What We Heard Report

Rice Howard Way Entertainment District

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SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Entertainment District supports the implementation of the Downtown Vibrancy Strategy and is expected to create a more vibrant and safer downtown. Overall feedback for the implementation of an Entertainment District on Rice Howard Way was positive, with nearly unanimous support from businesses, property owners and festival/arts organizations with a vested interest in Rice Howard Way. In the Public Engagement Survey, 87 per cent of people surveyed indicated they were likely, or very likely, to participate in the Entertainment District.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Downtown Vibrancy Strategy[1] implementation focuses on initiatives that promote sustained vibrancy and are designed to increase the number of people coming downtown to live, work, play and visit. To support this strategy, the City is proposing a bylaw amendment to allow for the establishment of an Entertainment District (District) on Rice Howard Way.

Municipalities are granted the authority to create a bylaw that permits the establishment of a District by the Government of Alberta through the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Commission (AGLC) and the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act. A District permits the consumption of alcohol in a public place. This bylaw will limit that consumption to alcohol purchased from licensed establishments and vendors, including restaurants and bars, within the defined boundaries of the District, which will be indicated with signage.

What is the goal of the project?

The creation of a District on Rice Howard Way is expected to create a more vibrant and safer downtown by delivering impactful, long-term benefits including increased pedestrian traffic, improved business retention and attraction, reduced red-tape and an overall positive economic impact on the designated area. Ideally, Rice Howard Way will become a sought-after destination that feels safe and vibrant for residents, workers and visitors alike.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

The role of stakeholders during this engagement was at the **ADVISE** level on the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum. Through individual in-person stakeholder meetings as well as an online survey, the project collected feedback from invested stakeholders that included anyone who lives, works or plays downtown, along with key stakeholder businesses directly impacted by the proposed District.

[1] City of Edmonton. Urban Planning and Economy Department. Downtown Vibrancy Strategy. June 2021. www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/Downtown_Vibrancy_Strategy.pdf?cb=1711138355

Specific communication tactics to promote the survey and share information about the project included:

- Social media posts on Facebook, 'X' and Instagram
- Print material, including postcards and table tent cards
- Engaged Edmonton webpage
- Public service announcement
- Media interviews, including CBC Radio Morning, This is Edmonton podcast and 630 CHED
- Direct emails to project stakeholders (internal/external)
- In-person stakeholder meetings with directly involved business owners

How We Engaged

Engagement was a combination of a public online survey and one-on-one stakeholder meetings with businesses, property managers and residents located on or adjacent to Rice Howard Way. Eighteen individual stakeholder meetings were held from January to April 2024. Information about the proposed project was shared and feedback was gathered in each meeting.

The online engagement survey was available on the Engaged.Edmonton.ca webpage from April 2 to 16, 2024. Postcards and tent cards were displayed at businesses on and around Rice Howard Way with a QR code linking to the survey, enabling customers to easily share their feedback. The Downtown Vibrancy District online survey received N=491 responses.

