Portage & Main Revitalization Study

Phase 1 Stakeholder Engagement Summary

Background

Portage & Main, Winnipeg's iconic intersection, has long been a part of our City's narrative, playing a key role in both the physical and cultural landscapes.

The City must make significant investment in aging infrastructure at the intersection. We are studying Portage & Main to determine the cost of replacing the membrane (waterproofing layer) that protects the underground concourse. As part of this study, we are also creating a vision to enhance the public space at the intersection.

Engagement

The goals of Phase 1 stakeholder engagement were to:

- Inform targeted stakeholders on what is required at Portage & Main and the implications for the membrane renewal
- Learn about property owners' current plans for private property at the intersection
- Seek input to inform ideas for the vision

Stakeholder engagement activities are summarized in Table 1 and described below. Participants in this phase included property owners, architects and designers, tenants, community-based organizations and residents of the Exchange District.

1. Stakeholder interviews: Interviews were structured around the following focus areas:
   - Identity, heritage, and street life
   - Functionality
   - Look and feel (aesthetic)

2. Designers meeting: In April 2022, the project team met with the designers working for the property owners at each of the four corners to share information about projects currently underway and identify opportunities to coordinate efforts and work toward a cohesive design for the intersection.

3. Stakeholder workshop and follow-up interviews: In July 2022, we held a workshop and sought input through two activities:
   - In Activity 1, participants provided their feedback on six design statements that could guide the design of Portage & Main.
   - In Activity 2, participants discussed the design statements in small groups while adding their responses and ideas to aerial images of the intersection.

After the workshop, interviews were held with two key stakeholders who had not been able to attend.

Table 1: Stakeholder engagement opportunities

Date	Activity	Details
April - May 2022	Stakeholder interviews	20 interviews were held with 24 individuals.
April 1, 2022	Designers meeting	The project team met with 4 representatives of the design firms hired by property owners at the intersection.
July - August 2022	Stakeholder workshop and follow-up interviews	70 organizations were invited and building owners were asked to extend the invitation to tenants. 39 individuals participated in the workshop. Two one-on-one interviews were held following the workshop.

What we heard

Stakeholder interviews and designers meeting

A majority of stakeholders that participated in the interviews and meetings believed that Portage & Main is an important intersection in the city due to its cultural and social significance, connection to other areas of the city, and central location. However, concerns were raised about its car-oriented nature, safety for pedestrians, and confusion when navigating the area. Many stakeholders expressed a desire for an open and vibrant aesthetic, with improvements such as:

- Walkability
- Wayfinding
- Art
- Greenery

There were mixed opinions on the need for consistency between all four corners of the intersection. Although opening the intersection to pedestrian crossings is not being contemplated as part of this study, the issue came up in discussions and was noted by the project team. Most stakeholders indicated that they were in favour of opening Portage & Main to pedestrians; one stakeholder expressed a desire for it to remain closed. Some stakeholders also raised the importance of balancing the needs of marginalized people with those of businesses and residents in the area.



Figure 1: Participants provide input at a stakeholder workshop.

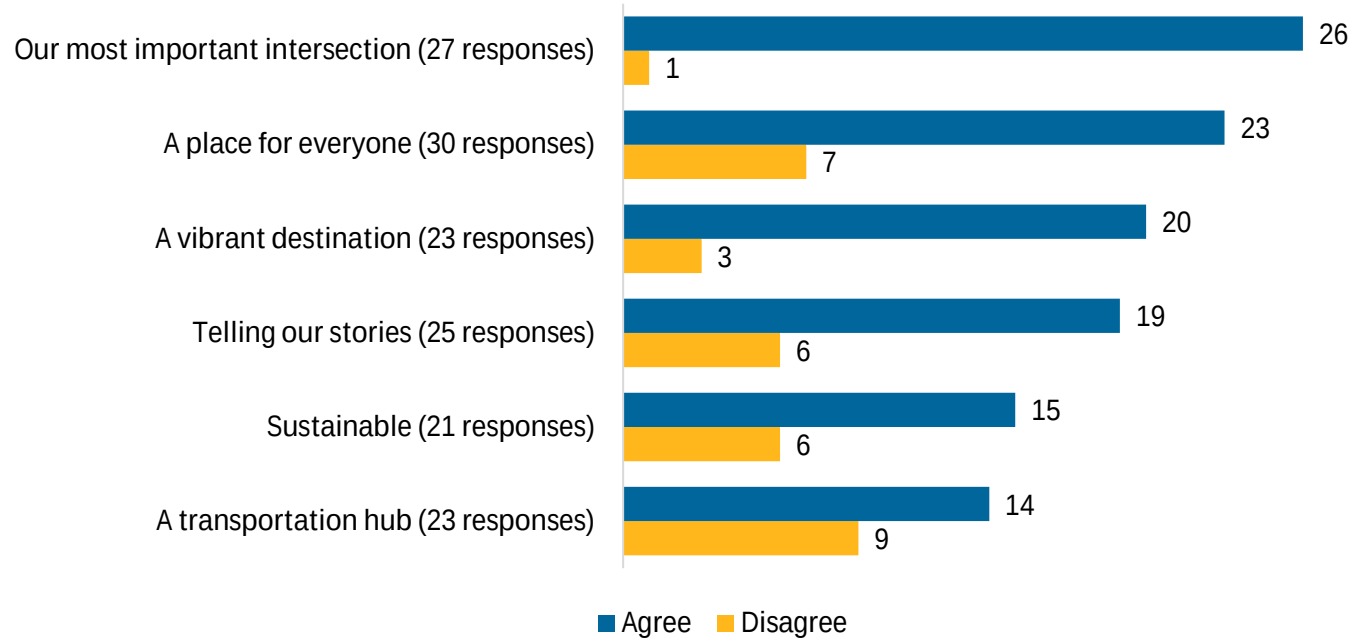
During the designers meeting, participants explored opportunities for collaboration and creating a common design language for the Portage & Main intersection. Designers shared plans that were underway for properties at the intersection and discussed opportunities for creating common design elements among the four corners, such as:

