What We Heard Report
Public Spaces Bylaws Review

August 2023

ADVISE

SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The City is reviewing its three primary public spaces bylaws to replace them with one comprehensive bylaw. For this review, public space is defined as any space in the City of Edmonton that is open and accessible to the general public including parks, transit, sidewalks and other open areas.

The three primary public spaces bylaws include:

- Public Places Bylaw (Bylaw 14614)
- Parkland Bylaw (Bylaw 2202)
- Conduct of Transit Passengers Bylaw (Bylaw 8353)

Other bylaws that contain regulations on behaviours in public spaces will be brought in-scope when appropriate.

The Public Spaces Bylaws Review project was presented to the Community and Public Services Committee on September 9, 2022 when Administration presented its project plan to conduct a full scale review and revision of applicable bylaws that address behaviours and enforcement in transit and other public spaces. The review is looking to address any inconsistencies or unintended impacts by reviewing public space regulation holistically from a community safety and equity lens.

The key objectives of this project are to provide clear legal parameters that apply to all public places in the city with clear, effective and equitable application of bylaws and enforcement measures. The project aims to simplify, remove redundancies and inconsistencies so bylaw terms are easily understood by Edmontonians and consistently applied by the teams who work with them.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Public and stakeholder engagement for the Public Spaces Bylaws Review project was conducted between May and June 2023.

Edmontonians and local organizations and stakeholders were invited to learn more about the Public Spaces Bylaws Review and share feedback. The focus of public and stakeholder engagement was to understand what is most important for the City to consider as Administration reviews the public spaces bylaws, specifically around how the City regulates behaviour and activities in public spaces.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SPECTRUM

Public Engagement was at the ADVISE level of the City's Public Engagement Spectrum and was delivered in alignment with the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Framework. The ADVISE level means that the general public and interested and affected stakeholders were engaged to understand the perspectives and concerns that City Administration should consider when reviewing the public spaces bylaws in Edmonton and in developing a recommendation to City Council.

HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE

The bylaw topics that City Administration engaged on during this project include:

- Performances, small commercial activity and large gatherings
- Recreational activities and,
- Panhandling, lingering without purpose, use of public space at night and visible drug use.

Engagement feedback on these topics will be used along with technical analysis (including enforcement considerations, legal recommendations and scan of what other jurisdictions are doing) to help Administration review the bylaws and provide a recommendation to City Council.

HOW AND WHO WE ENGAGED

Public and stakeholder engagement occurred between May and June 2023. The following section describes who and how City Administration engaged on this project.

Community Services Advisory Board (CSAB)

In March and April, 2023, two pre-engagement opportunities were provided to the Community Services Advisory Board (CSAB) to learn more about the project and gather feedback on the approach to engagement. This included engaging with Edmontonians who may be living in vulnerable circumstances or who may experience barriers to engagement as well as the questions asked throughout engagement.

General Public Engagement

General public engagement was conducted online through the City's Engaged Edmonton platform and utilized an online survey, Questions tool and Ideas tool. The survey was also distributed to the Edmonton Insight Community, as well, paper copies were available at five (5) locations across the City.

Administration also received five (5) additional correspondence via email from community members and organizations.

To learn more about the demographics of those who completed the survey, see Appendix A.

Stakeholder Engagement

Community partners and organizations were engaged through a series of one hour meetings. City Administration met with five (5) organizations. Organizations were chosen based on criteria (listed below) to ensure we heard from a range of perspectives. Recommendations from CSAB were taken into consideration when selecting organizations to meet with.

Criteria for selecting organizations included:

- Representative of equity seeking group(s)
- Adds varying perspectives and encourages diversity of input
- Addresses a cultural perspective
- Addresses a power imbalance
- Reduces risk of a single issue overtaking the conversation
- Helps ensure fair and equal access to the process and/ or is
- Impacted by the bylaw or changes to the bylaw

Organizations we met with included:

- Homeward Trust
- Bissell Centre
- Edmonton 2Spirit Society
- Alberta Public Interest Research Group (AP!RG) and
- Edmonton Downtown Business Association

On May 8 when the engagement process launched, a Media Toolkit was shared via email with over 450 stakeholders including the business community, housing and homelessness service providers, community leagues and community organizations such as those who focus on serving newcomers, students, seniors, cultural groups and 2SLGBTQIA+. This toolkit shared information about the project and engagement opportunities, and asked organizations to share with their organization and community members the opportunities for engagement to bolster the reach of the engagement.

We heard from some stakeholders after the engagement process had closed on May 21 and to ensure they had every opportunity to provide feedback, we provided a PDF version of the survey for them to fill out and submit by June 9. One survey was received during this extension.

Edmontonians in Vulnerable Circumstances

Administration knew that it was important to hear from those who have lived experience of living in vulnerable circumstances, including those who had been at risk of or had experienced homelessness. This is to better understand the impact and perspectives of those who may have had nowhere else to turn but to live in public spaces or who may experience higher impacts of bylaws than the general public. To ensure we heard those perspectives, Administration undertook the following tactics:

- Four of the five interviews included community organizations that provided services for low income, housing and homelessness, BIPOC communities and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities
- Paper copies of the survey were distributed at five in-person locations across the city
- The survey included a question specifically asking for input from those who had experienced or been at risk of homelessness

ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES OVERVIEW

	Engagement Opportunity	Date, Format and Location	Participation Rates	Audience
	Online Survey	May 8 - 21, 2023 Online, Engaged Edmonton	6425 Respondents	General Public, Edmonton Insight Community, Community Organizations
	Paper Survey	May 24 - June 9, 2023 In-person Lois Hole Library Capilano Library Calder Library Clareview Library Mosaic Centre	0 Respondents	General Public, People who may experience barriers to online engagement, People who may have experienced or been at risk of homelessness
	Engaged Edmonton page	May 8 - 21, 2023 Online	9,600+ Visitors	General Public, Community Organizations
	Ideas Tool	May 8 - 21, 2023 Online, Engaged Edmonton	40 Respondents, 17 Ideas 61 Likes 3 Comments	General Public, Community Organizations
	Questions Tool	May 8 - 21, 2023 Online Engaged Edmonton	15 Respondents 17 Questions	General Public, Community Organizations
	One on one interviews	May 15 - June 1, 2023 Online, Google Meets • Edmonton Downtown Business Association, May 15 • Alberta Public Interest Research Group (AP!RG), May 23 • Homeward Trust, May 24 • Bissell Centre, May 25 • Edmonton 2Spirit Society, June 1	5 Meetings	Community Organizations
	Presentation and Feedback Questions	March 2023 April 2023	N/A	Community Services Advisory Board

HOW WE COMMUNICATED

Communications for the Public Spaces Bylaws survey was focused on inviting Edmontonians to share their input on how it regulates activities and behaviours in public spaces by completing the survey. To ensure Edmontonians were aware of the engagement process, the City communicated the engagement in the following ways:

- Social media posts through City of Edmonton channels including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- Public Service Announcement on May 8 and May 15
- News release on May 11 to alert the media to the launch of the survey
- Morning radio show interviews to discuss the project and survey with Gord Cebryk, former Deputy City Manager, City Operations
- Advertisements at City facilities including externally at the Edmonton Valley Zoo, Muttart Conservatory, and LRT stations, and internally at facilities supporting Parks and Road Services, Waste Services, and Fleet and Facility Services
- Project and survey information to 311 operators to answer questions from residents
- Media Tool kit including all of the online engagement opportunities was shared with 450 community organizations who may have an interest or be impacted by the project

WHAT WE HEARD

This section describes the top themes and considerations we heard in this engagement process. The bylaw topics that City Administration engaged on during this project included:

- Performances, small commercial activity and large gatherings
- Recreational activities and,
- Panhandling, lingering without purpose, use of public space at night and visible drug use.

For the purposes of this engagement process, we defined public spaces as any space in the City of Edmonton that is open and accessible to the general public. This could include:

- Transit Property (including LRT platforms or while riding a bus)
- Sidewalks or Boulevards
- Pedways (while open to the public)
- Parks
- Playgrounds and Skateparks
- The River Valley
- Plazas and squares (such as Churchill Square)
- Places the public gather (such as food courts, shopping malls, campuses while open to the public)

For the purpose of this public engagement process, a public space is NOT:

- Backyards
- Private residences
- Locations outside the City of Edmonton

KEY THEMES OVERALL

The following themes were heard throughout the engagement opportunities.

Safety

Safety was the top priority heard throughout engagement. Edmontonians expressed that they wanted to feel safe and welcomed in public spaces. There was particular concern expressed by seniors and those with small children, as well as people were concerned with the unpredictable or inconsiderate behaviour of others.

