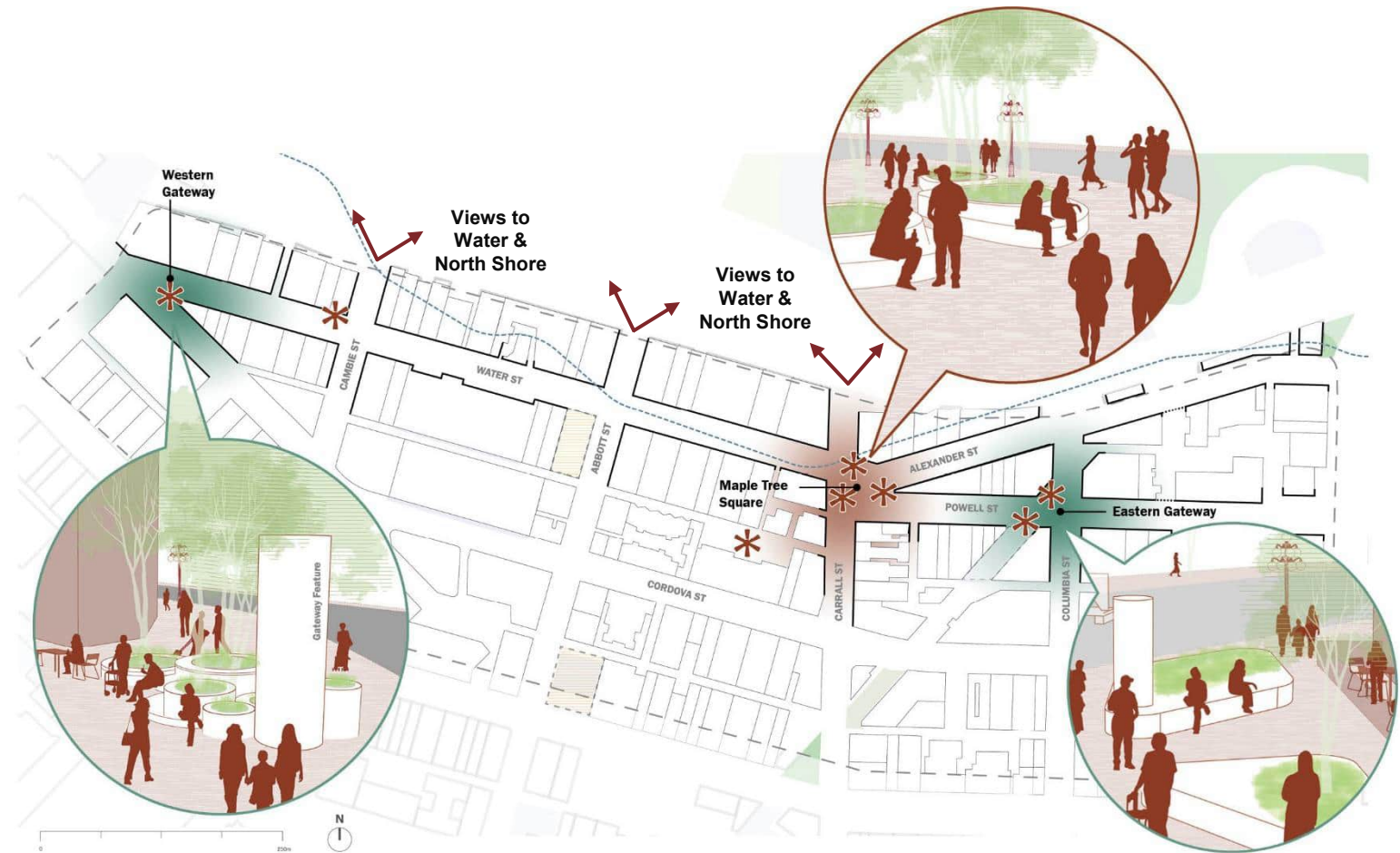
**Strengthen Gastown's streetscape character with resilient, accessible and high-quality materials**

**6**

**Continue to enhance neighbourhood experience, safety and operations through City and partner services**

# Partner with local Nations to weave their histories, cultures, uses, and aspirations into Gastown

- Enhance cultural visibility by honouring local Nations' relationship to Gastown and **key places of significance through public art** and other features.



# Partner with local Nations to weave their histories, cultures, uses, and aspirations into Gastown

- Enhance cultural visibility by honouring local Nations' relationship to Gastown and **key places of significance through public art** and other features.
- Work alongside local Nations to **embed their histories, cultures, uses, and aspirations into public space and streetscape designs**.
- Create a welcoming place for local Nations' cultural practices and connections by **supporting programming opportunities** and providing economic development opportunities



Storytelling (e.g. Storyboards)



