Portage & Main Revitalization Study

Phase 2 Public 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 its physical and cultural landscapes.

The City must make significant investments 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.

The project is organized into three phases. The first and second phases are now complete. This report summarizes what we heard from participants during Phase 2 engagement and how feedback was considered.

Engagement

The goals for public and stakeholder engagement in Phase 2 were to:

- Share information with the public about the need to excavate the intersection in order to replace the membrane that protects the underground concourse
- Share information about the opportunities and considerations for revitalizing Portage & Main
- Present ideas for the design of the public space at Portage & Main and collect feedback



Figure 1: Participants at a pop-up event.

From April 25 to May 26, 2023, the public was invited to provide feedback on ideas for the public space at Portage & Main. Public and stakeholder engagement activities are summarized in Table 1 and described below.

1. **Stakeholder meetings**: We held three meetings where we presented a summary of the project to date and shared ideas for the four zones: overhead, street edge, ground, and building wall; as well as for programming and placemaking. Stakeholder meeting notes can be found in Appendix A.
2. **Pop-up events:** We held two pop-up events, open to the public, and presented similar information to the stakeholder meeting. Participants used coloured stickers and sticky notes to provide their feedback on the display boards. Pop-up event notes can be found in Appendix B.
3. **Community gathering**: We held a community gathering to gather feedback from marginalized community members and the organizations that serve them. The project team presented the display boards and participants shared their feedback in a facilitated discussion, as well as with coloured stickers and sticky notes. Community gathering notes can be found in Appendix C.
4. **Online survey**: A survey was available online to gather feedback from the public on the ideas. Survey results can be found in Appendix D.

Additionally, the project team engaged with property owners at the intersection throughout the design process to share ideas, seek their feedback, and understand how changes to the intersection might impact owners, tenants, and people coming and going from their buildings.

Table 1: Public and stakeholder engagement opportunities

Date	Activity	Details
February 9, 14 and 16, 2023	Stakeholder meetings	We heard from **16 stakeholders** over three meetings. They represented a wide diversity of groups, including: • Community and social service organizations • Residents' organizations • Business organizations • Indigenous organization • Accessibility organizations
April 25 - May 26, 2023	Project webpage	16,300 visits
April 25 - May 26, 2023	Online survey	The survey received **9,633 responses**.
May 10 and 11, 2023	Pop-up events	Pop-up events were organized in a drop-in format at two locations at the intersection: • 201 Portage lobby (May 10) • Underground concourse (May 11) We received feedback from approximately **350 individuals** who attended the two pop-up events. Pop-up event boards
May 11, 2023	Community gathering	The community gathering was held in the lobby of 201 Portage, following one of the pop-ups. **Nine** staff and community members attended.

Promotion

Public engagement opportunities were promoted using the following methods:

- News release – April 25, 2023
- Facebook posts with over 37,000 followers – April 25 to May 26, 2023
- X (formerly Twitter) posts with over 119,000 followers – April 25 to May 26, 2023
- Instagram posts with 2,700 followers – April 25 to May 26, 2023
- Public engagement newsletter with over 5,000 recipients – May 5 and 16, 2023
- Digital advertising at 201 Portage Avenue and the Richardson Building
- Postcards mailed to 3,500 residents and businesses near the intersection
- Postcards and posters distributed to businesses near the intersection
- Media coverage in both local and national news from April 21 to May 26, 2023

See Appendix E for promotional material.

