



# Downtown Eastside Community Hubs

Engagement Summary

DTES Planning | Street Activities | Social Policy & Projects



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# 1.0 Introduction

The Downtown Eastside (DTES) is a neighbourhood with a consistently higher proportion of low income residents and a lower life expectancy than the rest of Vancouver. Many DTES residents are experiencing the impacts of multiple systemic barriers, including the overdose crisis, street homelessness, lack of access to social and cultural spaces, and gentrification pressures. In order to address these challenges, City Council approved the DTES Plan (2014) that sets out the policies and strategies needed to make the neighbourhood a more livable, safe and supportive place for all of its residents, particularly those facing systemic barriers.

Through engagement conducted in the DTES in the last three years, including the DTES Community Fair (2019) and as part of the City's COVID-19 Health Emergency Response, community members prioritized access to public spaces and amenities. Since 2020, staff from three different departments have collaborated to create temporary public parklets and are currently exploring a pilot to upgrade and transform these parklets into 'community hubs' in response to community priorities.

The following report provides an overview of community engagement completed between May and July 2021, where we gathered feedback from social service organizations, parklet users, and DTES residents on an initial five temporary public parklets identified as pilot sites. The report also presents the findings of a survey identifying infrastructure needs and demographic data to help the City with the design and implementation of upgrades.

Five social service organisations (or partners) assisted with engagement by providing input on the pilot program and helped implement a survey. Their work is sincerely appreciated. These organisations include:

- Kílala Lelum
- Evelyne Saller
- PHS Outpatient Clinic
- Union Gospel Mission
- Aboriginal Front Door

# 2.0 Background

The DTES Community Fair was held at the Vancouver Japanese Language School and Hall in 2019 to consult with residents and local organisations and groups on the implementation progress of the DTES Plan. At the Fair, community members expressed a desire for the creation of 'community hubs' due to the lack of safe public outdoor spaces for people to socialize and access services in the neighbourhood. Community members envision these community hubs as accessible, managed, programmed, safe places which provide a seating area, a shelter from the rain and sun, charging stations, utilities and lights, washrooms, information boards and planting. Council subsequently approved a budget of \$500,000 for the creation of community hubs to meet this priority requested by residents.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many community and social service organizations have had to adapt to public health orders, increasing the demand for outdoor spaces. In response to the community needs expressed at the DTES Community Fair and the pandemic, the City

collaborated with community partners to create 10 publicly accessible temporary parklets, as an interim measure, where residents) could socialize, feel welcome, and access programs and services. Three City groups: Street Activities (Engineering), Social Policy (Arts Culture Community Services) and DTES Planning (Planning, Urban Design, and Sustainability) partnered to create these temporary public parklets and provide support to non-profit organizations to steward the parklet connected to their organization.

Based on initial feedback, the City aims to pilot to create long-term public community hubs. These will enable non-profit organizations to continue to use the public space to offer services, such as food programs, and create outdoor community gathering spaces for residents to access needed amenities. The parklet outside the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre was the first parklet to be upgraded from temporary to permanent earlier in 2021 and provides an example of the kind upgrades that will be implemented as part of this initiative (Photo 1).

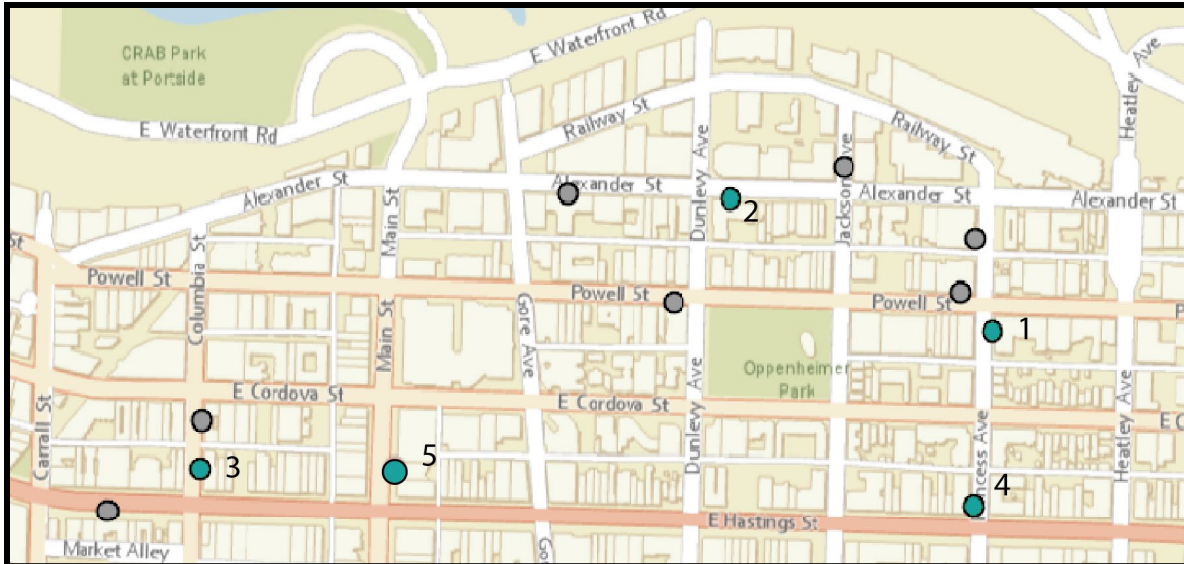


**Photo 1: The Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre parklet at 302 Columbia Street before (left) and after (right) upgrades.**

Five temporary public parklet locations were identified for initial upgrades (Table 1 and Map 1). Locations were selected based on: partner feedback and willingness to remain involved, hours of operation, geographic distribution, and by applying an equity and safety assessment.

