

**DOCKET ITEM #4****City Charter Section 9.06 #2021-00002*****Unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand***

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Application	General Data	
<b>Request:</b> Review whether the closure of the unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand to vehicular traffic is consistent with the City of Alexandria Master Plan pursuant to Section 9.06 of the City Charter.	<b>Planning Commission Hearing:</b>	November 1, 2022
	<b>City Council Hearing:</b>	November 12, 2022
	<b>Zone:</b>	KR and WPR
<b>Address:</b> Unit block of King Street (between Union Street and the Strand), and the Strand (between Wales Alley and King Street)	<b>Small Area Plan(s):</b>	Old Town and Waterfront

**Staff Reviewers:**

Christopher Ziemann, Transportation & Environmental Services,

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**Staff Recommendation:** Staff recommends that the Planning Commission **approve** this request, finding that the proposal is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia, and with the City's Master Plan.



## **I. DISCUSSION**

The City proposes to close the unit block of King Street, between Union Street and the Strand, and the northern portion of the Strand, between Wales Alley and King Street, to vehicular traffic. Section 9.06 of the City's Charter requires that the Planning Commission review any changes to the use of a public street. The Planning Commission is charged with ensuring that any change is consistent with the City's Master Plan.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

The unit block of King Street between the Strand and Union Street is a one-way street heading west with parking on one side of the block. On the other side, it previously hosted the King Street Trolley terminus and layover area until this was moved to Market Square with the closing of the 100 block of King Street. The block is commercial with several restaurants. Before the pandemic, these restaurants participated in the City's outdoor dining program, which allowed restaurant seating on the sidewalk while maintaining a five-foot wide accessible path for pedestrians. Two (2) parking spaces on this block are restricted to two-hour parking from Monday-Saturday from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The northern portion of the Strand, between approximately Wales Alley and King Street, is a two-way street heading north and south with outdoor dining in former parking spaces. On the other side is the newly designed Waterfront Park. The block is commercial with two restaurants and a currently vacant commercial space. Before the pandemic, one of these restaurants participated in the City's King Street Outdoor Dining Program for dining seats on the sidewalk. During the temporary outdoor business program, this restaurant provides dining seats in leased parking spaces behind the restaurant. Another restaurant participates in outdoor dining along Wales Alley.

In 2012, the City Council adopted the Waterfront Small Area Plan, which, among many things, recommends closing the unit block and the Strand north of the parking garage entrance to traffic (except EMS, fire, police, etc.) to make a pedestrian plaza. In 2019, the Council directed staff to develop a pilot program to test closing the 100 block of King Street to car traffic following recommendations from the Lower King Street Multi-modal Feasibility Study. In May 2020, the City temporarily closed the 100 block of King Street to vehicular traffic to support the first phase of business recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Closing the street enabled businesses to use additional sidewalk space for outdoor dining while meeting public health guidelines for social distancing.

As the City began the re-opening process during the COVID-19 pandemic, staff developed a Temporary Outdoor Business permit for restaurant, retail and fitness businesses to use adjacent parking spaces for conducting business outdoors. Given the concentration of restaurants and pedestrians along the 100 block of King Street, as well as the desire to provide expansive space for pedestrians to safely maintain distance, staff worked with the businesses to close the 100 block to all vehicle traffic. The closure required the inclusion of a 22-foot wide Emergency Access Easement (EVE) in the center

of the street to allow for emergency vehicles. The temporary closure took effect on May 29, 2020. In October 2021, the Council permanently closed the street to traffic, maintaining the EVE.

Following the closure of the 100 block of King Street, an observable decline in through traffic on the unit block resulted. This decline, and the popularity of the new Waterfront Park, has led to an increase in pedestrian volume on the unit block and the Strand. In addition, based on the success of the closure of the 100 block, staff has received requests from the businesses along the unit block to assess the feasibility of closing this block as well. The City conducted a pilot project between Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day weekend (and extended through November 20), which proved this closure successful.

The street closure and additional space for pedestrians have been well-received by the community. Over 1,800 responses were provided on a call for feedback about the temporary street closure (Attachment 1). Of resident respondents, 91% had a positive or very positive experience with the pedestrian zone, and 89% of residents responded that they wanted to see the closure continue into the future. Throughout the closure, businesses periodically expressed support for the closure. In addition, an advisory group made up of staff from various departments, APD, Fire and the Old Town Business Association recommended permanently maintaining the pedestrian zone

The Waterfront Commission reviewed this proposal at their meeting on October 18 and voted to support this permanent closure (Attachment 4). The Traffic and Parking Board will review the request at their meeting on October 24.

The City Council will consider the street closure at a public hearing in November and will consider the feedback from the Planning Commission, as well as the Traffic and Parking Board and Waterfront Commission who have also reviewed this proposal.

### **III. CONSISTENCY WITH THE MASTER PLAN**

The subject property is within the Old Town Small Area Plan (originally adopted in 1993) and the King Street Retail Strategy (adopted in 2005) boundaries. It also is in the boundaries of the Waterfront Plan (adopted 2012). Closure of the unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand to vehicular traffic is consistent with several goals stated in these plans.

**Waterfront Plan:** Three separate recommendations in the Waterfront Small Area Plan refer to pedestrianizing the unit block of King Street and the Strand:

3.67: Implement the vision of the Plan for King Street at the river, Waterfront Park, and the City marina. The component elements of this vision are outlined below but the sequence and timing of the elements will vary based on the unique challenges and opportunities of each element. Phasing is also addressed in Chapter 5 of this Plan; Element 1 - Pedestrian Plaza from Union Street to the River; Marina Repairs and Upgrades