Downtown, transit and trails in the river valley were the top locations where people indicated that they felt the most unsafe, and some shared incidents where they felt threatened or nervous due to the unpredictable behaviour of others. Due to the experience or fear of feeling unsafe, respondents indicated that they are avoiding visiting these areas.

What would make them feel safe or unsafe differed from person to person and depended on the behaviour we asked about. More details about safety considerations specific to behaviour topics are detailed later in this report.

Enforcement

Respondents indicated that enforcement of bylaws was an important factor in the effectiveness of the bylaw. Some indicated that no bylaw changes were needed, but instead the bylaw needed to be enforced better for behaviours that were not permitted in the bylaw.

Some respondents indicated a desire for better mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and enforcing behaviours that are not permissible in the bylaw. Others also indicated that communication of where and what bylaws apply are important to ensuring people follow the bylaws. Some suggested signage or communication packages to understand how to apply the bylaw be shared with service providers and be made available to the public.

Some also indicated that the bylaw needed to be consistently enforced for all people, and not applied just to those experiencing homelessness, mental health issues or addiction. Others also indicated that the bylaws can disproportionately affect people in vulnerable circumstances, such as people experiencing homelessness, mental health issues or addiction and that enforcement is not effective at helping people out of those situations.

Support for Edmontonians in vulnerable circumstances

Respondents indicated that bylaws do not help people out of vulnerable circumstances and that a key solution to managing undesirable behaviour includes providing support for people. Suggestions included housing supports, employment supports, mental health supports, addictions and substance abuse supports and providing a community for people to feel welcome and supported. Some suggested that regulating the behaviour through bylaw does not actually address the behaviour, but rather shifts the behaviour to places that are not visible to the general public and can increase health and safety risk for people engaging in the behaviours.

Disruption or prevention from using public spaces

Respondents shared that they may want a behaviour to be regulated or restricted if the behaviour prevents themselves or others from using public spaces or if they will be bothered by this behaviour and therefore not want to use the public space. Reasons included safety concerns for those engaging in the activity and those nearby, as well as potential conflicts between users and non-users of the space. Specific concerns for each behaviour are detailed later in this report.

Maintenance and cleanliness of public spaces

Respondents shared that the maintenance and cleanliness of public spaces is important as they are a shared resource and responsibility, and should be preserved for the enjoyment of everyone. Respondents shared that regulation should ensure that public spaces are not damaged or left dirty, and indicated that well maintained and clean public spaces fosters community pride, encourages usage and promotes health and safety.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE GENERAL PUBLIC

How People Want to Feel in Public Spaces

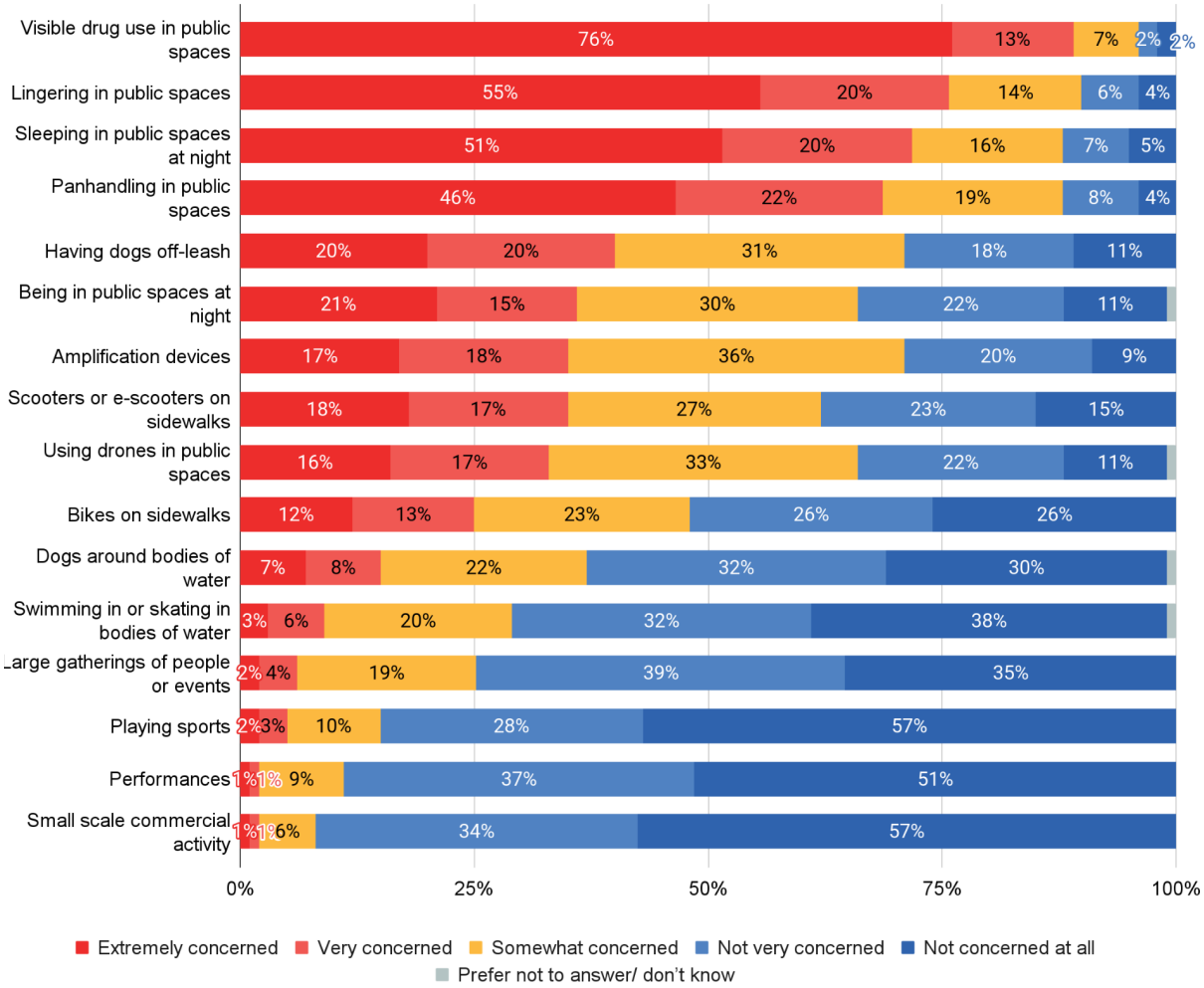
We asked Edmontonians how they wanted to feel in public spaces.

Top considerations include:

- Feeling safe when in public spaces
- Use of transit spaces only for transportation purposes, and suggestion for turnstiles
- Improving vibrancy in public spaces through performances
- Inclusive and welcoming public spaces for all
- Accessible public spaces for people with disabilities

Top Concerns

We asked the public to think about their experiences, interactions and any behaviours they've witnessed in public spaces, and how concerned they were. This graph shows the level of concern for all behaviour topic areas.