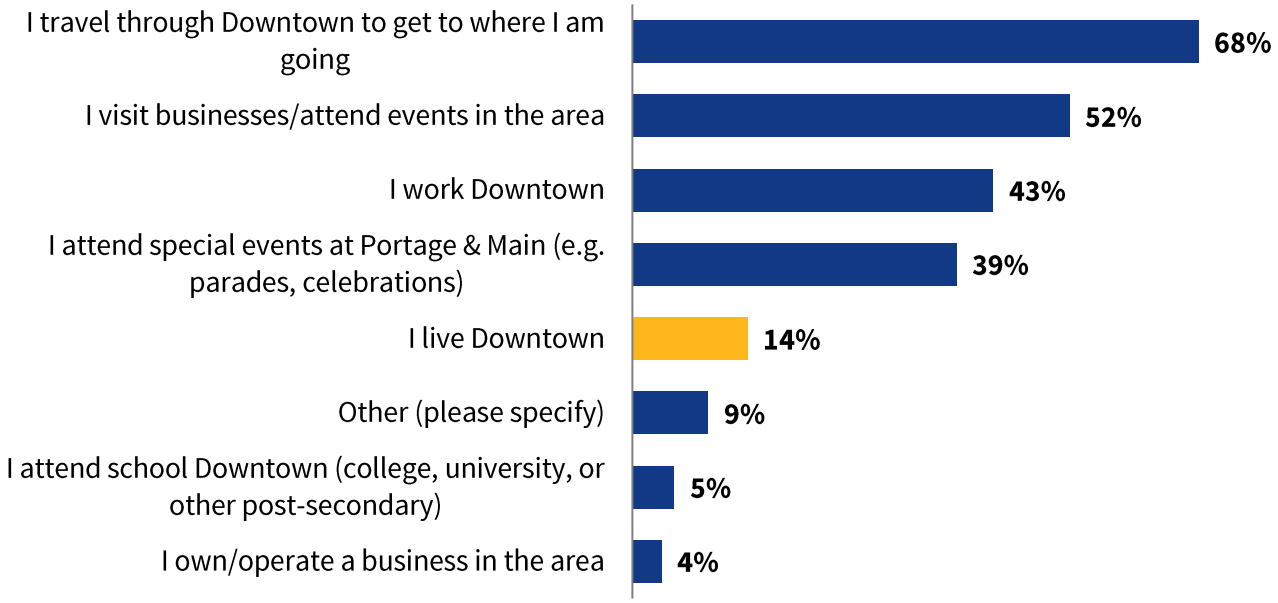
Who we heard from

We heard from residents, property owners, Rightsholders, community and social service organizations, residents' organizations, Indigenous organizations, homelessness advocates, accessibility organizations, healthcare, safety organizations, businesses and business associations, and other users of the intersection.

During the month that the survey was open, we received 9,633 responses. We asked respondents their connection to Portage & Main. Fourteen percent of survey respondents live Downtown. Survey respondents also indicated that they work, attend school Downtown, or travel through Downtown, as well as own/operate a business, attend special events, or visit businesses in the area. See **Figure 2**: Connection to Portage & Main.

Figure 2: Connection to Portage & Main

What is your connection to Portage & Main? Select all that apply.



What we heard

The following summarizes the feedback received from participants, organized by engagement activity.

Stakeholder meetings

Participants noted that Portage & Main should feel open, welcoming, and usable by everyone. They stressed the importance of maintenance and making sure it can withstand Winnipeg's weather.

They also highlighted the need to make the intersection inviting and change any negative opinions people have about it. Participants indicated that the intersection should be able to adapt to accommodate special events. They

supported the idea of incorporating storytelling and flexibility into the design. They also emphasized the importance of wayfinding and being able to move around easily.

Pop-up events

The pop-up events received feedback from approximately 350 participants across two events. The key themes that emerged for each of the ideas presented are summarized below.

Overhead Ideas:

- Monumental public art:
  - Support for artwork expressing identity and vibrancy
  - Concerns about cost-effectiveness and shadowing historic buildings
  - Desire for simplicity in design and ensuring pedestrian improvement
- Living art:
  - Concerns about maintenance costs, increased taxes due to green space, and pedestrian accessibility
- Sky garden:
  - Concerns about functionality, accessibility, shadow casting, and safety
  - Support for attractive spaces and human-scale design (spaces that are easy and comfortable for people to use)

Street Edge Ideas:

- Multi-media lighting:
  - Emphasis on increased lighting, unique designs, and clear traffic sightlines
  - Proposal for safety buttons on light poles
- Light poles with canopies:
  - Support for more lighting, barrier-free design, and concerns about seasonal viability
- Lookout towers:
  - Safety concerns, opposition to the idea, and potential hazards

Ground Level Ideas:

- Edge-to-edge paving pattern:
  - Debate over opening the intersection, traffic flow reduction, and paving material costs
  - Comments in favour of opening the intersection to pedestrians, even though eliminating the barricades was not within the scope of the engagement
- Edge-to-edge paving with trees:
  - Support for green elements, desire to remove barriers, and concerns about deterioration

Building Wall:

  - Feedback supportive of showcasing art, historical relevance, and celebrating events

People and Activities:

- Strong support for various activities, events, and features at Portage & Main such as playful public art, food vendors, pop-up commerce, and Indigenous programming
- Emphasis on safety, attracting people downtown, opening the intersection, and making it a welcoming destination

Community gathering

The following themes emerged from the community gathering.

Overhead Ideas:

- Sky garden:
  - Support for interactive elements, diverse experiences, and pride in Winnipeg
  - Safety concerns addressing 24/7 security, suicide risks, and provision of services
  - Incorporation of community organizations for presence and services

Street Edge Ideas:

- Multi-media lighting and light poles with canopies:
  - Support for both ideas, including combining them with other concepts like Sky Garden and Lookout Towers
  - Desire for canopies and incorporation of plants, potentially edible and indigenous
  - Consideration of winter adaptability, including providing indoor areas

Ground Level Ideas:

- Edge-to-edge paving pattern and edge-to-edge paving with trees:
  - Mixed opinions, with some support for aspects such as bollards and open feeling
  - Suggestion that these ideas could complement other concepts like Sky Garden and Multi-Media Lighting

Other Themes:

- Indigenous representation:
  - Strong emphasis on representing Indigenous history, Métis history, and Treaty 1 at Portage & Main
  - Suggestions for statues, spaces for traditional activities, and incorporation of the four directions and medicine wheel
  - Inclusion of newcomers alongside Indigenous representation, aligned with the concept of the four directions
- Above-ground crossing options:
  - Interest in above-ground crossing options, either at street level or elevated