Nations-led Programming



Paving Pattern



Site Furnishing

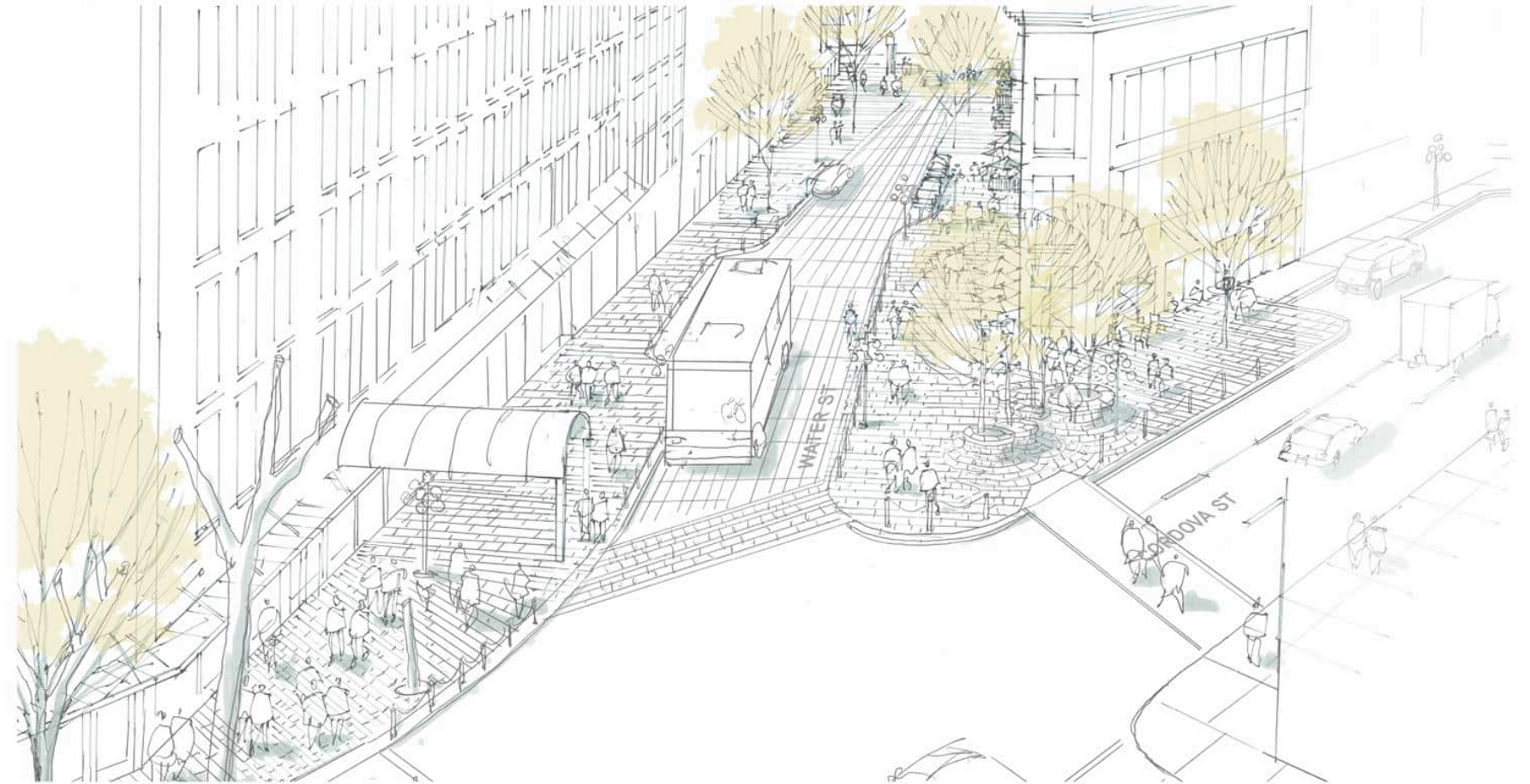


Planting Species



Public Art

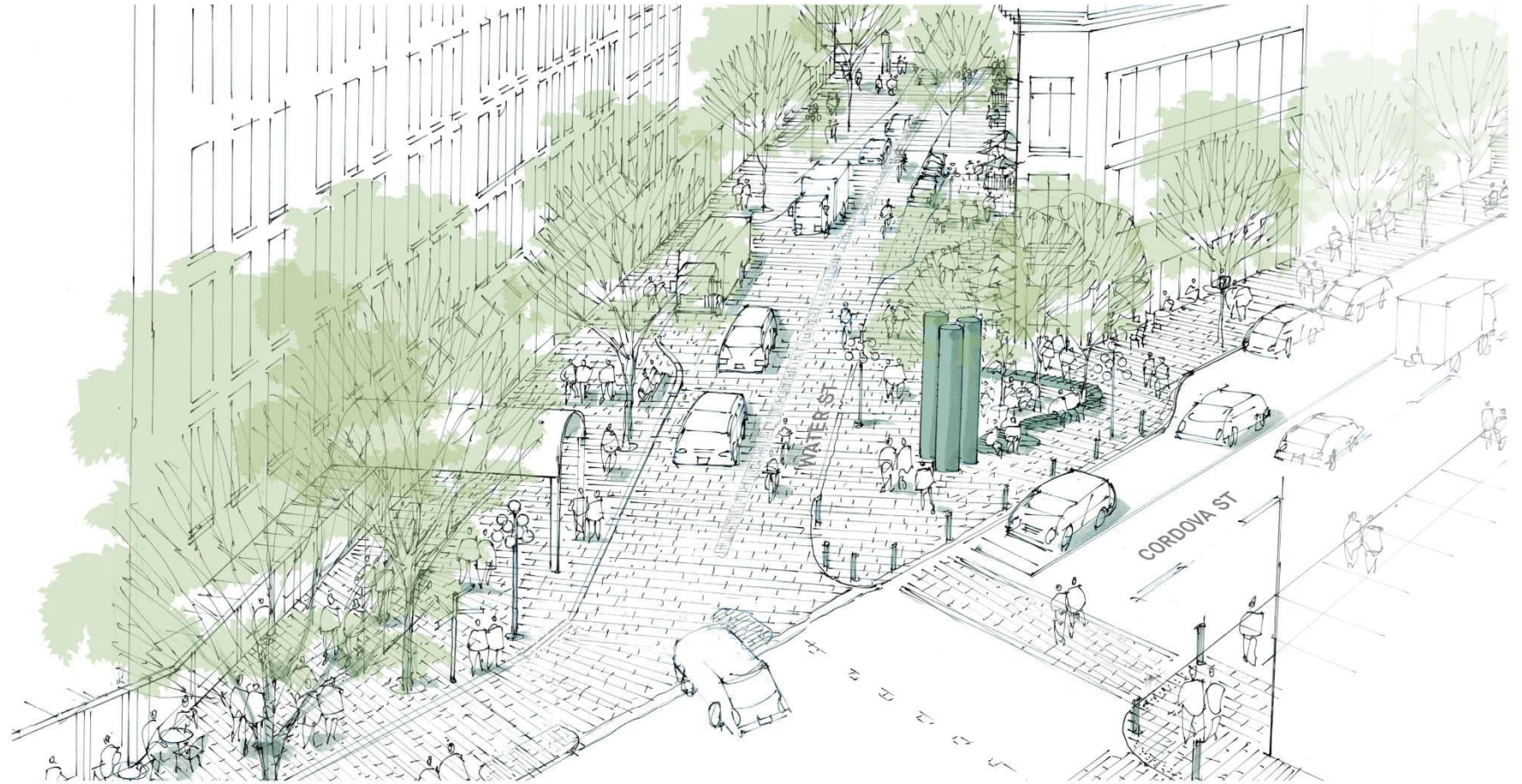
# Enhance Gastown's public space network, including key Gateways and Maple Tree Square, to center daily public life and support vibrant local businesses, gatherings and celebrations