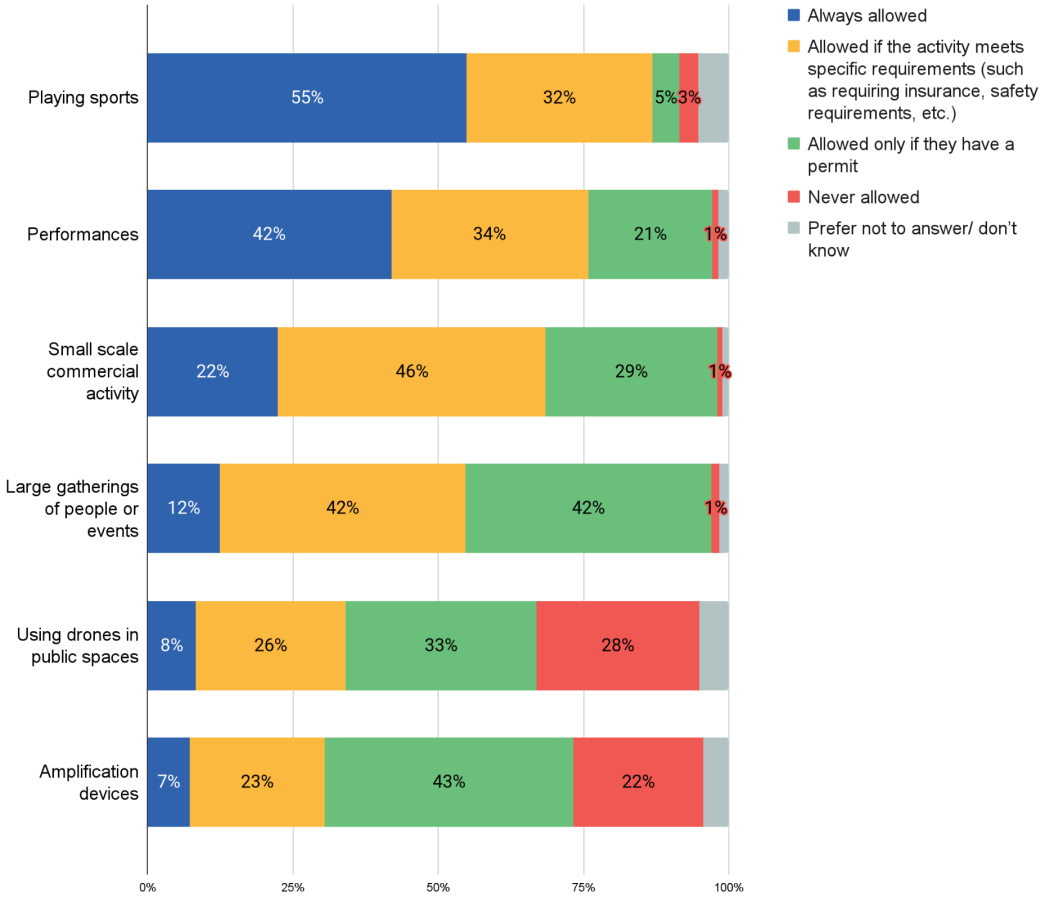
The top behaviour topics that have the highest level of concern (extremely or very concerned) include visible drug use (89%), lingering in public spaces without intent to use the space for its intended purpose (75%), people sleeping in public spaces at night (71%) and panhandling in public spaces (68%).

The behaviour topics respondents were least concerned about (not concerned at all or not very concerned) include small scale commercial activity (91%), performances (88%), playing sports in public spaces (85%) and large gatherings of over 50 people (74%).

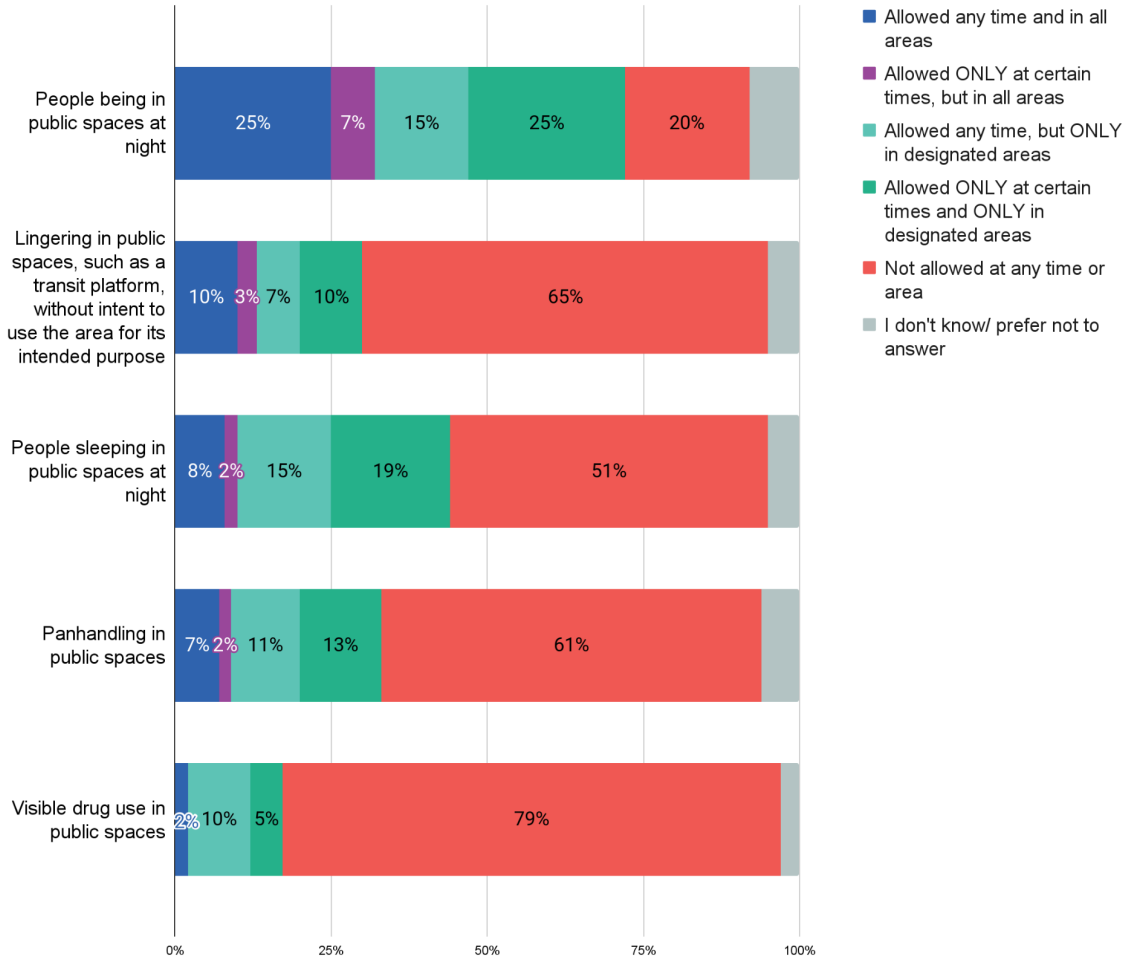
Options for regulation

The City wanted to know if behaviours are allowed, how it should regulate them. We asked participants to tell us when the following activities should be allowed.

The following graph shows the responses for the regulation options for playing sports, performances, small scale commercial activity, large gatherings of people, use of drones and amplification devices in public spaces.



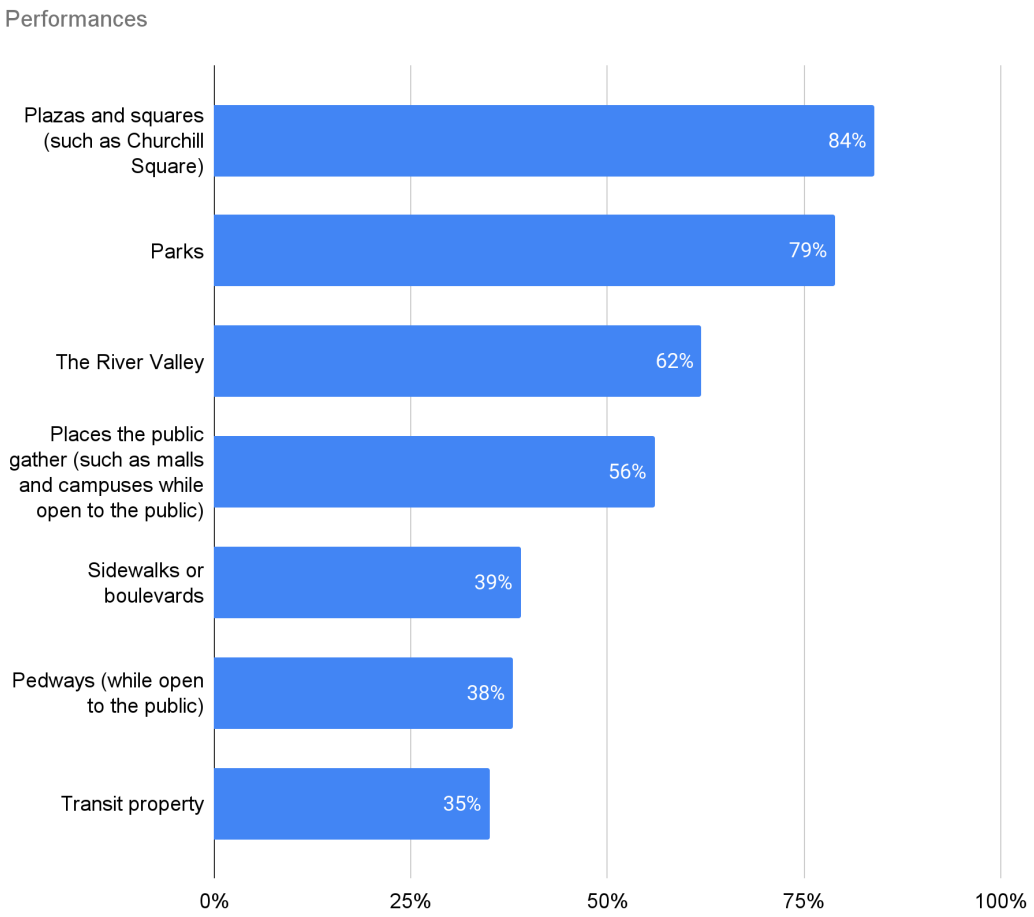
The following graph shows the responses for the regulation options for people being in public spaces at night, lingering in public spaces without intent to use the area for its intended purpose, people sleeping in public spaces, panhandling and visible drug use in public spaces.