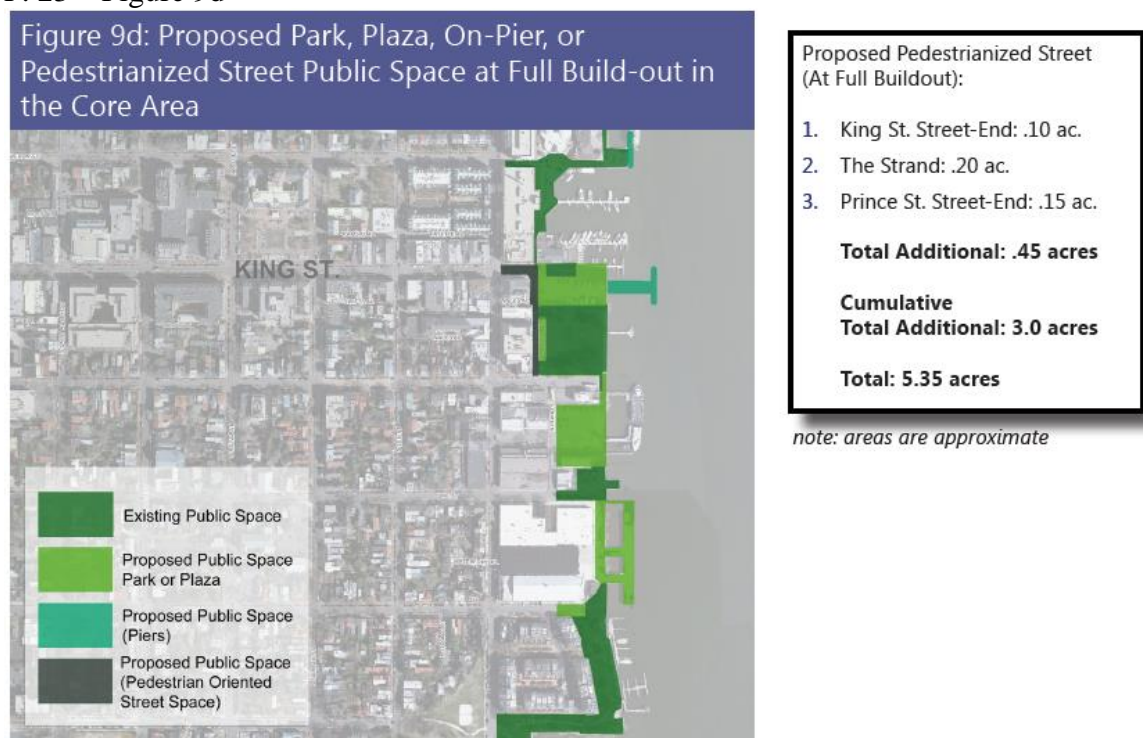


3.68: Limit vehicular access to the unit block of King Street and The Strand between Prince and King Streets to emergency vehicles, deliveries (limited hours), motorcoaches, and the King Street Trolley. The Strand would also be open to vehicles accessing the parking garages and lots that have entrances on this block of The Strand.

3.91: Create a comfortable pedestrian-focused zone along The Strand from King Street to Point Lumley, limiting vehicular access where possible. Open alleyways and other east-west links between Union Street and the river.

In addition, the plan contains the following references:

P. 23 – Figure 9d



P. 131 – Fitzgerald and Waterfront Park Phases

“... Elevate King Street and The Strand slightly; repave, creating a pedestrian-oriented plaza or square in the unit block of King Street; ...”

Finally, the plan includes the following references to support the pedestrian nature of these Blocks:

*“Increase and improve access to the public spaces of the Waterfront. Pedestrian connectivity along the Waterfront should be continuous.”* This block provides a connection to the Interim Waterfront Park and by removing vehicles from this segment, more space is provided for pedestrians to access the park. Additionally, by closing the

block to vehicles, new pedestrian space is created which complements the open space directly along the Waterfront.

*“Maintain a living, active Waterfront that is a destination that attracts all Alexandrians and visitors and should be integral to the visitor experience in Alexandria.”* Over the last year, this block has proved to be a destination that attracts residents and visitors alike. By closing this block to vehicles and improving the space for pedestrians, a prominent entrance to the Waterfront can be established that creates an improved visitor experience.

*“Provide a variety of uses, themes, activities, and experiences along the Waterfront.”* The closure of this block to vehicles and creation of a pedestrian plaza will create a unique experience for people entering the Waterfront. The historically commercial nature of the block provides a different activity from the passive open space along the Waterfront and the expanded areas for the businesses that can result from the closure will further enhance this activity.

*“Improve the Waterfront’s vehicular and pedestrian circulation.”* The Waterfront Plan calls for minimizing pedestrian and vehicle conflicts. These blocks are particularly challenging for pedestrians given the limited sidewalk space, lack of traffic, and desire that by visitors to walk in the street. By eliminating vehicles from these blocks, the businesses can expand while also creating more space for pedestrians to move through the blocks along the sidewalks and down the center of the street. Additionally, the intersection of Union and King Street is often congested from vehicles and pedestrians moving through the area. While the closure does not completely eliminate conflicts, eliminating one of the vehicular travel directions does reduce potential conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles. In addition, and in connection with the closure of the 100 block, with pedestrians crossing across Union Street in the middle of King Street, they are more visible to traffic when large trucks are parked close to the corner. Regarding parking, while this proposal does eliminate two metered parking spaces and two unmetered spaces, there are several public parking options nearby that accommodate the parking demand from these spaces (three garages within one block, three garages within two blocks, and four garages/lots within three to five blocks).

#### **IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

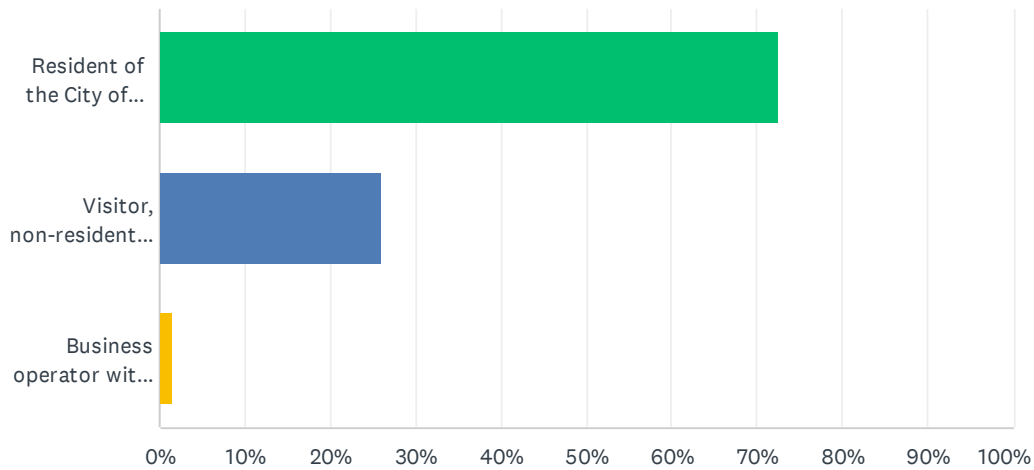
Staff recommends that the Planning Commission find that the proposed closure of the unit block of King Street, between Union Street and the Strand, and the northern portion of the Strand, between Wales Alley and King Street, to vehicular is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia and with the City’s Master Plan, including specifically the Waterfront Small Area Plan.

