



# St. George's Square preliminary design engagement

## Results Report

April 2025

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# 1.0 Introduction

The City of Guelph is now undertaking the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program (DTIRP), which aims to improve and upgrade roads, sewers, watermains, sidewalks, cycling facilities and the streetscape in parts of the [Downtown Secondary Plan area](#). The current phase of the project scope focuses on Wyndham Street North from Carden Street to Woolwich Street. As St. George’s Square sits within this study area, the City of Guelph decided to include redevelopment of St. George’s Square within this phase of the DTIRP.

As part of the preliminary design phase for St. George’s Square, the City engaged with residents in order to,

- Share information about the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program, and specifically the opportunities this presents for the redesign of St. George’s Square.
- Share preliminary concept designs for the Square.
- Hear from residents regarding preferences and ideas about these designs.

This report provides a summary of engagement undertaken during the preliminary design phase for the St. George’s Square Master Plan design process. The following sections outline engagement methods and results.

## 1.1 Previous Engagement

As St. George’s Square is the centre of Guelph’s Downtown, the City of Guelph undertook a participatory design process for the Master Plan design project. Throughout the summer and fall of 2024, the City engaged in various activities to collect ideas about the redesign of St. George’s Square from Guelph residents. This included:

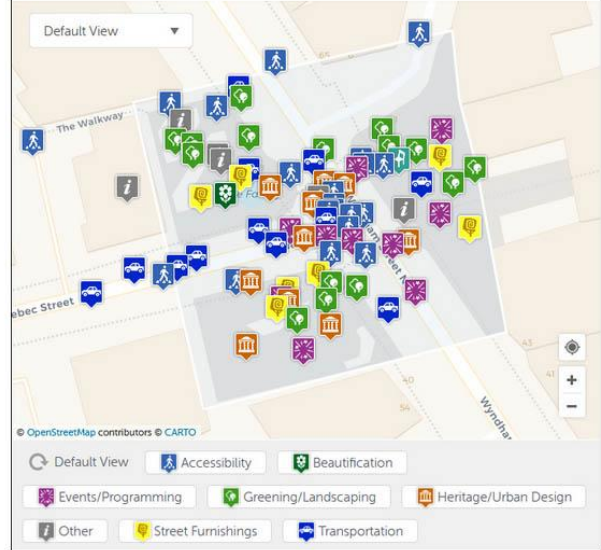
- Attending community events where 452 residents shared their views about what they would like to see in a redesigned Square.
- An online survey about the Square redesign that was completed by 196 people.
- Onsite tours with event presenters and other stakeholders.
- An online Community Design Lab where 85 pinpointed ideas were shared for redesigning the Square.

## Community Events



City of Guelph booth at Guelph Ribfest, August 2024

## Community Design Lab



Community Design Lab Map

Key themes from the summer and fall engagement activities directly informed the concept designs presented in this recent round of engagement. These included:

- Increase pedestrian flow and accessibility.
- Increase trees and green elements to provide shade.
- Include park-like elements such as play opportunities and lawn areas.
- Highlight and give prominence to the shape of the Square.
- Increase flexibility of use of space with the reduction of steps and level more areas to accommodate more events within the Square.
- Design for pedestrians first and give them more importance over vehicles by using decorative paving materials and curb-less streets within the Square, while still allowing for vehicular/transit movement through the space.

## 2.0 Engagement Methods

Three engagement events were hosted to support the St. George's Square preliminary Master Plan design phase. This included an in-person Open House, a virtual Open House, and Construction Café where the project designers attended to answer additional questions about the preliminary concept designs.

### 2.1 Engagement Events Notification

The City of Guelph undertook outreach and notification efforts to provide residents with information about the St. George's Square Master Plan design phase. This included physical posters of the concept designs displayed in St. George's Square and in the City's storefront display on Carden St. The City also communicated with residents about the St. George's Square Master Plan design project through various means, as follows:

- Public notice distributed January 20, 2025
- Messages in the Downtown newsletter
  - January: 552 subscribers with a 65% open rate
  - February: 551 subscribers with a 45% open rate
- City of Guelph Have Your Say messaging
  - January newsletter – January 7: 3423 subscribers with a 57% open rate
  - February newsletter – February 4: 3430 subscribers with a 56% open rate
  - Specific message for followers of Downtown Infrastructure - January 22: 196 subscribers with a 76% open rate
- City News – January 23
- Notice on Carden window display
- Social media posts between January 1 and February 23
  - Facebook – 4 posts
  - Instagram – 3 posts
  - Twitter – 5 posts

Social media activity resulted in resulted in 29,896 impressions and 342 clicks.

## 2.2 Public Open House

The Public Open House was hosted in the Galleria at Guelph City Hall on February 12, 2025, between 6 and 8 p.m. The event was facilitated by City of Guelph staff, as well as staff from MTE and GSP, members of the project consultant team. The Open House offered various activities, including the opportunity to review display boards about the St. George's Square project, as well as the proposed concepts for the redesign of St. George's Square. Residents were provided the opportunity to speak with City staff and the project team about the concept designs. Additionally, they were able to share their thoughts about each concept on large posters of the detailed designs. Additional information was available about potential design features that could be included in the redesign. Due to inclement weather, attendance at the in-person Open House was lower than anticipated with 11 visitors throughout the evening.