Performances in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where performances should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated high levels of support for most locations, with highest levels of support for performances to be allowed in plazas and squares (84%), parks (79%), the river valley (62%) and places the public gather (56%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around performances in public spaces.

Top considerations include:

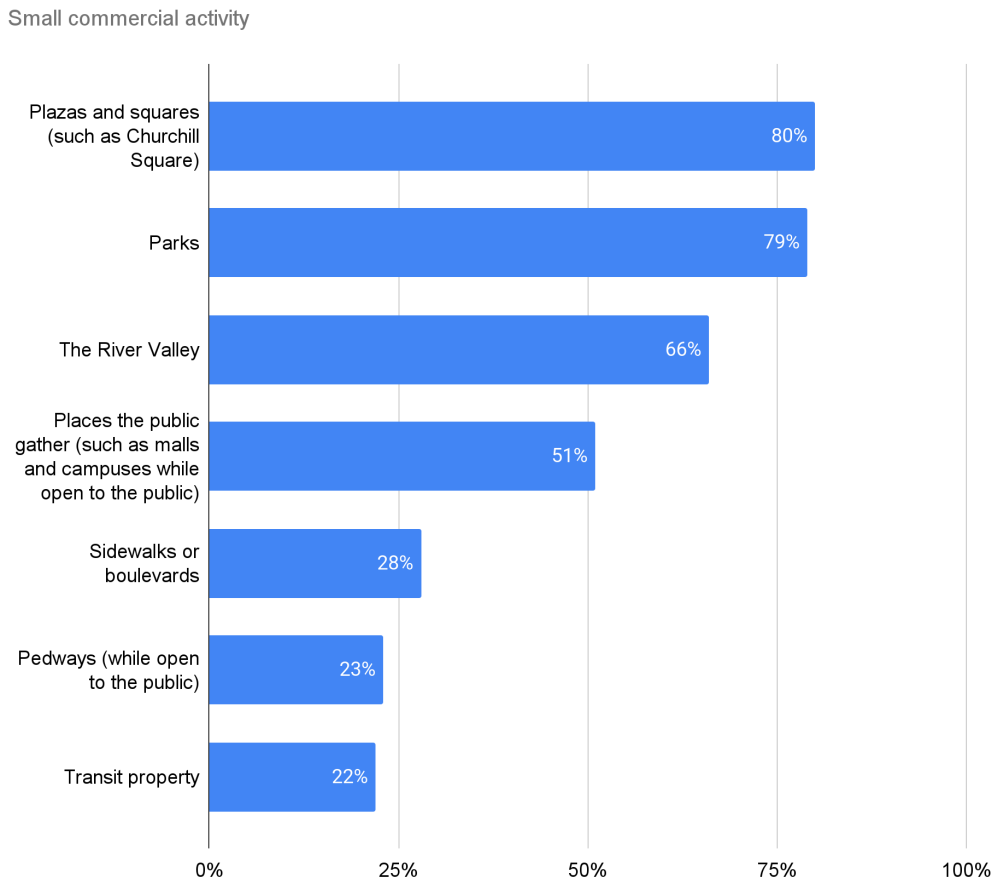
- Concern about others who may try to push ideology onto the general public, such as street preachers
- Busking, performances and bringing art and culture to the street positively activates the space and create a more vibrant atmosphere

- Limiting red-tape would encourage more people performing in public spaces, but recognition that there should be rules to ensure people are not preventing use of the space for others or being aggressive
- It is important that spaces are not damaged or left unclean as a result of performances in public spaces
- Noise and amplification not seen as necessary for performances or to increase vibrancy
- Concern about noise in residential areas

Small Commercial Activity in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where small commercial activity should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated the highest levels of support for small commercial activity in plazas and squares (80%), parks (79%), the river valley (66%) and places the public gather while open to the public such as malls and campuses (51%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around small commercial activity in public spaces.

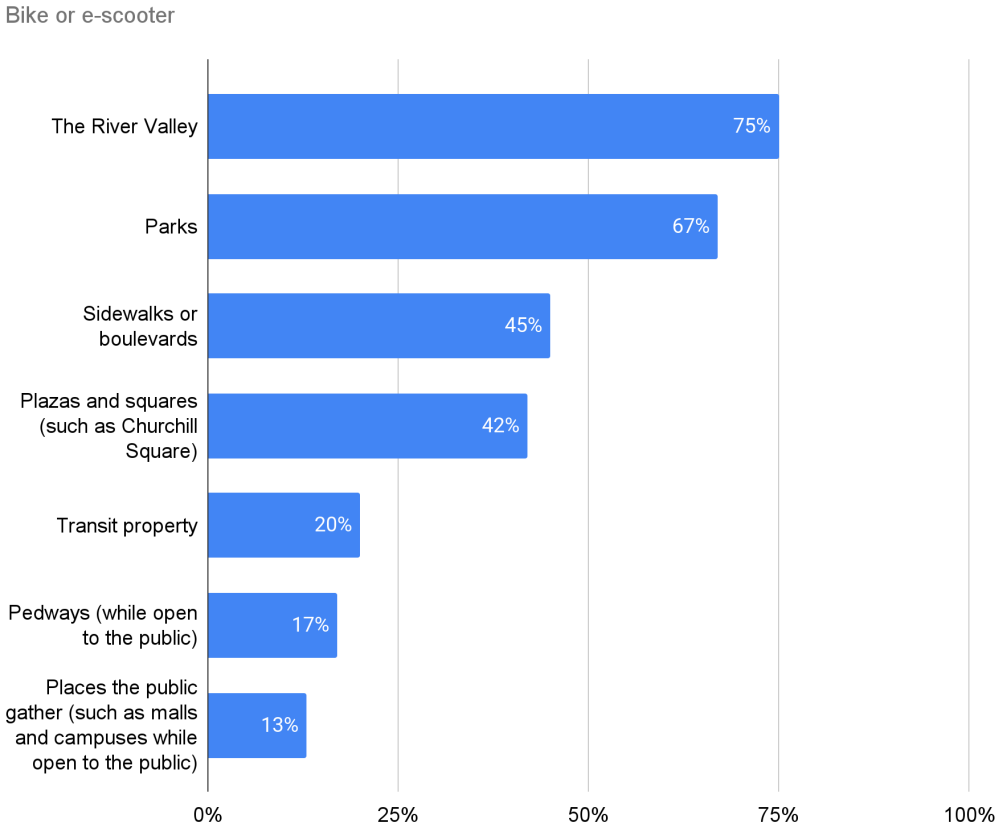
Top considerations include:

- Having small commercial activity in public spaces would bring joy and vibrancy to the space
- There should be measures to limit property damage, noise, cleanliness and maintain order in public spaces to ensure that others are still able to enjoy the space

Bikes and E-Scooters in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where bikes and e-scooters should be allowed to be operated.



Respondents indicated highest levels of support for bikes and e-scooters to be allowed in the river valley (75%) and parks (67%), and there were mixed levels of support for sidewalks and boulevards (45%) and plazas and squares (42%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around bikes and e-scooters in public spaces.