STAFF: Karl Moritz, Director, Planning & Zoning

Ann Horowitz, Planning & Zoning  
Christopher Ziemann, Transportation & Environmental Services  
Katie North, Transportation & Environmental Services  
Bob Garbacz, Transportation & Environmental Services  
David Kurtz, Transportation & Environmental Services  
Alton Weaver, Transportation & Environmental Services  
Jack Browand, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities  
Michael Sharpe, Alexandria Fire Department  
Jaime Bridgeman, Alexandria Police Department  
Matt Landes, Department of Project Implementation

## Q1 Tell us a little bit about yourself. I am best described as a

Answered: 1,853 Skipped: 0

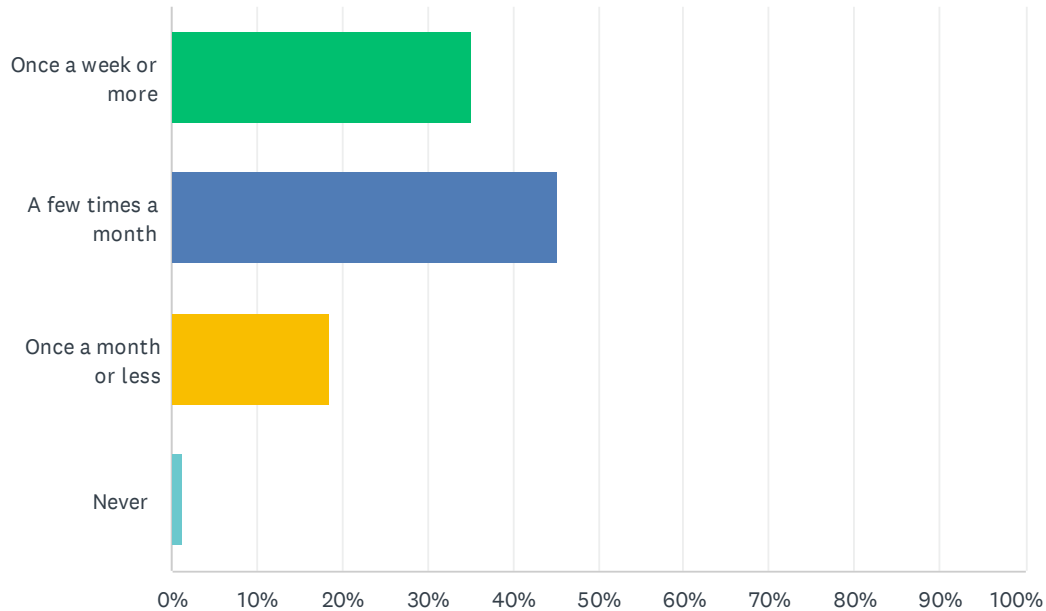


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Resident of the City of Alexandria	72.48%	1,343
Visitor, non-resident, or employee who works in Alexandria	26.01%	482
Business operator within the City of Alexandria	1.51%	28
TOTAL		1,853



## Q2 Since May 27, 2022, I visited the Unit Block of King Street (between Union Street and the Strand):

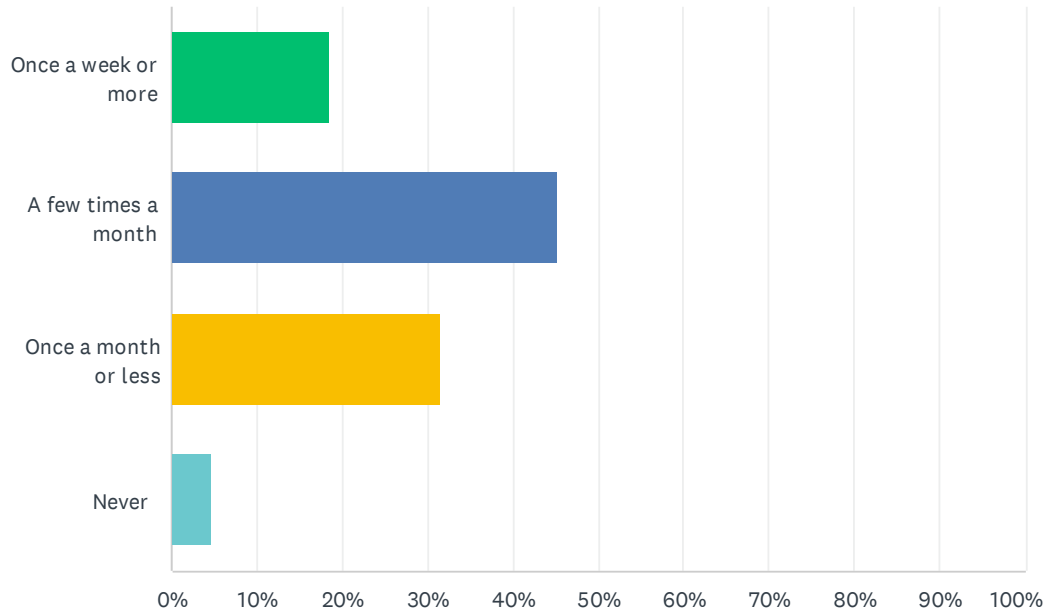
Answered: 1,694 Skipped: 159



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Once a week or more	35.12%	595
A few times a month	45.10%	764
Once a month or less	18.54%	314
Never	1.24%	21
TOTAL		1,694