**Western Gateway – Existing**

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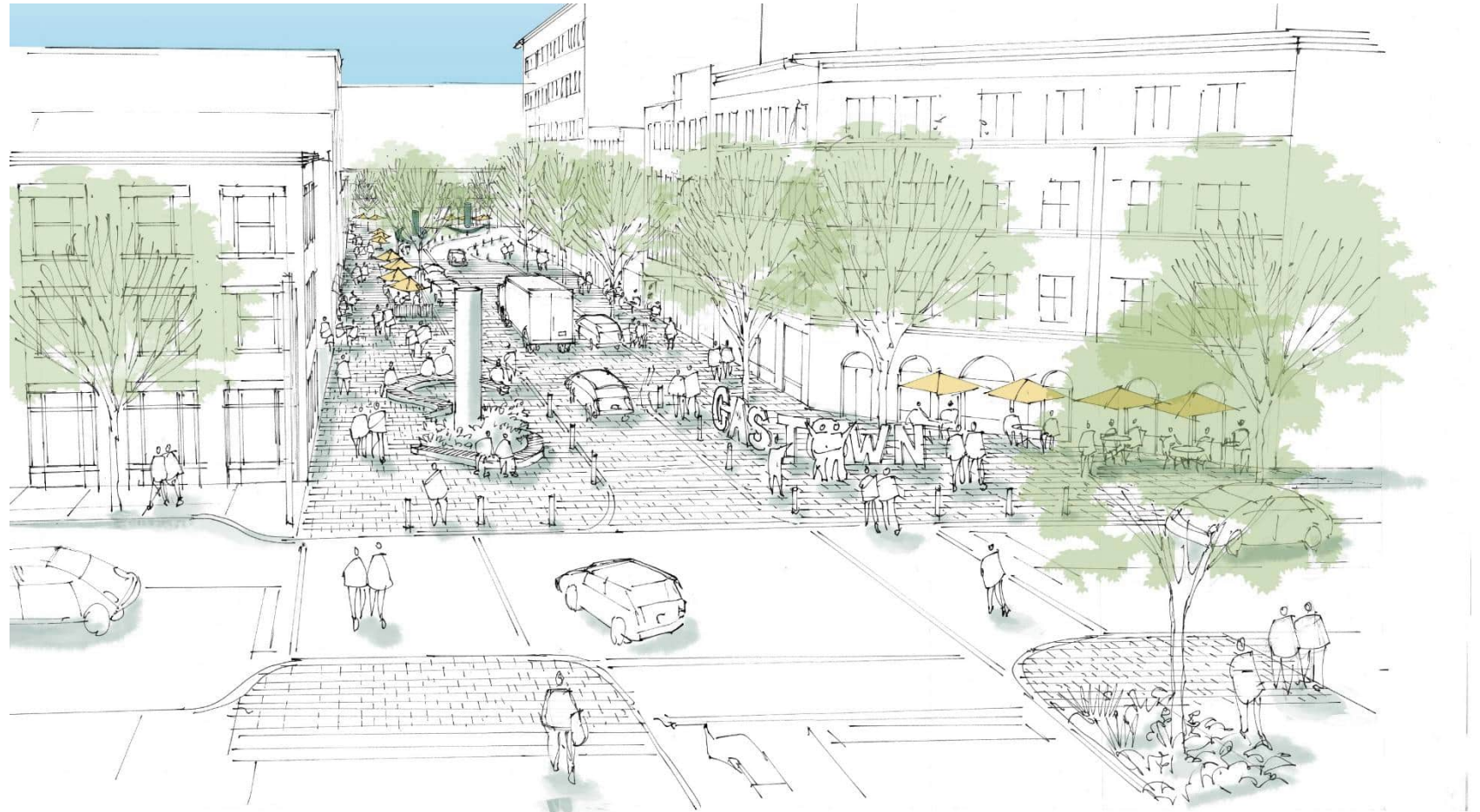
- Design **gateways** to enhance sense of arrival to Gastown – key opportunities for local Nations' visibility and welcoming elements



**Western Gateway – Proposed Day-to-Day**

# Enhance Gastown's public space network, including key Gateways and Maple Tree Square, to center daily public life and support vibrant local businesses, gatherings and celebrations

- Design **gateways** to enhance sense of arrival to Gastown – key opportunities for local Nations' visibility and welcoming elements
- Support a **variety of uses and gathering needs** throughout the streets, laneways and public spaces of Gastown



**Eastern Gateway – Proposed Day-to-Day**

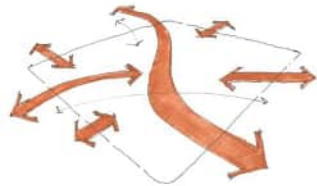
# Enhance Gastown's public space network, including key Gateways and Maple Tree Square, to center daily public life and support vibrant local businesses, gatherings and celebrations