**Table 1: Partner organizations and parklets selected for upgrades**

| <b>Parklet</b>                          | <b>Location</b>     | <b>Partner Organization</b> |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>1. Kílala Lelum</b>                  | Princess & Powell   | Kílala Lelum Health Centre  |
| <b>2. Evelyne Saller (new location)</b> | Dunlevy & Alexander | Evelyne Saller              |
| <b>3. PHS Outpatient Clinic</b>         | Columbia & Hastings | Portland Hotel Society      |
| <b>4. Union Gospel Mission</b>          | Princess & Hastings | Union Gospel Mission        |
| <b>5. Aboriginal Front Door</b>         | Main & Hastings     | Aboriginal Front Door       |



**Map 1: Location of the ten temporary public parklets and the five parklets designated for upgrades in the DTES (see Table 1, locations 1-5)**

The photos below represent two out of the five temporary public parklets selected for the pilot.



**Photo 2: Kílala Lelum at 220 Princess Street**



**Photo 3: Evelyne Saller at 320 Alexander Street**

## 3.0 Engagement Overview

An engagement plan was developed in collaboration with staff from Streets Activities, Social Policy & Projects and DTES Planning team. In the spring 2021, staff engaged with the aforementioned five partner organizations and residents to understand how the parklets were being used, assess the interest to transform them into community hubs, and understand infrastructure needs. The engagement was multi-faceted, providing the partner organizations and residents with a variety of ways to share their feedback.

## 3.1 Methods of Engagement

### 1. Parklet partner organizations 1-on-1 engagement

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Staff from Street Activities and DTES Planning team approached each of the partner organizations to collect feedback on how the parklets were supporting their activities; discuss their interest in continuing on as stewards of the spaces, and share the vision for the community hubs. Peer workers, hired by the partner organizations, were paid an honorarium at a living wage to conduct surveys with patrons of the parklets, in an effort to inform the upgrades.

### 2. DTES Newsletter and Community Notification

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The DTES Planning team distributes a newsletter to inform the community about the progress on implementing the DTES Plan, upcoming events, and other information of interest to residents. The most current community newsletter (May 2021) included an update to inform residents about the intention to upgrade five parklets. Additionally, a community notification email was shared via the DTES list serve (email list) to notify the community about the parklet improvements and request feedback.

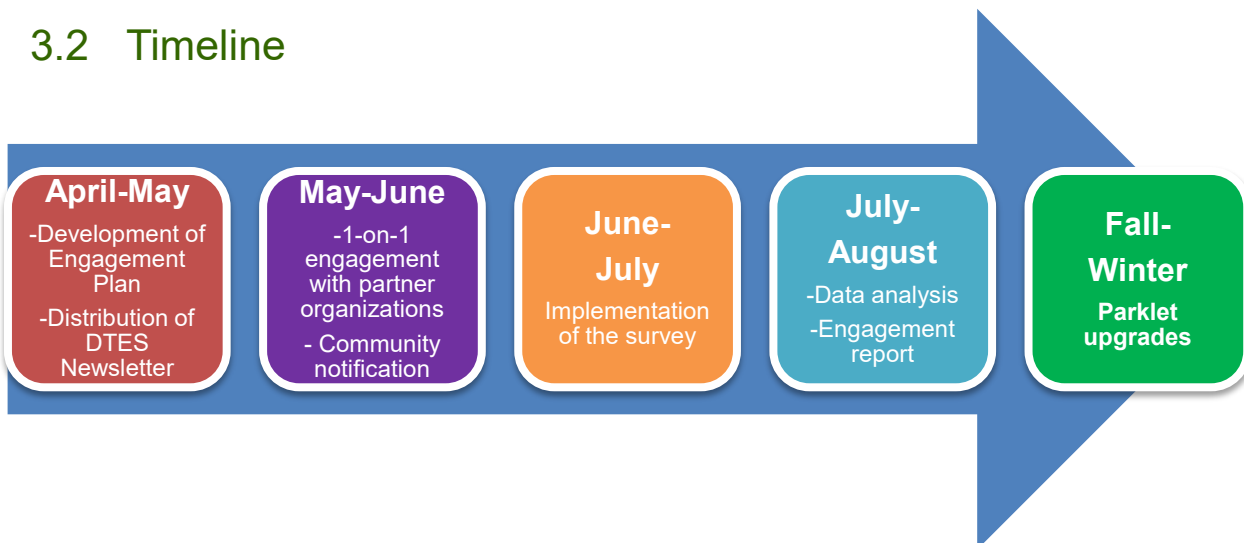
### 3. Survey of parklet patrons

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Based on the recommendations from the partner organizations, peers and staff working at the community hub sites conducted a survey with community members accessing the spaces. The implementation of the surveys included an honorarium at living wage for the peers, and the completed surveys were processed and analyzed by the DTES Planning team.