## Q3 Since May 27, 2022, I patronized a business on the Unit block of King Street:

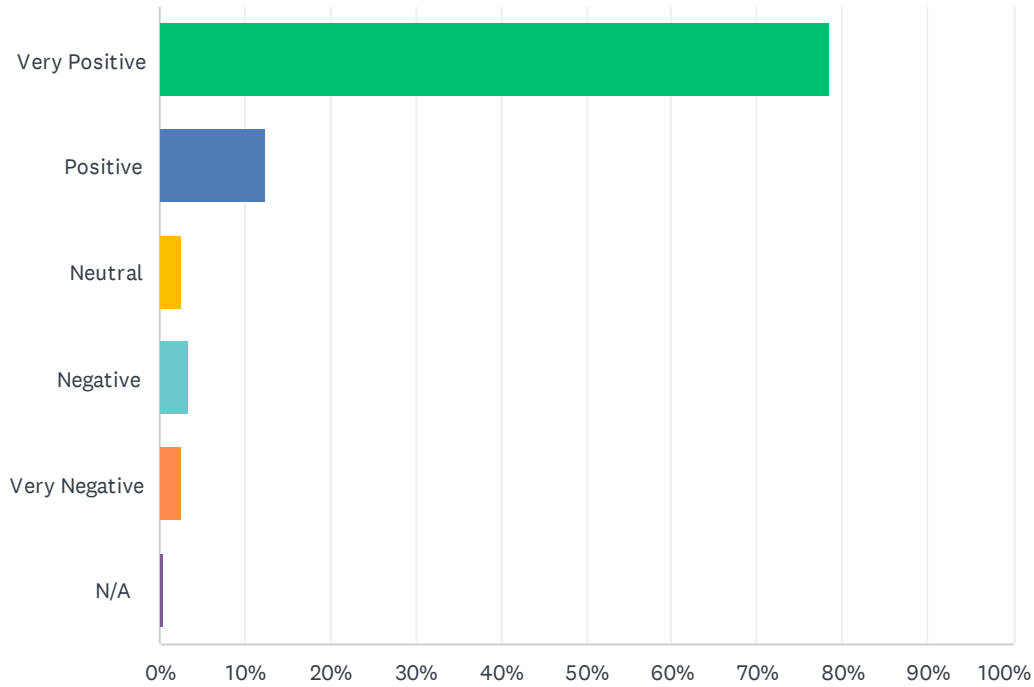
Answered: 1,694 Skipped: 159



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Once a week or more	18.48%	313
A few times a month	45.16%	765
Once a month or less	31.64%	536
Never	4.72%	80
TOTAL		1,694

## Q4 Please rate the quality of your experience with the closure of the Unit Block of King Street.

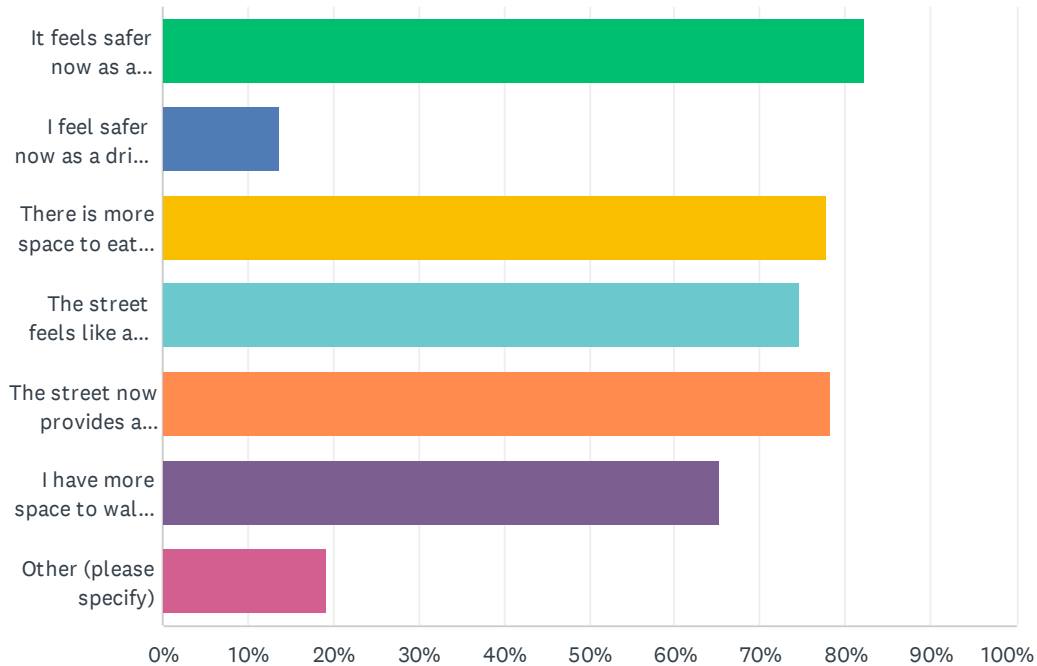
Answered: 1,694 Skipped: 159



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very Positive	78.39%	1,328
Positive	12.46%	211
Neutral	2.54%	43
Negative	3.42%	58
Very Negative	2.66%	45
N/A	0.53%	9
TOTAL		1,694