- Lighting
- Bollards
- Planters
- Art
- Wayfinding
- Flag poles
- Programming

Stakeholder workshop

Figure 2 shows the number of stakeholders who agreed and disagreed with each of the six statements describing the future of Portage & Main. The most agreed upon statements were that Portage & Main should be our most important intersection and a place for everyone. The statement that received the most opposition was that Portage & Main should be sustainable. Responses to the statement about sustainability indicated that respondents do not think Portage & Main is sustainable now, due to its emphasis on concrete and vehicle traffic. However, participants also expressed a desire for more greenery, water, and sustainable features in the space.

Figure 2: Stakeholder responses regarding what Portage & Main should be



The stakeholder workshop and follow-up interviews revealed that most people were in favour of:

- Opening the intersection visually and physically
- Prioritizing safety and accessibility
- Collaborating with property owners
- Including programming (such as exhibits, festivals, and large events) in the space

Some participants also want the intersection to:

- Focus on street-level activation
- Host art and culture initiatives
- Recognize the seasonality of Winnipeg
- Preserve the intersection's long cultural history and stories

How input was considered

Table 2 summarizes what we heard and how it was considered.

Table 2: What we heard and how it was considered

What we heard	How it was considered
To make Portage & Main a vibrant destination, some stakeholders suggested: • More programming, special events and street life • Collaboration with owners and downtown agencies • Bridge public and private space • Improve flexibility and permeability	• Ideas include enhanced programming opportunities. • Property owners have been consulted and are in favour of collaboration and sharing the space. • Ideas include barriers that are less visually imposing and have removable sections.
To make Portage & Main Winnipeg's most important intersection, some stakeholders suggested that the design should be big, iconic, and visible from a distance, and that it could include public art.	Most of the ideas are visible from a distance and include opportunities for art.
Some stakeholders said that Indigenous and Metis perspectives and stories should be honoured in the design, and that other stories should also be told, such as the history of commerce.	All of the ideas have opportunities to tell stories through art, signage, and programming.
To make Portage & Main sustainable, some stakeholders suggested: • Less concrete, more greenery, better lighting, and consideration of a winter city • Identify opportunities to capture stormwater, use solar and wind power	• Most of the ideas show enhancements with greenery. • All ideas have enhanced lighting. • All ideas have improved wind control through planting and/or railing design.

What we heard	How it was considered
There were different opinions on how Portage & Main's role as a transportation hub relates to the vision: • Many stakeholders thought focusing on Portage and Main as a transportation hub contradicted the desire to make it a "people place." • Some stakeholders suggested wider sidewalks and better wayfinding. • Some stakeholders welcomed the addition of a Transit station.	• All ideas expand and enhance space for pedestrians by reducing the size of traffic barriers. • All ideas are intended to embrace Transit and take advantage of the activity it creates. • Future Transit station design will look at accommodating all modes of travel. • Wayfinding will be considered in more detail in the next stage of the vision.
To make Portage & Main a place for everyone, some stakeholders suggested: • Improving accessibility is essential • Add amenities like public washrooms • Provide safety and security for all ages and abilities, relying on people trained in mental health and substance abuse rather than police/security guards	• The vision is only for the sidewalk level, which will comply with the City's standards for accessibility. • Public washrooms have not been included in the design ideas. • Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles will be applied to the next stage of design.

Next steps

Stakeholder input has been used to develop ideas to enhance public space at the intersection. We will present these ideas to the public and stakeholders for feedback in winter and spring 2023. Following Phase 2 public and stakeholder engagement, the project team will develop and recommend a vision to City Council.

Appendices

Appendix A – Stakeholder organizations
Appendix B – Stakeholder interview notes
Appendix C – Stakeholder workshop notes