The surveys asked questions about the frequency of use, infrastructure gaps and needs, and demographic information to better understand who is, and is not, accessing the community hubs in an effort to make the hubs more accessible. Questions included both multiple-choice to allow respondents to choose answer(s) that best applied to them, and also open format to enable respondents to provide deeper insights.

## 3.2 Timeline



# 4.0 Highlights of Engagement

## 1. 1-on-1 Engagement with Partner Organizations

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- This engagement led to identifying **5** temporary public parklets for upgrades.
- Approximately **14** individuals (peers and staff) implemented roughly **25 surveys** per parklet.
- A total **122 patrons** responded to the survey.

## 2. DTES Newsletter and Community Notification

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The City reached more than 528 recipients. We received the feedback from five respondents summarized as follows:

- A respondent ***“would like to use these parklets when walking with my 3 year old granddaughter”*** but would like to be assured that they are ***“non-smoking places with no foul language”***.
- Another response noted the suggested improvements made them ***“happy”***.
- A respondent expressed that the idea was too ***“costly”***.
- A respondent asked not to ***“forget people without mental health or addiction”*** who live in the area.
- A respondent noted nowhere to go ***“outside to sit and use wifi.....almost no washrooms”*** near the Carnegie area.

## 3. Survey

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- The temporary public parklets are in **high** demand as many patrons use the parklets more than once a day (42%) or few times per week (35%).
- 60% of patrons **start their day** in the parklets.
- The parklets serve as places for **connecting: a place to sit** (56%), **a place to be with friends** (46%) and a place to **access services** (40%).
- The most needed amenities are **washrooms** (61%), **places to sit** (53%), and **rain and sun coverage** (50%).
- **Accessibility** is important as 51% of the respondents self-identified as having a **disability**.
- The parklets should be **inclusive and de-colonial**. 28% of the respondents self-identified as **Indigenous**, the most common ethnicity among the respondents.
- The parklets are an important space for residents: 89% of respondents live in the DTES and are **homeless**, living in an **SRO** or in **social housing**.

# 5.0 Survey Results

This section provides further detailed information on the results of the survey.

- Part 1 of the survey provides information on infrastructure needs, and respondents had the option to choose more than one response.
- Part 2 of the survey provide information on demographics. The demographic results include responses from four partner organizations. One organization opted out of asking this part of the survey. The community hubs survey is contained in the Appendix 1.

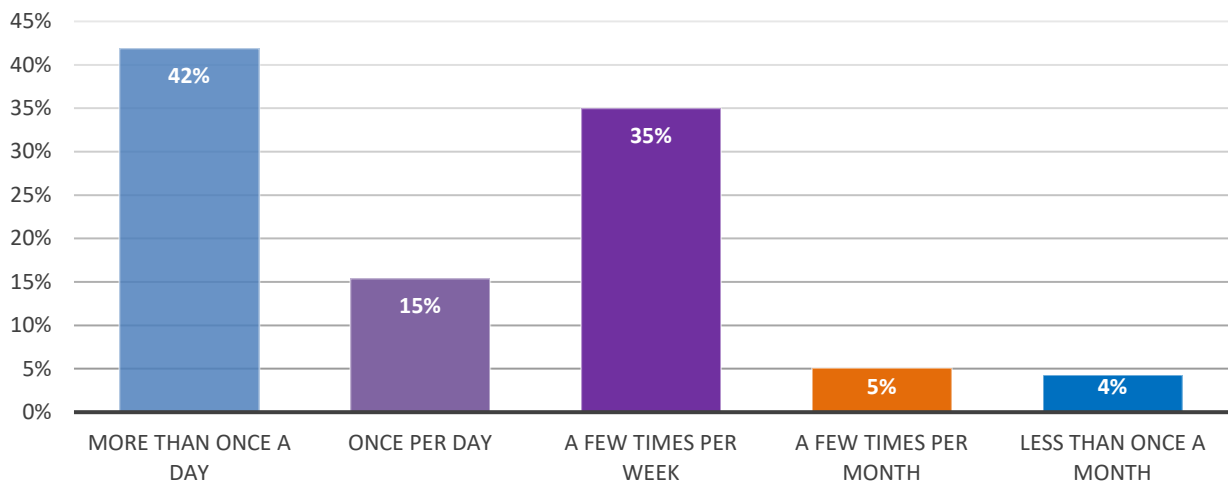
## 5.1 Part 1: Infrastructure

**Question 1:** On average, how often do you use the parklet?

### Snapshot

- Respondents most commonly use the parklet more than once a day (42%) or a few times per week (35%).

### Results



| Parklet               | More than once a day | Once per day | A few times per week | A few times per month | Less than once a month |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Kílala Lelum          | 27%                  | 20%          | 50%                  | 3%                    | 3%                     |
| New Evelyne Saller    | 33%                  | 21%          | 46%                  | 0                     | 0                      |
| PHS Outpatient Clinic | 50%                  | 10%          | 30%                  | 10%                   | 0                      |
| Union Gospel Mission  | 39%                  | 14%          | 21%                  | 14%                   | 14%                    |
| Aboriginal Front Door | 68%                  | 8%           | 24%                  | 0                     | 0                      |