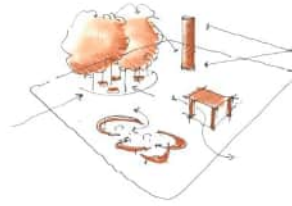
Edge and Enclosure



Scale and Flex



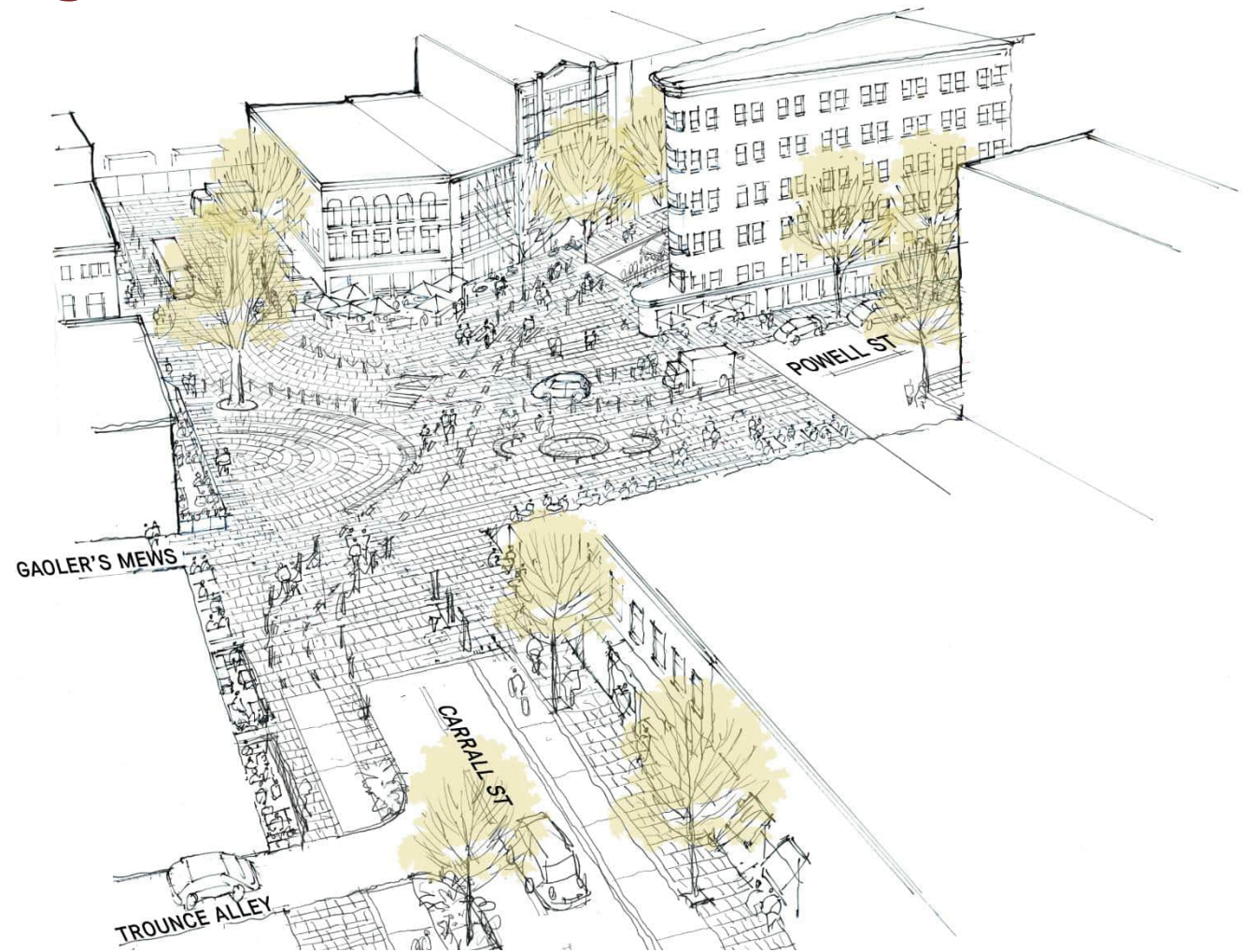
Connections



Big Idea



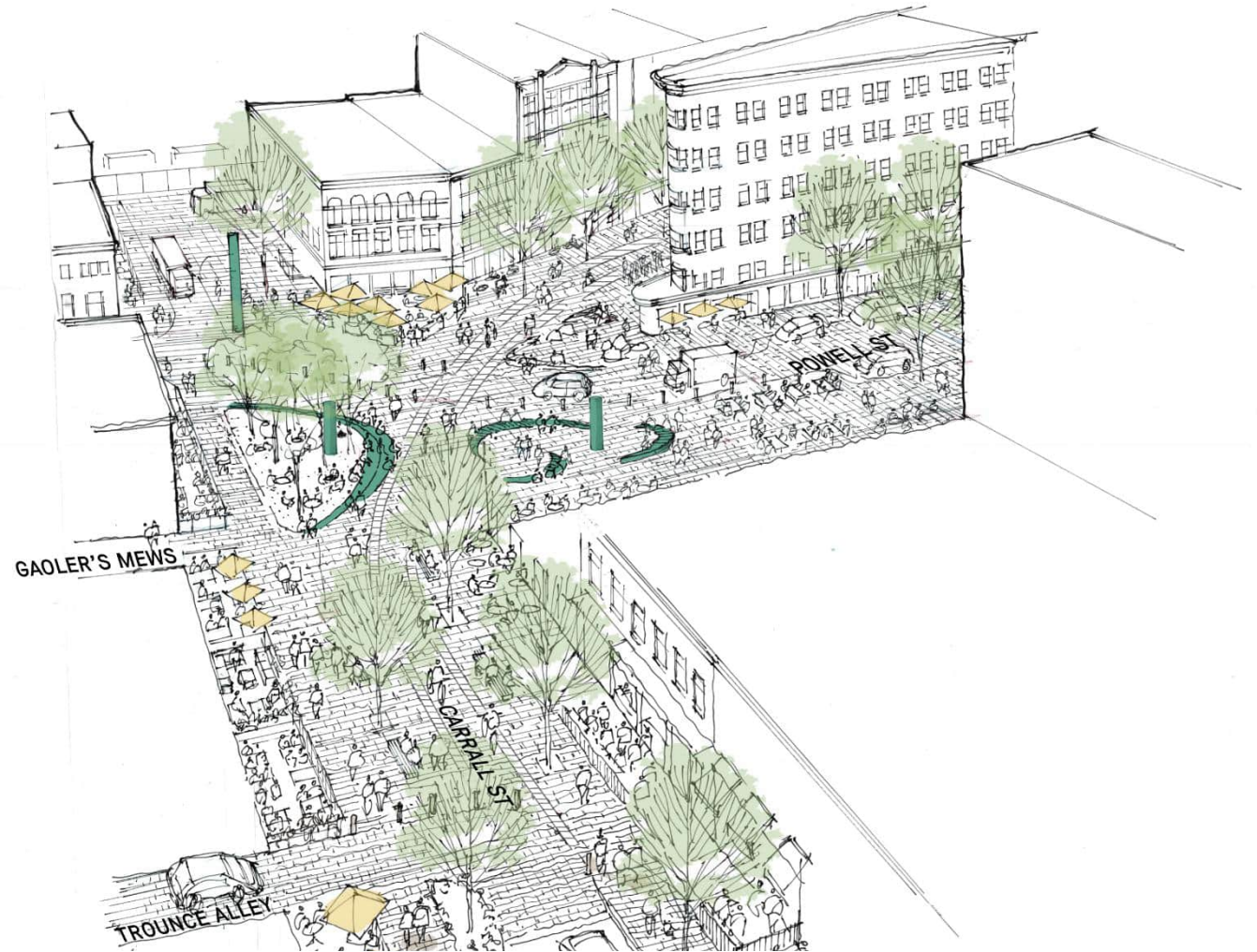
Invitation



Maple Tree Square - Existing

# Enhance Gastown's public space network, including key Gateways and Maple Tree Square, to center daily public life and support vibrant local businesses, gatherings and celebrations

- **Establish Maple Tree Square as the heart** of the neighbourhood, with daily/nightly public life, movement, and events
  - Vibrant destination (e.g. patios, busking)
  - Strengthen draw and sense of arrival (e.g. art, enhancing key views)
  - Comfort and enjoyment for lingering (e.g. seating, native planting / trees)



**Maple Tree Square – Proposed Day-to-Day**

# Make Water Street a people-first, safe, multi-modal retail corridor with a flexible design that can enable events and pedestrian zones

## *What is a Flexible Street?*

- Designed to **accommodate different uses and activities**.
- Vehicles **speeds and volumes are reduced** to make shared use safe and comfortable.
- **Flush** or gently sloped surfaces allow **seamless movement** between sidewalks and roadway.
- Furniture can be **removed or rearranged** to adapt to changing uses.
- **Balances flexible design** with **universal accessibility** considerations.



**Water Street - Existing**

# Make Water Street a people-first, safe, multi-modal retail corridor with a flexible design that can enable events and pedestrian zones

- Provide a **safe and comfortable two-way cycling** connection along Water Street that improves local access and fills a critical gap in the bike network.