## 2.3 Virtual Open House

The virtual Open House (vOH) was hosted using the PlanLocal service, supported by messaging and links on the City's Have Your Say engagement site, from January 20 – February 23, 2025. Visitors to the vOH were led through virtual display boards, available online, similar to those available at the Open House. The flow of the presentation began with information about the history of St. George's Square, the DTIRP project, as well as existing conditions in the Square, design principles, constraints and opportunities. Included in the vOH were the detailed design concepts, as well as 3D images of the designs and reference images of potential elements that may be included in the Square. Throughout the virtual presentation, residents were asked to share their thoughts and preferences about the St. George's Square preliminary design concepts. 346 participants shared their feedback for designs online.

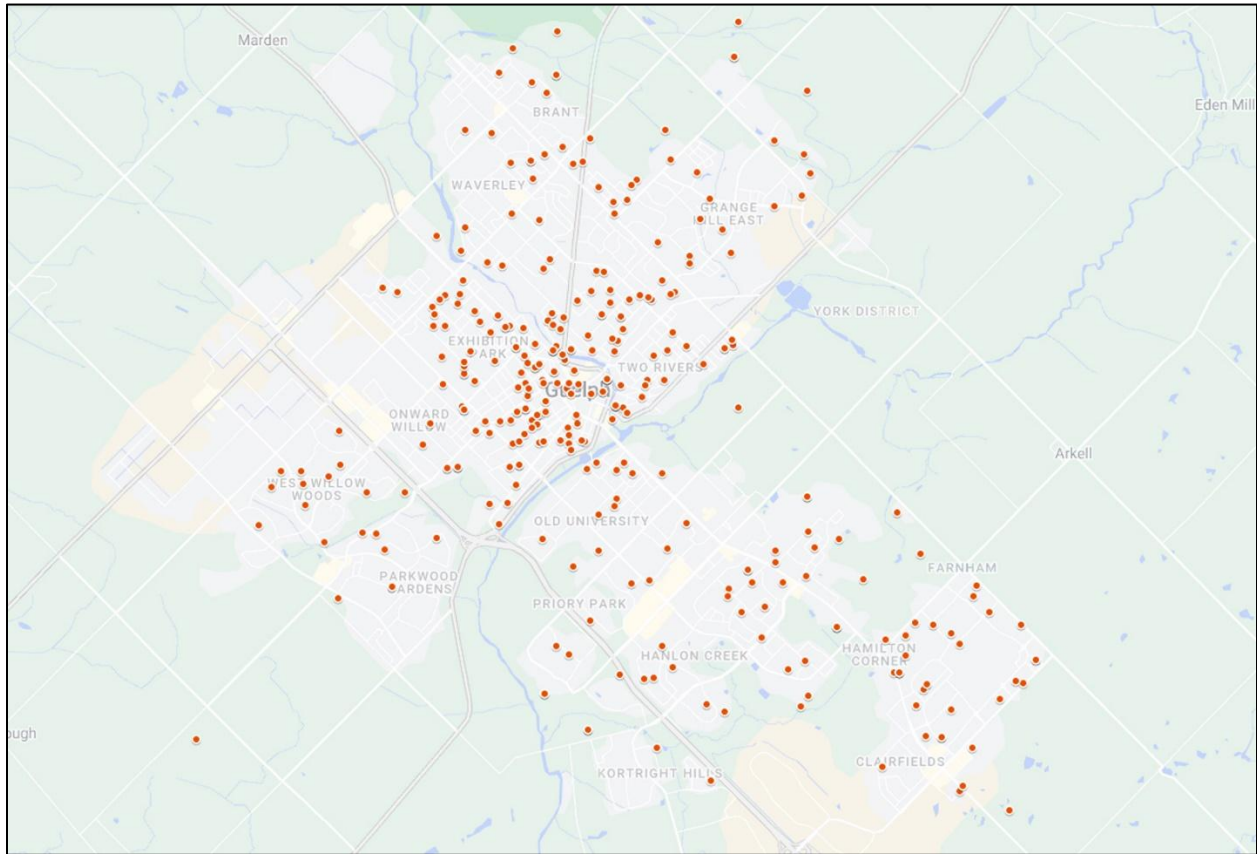
## 2.4 St. George's Square Construction Café

As part of the overall engagement for the DTIRP project, the City of Guelph host regular Construction Cafés on the third Thursday of the month. These events are open to businesses and residents and offer an opportunity for open dialogue, questions and feedback about all things related to Downtown infrastructure renewal. The February 20 Café was focused primarily on the St. George's Square preliminary design process. It was attended by 10 people split between residents and the business community and led by the project team designers who were able to discuss the proposed concepts with attendees.

### 3.0 Engagement Results

The following section presents a summary of engagement feed back from Guelph residents received as part of the virtual Open House that was available between January 20 – February 23, 2025. Additional comments received from residents who attended the public Open House on February 12 are also included in its own section below. In total, 346 responses were received through the virtual Open House. Figure 1 displays postal code locations shared by vOH respondents.

Figure 1: Respondent Postal Codes



Note: Not all respondents are shown due to map extent.

### 3.1 Concept A - St. George's Square

The main purpose of the engagement activities was to share the two preliminary concept designs for St. George's Square. Both at the Open House and via the virtual Open House, residents were asked to specify what features they liked in each of the proposed concepts, as well as which concept was their preferred option. The following summarizes these results.