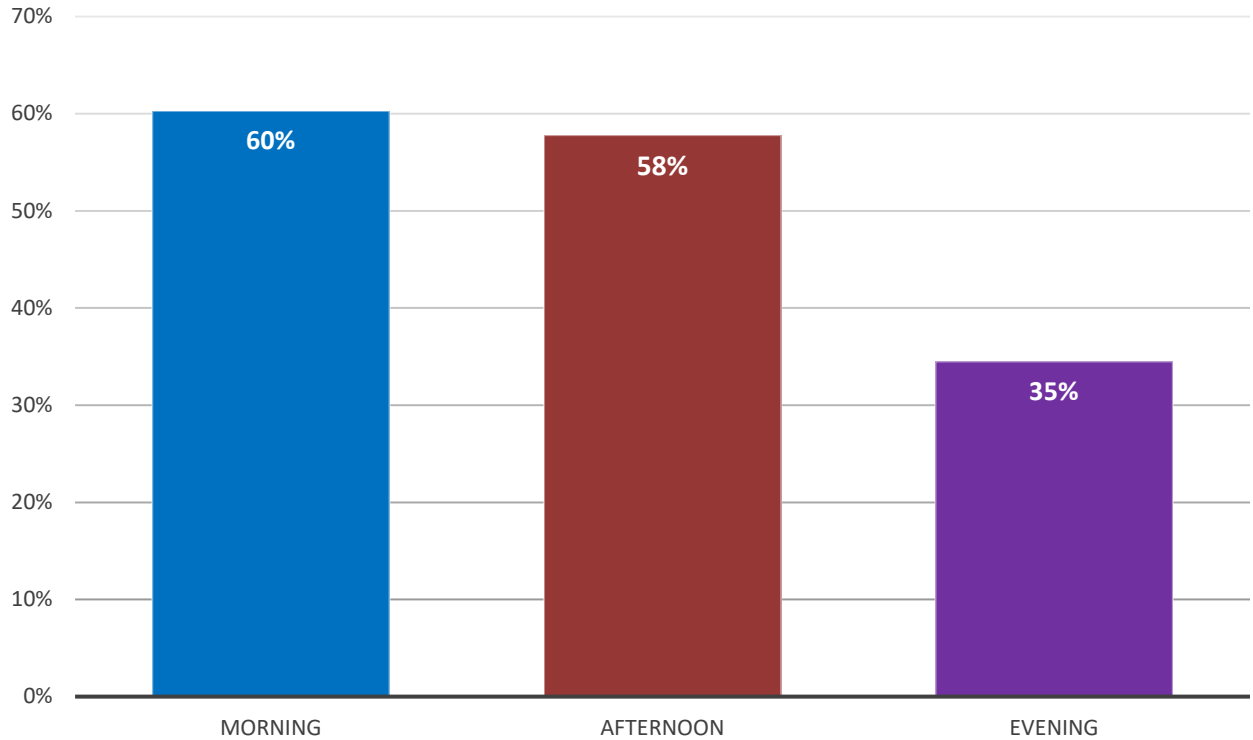


**Question 2:** What time of the day do you use the parklet?

**Snapshot**

- Respondents most commonly use the parklets in the morning (60%) or the afternoon (58%).

**Results**



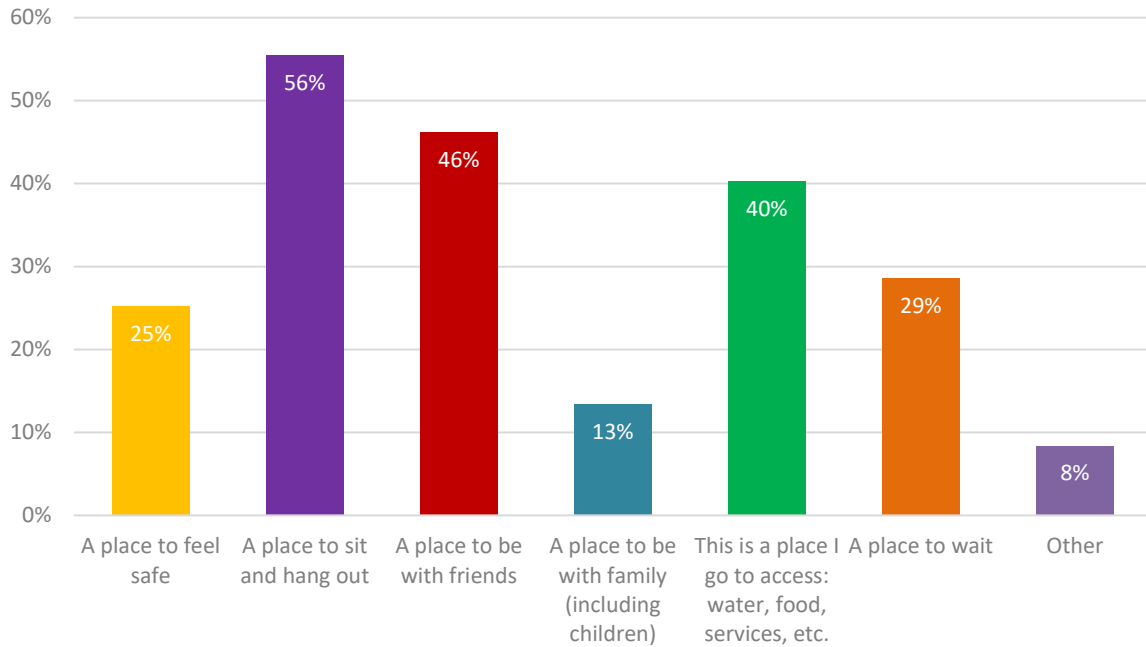
| Parklet               | Morning | Afternoon | Evening |
|-----------------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| Kilala Lelum          | 45%     | 62%       | 48%     |
| New Evelyne Saller    | 83%     | 63%       | 29%     |
| PHS Outpatient Clinic | 40%     | 60%       | 0       |
| Union Gospel Mission  | 56%     | 59%       | 56%     |
| Aboriginal Front Door | 69%     | 46%       | 15%     |

**Question 3:** How do you use the parklet?

**Snapshot**

- The respondents' most common uses of the parklets are: a place to sit (56%), a place to be with friends (46%) and a place to access services (40%).