## Legend

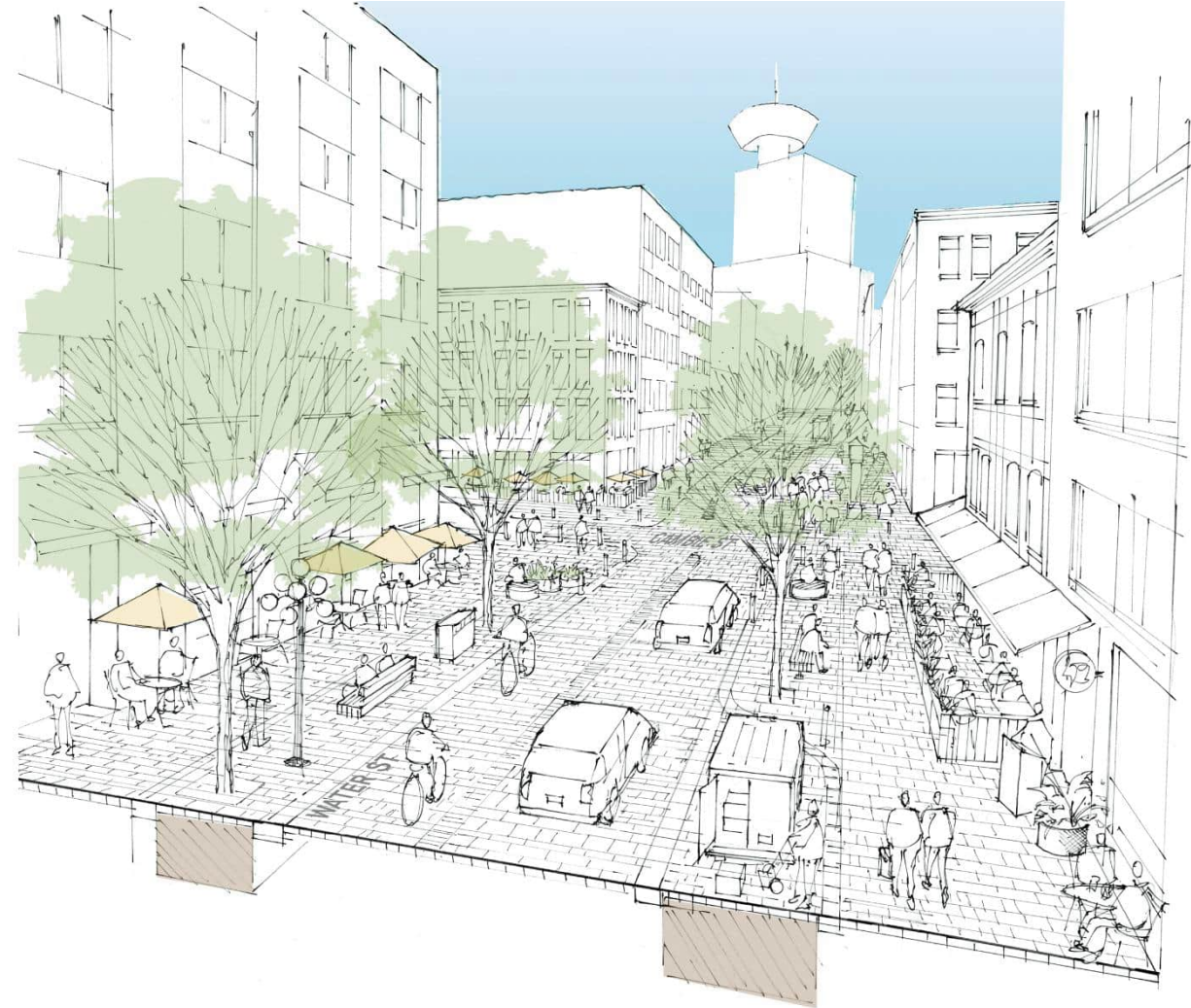
-  Filling in the Network Gap
-  Existing Major Bikeway & Regional Greenways Network
-  Other Bike Facility
-  Skytrain Station



Biking Network Map

# Make Water Street a people-first, safe, multi-modal retail corridor with a flexible design that can enable events and pedestrian zones

- Enhance the **pedestrian experience along Water Street** and **support business uses**
  - **Amenities** such as public seating, street trees, and public art
  - Space to support adjacent **ground floor uses and activities** such as restaurant patios, street vending and queuing areas
- Plan for **curbside management** with uses such as **parking, loading, and tourist buses** while balancing other public life needs



**Water Street – Proposed Day-to-Day**

# Make Water Street a people-first, safe, multi-modal retail corridor with a flexible design that can enable events and pedestrian zones

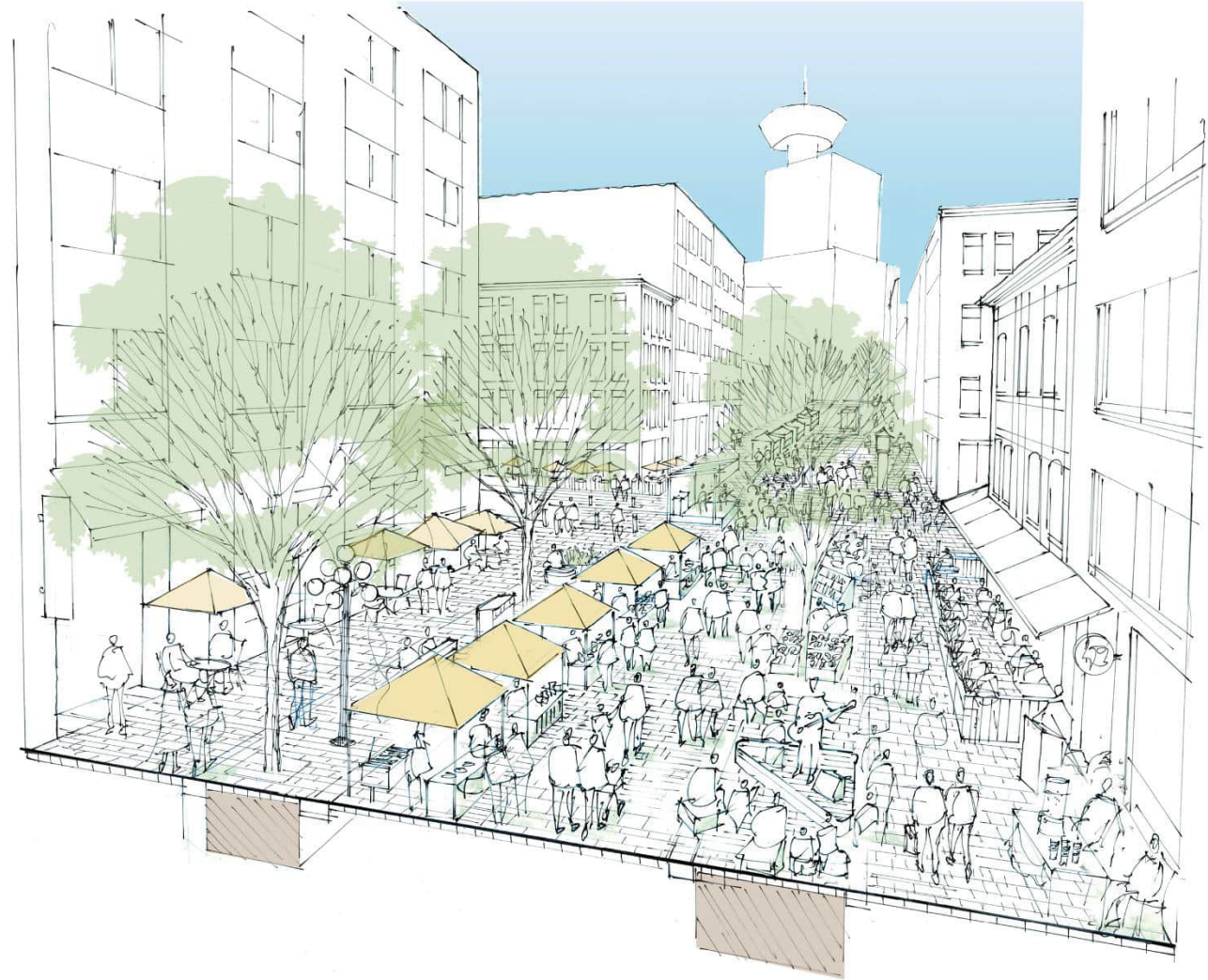
- Design Water Street to be **flexible for different daily and seasonal uses** with the ability to evolve over the long-term to meet changing needs