## Q5 What do you like about having this section pedestrianized? (select all that apply)

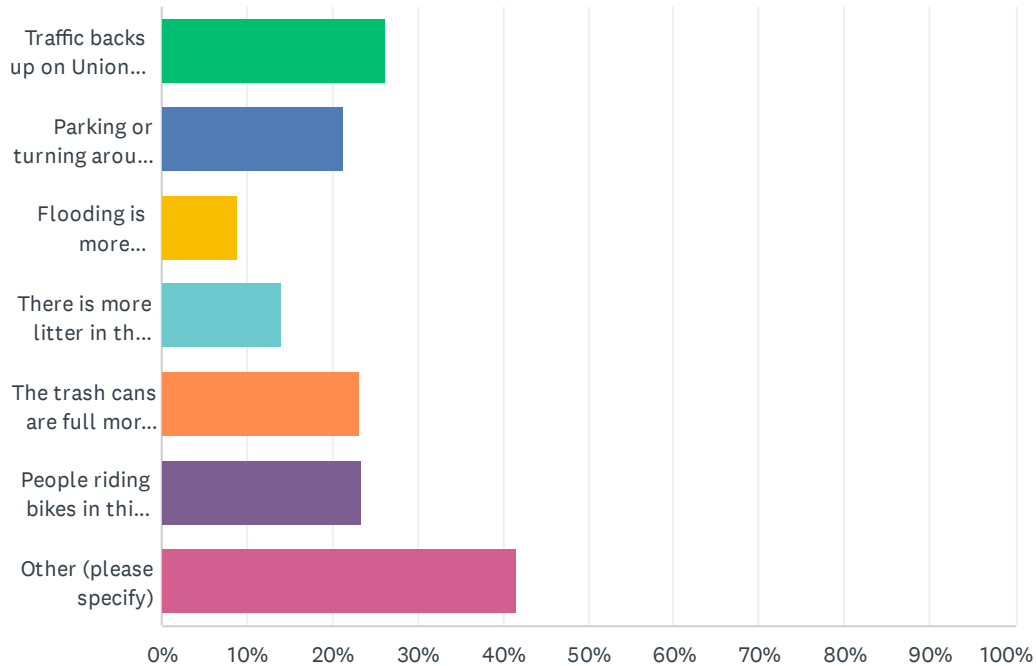
Answered: 1,681 Skipped: 172



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
It feels safer now as a pedestrian	82.27%	1,383
I feel safer now as a driver in the area	13.68%	230
There is more space to eat or shop outside	77.81%	1,308
The street feels like an extension of the park	74.60%	1,254
The street now provides a greater benefit to the people using the public space	78.23%	1,315
I have more space to walk or physically distance from others	65.20%	1,096
Other (please specify)	19.16%	322
Total Respondents: 1,681		

## Q6 What challenges have you experienced with this section pedestrianized? (Select all that apply)

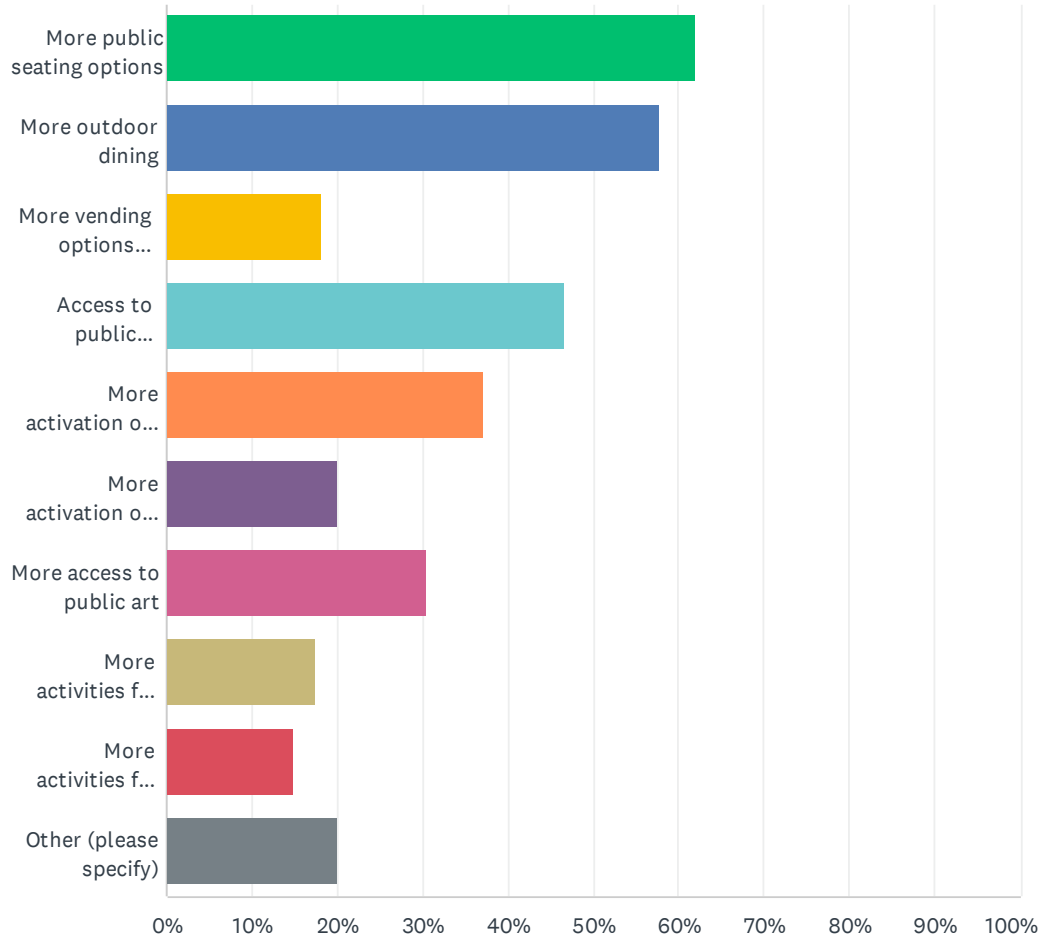
Answered: 1,367 Skipped: 486



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Traffic backs up on Union Street more than it did before	26.19%	358
Parking or turning around on the Strand is more difficult	21.29%	291
Flooding is more inconvenient now that it is open to pedestrians	8.92%	122
There is more litter in the area than before	13.97%	191
The trash cans are full more often than before	23.34%	319
People riding bikes in this space create more conflicts than before	23.48%	321
Other (please specify)	41.62%	569
Total Respondents: 1,367		

## Q7 If this section were closed permanently, what are some things you would like to see in this space? (Select up to 5)

Answered: 1,694 Skipped: 159



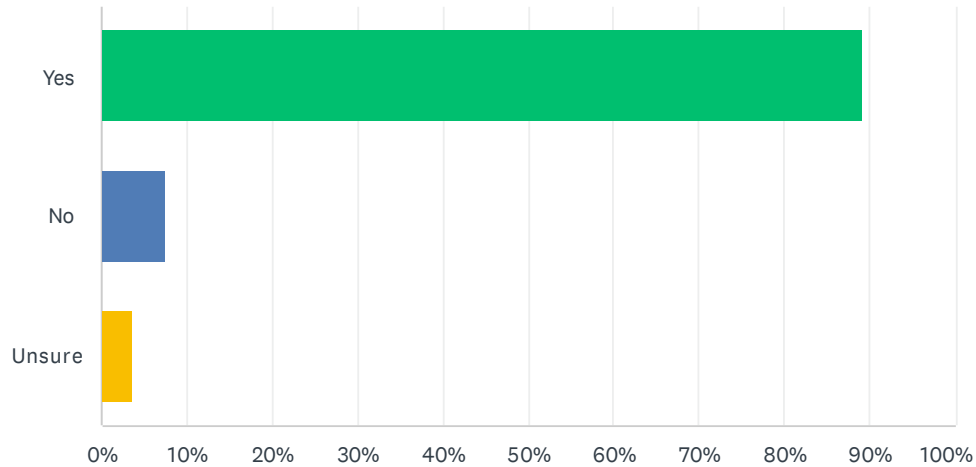
## Unit Block of King Street Closure Feedback Form