**Results**



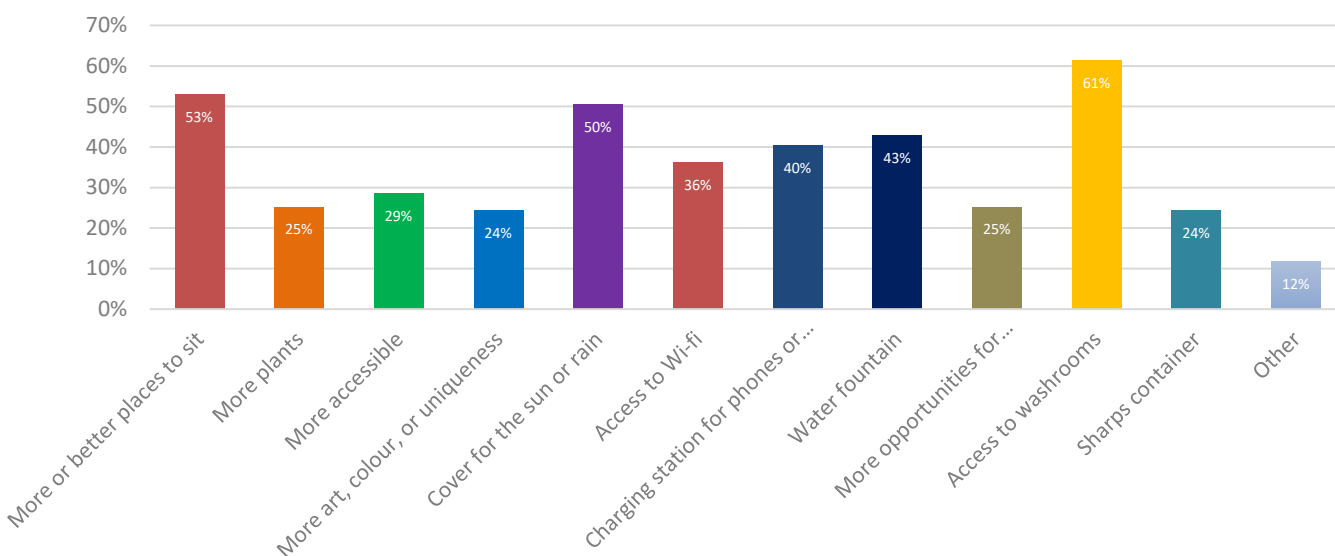
| Parklet                                            | Kílala Lelum | New Evelyne Saller | PHS Outpatient Clinic | Union Gospel Mission | Aboriginal Front Door |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>A place to feel safe</b>                        | 20%          | 38%                | 9%                    | 32%                  | 19%                   |
| <b>A place to sit &amp; hang out</b>               | 73%          | 29%                | 73%                   | 54%                  | 54%                   |
| <b>A place to be with friends</b>                  | 57%          | 58%                | 64%                   | 43%                  | 19%                   |
| <b>A place to be with family</b>                   | 27%          | 4%                 | 18%                   | 14%                  | 4%                    |
| <b>A place to access food, water services, etc</b> | 30%          | 38%                | 9%                    | 50%                  | 58%                   |
| <b>A place to wait</b>                             | 43%          | 8%                 | 18%                   | 43%                  | 19%                   |
| <b>Other</b>                                       | 17%          | 8%                 | 0                     | 11%                  | 0                     |

**Question 4:** Overtime, the City hopes to improve this space. How can the City make the parklet more welcoming to you? Is there anything that you would like to see in the space?

**Snapshot**

- The most common requests for space improvements are: more access to washrooms (61%), more or better places to sit (53%), and cover for the sun or rain (50%).

**Results:**



| Responses by parklet                              | Kilala Lelum | New Evelyn Saller | PHS Outpatient Clinic | Union Gospel Mission | Aboriginal Front Door |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| More or better places to sit                      | 39%          | 54%               | 70%                   | 61%                  | 54%                   |
| More plants                                       | 32 %         | 13%               | 10%                   | 43%                  | 15%                   |
| More accessible                                   | 42%          | 13%               | 40%                   | 25%                  | 27%                   |
| More art                                          | 45%          | 4%                | 10%                   | 29%                  | 19%                   |
| Cover for the sun or rain                         | 71%          | 41%               | 70%                   | 46%                  | 31%                   |
| Access to Wi-fi                                   | 65%          | 25%               | 40%                   | 32%                  | 15%                   |
| Charging station                                  | 68%          | 33%               | 10%                   | 32%                  | 35%                   |
| Water fountain                                    | 45%          | 21%               | 50%                   | 61%                  | 39%                   |
| More opportunities for socializing or programming | 39%          | 21%               | 0                     | 29%                  | 19%                   |
| Access to washrooms                               | 71%          | 33%               | 60%                   | 75%                  | 62%                   |
| Sharps container                                  | 39%          | 8%                | 0                     | 39%                  | 15%                   |
| Other                                             | 13%          | 17%               | 0                     | 21%                  | 0                     |

**Question 5:** Are there any other comments you would like to share about improving the parklet?

**Responses:**

"Access to washrooms 24/7  
Thanks - appreciate it!"