Flush street design



Removable/retractable bollards

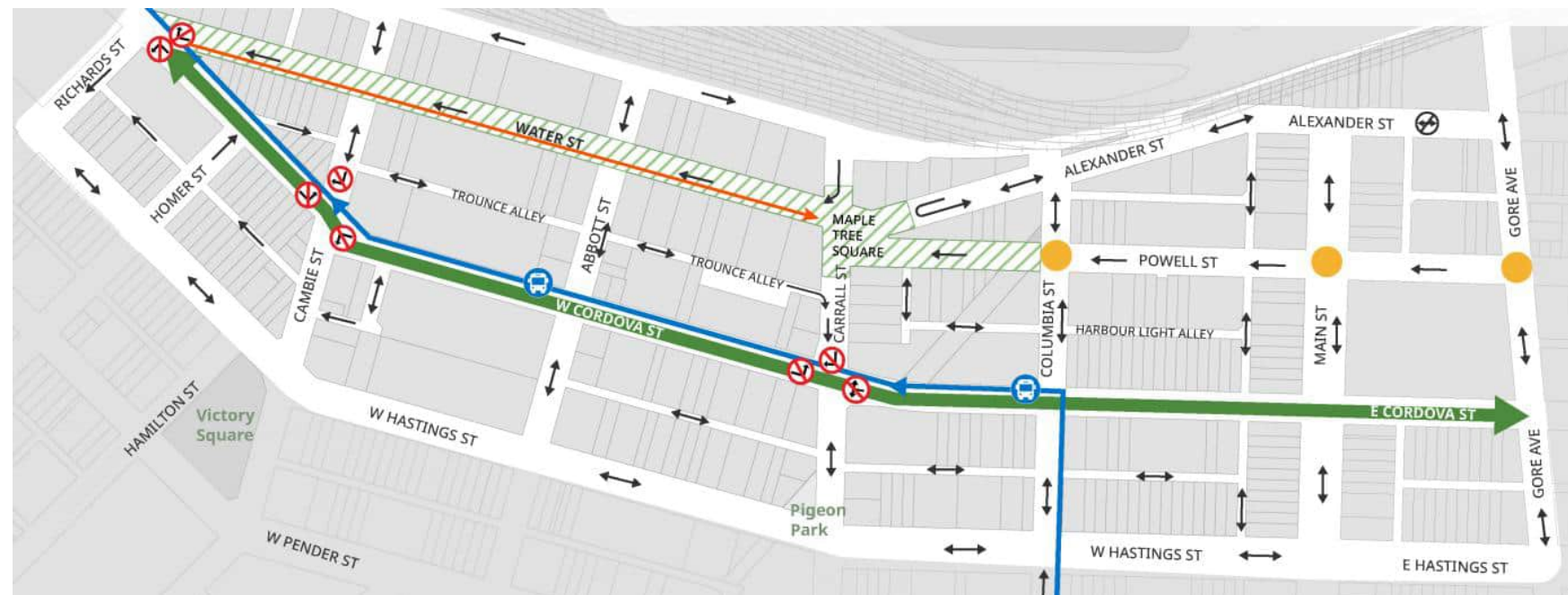


## Water Street – Proposed Pedestrian Zone

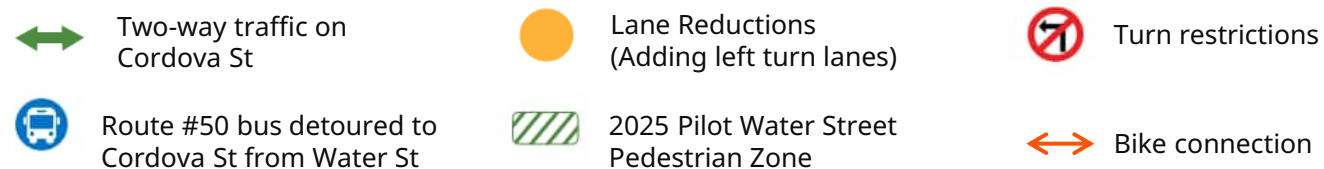
# Make Cordova Street two-way to improve its overall experience and improve the transportation network for Gastown and beyond

## *Learning from current pilot to inform network changes*

- Monitor and adjust the interim two-way Cordova toward a **permanent configuration**
  - Explore extension of two-way traffic further east
  - Implement transit-priority measures where needed



2025 Gastown Pilot Transportation Network (two-way Cordova St currently in place)



# Make Cordova Street two-way to improve its overall experience and improve the transportation network for Gastown and beyond



**Cordova Street - Existing**

# Make Cordova Street two-way to improve its overall experience and improve the transportation network for Gastown and beyond

- Enhance the **pedestrian experience** on Cordova Street through **expansion of sidewalks** where possible, including key intersections and bus waiting areas
- Plan for **curbside management** with uses such as **parking, loading, and longer-stay tourist bus stops**, while balancing other transportation, resident, and business needs



**Cordova Street - Proposed**

# Strengthen Gastown's unique streetscape character with resilient, accessible and high-quality materials

- Gastown is a **cherished National Historic site** with a unique character
- Current materials and elements were **added in the 1970s**
- The **local Nations' deep histories** and relationships to the area have not been visible



Cordova and Richards St, 1912



1970's Water Street beautification with red brick pavers

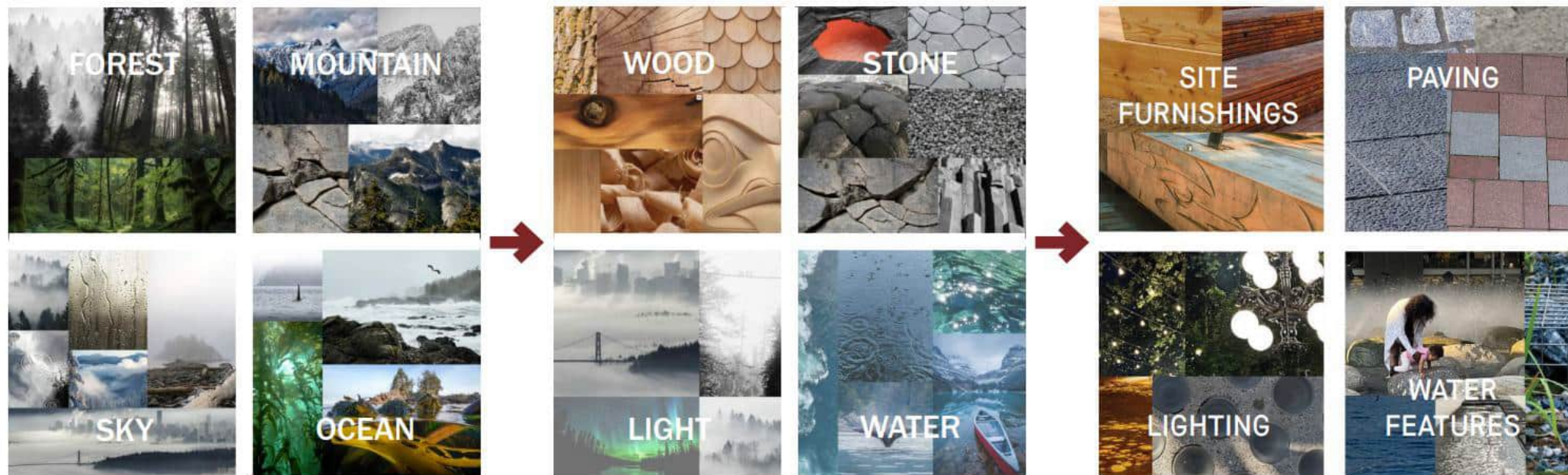


Black for street furnishings used as a cohesive design element



# Strengthen Gastown's unique streetscape character with resilient, accessible and high-quality materials

- **Deepen Gastown's distinctive identity and history** by weaving in local Nations' cultural expressions and grounding the refresh in surroundings **natural landscapes, using locally sourced materials** that echo an authentic regional heritage
- **Character defining elements** can continue to anchor the public realm while allowing a more holistic cultural expressions to emerge