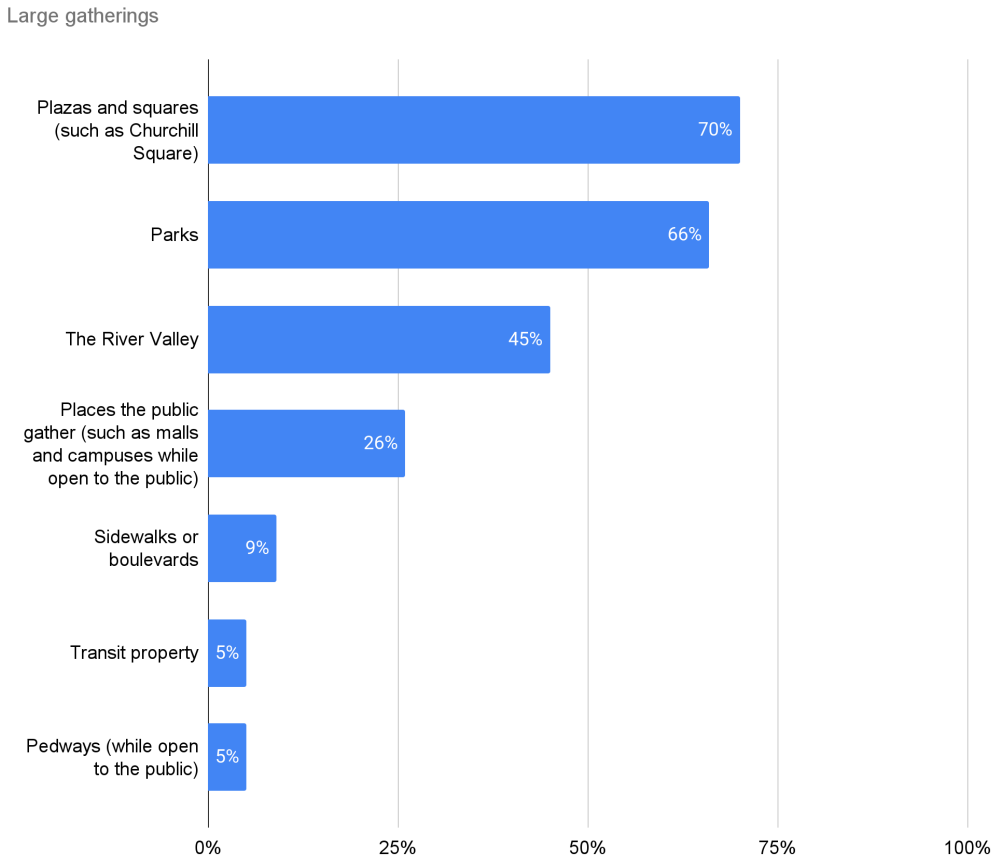
There were mixed views on bikes and E-scooters. Top considerations include:

- Safety was the primary concern
- Concern about negative interactions with other people wanting to use the space, such as those walking, particularly those with small children or animals, specifically around high speeds and inconsiderate users
    - Higher levels of concern on areas that are focused on pedestrians, such as sidewalks, whereas some noted that places like parks and the river valley or designated paths may be more appropriate
    - Concern with lack of enforcement where bikes and e-scooters are allowed and many mentioned near injury due to reckless usage
- Concern with e-scooters and rented bikes being left on sidewalks and other inappropriate areas and related issues with preventing people from using a space, particularly for those with mobility issues
- Suggestion to allow bikes and e-scooters on sidewalks due to safety concerns with the proximity to vehicle traffic on roadways, and some expressed a desire for these activities to be allowed in more spaces
    - Some mentioned that there should be more dedicated infrastructure to limit negative interactions between pedestrians, vehicles and those using bikes and e-scooters

Large Gatherings (+50 people) in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where large gatherings of over 50 people should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated high levels of support for large gatherings to be allowed in plazas and squares (70%), parks (66%), there were mixed levels of support for the river valley (45%), and there were low levels of support for sidewalks or boulevards (9%), on transit property (5%) or in pedways (5%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around large gatherings of over 50 people in public spaces.

Top considerations include:

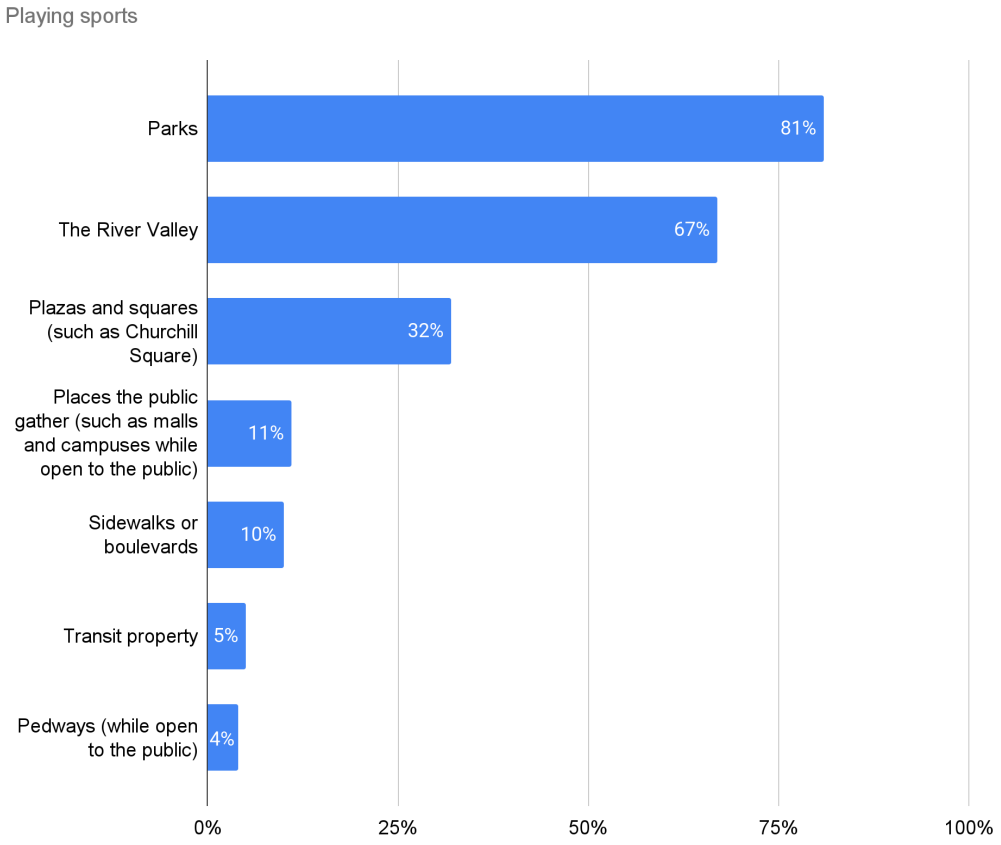
- Primary concern was safety and disruption of others wanting to use the space
- Concern about noise, particularly in residential areas, ensuring there is appropriate enforcement, crowd control and emergency preparedness measures
- Concern about the disruption of traffic

- A suitable location was important to consider, with parks referenced as an appropriate location and areas of confined space was seen as less appropriate
- Concern with those who wished to impose ideology on others
- Concern about the appropriateness of the activity in front of children Suggestions that more permissible regulation could encourage community vibrancy through small community gatherings and festivals and events

Playing Sports in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where playing sports should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated high levels of support for playing sports to be allowed in parks (81%) and the river valley (67%), and there were low levels of support for sidewalks or boulevards (10%), on transit property (5%) or in pedways (4%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around playing sports in public spaces.

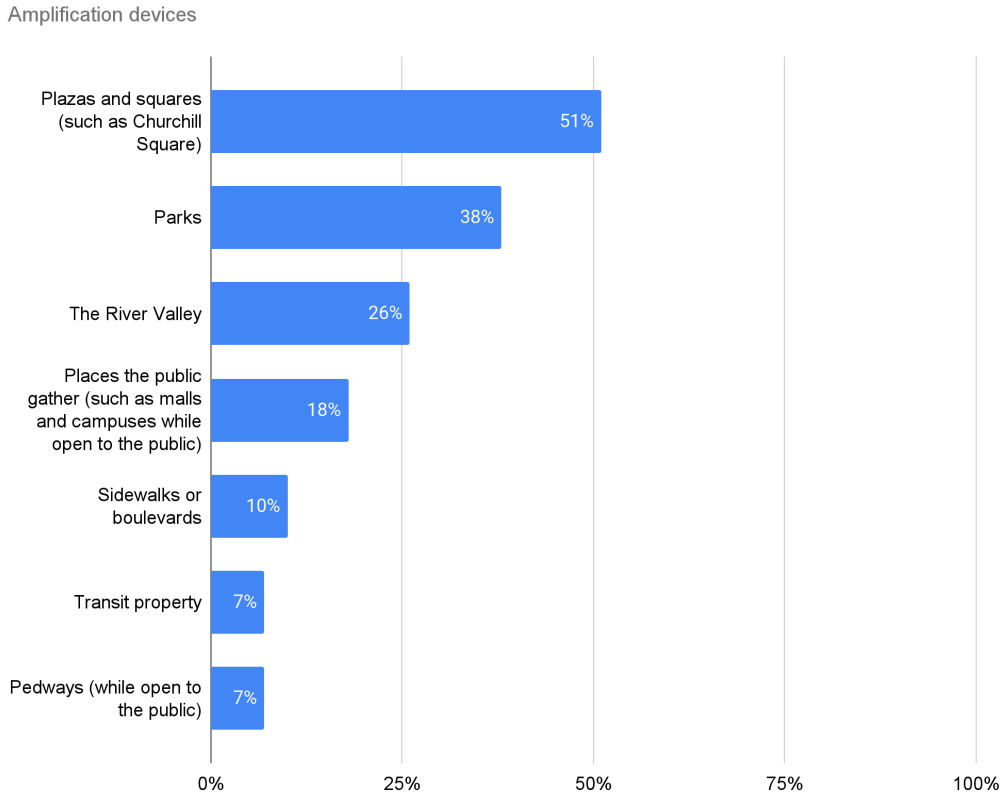
Top considerations include:

- Primary consideration was safety, encouraging an active community and limiting disruption of others trying to use the space
- General support for playing sports and this behaviour was seen as a positive use of public space
- General sentiment that regulation should be more permissible so long as safety and disruption of others is considered

Amplification Devices in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where usage of amplification devices should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated highest levels of support for amplification devices to be allowed in plazas and squares (51%), and there were low levels of support for sidewalks or boulevards (10%), on transit property (7%) or in pedways (7%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around amplification devices in public spaces.