"Keep it, it's great"

"Emphatically leave it how it is!"

"Power wash more often, table  
clothes, eat when cold"

"Less grumpy people activity,  
additional outreach workers,  
more info on recovery job,  
training opportunities"

"Free coffee + cold water"

"I wish people who use hard  
drug not sit outside and use at  
these tables because of this  
being a family building. Plus no  
graffiti also."

"More chairs please. How would  
they maintain washroom  
facilities?"

"More police present patrolling  
on feet"

"Would like to watch a TV or  
monitor showing positiveness"

"More tents"

"Closer to the building to avoid  
traffic. Clear marking on pylons  
with reflective material better  
lighting at night."

"This little parklet is in front of  
my home"

"Umbrellas for shade / rain hose  
for clean up"

"Love the benches to sit at. Not  
many places to sit around this  
building. Usually sit out to have  
a cig."

"We need our benches back"

"Put another garbage there  
'cause food containers  
overflow..."

"Bingo at the parklet"

## 5.2 Part 2: Demographics

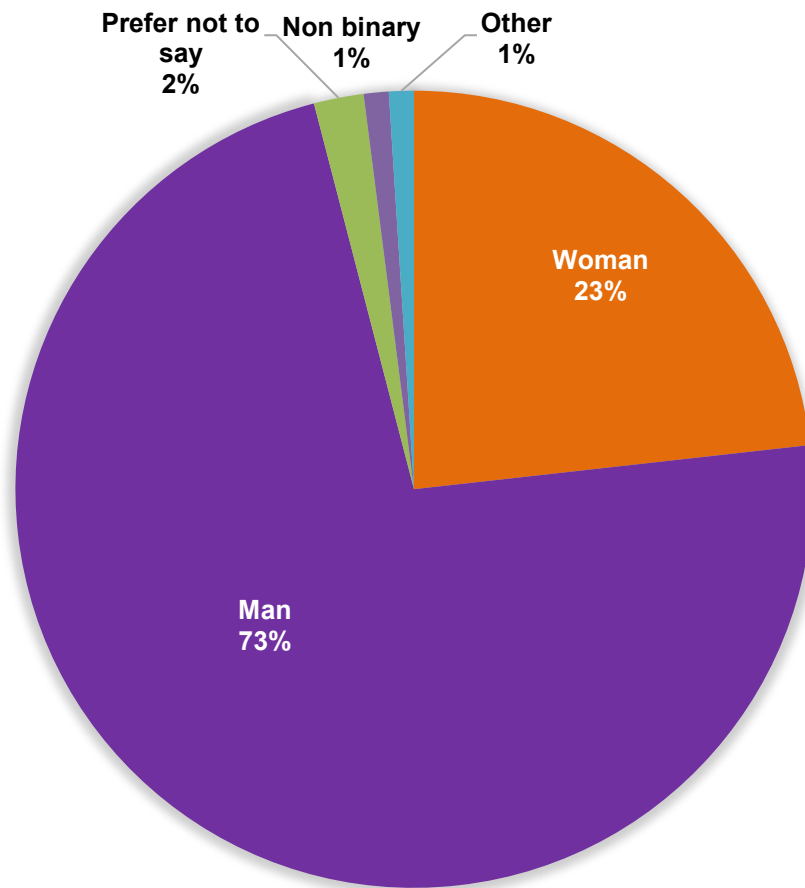
### **Question 6:** What is your gender identity?

#### **Snapshot**

- Most respondents (73%) surveyed identified as men.
- The exception was the PHS Outpatient Clinic where most respondents identified as women (91%).