Figure 2: Concept A

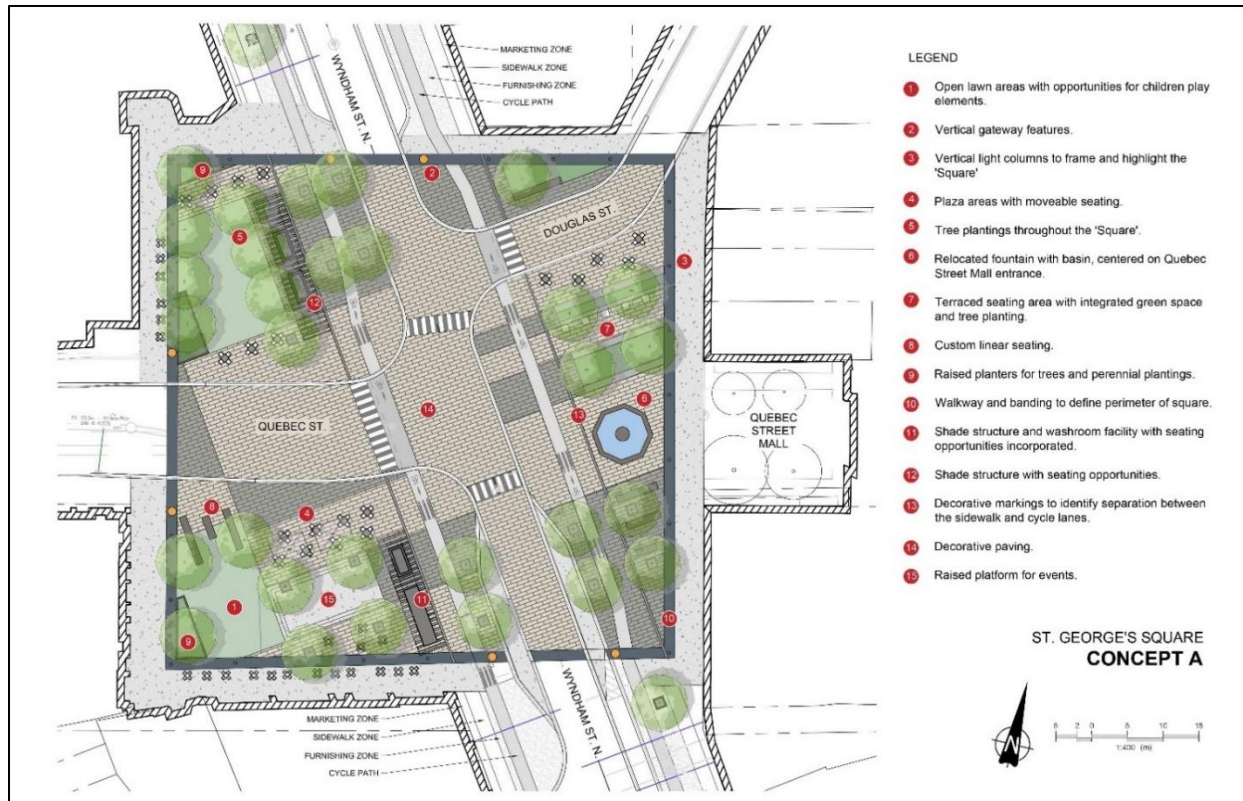
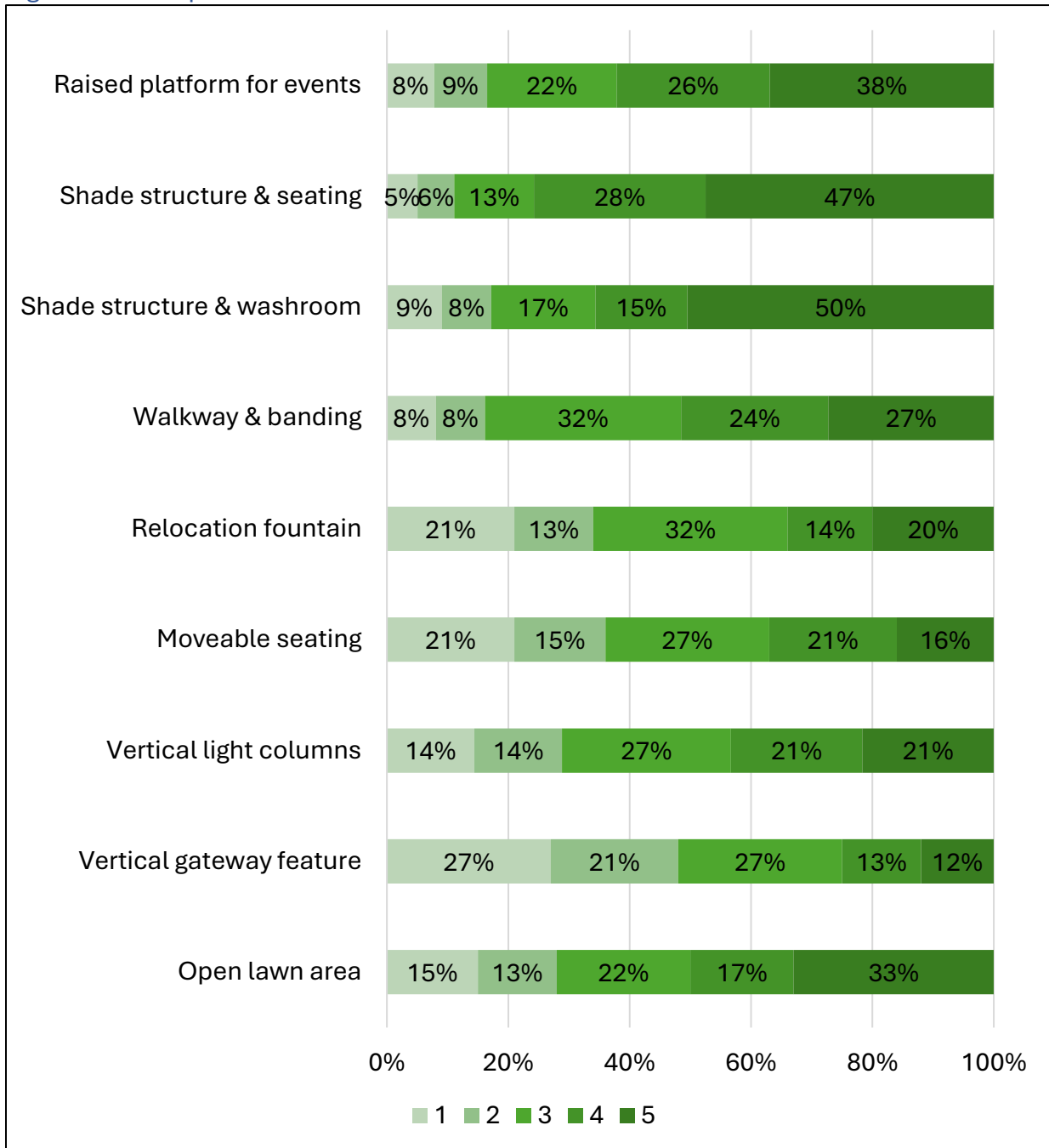