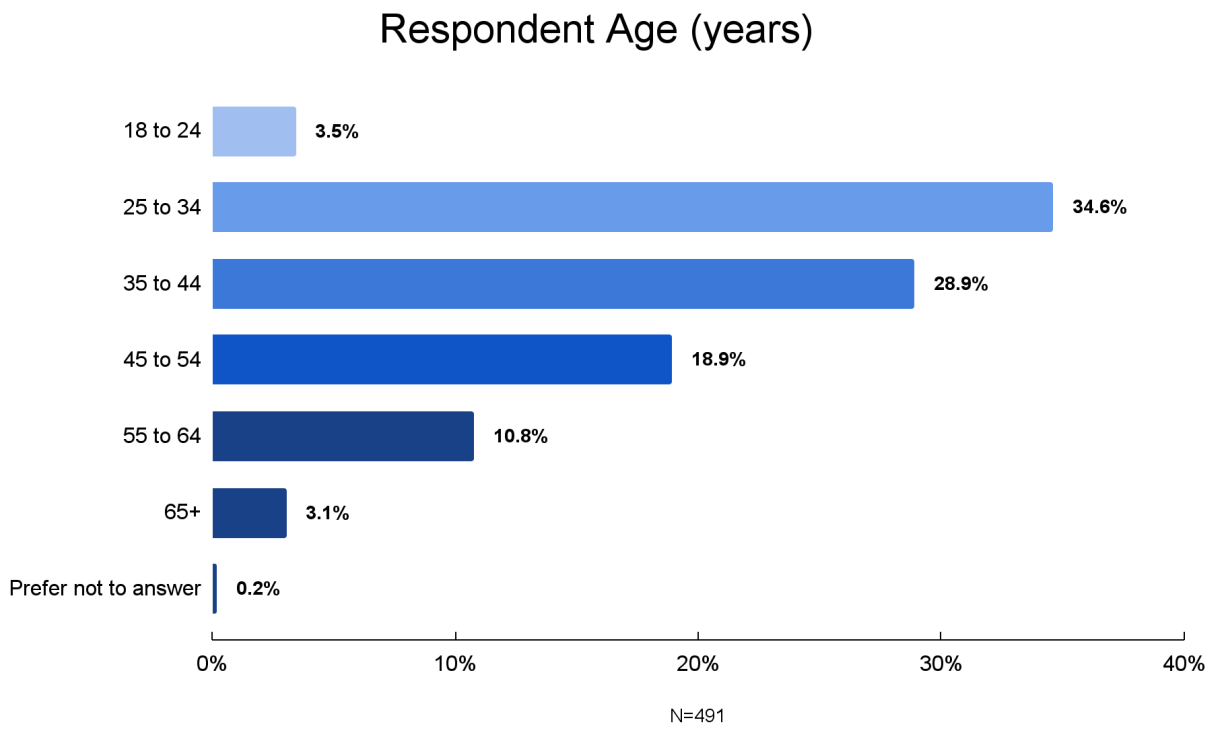
Who We Engaged

Phase 1 of the project's engagement focused on a small group of core stakeholders with a vested interest in the area of Rice Howard Way and, more broadly, the success of downtown. Phase 2 was an online public engagement survey and the results for the survey are discussed in following sections of this report.

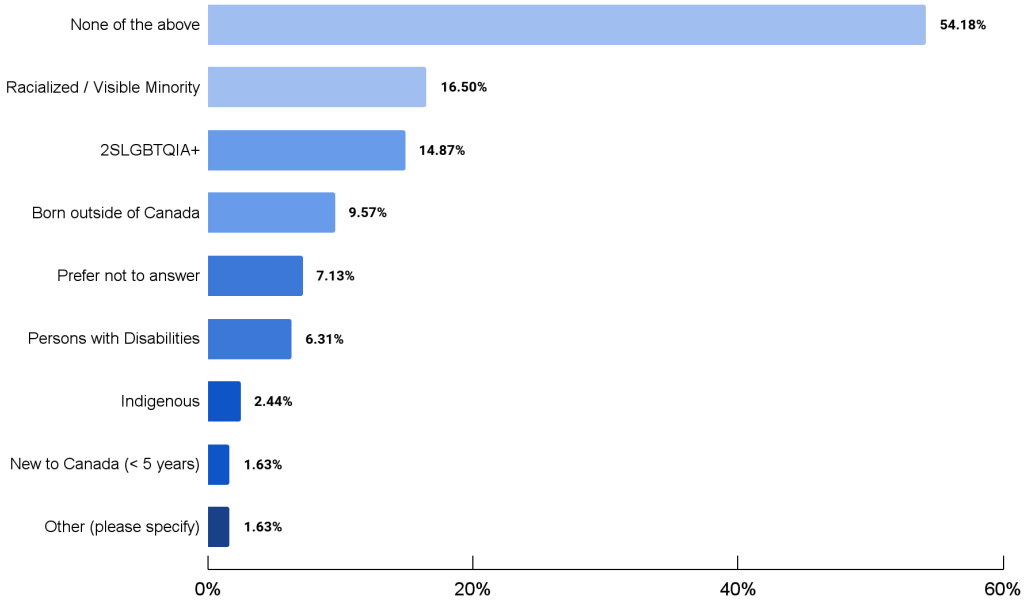
Through a combination of in-person and virtual stakeholder conversations, the Project Team provided information to and received feedback from the following stakeholder groups residing on or adjacent to, Rice Howard Way:

- Food and Beverage businesses (10)
- Property Managers (3)
- Condominium Boards (2)
- Arts Partners (4)
- Churchill Square Signature Festival Partners (4)
- Organizations supporting Equity-Seeking Groups (1)