#### **Results:**

86 responses in total



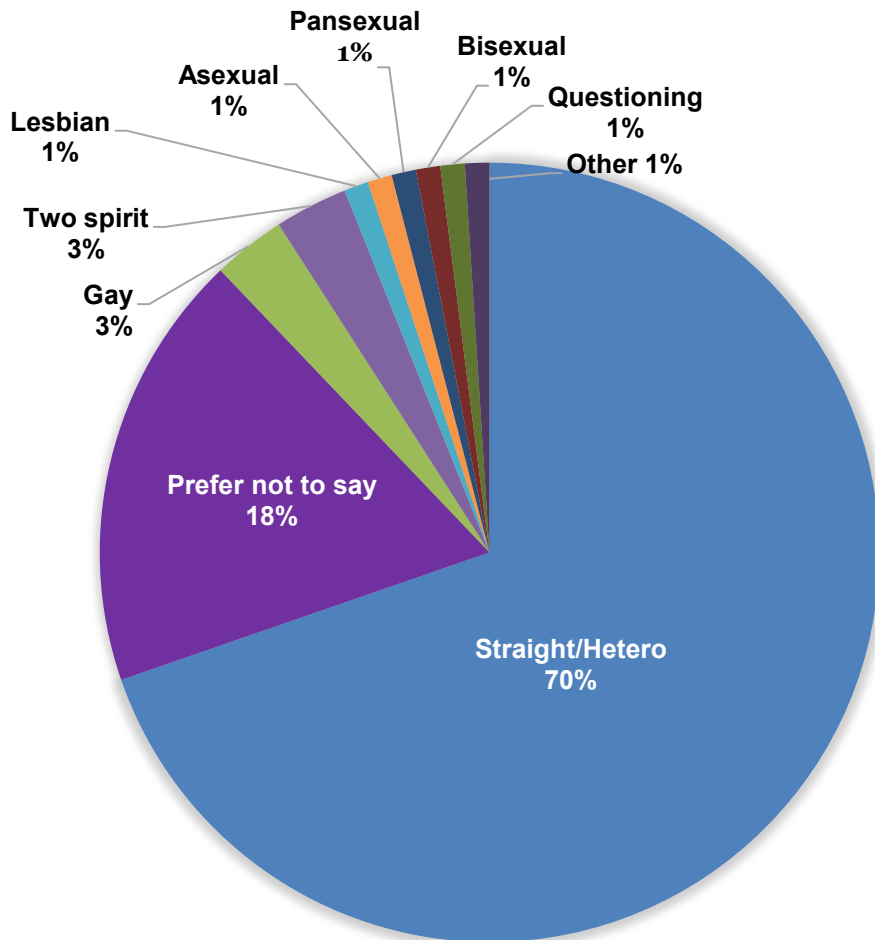
**Question 7:** What is your sexual orientation?

**Snapshot**

- Most respondents identified as straight or heterosexual (70%), with a significant proportion of respondents identifying as 2SLGBTQI+ (12%)
- The exception was the Aboriginal Front Door where most respondents preferred not to share their sexual orientation (56%).

**Results:**

74 responses in total



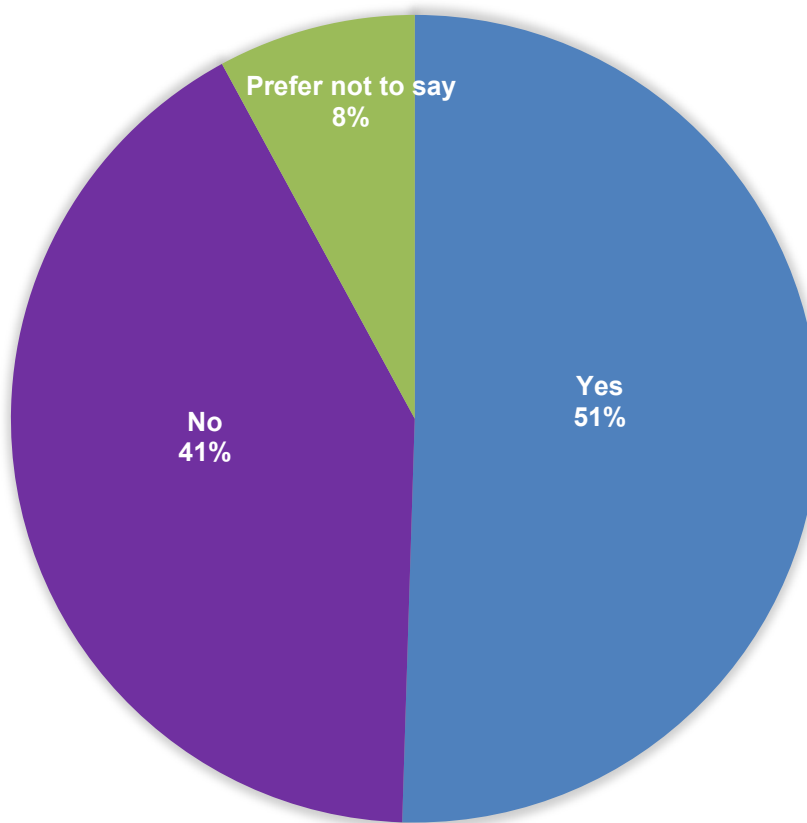
**Question 8:** Do you identify as a person with a disability?

**Snapshot**

- A slight majority of respondents identified as having a disability (51%).
- The exception was the Aboriginal Front Door (62%) where a majority of respondents identified as not having a disability.