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
More public seating options	62.04%	1,051
More outdoor dining	57.85%	980
More vending options available in the space	18.12%	307
Access to public bathrooms	46.64%	790
More activation of the space with musicians	37.19%	630
More activation of the space with street performers (non-musicians)	20.07%	340
More access to public art	30.58%	518
More activities for art (street chalk, etc)	17.47%	296
More activities for kids	14.94%	253
Other (please specify)	20.07%	340
Total Respondents: 1,694		



## Q8 Would you like to see the closure of the Unit Block of King continue on a permanently?

Answered: 1,694 Skipped: 159



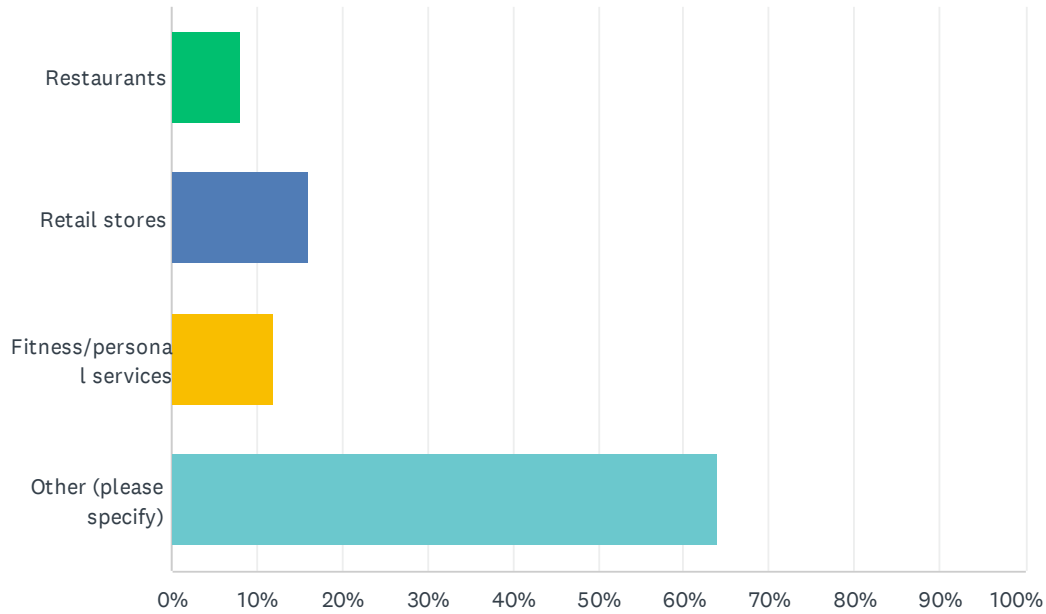
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	89.02%	1,508
No	7.44%	126
Unsure	3.54%	60
TOTAL		1,694

**Q9** In a few words, please explain your responses to the question above or provide additional feedback.

Answered: 1,198   Skipped: 655

## Q10 I am associated with this type of business:

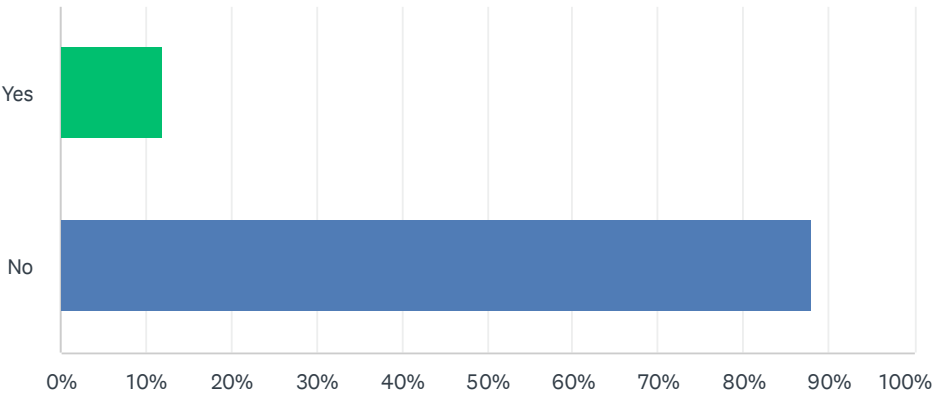
Answered: 25    Skipped: 1,828



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Restaurants	8.00%	2
Retail stores	16.00%	4
Fitness/personal services	12.00%	3
Other (please specify)	64.00%	16
TOTAL		25

Q11 Does your business operate on the Unit Block of King Street?