Figure 2 displays the design for Concept A, which envisions a public open space designed as a passive park, emphasizing tranquility, accessibility, and natural beauty. The park will feature lawns, shade trees, pathways and seating that encourages people to stop and enjoy their surroundings and relax. The design prioritizes everyday use, offering a welcoming environment for individuals and families to engage in relaxing activities such as strolling, reading, picnicking, and socializing. Additionally, it offers flexibility for events throughout the year.

Residents were asked for their thoughts about nine elements featured in the design. The summary of respondents' feedback about these elements is summarized in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Concept A – Element Preferences



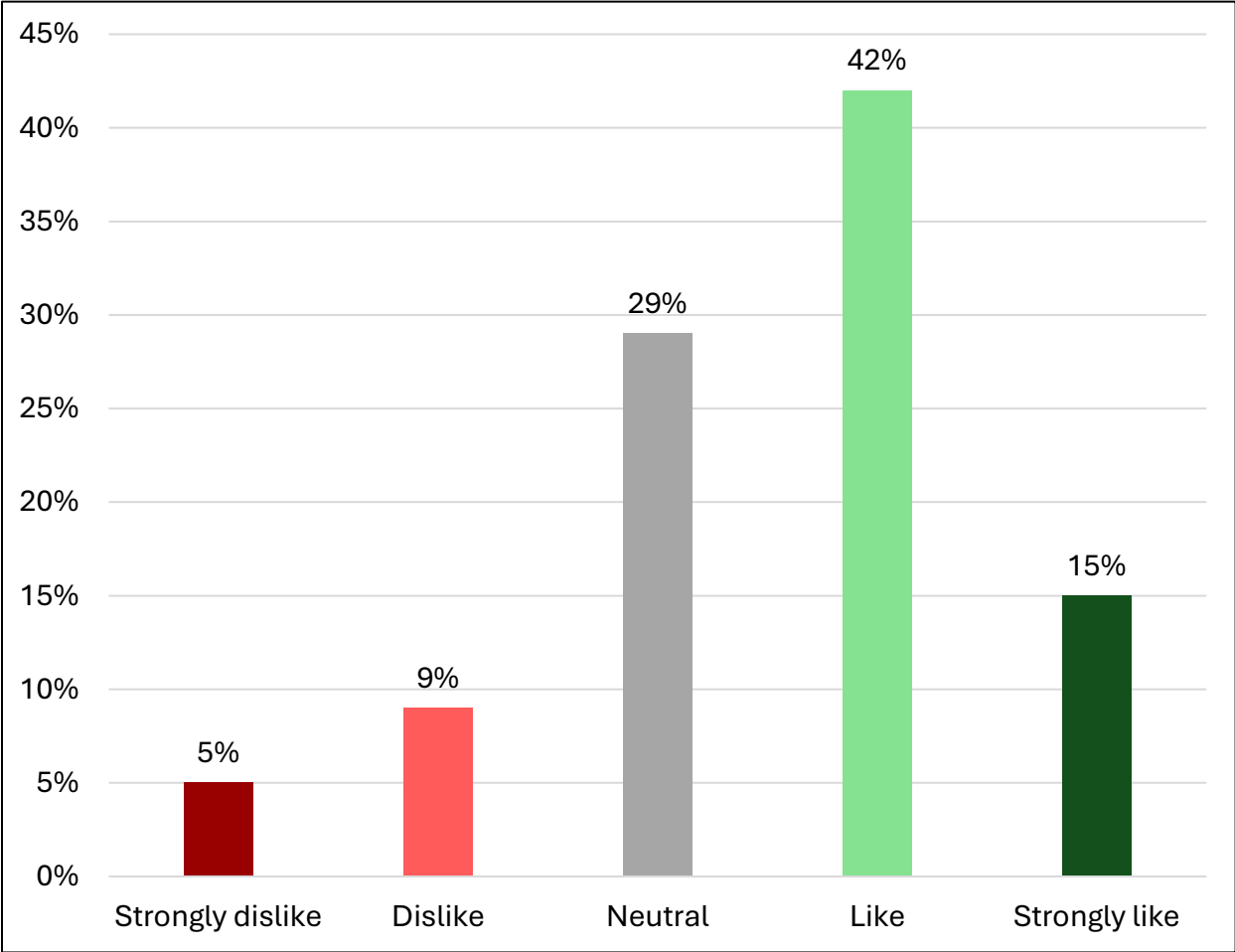
N=346

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of support for each concept elements on a scale from lowest to highest support, where 1 was lowest support and 5 was highest support. All virtual Open House visitors shared their views on these elements. The elements that received the highest level of support (those who selected levels 4 or 5 in the scale) are as follows:

- Shade structure with seating - 75%
- Shade structure with washrooms – 65%
- Raised platform for events – 64%.
- Walkway and banding – 51%
- Open lawn area – 50%

Following the detailed feedback on specific elements for each concept, respondents were asked to share how much they liked each concept as a whole. They were asked to choose from a scale where 1 was strongly dislike, 3 was neutral and 5 was strongly like. 57% of respondents indicated that they either like or strongly like Concept A. Figure 4 shares the results by percentage for Concept A.