Online survey

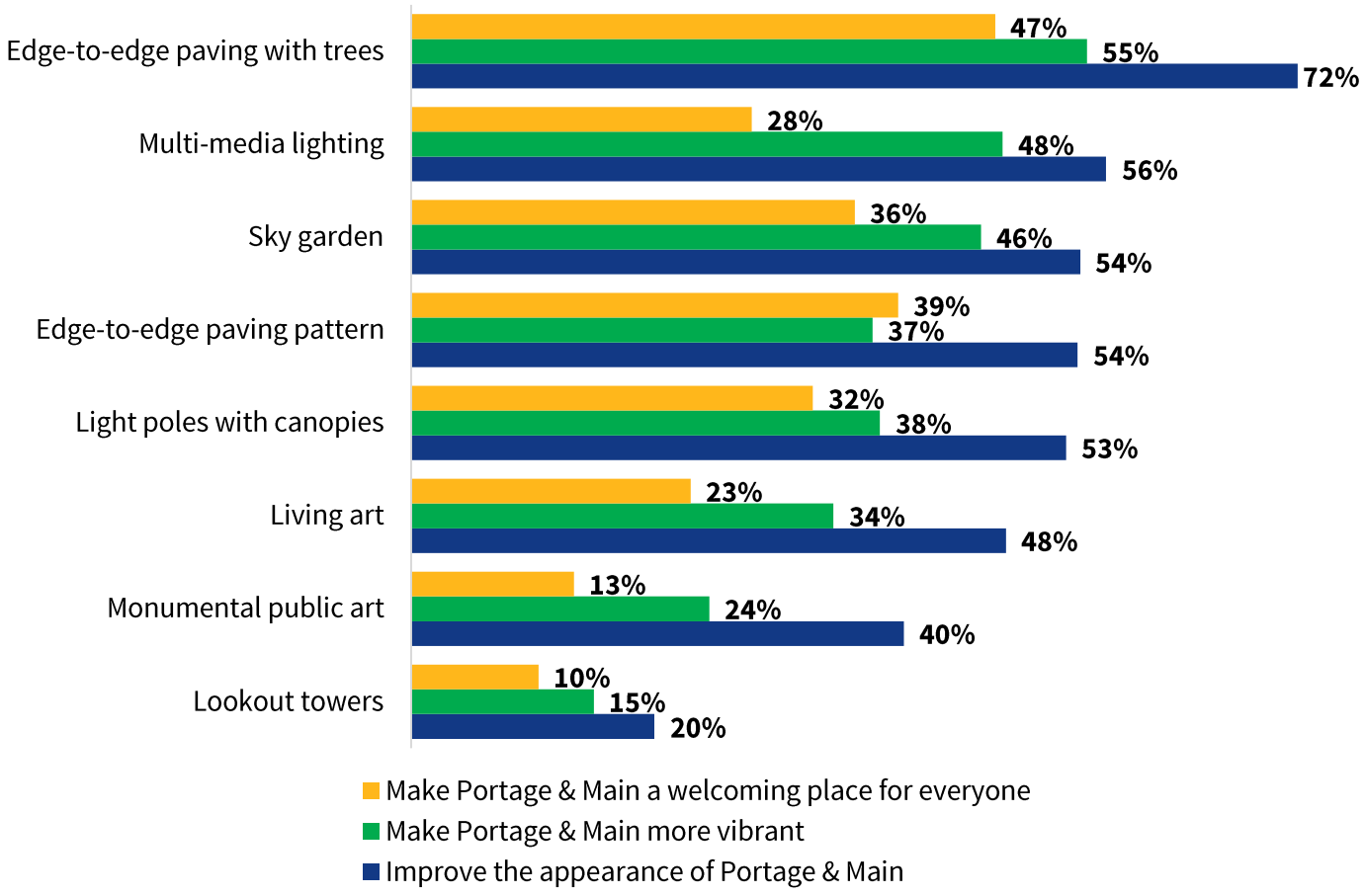
Survey respondents were asked to share their feedback on ideas for the public space at the intersection. We asked participants to think of the ideas as pieces of a puzzle that could be put together to create a vision for the intersection.

All respondents, regardless of their connection to Downtown, indicated that edge-to-edge paving with trees is the most likely to improve the appearance of the intersection, make it more vibrant, and a welcoming place for everyone. Lookout towers was the least likely.

Figure represents all survey participants and shows how likely or very likely each idea is to:

- Improve the appearance of Portage & Main
- Make Portage & Main more vibrant
- Make Portage & Main a welcoming place for everyone

Figure 3: Likelihood (likely or very likely) ideas are to improve the intersection



The table below compares all survey respondents to those that indicated they live Downtown and those that indicated they travel through Downtown to get where they are going. There are no notable differences among survey participants based on their connection to Portage & Main.

Table 2: Likelihood (likely or very likely) ideas are to improve the intersection

	Improve the appearance of Portage & Main			Make Portage & Main more vibrant			Make Portage & Main a welcoming place for everyone		
Idea	**All**	**Down-town residents**	**Travel through Down-town**	**All**	**Down-town residents**	**Travel through Down-town**	**All**	**Down-town residents**	**Travel through Down-town**
Lookout towers	20%	18%	20%	15%	14%	15%	10%	8%	10%
Monumental public art	40%	40%	41%	24%	24%	25%	13%	13%	13%
Living art	48%	48%	49%	34%	32%	35%	23%	22%	23%
Light poles with canopies	53%	48%	54%	38%	34%	38%	32%	29%	33%
Edge-to-edge paving pattern	54%	54%	54%	37%	39%	37%	39%	41%	40%
Sky garden	54%	52%	54%	46%	42%	46%	36%	32%	35%
Multi-media lighting	56%	46%	57%	48%	38%	49%	28%	21%	27%
Edge-to-edge paving with trees	72%	74%	72%	55%	57%	55%	47%	50%	47%

Note: When asked about their connection to Portage & Main, participants were able to select all that applied to them. Therefore, participant responses can be represented in more than one category. i.e. a participant may have indicated they live Downtown and travel through Downtown to get where they are going.