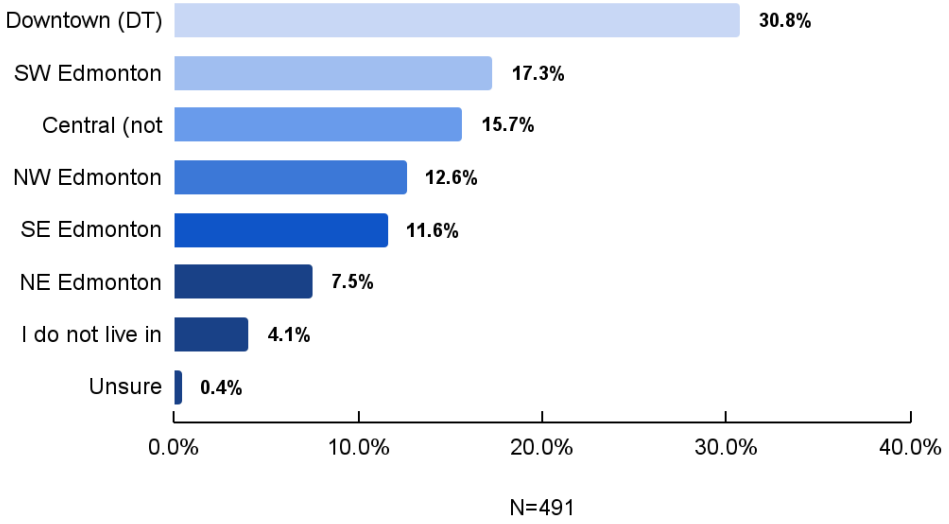
Demographics

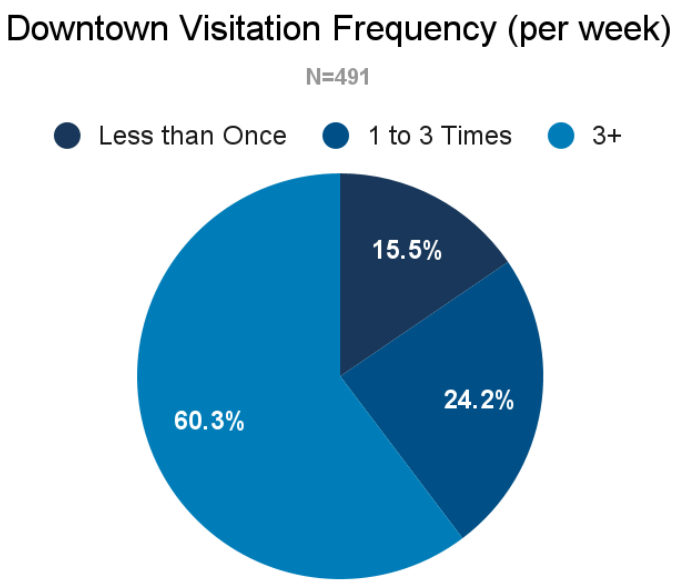


Do You Identify with Any of the Following?



Where Respondents Live





Note: 74.1% of respondents did not have children under the age of 18 living at home

What We Asked

In our stakeholder engagement sessions, the Project Team explained the concept of the District to business owners and asked for feedback.

In the public engagement survey, the Project Team invited feedback from anyone who lives, works or spends time downtown. The Project Team was looking to understand how many people were likely to visit the District if it were to be implemented, as well as what activities they would like to see in the space once operational. The Project Team also asked if they had any concerns about the proposed District.