Figure 4: How do you feel about Concept A, by Percentage



Respondents were asked to share more detailed feedback about Concept A. In total 128 comments were received, and some key themes emerged:

- Lawn and green spaces were the most commented on (n=41). While, overall, there was support for more green space, there was concern about lawn features, in particular their longevity and maintenance. Other negative feedback about lawns included the view that they would become locations for encampments of unsheltered residents.
- Comments about seating (n=23) indicated that more seating is desirable. Respondents had concerns about the movable seating being misused, vandalized, or stolen. Others commented on the location of seating, some indicating that more seating should be located near the fountain.
- Pedestrian prioritization (n=21), and public washrooms (n=20) were the other top categories for comments. Respondents felt that the designs did not go far enough to prioritize pedestrians. In terms of the washrooms, comments were split between positive views about the facilities and concern about maintenance.

Other comments shared by respondents included:

- Feature naturalized design and native plants.
- Incorporate heritage elements into designs.
- Ensure that there is bike parking.
- Trees are an asset to the design.

## Open House Feedback

Residents who attended the Open House on February 12 had an opportunity to share specific feedback about each of the concept designs. The following are key comments received about Concept A:

- Support for relocation of the fountain as a way of creating a visual centre in front of Old Quebec St. Mall
- Support for fully pedestrianizing Douglas Street
- Support for defined threshold into the Square from Quebec Street
- Support for unique paving to help define the Square space
- Keep gathering areas (e.g. Southwest Plaza) flatter and more flexible in use