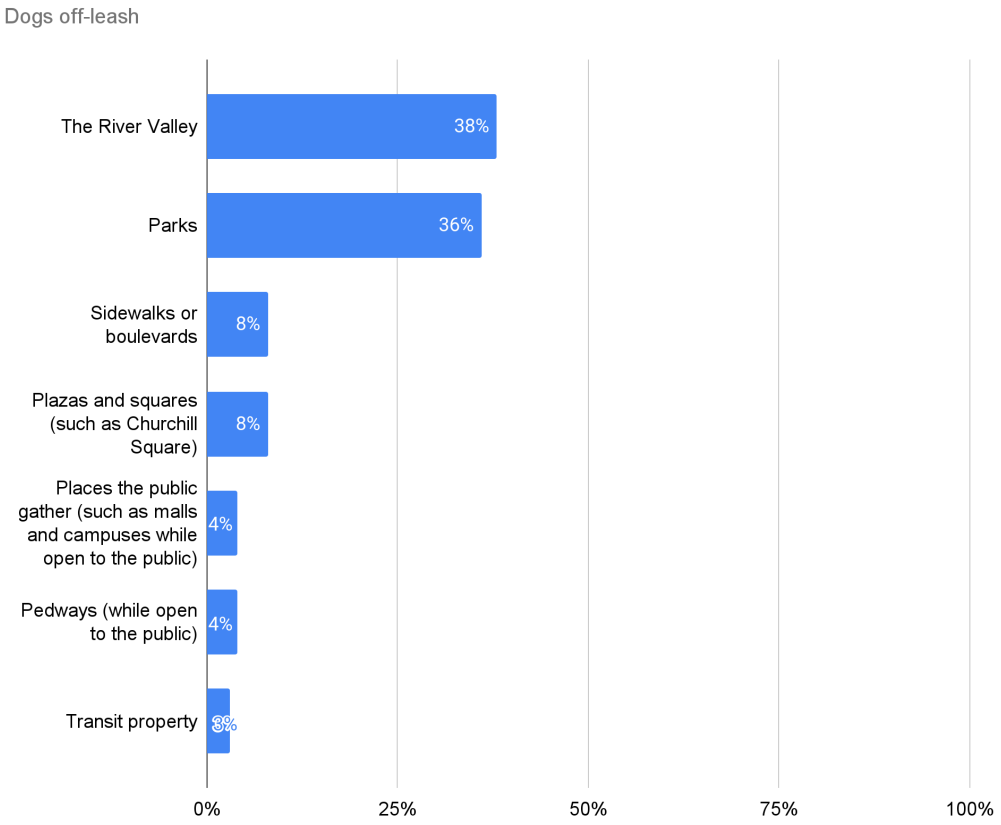
Key Considerations:

- General non-support of amplification
- Concern about street preachers and others who may try to push ideology onto the general public
- Concern with noise
- Not seen as necessary to improve vibrancy

Having Dogs off Leash in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where dogs off leash should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated low levels of support for sidewalks or boulevards (8%), in plazas and squares (8%), in places the public gather while open to the public such as malls and campuses (4%), in pedways (4%), or on transit property (3%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around having dogs off leash in public spaces.

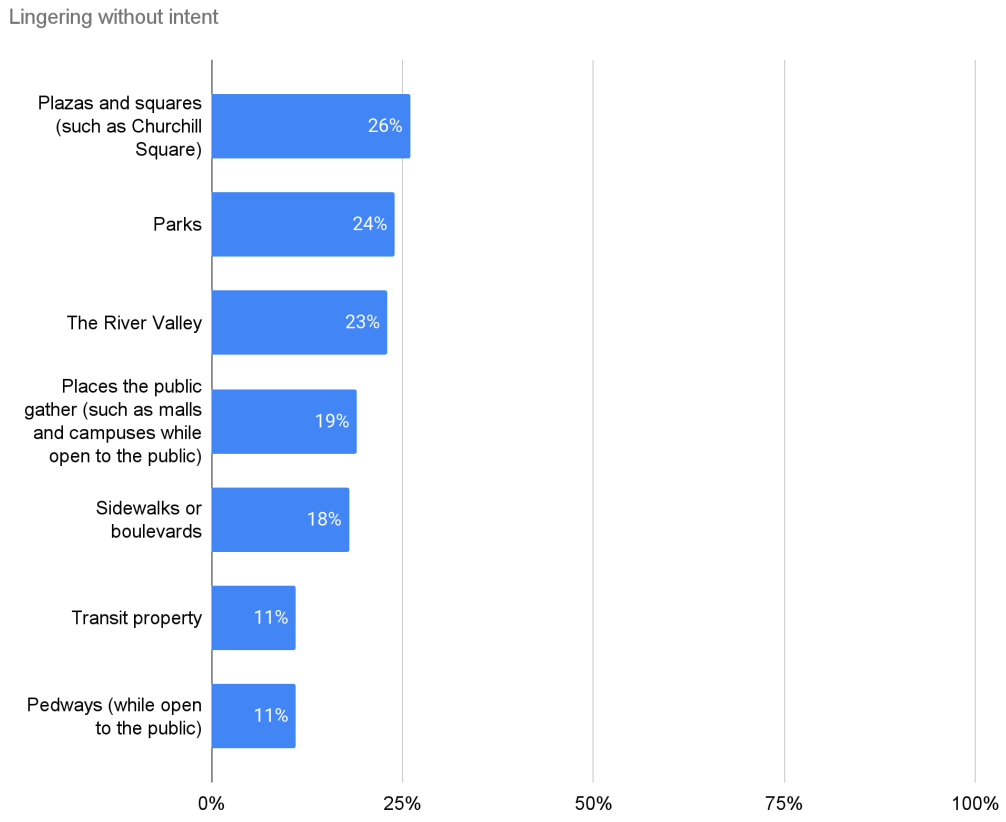
Top considerations include:

- Concern about irresponsible dog owners and aggressive dogs
- Concern with dogs off leash around children, people walking and riding bikes

Lingering Without Intending to use a Space for its Intended Purpose in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where lingering without intending to use a space for its intended purpose should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated lower to mixed levels of support overall, with the lowest levels of support for on transit properties (11%) and in pedways (11%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around lingering without intending to use a space for its intended purpose in public spaces.

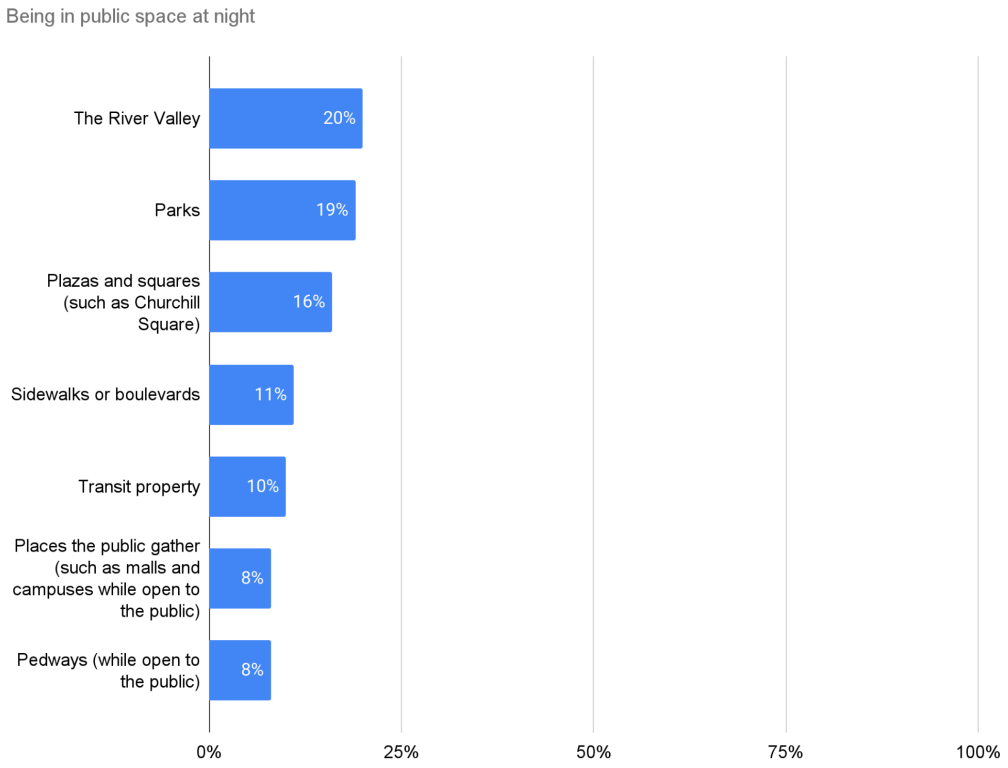
Top considerations include:

- Distinguish between recreational lingering (e.g. enjoying time at plazas) and lingering that impedes or risks the safety of others using the same space (e.g. blocking sidewalks)
- Some highlighted the importance of access and equitably sharing public spaces (e.g. parks), without pushing out vulnerable communities who may not have anywhere else to go
- Spaces such as transit property and malls as locations that were highlighted as inappropriate spaces to engage in this behaviour
- Some felt that lingering is detrimental to business and culture, making neighbourhoods and public spaces where it is more common undesirable to visit
- Concerns about safety when using public spaces due to the unpredictable and unknown behaviour of others as a result of drug use and interpersonal violence (e.g., fights between those loitering, fear of physical assault or verbal harassment) at bus stations and LRT stations
- Desire to improve current cleanliness and maintenance of shared spaces (littered with broken glass, needles, etc.), especially Transit stations and LRT cars which were noted as often covered in bodily fluids or refuse
- Desire for more bylaw enforcement through the increased presence of police, transit police, and peace officers that report and monitor dangerous and non-permissible activities in public spaces

Being in or Sleeping in Public Spaces at Night

Locations

We asked where being in or sleeping in public spaces at night should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated lower levels of support overall, with the lowest levels of support for on transit properties (10%), in places the public gather while open to the public such as malls and campuses (8%) and in pedways (8%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around being in or sleeping in public spaces at night.

Top considerations include:

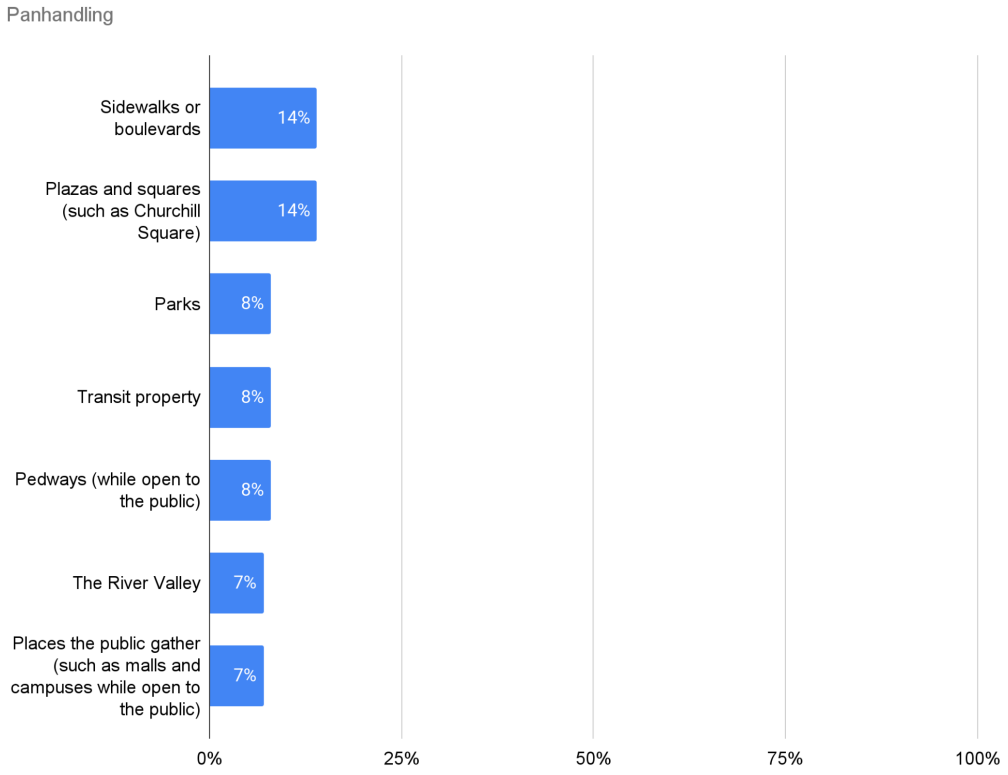
- Support vulnerable communities by providing housing assistance and additional social services is an important proactive action to preventing people from having to sleep or be in public spaces at night
- Overall, varying perspectives around night uses of public spaces:
    - Some noted that public spaces should be used for their intended purpose where homeless encampments should not be permitted in places such as parks as they obstruct the full use of these spaces

- Others noted that we should allow those who are homeless to sleep in public spaces unless they are physically causing a disturbance, and cannot ban this when there is not enough housing support
- Concerns about safety due to fear of assault or physical violence because of public intoxication and aggressive behaviour

Panhandling in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where panhandling should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated lower levels of support overall, with the lowest levels of support for in parks (8%), on transit property (8%), in pedways (8%), in the river valley (7%), and in places the public gather while open to the public such as malls and campuses (7%).

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around panhandling in public spaces.

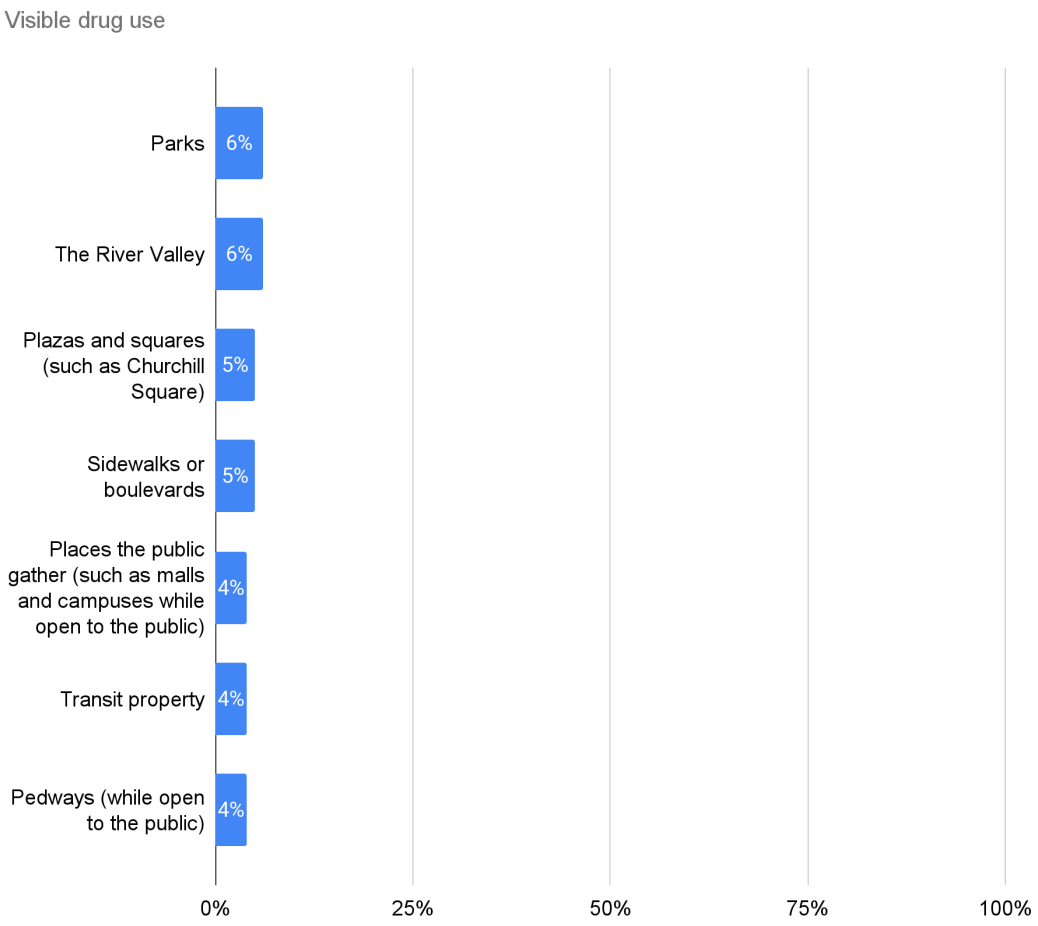
Top considerations include:

- Concerns around panhandling where it is not safe to do so, such as traffic intersections, these spaces should only be used for their intended purpose
- Provide social support for vulnerable communities
- Concerns about safety of those not panhandling due to the unpredictable behaviour of those engaging in the activity, such as disrupting traffic and verbal harassment
- Women are more likely to feel unsafe during panhandling encounters
- Presence of enforcement (such as police and/or peace officers) is needed to ensure the safety of those engaging and not engaging in this behaviour

Visible Drug Use in Public Spaces

Locations

We asked where visible drug use should be allowed to occur.