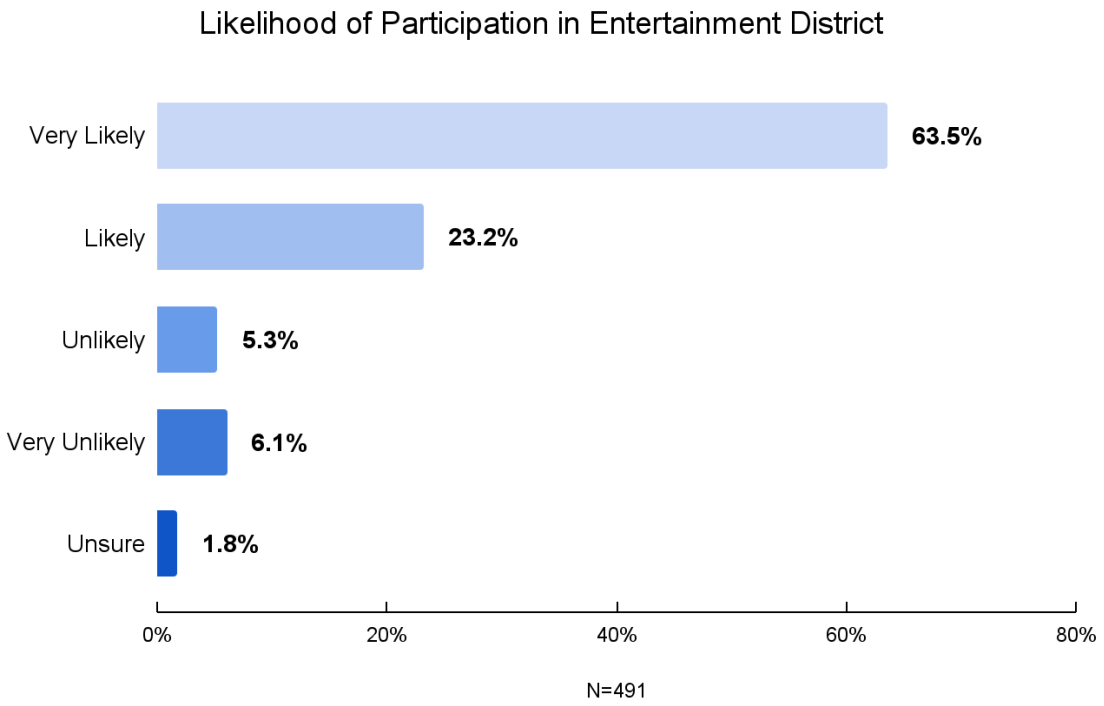
PROJECT ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY AND RESULTS

What We Heard

Feedback: In-Person Meetings

- Many business owners in Rice Howard Way supported the creation of the District.
- Many business owners shared that they had been hoping for a project like this in the area and were excited to explore it.
- Some owners shared the importance of a loading zone for deliveries (100a St)
- Some owners cited safety and cleanliness in the area as a concern
- Many owners agreed that more people in the area overall would be a huge benefit