## 3.2 Concept B – St. George’s Square

Figure 5: Concept B

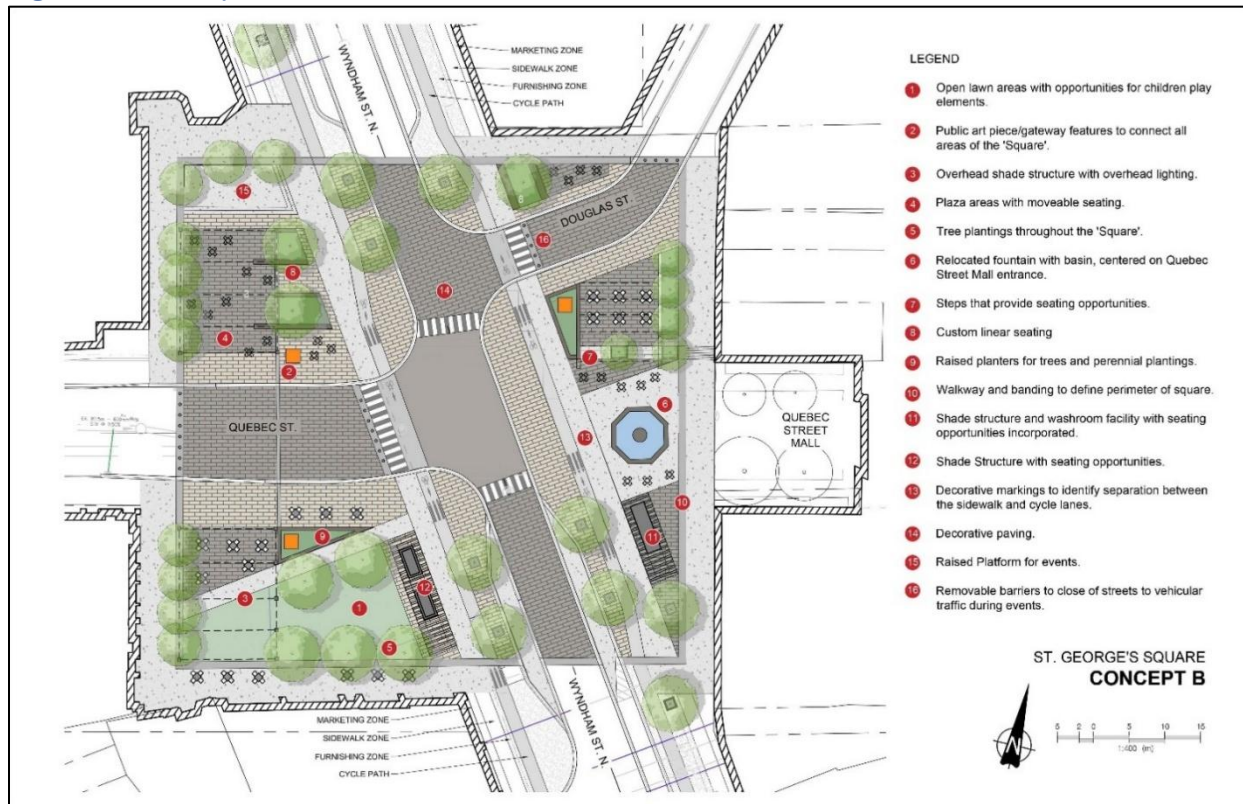
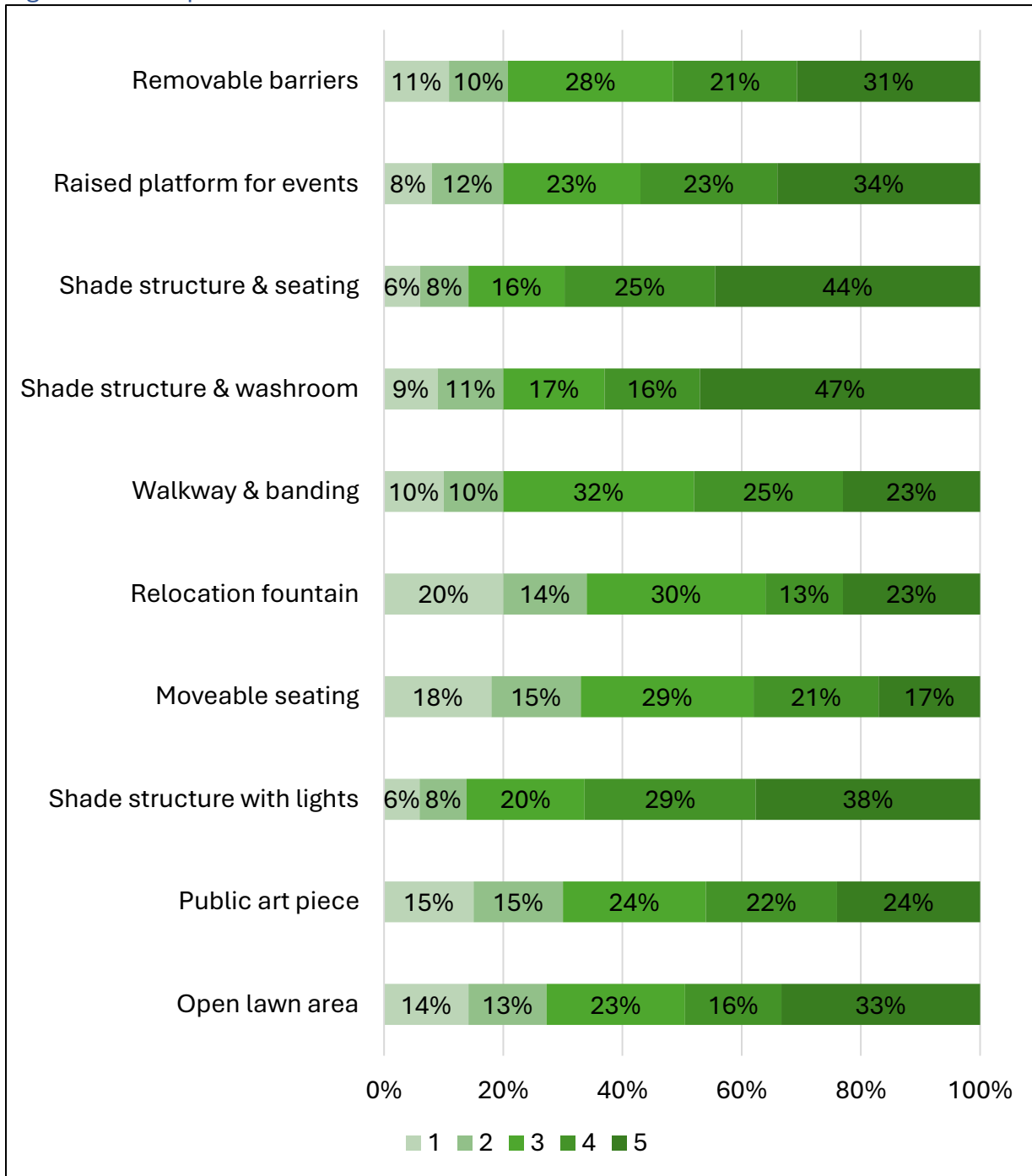


Figure 5 shows the detailed design for Concept B, which envisions the Square as a public open space designed as an active park with a stronger emphasis on hard surfaces and lasting materials, creating the perfect environment for a wide range of events and programming. The layout prioritizes durability and functionality, featuring expansive paved areas, flexible seating, and open spaces that can be easily transformed to accommodate festivals, performances, markets, and community gatherings. This urban space is an inviting hub for outdoor activities, with ample room for people to gather and for public events, making it a dynamic, year-round destination for people of all ages.

Residents were asked for their thoughts about ten elements featured in the design concept. The summary of respondents’ feedback about these elements is included in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Concept B Elements Preferences