# Strengthen Gastown's unique streetscape character with resilient, accessible and high-quality materials

- Provide **high-quality streetscape paving materials** with consideration toward asset life cycle, repairs, longevity, and aesthetics
- Create visual cohesiveness with **consistent public realm design elements** like street furniture, signage and lighting

## A Range of Paving Materials under Consideration



Granite Pavers



Precast Concrete Unit Pavers

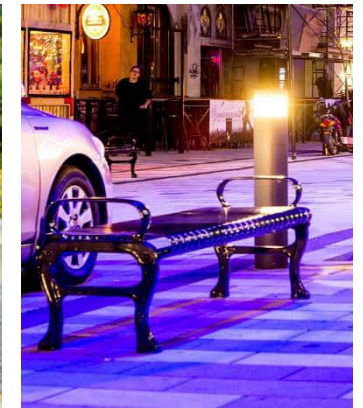


Clay Brick Pavers

## Examples of Street Furnishing and Lighting Options under Consideration



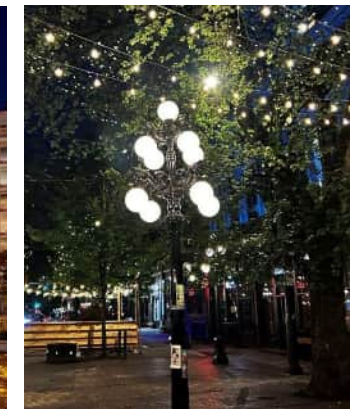
Bollards



Seating



Lighting



Lighting: Potential Retrofit

# Strengthen Gastown's unique streetscape character with resilient, accessible and high-quality materials

- Enhance **accessibility and comfort** in street surface treatment, street furniture, and amenities
  - An important principle, especially for a **curbless street** where the challenge is ambiguity
  - Need **safe zones** and ways to **delineate between different users** on the streets



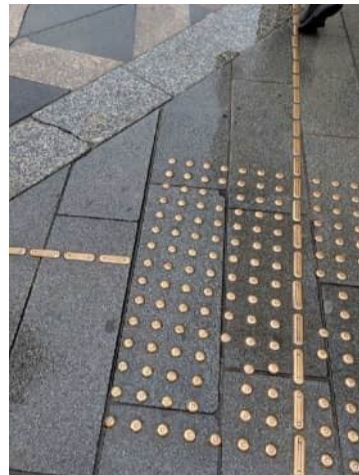
Carved Stone Strip Wayfinding Panel



Tactile Directional Indicator (TDI)



Metal Trapezoidal TWSI



Metal Stud TWSI



COV Standard Cast Iron TWSI



Smooth and barrier free paving for people with mobility challenges

# Strengthen Gastown's unique streetscape character with resilient, accessible and high-quality materials

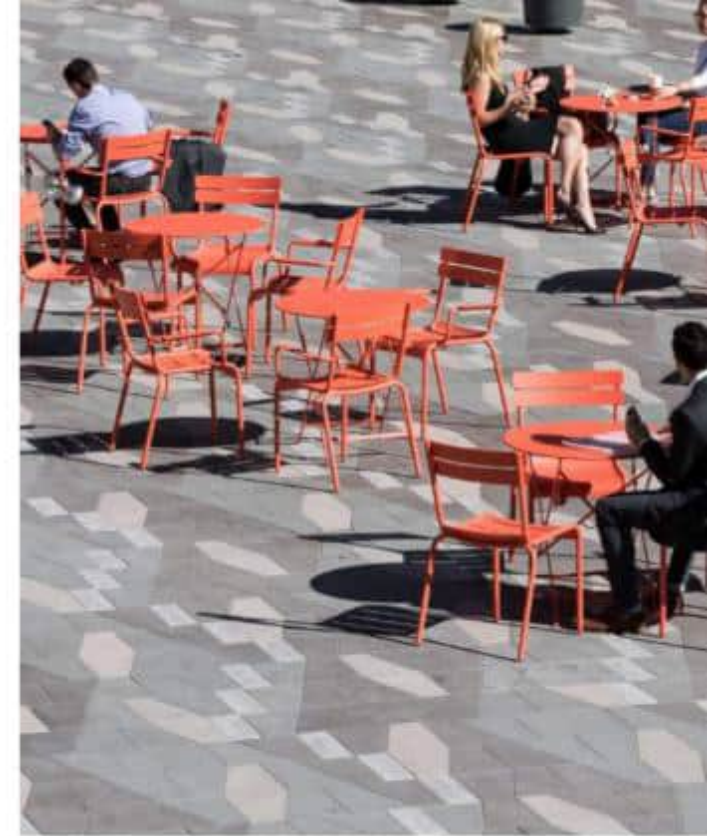
*Paving precedents:*



Argyle Street, Halifax NS



5th and Pine, Downtown Seattle WA



Xwilt'eq Square, Vancouver BC

# Continue to enhance neighbourhood experience, safety and operations through City and partner services

- Improve laneway safety and usability by working with partners to **enhance waste management**
- Maintain **cleanliness and sanitation services** using coordinated approaches that **prioritize high-activity zones and peak periods**
- Continue to explore opportunities to provide **access to public washrooms** in Gastown
  - Install Portland Loos at Water and Abbott and at Main and Powell



# Continue to enhance neighbourhood experience, safety and operations through City and partner services

- Collaborate with partners to:
  - Explore approaches to **public space stewardship and district management** as Pedestrian Zone program evolves
  - Promote a **safe and more inclusive** public realm
- Continue to **support external partners to offer programming** through existing City programs



# Recommendations

# Recommendation A

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THAT Council approve the Gastown Public Spaces Plan, a holistic vision and framework to guide investment in Gastown, generally as outlined in this report and presented in Appendix A.