Online Survey Results

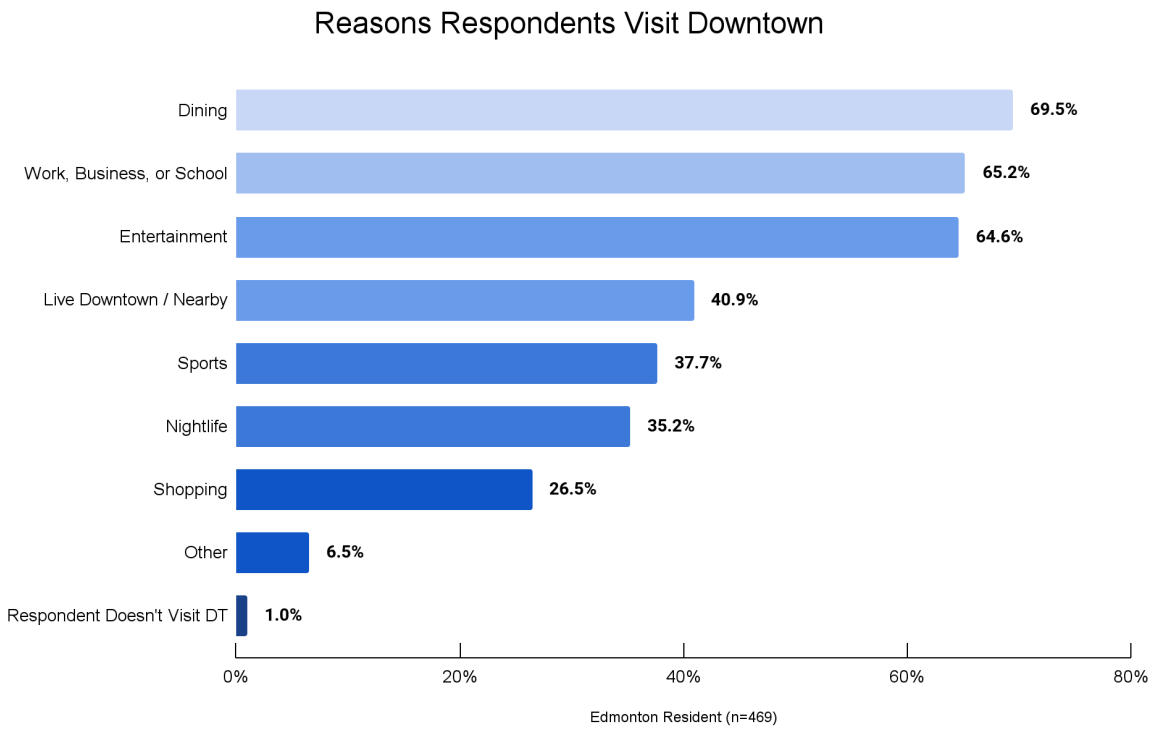


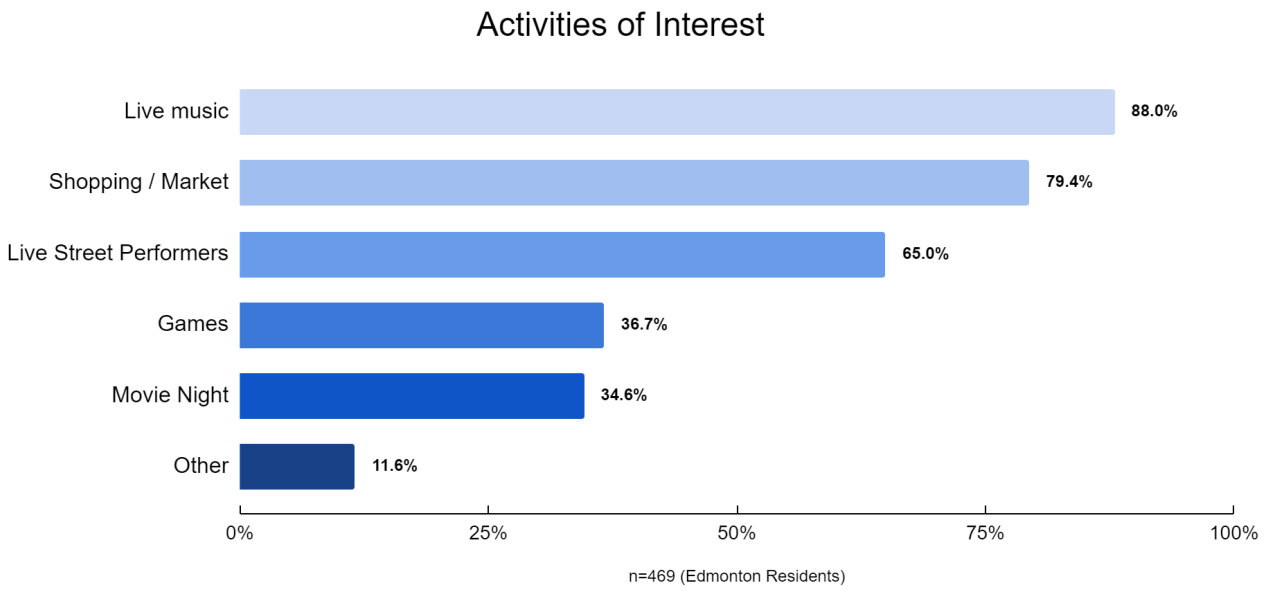
Entertainment District Participation

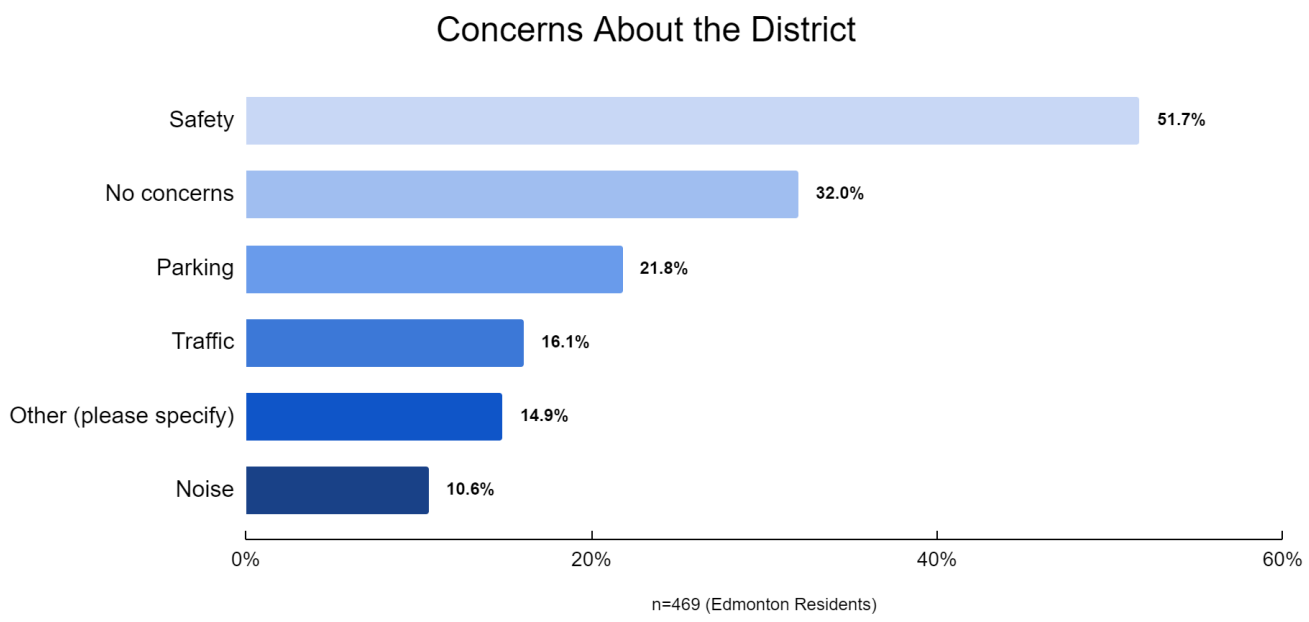
The survey results suggest interest in the Entertainment District with **86.7%** indicating they would "Likely" attend (top two response categories), with 63.5% responding "Very Likely" to attend.