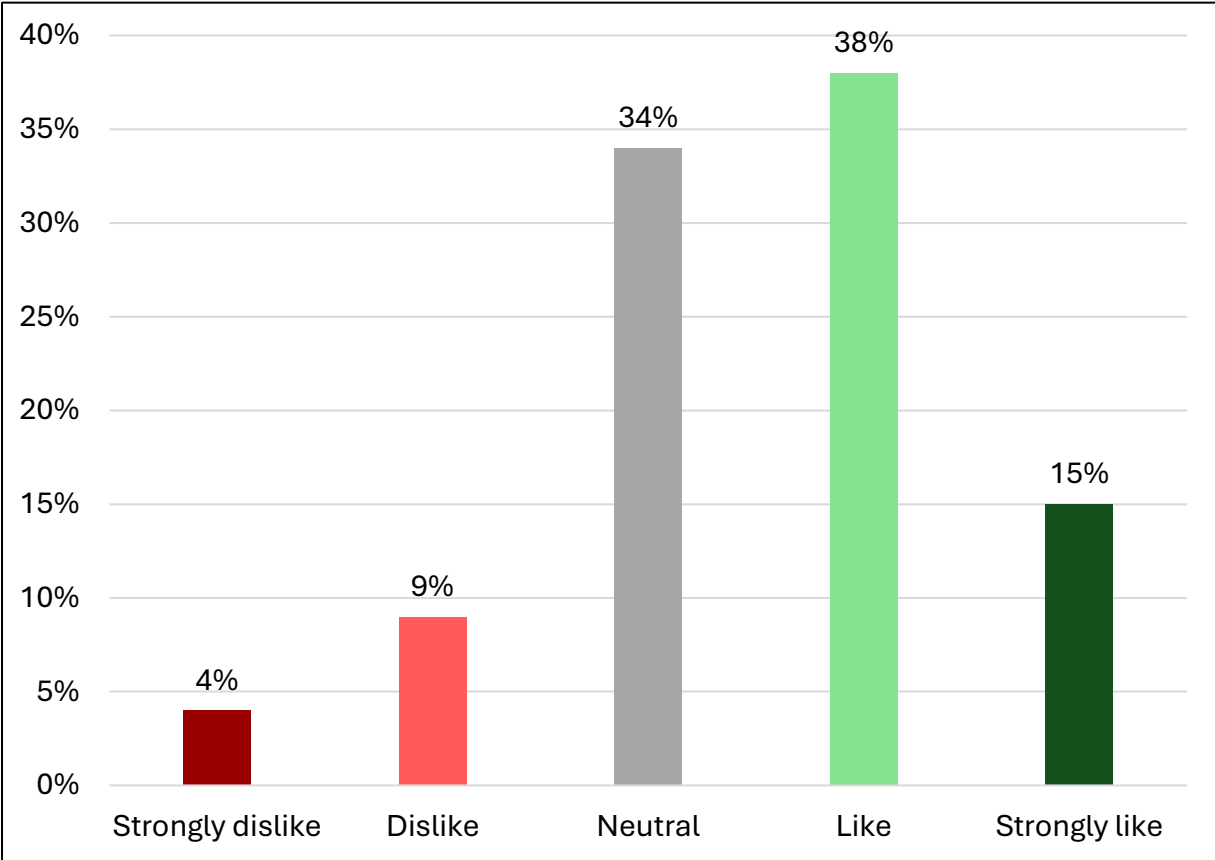
N=346

Similar to Concept A, respondents were asked to indicate their level of support for each concept elements on a scale from lowest to highest support, where 1 was lowest support and 5 was highest support. All virtual Open House visitors shared their views on these elements. The elements that received the highest level of support (those who selected levels 4 or 5 in the scale) are as follows:

- Shade structure with seating – 69%
- Shade structure with lighting – 67%
- Shade structure with washrooms – 63%
- Raised platform for events - 57%
- Moveable barriers – 52%
- Open lawn area - 49%

Following the detailed feedback on specific elements for each concept, respondents were asked to share how much they liked each concept as a whole. They were asked to again choose from a scale where 1 was strongly dislike, 3 was neutral and 5 was strongly like. 53% of respondents selected either like or strongly like for Concept B. Figure 7 shows the results by percentage for Concept B.

Figure 7: How do you feel about Concept B, by Percentage



N=346

In total 110 qualitative responses were collected related to Concept B. Some comments were not specific to Concept B but expressed a preference for one concept over the other.

Respondents noted the following:

- Lawn and green spaces were the most commented on (n=31). Comments mirrored those expressed about Concept A: concern about the longevity and maintenance of lawn features, and the view that lawns would become locations for encampments of unsheltered residents.
- Washrooms (n=17), seating (n=17), and public art (n=17) were the next most commented on features. Comments mirrored those expressed about Concept A: the desire to have washrooms but concern about cleanliness and misuse; the desire to have plentiful seating but concerns about movable furniture being stolen or misused.
- Comments about public art were split between those who support it and feel it is an important aspect of placemaking, and those who feel that it is not a good use of money and may end up vandalized.
- Of the comments related to the removable bollards (n=14) the vast majority were positive. Respondents indicated that they are a (small) step in prioritizing pedestrians and will help to create the possibility of events in the Square.

Other comments shared by respondents included:

- A play structure and increased lighting are assets to Concept B.
- Prioritize seating around the fountain.