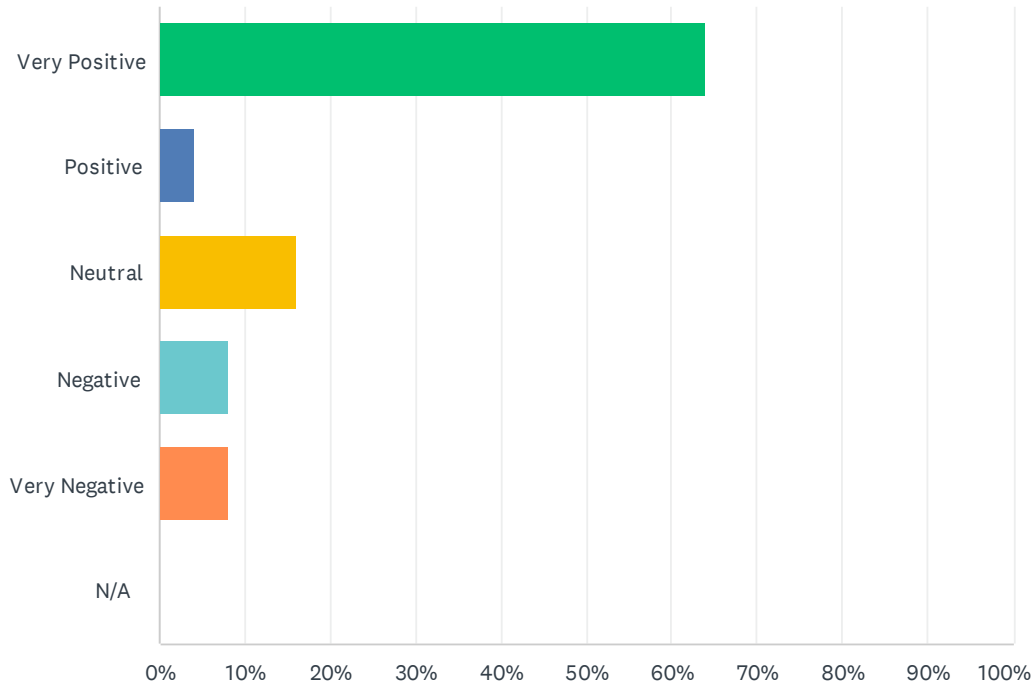
Answered: 25    Skipped: 1,828



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	12.00%	3
No	88.00%	22
TOTAL		25

## Q12 Please rate the quality of your experience with the closure of the Unit Block of King Street.

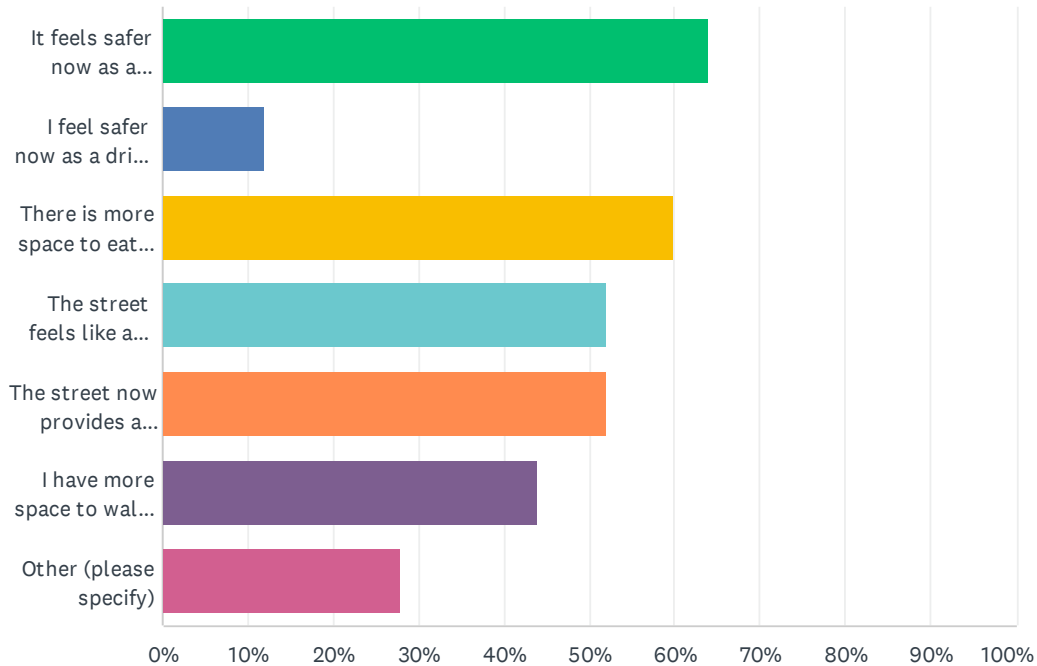
Answered: 25 Skipped: 1,828



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very Positive	64.00%	16
Positive	4.00%	1
Neutral	16.00%	4
Negative	8.00%	2
Very Negative	8.00%	2
N/A	0.00%	0
TOTAL		25

## Q13 What do you like about having this section pedestrianized? (select all that apply)

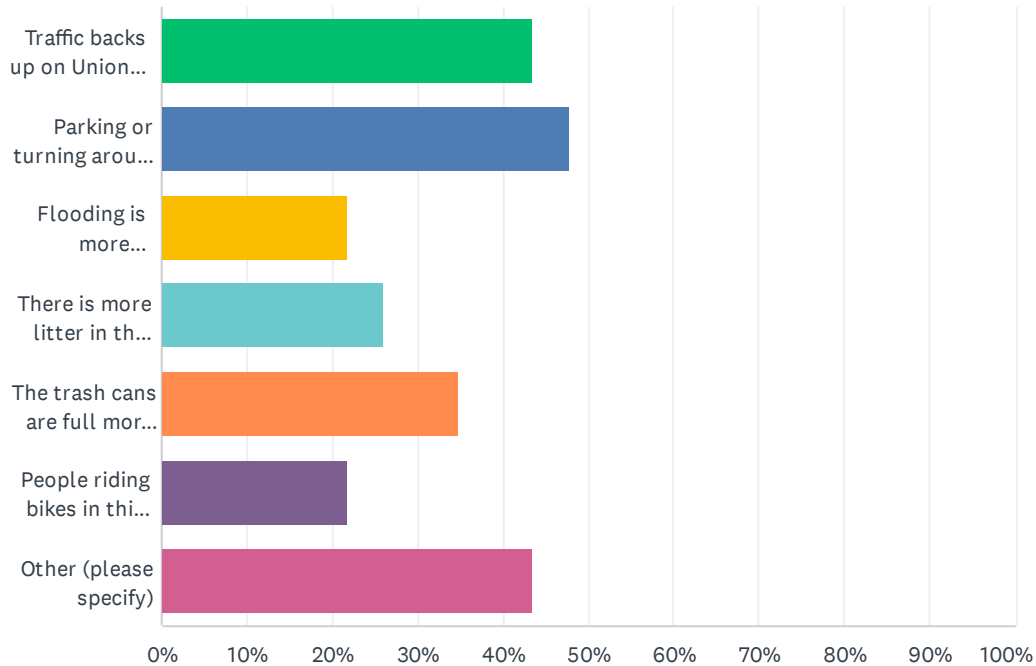
Answered: 25 Skipped: 1,828



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
It feels safer now as a pedestrian	64.00%	16
I feel safer now as a driver in the area	12.00%	3
There is more space to eat or shop outside	60.00%	15
The street feels like an extension of the park	52.00%	13
The street now provides a greater benefit to the people using the public space	52.00%	13
I have more space to walk or physically distance from others	44.00%	11
Other (please specify)	28.00%	7
Total Respondents: 25		