Among respondents "Likely" to attend (86.7%) :

- **91.8%** of respondents from the SW region indicated that they were either likely or very likely to participate in the District
- **89.4%** of respondents from Downtown indicated that they were either likely or very likely to participate in the District
- **87.7%** of respondents from the SE region indicated that they were either likely or very likely to participate in the District


Reasons Respondents Visit Downtown
Dining
69.5%
Work, Business, or School
65.2%
Entertainment
64.6%
Live Downtown / Nearby
40.9%
Sports
37.7%
Nightlife
35.2%
Shopping
26.5%
Other
6.5%
Respondent Doesn't Visit DT
1.0%
0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
Edmonton Resident (n=469)


Activities of Interest
Live music
88.0%
Shopping / Market
79.4%
Live Street Performers
65.0%
Games
36.7%
Movie Night
34.6%
Other
11.6%
0%
25%
50%
75%
100%
n=469 (Edmonton Residents)



While safety, traffic and parking were listed as the highest concerns for respondents, safety was rated a higher concern among those who live outside of downtown (37%), compared to people who live downtown (33%).

Other concerns that were voiced included:

- A desire for safe, secure bike parking
- Parkade access being impeded
- Over-consumption of alcohol
- Pedestrian conflicts with open traffic on 100 A Street
- Excessive garbage/waste
- Environmental impact of single-use cups
- Required purchases to visit the space
- Displacement and over-policing of vulnerable community members

GBA+ Engagement

A GBA+ analysis was conducted as part of this engagement in order to ensure different views and experiences of members of the public were captured. Thoughtful consideration was given to those who are underrepresented to ensure barriers to participation are not being created with this project.

To assist in this, the Project Team met with an organization that works towards ending chronic homelessness in Edmonton and provides support in the Downtown neighborhood.

While no major concerns with this specific project were flagged, it was noted that public events can be challenging for people experiencing homelessness, as they might not feel welcome, or may be asked to leave.

What We Did

The survey results combined with our one-on-one stakeholder conversations will allow us to fine-tune the approach to the proposed District pilot in 2024. Here are some actions the Project Team is taking to address the feedback that was received.

Parking/Access Concerns:

- After initially planning for a Friday and Saturday operation of the District, the proposed pilot has been reduced to 13 Saturdays between June and August. This version of the project allows for reduced impacts on parking and vehicle access to the area.

Noise Concerns:

- The reduction of the proposed pilot to one night per week instead of two in order to reduce additional noise in the area.

Cleanliness of the Area:

- To enhance the area in preparation for the District, the City will be undertaking brick repairs on Rice Howard Way, adding more summer planters and taking care of other minor infrastructure improvements in the area.

What Happens Next

A report will go to the Community and Public Services Committee on April 29, followed by a reading at City Council on May 14 so that the bylaw can be formally amended. If the bylaw amendment is approved (and the subsequent proposed pilot), then the anticipated opening date for the District would be June 1, 2024.

The target dates for the District to operate during the proposed pilot are:

- June 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
- July 6, 13, 20, 27
- August 3, 10, 17, 24

In collaboration with the Edmonton Downtown Business Association and the on-site businesses, programming that reflects the interests of those in the area will be planned for each Saturday of the District activation.

A working group will be formed with representatives from relevant City departments and external stakeholders, including the businesses located in the District, to ensure collaboration and communication during the project.