As a follow up question, we asked survey participants what we should keep in mind when selecting the ideas that will go into the recommended vision for the intersection.

The following themes emerged in multiple responses:

- Create an accessible space that allows people to move around freely and efficiently whether they are cyclists, motorists, or pedestrians
- Focus on the safety of all in the recommended vision
- Focus on functionality of the space, rather than the aesthetics
- Add more plants and greenery

- Design a space that is durable and can easily be maintained, including withstanding winter weather and snow clearing
- Minimize cost of the design: there are other more important issues to spend money on

> *"Give citizens a safe place to gather away from traffic and they will come. People bring other people, so make it beautiful and keep it clean."*
> *- Survey respondent*

We also asked participants what kinds of activities, events, and features they would like to see at Portage & Main. Participants indicated support for all the options presented:


Events and celebrations
74%


Temporary art
61%


Wayfinding
56%


Mobile food vendors
74%


Pop-up businesses
58%


Indigenous programming or art
56%

Pedestrian crossing

Although opening the intersection to pedestrian crossings is not being contemplated as part of this study, the issue was brought up by participants in all engagement activities. Opening the intersection to pedestrian crossings was the most common theme identified in the open-ended responses of the survey. Keeping the intersection closed to pedestrian crossing was also noted by participants. The open-ended survey analysis can be found in Appendix D.2. 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
Stakeholders responded favourably to opportunities that create comfortable and lively public spaces, as well as those that incorporate greenspace, flexible lighting, public programming, and art and storytelling featuring First Nations, Métis and Inuit stories.	All of these elements are incorporated in the draft design. Feedback on the importance of including Indigenous art, culture and history will be passed along to the team responsible for detailed design if the project moves forward to that stage.

What we heard	How it was considered
Accessibility was a recurring point of discussion in all engagement activities.	Accessibility is a key consideration in the draft design and influenced the design of: • New and renovated pavilions that provide access to the concourse • Paving patterns • Roadway elevation • Wayfinding
Participants indicated that the design should be welcoming to all.	Making the intersection better for everyone, regardless of background or circumstances, is a key consideration in the draft design.
Participants were split between interest in very bold opportunities like the sky garden and modest improvements like nicer paving, trees, shelter, multi-media, and lighting. Participants also indicated that cost should be minimized and the design should be easy to maintain.	The draft design balances the desire for something bold at the intersection with desire of making modest upgrades that consider weather and maintenance. The draft design includes: • Multimedia lights • Boldly patterned, high quality paving • Pavilions with greenery, artwork, storytelling, and safety features
Participants indicated that the design needs to focus on the safety of all.	The draft design includes crime prevention features through environmental design (CPTED), such as lighting, openness and sightlines, particularly in the design of the pavilions.
There was also wide support among participants for various types of programming to activate to public spaces.	Programming will be in partnership with the building owners, who have invested in performance venues, outdoor eating and activity spaces to enliven their plazas.

Next steps

Public and stakeholder feedback was considered and incorporated into the draft design of the public space at the intersection.

In the final phase of engagement, the project team will meet with property owners at the intersection to review the draft design and refine it based on feedback. The project team will also review the technical feasibility of the draft design and ensure it meets the requirements of the study.

We will also meet with stakeholders that participated in Phase 1 and Phase 2 engagement to share the draft design and answer questions. Following final tweaks to the design, cost estimate updates, and coordination with the membrane replacement strategy, the recommended design vision and membrane replacement strategy reports will be submitted to Council for consideration.

Appendices

Appendix A – Stakeholder meeting notes
Appendix B – Pop-up event report
Appendix C – Community gathering notes
Appendix D – Survey results
Appendix E – Promotional material