Respondents indicated very low support overall of visible drug use in all public locations being 6% or lower.

Key Considerations

We asked about what the City should consider when reviewing the bylaws around visible drug use in public spaces.

Top considerations include:

- Additional social services for supporting vulnerable communities, such as drug and addictions support
- Public spaces are not appropriate for this behaviour
- Suggestion to create designated areas for this activity, such as safe injection sites
- Concerns and fear about safety due to the unpredictable and unknown behaviour of others
- Need for reporting and monitoring through enforcement

What We Heard From Those Who Had Been at Risk or Experienced Homelessness

We define homelessness as ***the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.*** It encompasses a range of physical living situations, including:

- Unsheltered, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation
- Emergency Sheltered, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence
- Provisionally Accommodated, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure
- At Risk of Homelessness, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards

We asked respondents: *If you feel comfortable sharing, have you ever been at risk or experienced being homeless?* 773 survey respondents replied yes (12 per cent of total responses). Of this, 482 people shared their experiences about how they felt being in public spaces and the impact bylaws around panhandling, loitering or sleeping in public spaces had on them through the open ended question.

The key themes that emerged included:

What People Experienced

Respondents shared various experiences of being homeless or at risk of homelessness.

- Couch surfing or sleeping in their car
- Sleeping on the street or in a tent
- Using public spaces without bothering anyone
- Food insecurity, domestic abuse and mental health issues
- Feeling unwelcome or unwanted in their community

Two per cent of respondents indicated that bylaws had no impact on them. Reasons for this included:

- Not engaging in illegal behaviours
- No knowledge of the bylaws or what did or did not apply
- Being polite and not confrontational
- Sleeping in a car or on a couch and
- Substance use, domestic abuse or mental health issues were primary concerns

Financial and Social Supports

We heard differing perspectives around where responsibility lies for people in vulnerable circumstances to seek support. Some respondents said it is up to the individual to find and seek out existing supports and others felt it was the responsibility of the government to provide financial and social supports.

Feedback was split almost 50-50 as to the level of resources that are currently available. Respondents either felt that there are currently enough financial and social support resources for people in vulnerable circumstances or that there aren't enough current resources available for those in need. Barriers to accessing these services were also mentioned including navigating a complex system, feeling unsafe at shelters, undiagnosed or untreated mental illness and over-policing.

Increased housing support was the support service mentioned most frequently.

Safety

There was a general desire and need for all people to feel safe in public spaces both for those experiencing homelessness and those that are not. The top concerns shared included fear of unknown or unpredictable behaviour of others and fear of assault or physical violence.

Community

Respondents shared that those in vulnerable circumstances should be supported by the community and made to feel welcome and accepted. Those that have experienced homelessness felt cast aside, invisible and always 'on alert.' There was a desire for those in vulnerable circumstances to access public spaces if they weren't bothering others and shared the sentiment that they shouldn't be 'punished for existing.'

Enforcement

Some respondents felt that it's important to enforce current bylaws, but we must also be mindful of their impact on vulnerable people. Enforcement can lead to punitive measures rather than providing the necessary support for individuals in need. Respondents were concerned about criminal behaviour in public spaces but acknowledged that there needs to be a balance between ensuring safety and public spaces where everyone feels welcomed and supported.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM STAKEHOLDERS/ORGANIZATIONS

Recreation

We asked what was most important for the City to consider as we reviewed the public spaces bylaws that pertained to recreational activities and spaces.

Top considerations shared by stakeholders included:

- Access to public recreational spaces is important for those who do not have access to private places
- Recreational uses of public spaces increases the vibrancy and positive activation of a space which could aid in reducing negative activities in parks
- Public spaces, such as indoor spaces or transit spaces, may not be suitable places for certain activities (such as sports and performances) that may be unsafe for others or obstruct the use of these areas
- Regulations should be more permissible to reduce barriers and encourage positive recreational behaviours in public spaces such as organized sports, festivals, food trucks, cultural festivities and more
- Respect and consider Indigenous cultural ties to the land, practices and rights
- Create and find opportunities to celebrate diverse culture, such as Indigenous wellness gathering or sweat lodges

Performances, large gatherings and small commercial

We asked what was most important for the City to consider as we reviewed the public spaces bylaws that pertained to performances, large gatherings and small commercial activities.

Top considerations shared by stakeholders included:

- Performances, gatherings and commercial opportunities should be encouraged where appropriate to promote Edmonton's vibrancy, as these activities make the City a more attractive option to live in and visit
- Some areas such as Transit property and indoor confined places - like food courts - may not be appropriate spaces for all public festivities and certain commercial activities such as food events
- Balance between stricter regulations and permissible regulations.
    - Some restrictions are needed to ensure safety and order maintenance, limit overcrowding, and ensure that others are not bothered or obstructed from using a public space by the activity
    - Limit regulatory barriers while ensuring that mandatory rules are enforced equitably to provide access for lower-income groups and non-profits
- Aligned concerns around amplification and excessive/ bothersome noise.
    - Concern about street preachers and hate speech - amplification is not necessary for the goal of vibrancy
- Varying perspective on large gatherings:
    - Exclusive use of booked spaces should be permitted to prevent disruption from external sources and protests
    - Some suggested that the exclusive use of bookable public spaces should not be permitted as the benefits of allowing access outweighs the concern of disruptive behavior
    - Collective concern about the disruption of vehicle traffic due to congestion and lack of parking in event spaces

Panhandling, lingering without intended use, visible drug use, and night use

- Common behaviour in every major urban centre
- Important to distinguish that not all those who use drugs or panhandle are homeless
- Support for vulnerable communities:
    - Importance of providing support through social services such as safe consumption sites and shelters against extreme weather conditions for the most vulnerable
    - Vulnerable communities should be afforded basic humanity, dignity and support for their circumstances instead of being penalized
    - Concern that there are no shelters for queer, intersex, or Two Spirit people
- Concerns about gentrification and pushing unwanted behavior to other places in the city.
    - Residents and business owners are worried about being located in areas where panhandling, drug use, lingering and night use are more common
- Balance public feelings of safety when providing space for those in vulnerable circumstances
- Transit is not an appropriate place for these types of activities, but recognize that a safe space is needed
- Concerns related to these activities include aggression from those engaging in this behaviour and obstructing others' use of those spaces (such as preventing people from accessing transit), including the need to maintain sanitary environments (not littered with garbage and needles)
- Varying feedback received around regulations:
    - Some believe that bylaws do not need to change, but they need to be enforced equitably - not just focused on removing homeless people
    - Some believe that public spaces should permit night use for people seeking a safe place to sleep without concern of enforcement activity like being fined, having their belongings taken, abandoned or destroyed
    - Sentiment that people who are homeless feel like they are not welcome or do not belong in Edmonton, even if they were born and raised here. There is a desire to be part of society, not separated from it

        - A notable example is alcohol allowed in public spaces downtown during the playoffs. Housed people are allowed to be drunk in public places, but those who are homeless would be removed

Other feedback: Communication

- Need for strong communication between City Administration and community organizations, as well as the public about what and where activities are allowed and not allowed
- Suggestions to improve communication include:
    - Signage and providing a communications package to organizations (particularly to those that serve the homeless population)
    - Simplify language around rules and regulations to ease understanding and application (consider ESL or lower education)

NEXT STEPS

The feedback we received and summarized in this report will be used along with technical analysis (including enforcement considerations, legal recommendations and scan of what other jurisdictions are doing) to help Administration review the bylaws and provide a recommendation to City Council.

Visit edmonton.ca/bylaws for more information and to stay up to date on this project.