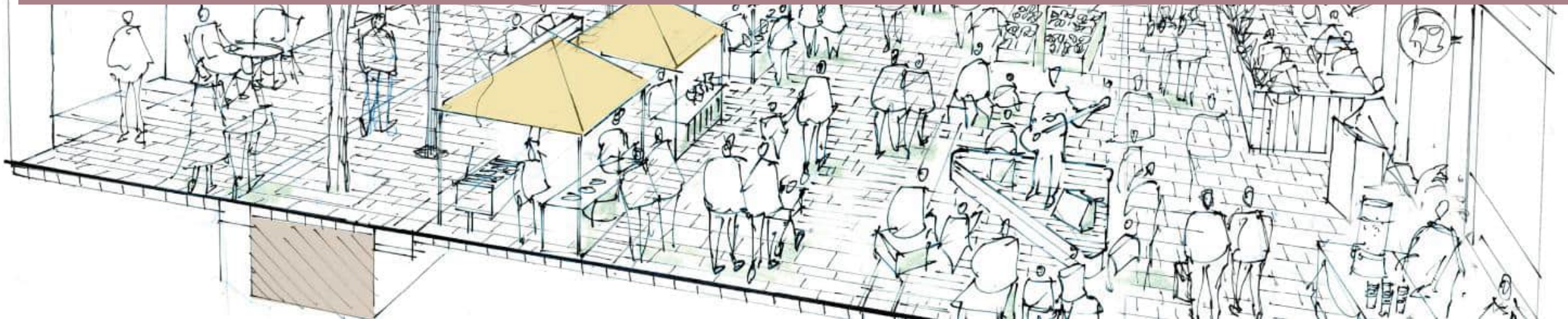
# Considerations for plan implementation

**Long-term plan,**  
with design work still  
to come

Requires **decisions**  
**on what projects**  
**advance** and  
investment across  
**multiple capital**  
**plans**

**Project sequencing**  
and **construction**  
**impacts** on  
businesses and  
residents

**Continued**  
**engagement** with  
partners,  
stakeholders and the  
public



## Recommendation B

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THAT Council direct staff to advance design for Maple Tree Square in alignment with the Plan and neighbourhood context, including partnerships with local Nations, engagement with the Gastown Business Improvement Society and the public, and implementation planning.

# Advance design for Maple Tree Square

## Opportunities include:

- Strengthen the Square as a **preeminent public space** and **destination** within the neighbourhood
- Integrate **local Nations visibility** with current look and feel:
  - Opportunity to work with three local Nations to **integrate cultural visibility into the new design** – e.g. weaving patterns or other motifs
  - Advance **feature projects** similar to Squamish Nation kiosk with Musqueam and Tseil-waututh Nations



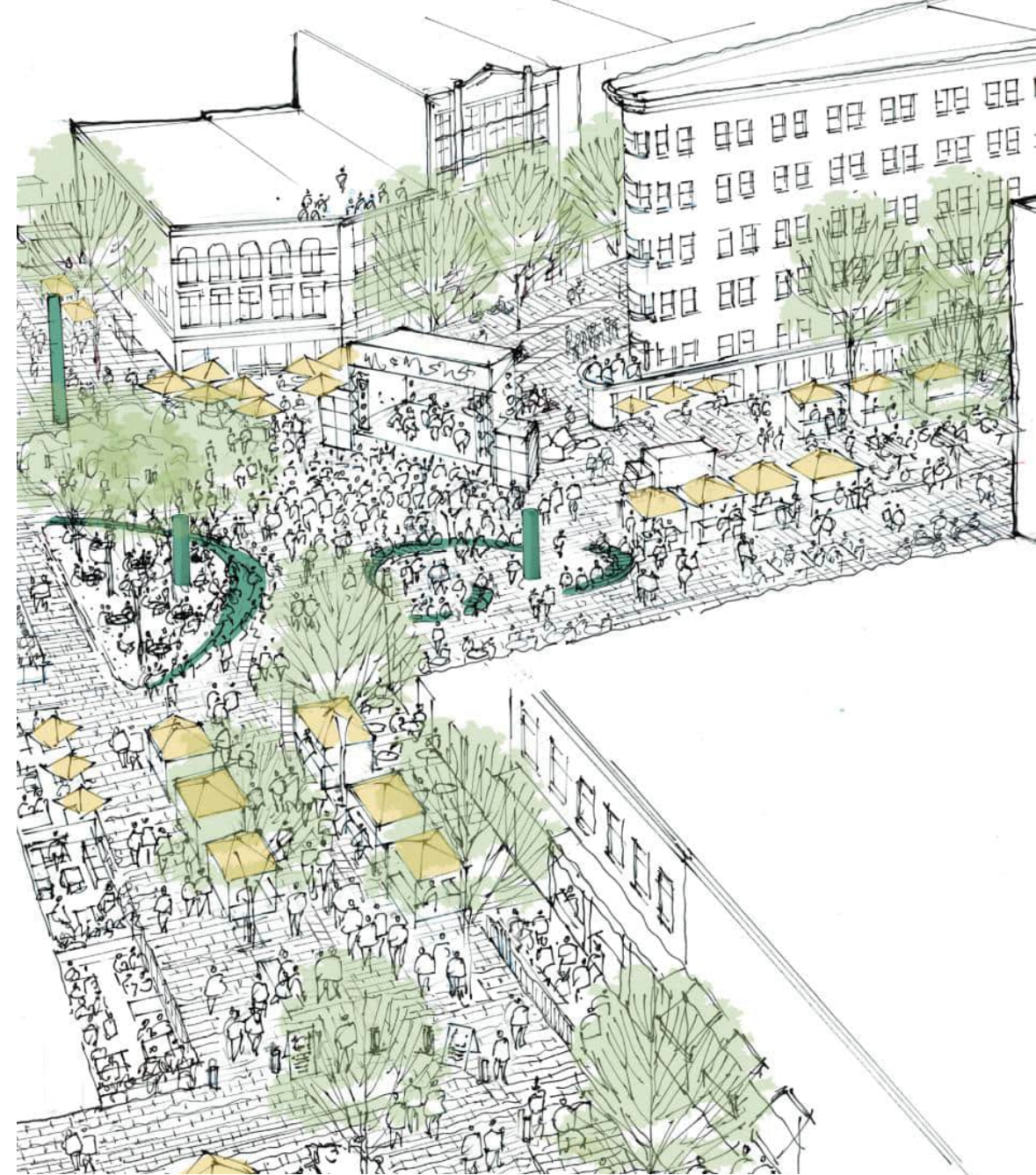
# Advance design for Maple Tree Square

## Design and implementation considerations include:

- **Balancing needs of movement** through the Square and daily/nightly **public life** in the Square
- Creating a design that can **easily adapt** to become a **car-free public space** for events, summer Pedestrian zones, etc.
- Considering and minimizing **construction impacts** on businesses and residents

## General considerations:

- Can be a **standalone project**
- Cost: **\$20-25M**
- Design work can continue within current budget



**Maple Tree Square – Proposed Pedestrian Zone**

## Recommendation C

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THAT Council direct staff to proceed with actions as outlined in this report, including:

- i. Improvements to interim design on Water St;
- ii. Continued support and regularization of Sunday pedestrian zones on Water St;  
and,
- iii. Technical work and engagement on the potential extension of two-way vehicle traffic on Cordova St east to Powell St Overpass.

# Near-term Actions

## i. Improvements to interim design on Water Street

- Improve current placemaking assets and interim cycling measures
- Lower operational costs of Ped Zones and special events by adding physical measures (e.g. retractable or removable bollards) in key locations



## ii. Continue to support and regularize Sunday Pedestrian Zones

- Transition to a regular program that can expand as desired over time, including patio expansions, Open Streets permits, and design improvements
- Work with GBIS toward sustainable approach to programming



## iii. Further work on extension of two-way Cordova

- Technical work and engagement with TransLink, businesses, and other stakeholders east of Gore Ave to Powell Overpass
- Arterial road renewal on Cordova St from Seymour St to Powell St in next Capital Plan





# Gastown Public Spaces Plan