## Q14 What challenges have you experienced with this section pedestrianized? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 23 Skipped: 1,830

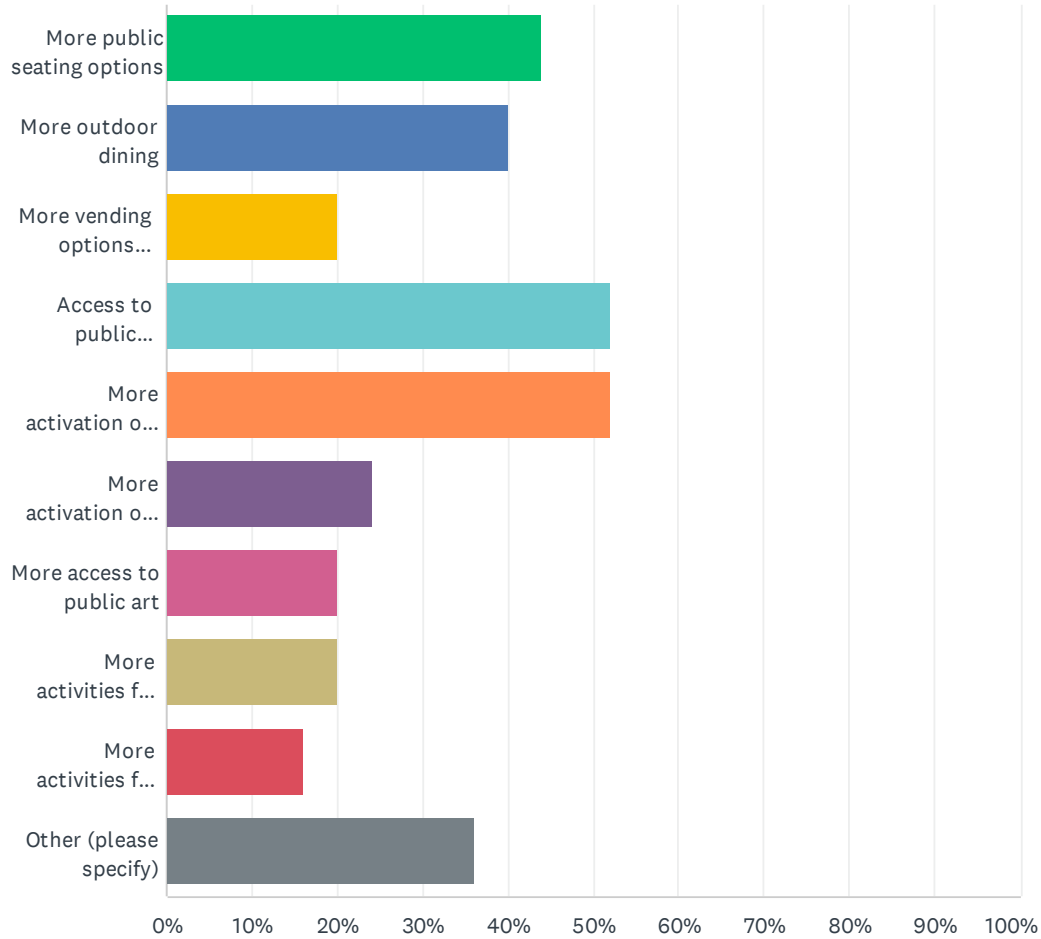


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Traffic backs up on Union Street more than it did before	43.48%	10
Parking or turning around on the Strand is more difficult	47.83%	11
Flooding is more inconvenient now that it is open to pedestrians	21.74%	5
There is more litter in the area than before	26.09%	6
The trash cans are full more often than before	34.78%	8
People riding bikes in this space create more conflicts than before	21.74%	5
Other (please specify)	43.48%	10
Total Respondents: 23		



## Q15 If this section were closed permanently, what are some things you would like to see in this space? (Select up to 5)

Answered: 25 Skipped: 1,828

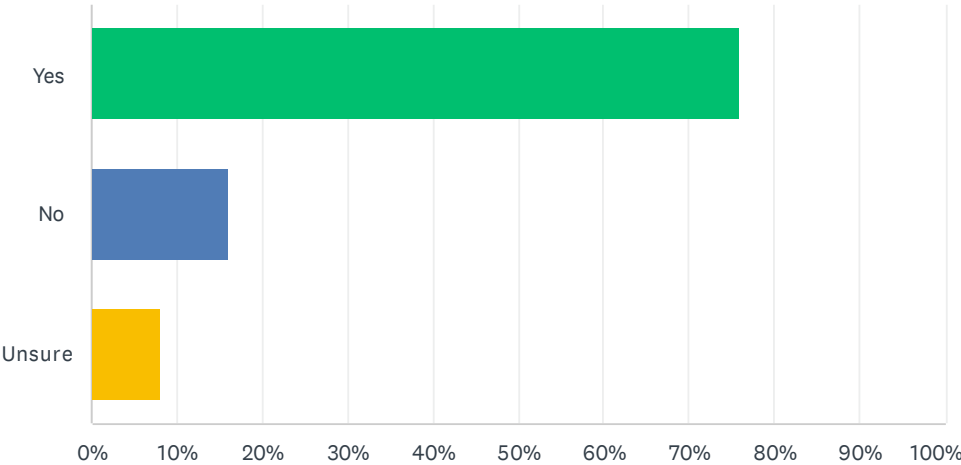


## Unit Block of King Street Closure Feedback Form

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
More public seating options	44.00%	11
More outdoor dining	40.00%	10
More vending options available in the space	20.00%	5
Access to public bathrooms	52.00%	13
More activation of the space with musicians	52.00%	13
More activation of the space with street performers (non-musicians)	24.00%	6
More access to public art	20.00%	5
More activities for art (street chalk, etc)	20.00%	5
More activities for kids	16.00%	4
Other (please specify)	36.00%	9
Total Respondents: 25		

Q16 Would you like to see the Unit Block of King Street continue be closed permanently to vehicles?

Answered: 25    Skipped: 1,828



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	76.00%	19
No	16.00%	4
Unsure	8.00%	2
TOTAL		25

**Q17** In a few words, please explain why you would or would not like to see the continuation of the closure of the Unit Block of King Street or provide additional feedback.

Answered: 23   Skipped: 1,830