## Open House Feedback

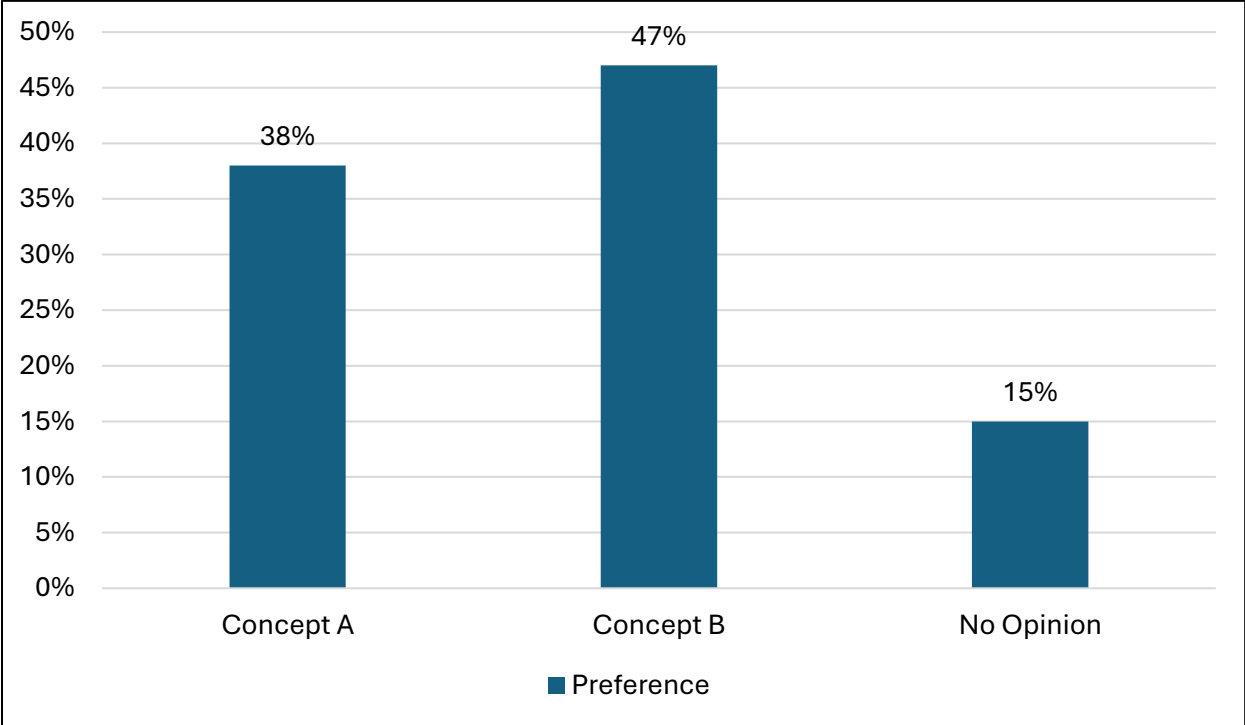
Residents who attended the February 12 Open House had an opportunity to share specific feedback about each of the concept designs. The following are key comments received about Concept B:

- Support for moving the fountain elsewhere or keeping it in existing location in front of Post Office. One suggested relocation was the north side of Douglas Street
- Suggestion that Concept B better defined the Square
- Add a pedestrian scramble
- Add bike racks
- Add historical plaques
- Support for shade structure with lighting all year round
- Add nicer garbage/recycle bins.

### 3.3 Preferred Concept Design

Respondents were asked to identify which of the concept designs they preferred for St. George’s Square. Figure 8 displays these results. 47% of respondents selected Concept B as their preferred design.

Figure 8: Preferred Concept Design, by Percentage



N= 346

## 3.4 Additional Comments

Finally, respondents were asked again to share any additional thoughts they might have about the St. George's Square Master Plan design process. In total 137 comments were received, in addition, general comments from Concept A and B are included here as well. The main themes from general comments are outlined below.

**Greenspace and lawn longevity and maintenance** - This feature garnered the largest number of overall comments. Respondents said green space is a priority, but the use of lawn space was met with concern from a maintenance perspective. Concerns were also expressed about the potential for encampments to be erected on lawn areas.

**Prioritizing pedestrians** - Respondents said that, while there may be improvements, the designs don't go far enough to prioritize pedestrians, and that vehicle through-traffic appears to be the priority.

**Washroom maintenance** - While most comments about the washroom facilities were in favour of their inclusion in both Concept A and B, most comments also indicated concern for their cleanliness and upkeep.

**Seating options** - More seating was viewed as important, but the option for movable seating was met with concerns about misuse and theft. Preferences varied about type of seating otherwise. In terms of location, comments were made about having seating near the fountain, near the stage, and in the shade.

**Unsheltered Residents** - Respondents expressed concern about spending on an infrastructure project while residents remain unhoused. Others indicated concern that green spaces or washroom facilities would 'encourage' unsheltered residents to establish encampments in the area.

## 3.5 Construction Café Comments

Though the construction cafes by design are open to any range of topics surrounding the Downtown Infrastructure project, participants attending the February 20 café were mainly interested in the St. George's Square design concepts. Other topics of discussion included construction planning and plans for management around construction impacts, and timelines for the project moving forward. Most comments received around the design concepts were general in nature and are listed by theme below:

**Importance of events and animation** - Several attendees shared interest in frequent activities and things to do beyond walking through and sitting in the space. Some cited the importance of the Square as a destination and the potential tourism impacts. Some attendees highlighted the positive aspects of creating a skateboard friendly Square and urged the designers to include flexible elements that can attract skateboarding activity.

**Prioritizing pedestrians** - Similar to other themes heard throughout the design engagement process, some attendees wished for less prominence to vehicular traffic, though attendees were more split on the idea of removing or relocating parking to create more pedestrian space. One attendee noted an interest in more thru paths to help pedestrians cut the corner in the larger sections of the Square.

**Space to linger** – Picnic and seating areas were of value to most attendees. Both business owners and residents attending expressed interest in people spending more time Downtown. Some participants pointed out that places to relax, play or eat would increase the time they spend in the area. One business owner, cautioned away from seating directly in front of their store; citing that some people who frequent the Square may not help to attract customers.

**Taking care of businesses** – Additional themes heard from business owners fronting the square centred on the need for restaurant patio space, ensuring snow can be cleared away from storefronts and request for mindful design regarding tall structures, areas where people can sit and the washroom location in relationship to business frontages.

## 4.0 Next Steps

The feedback received from the St. George's Square engagement activities will inform a revised preferred design that will be presented to the public in late spring 2025 as part of the next round of engagement, involving both in person and online opportunities. The revised design for St. George's Square will be part of the Wyndham Street North phase of the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Project. The final designs will be presented to the public during engagement activities in fall 2025, and DTIRP construction on the Wyndham Street North phase of the project is scheduled to begin in 2026.