**Results:**

79 responses in total



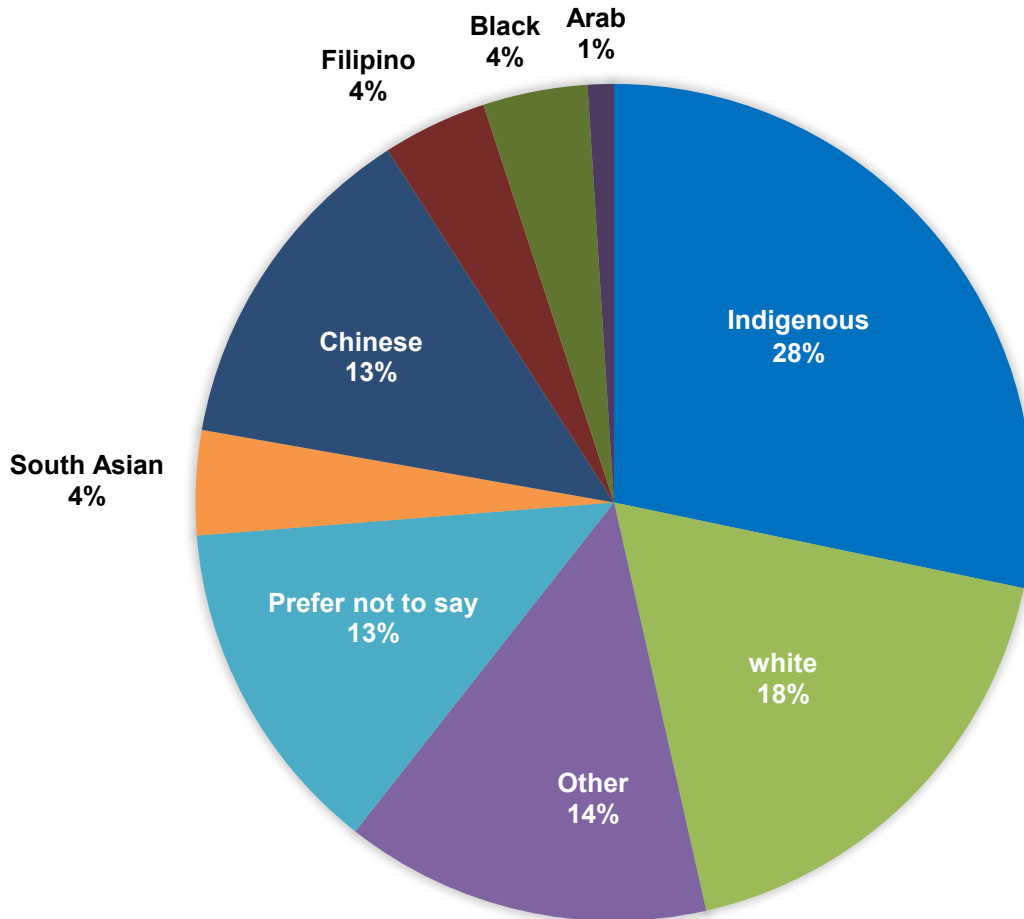
**Question 9:** How would you describe your ethno cultural/ racial identity?

**Snapshot**

- The most common ethno cultural/racial identity was Indigenous (28%), followed by white (18%), other -not specified (14%), Chinese (13%) or 'prefer not to say' (13%).
- Two exceptions: PHS Outpatient Clinic parklet patrons most commonly identified as Chinese (50%) and the Union Gospel Mission parklet patrons most commonly identified as white (40%).

**Results:**

78 responses in total





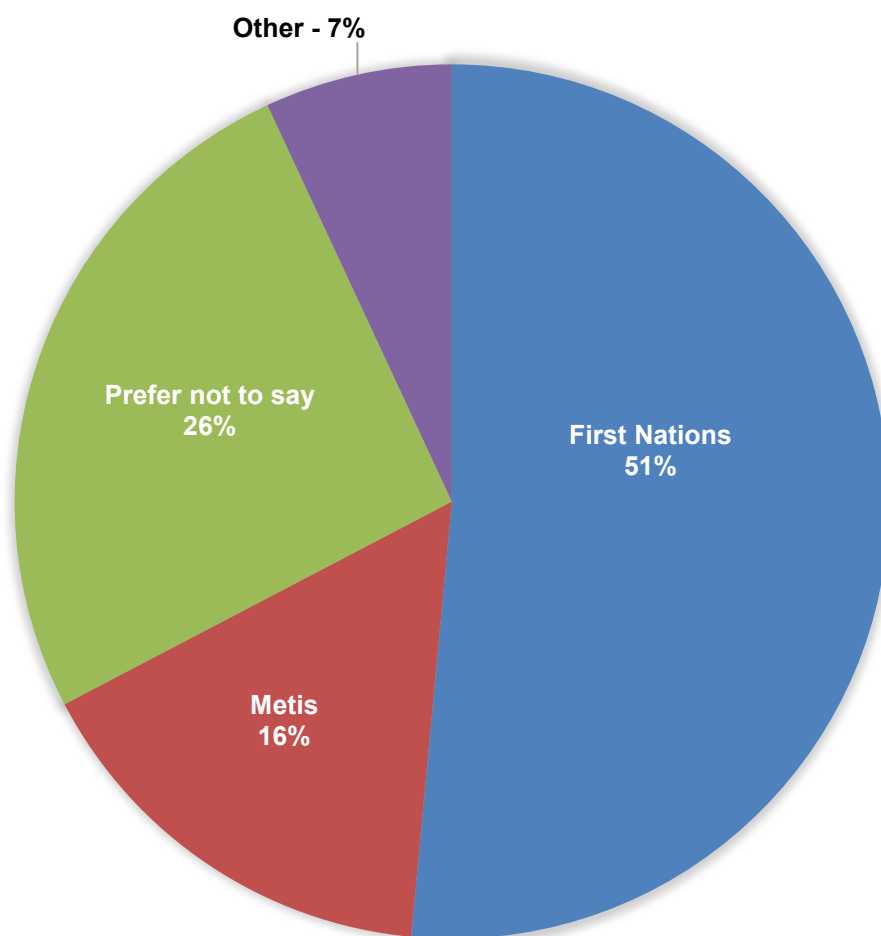
**Question 10:** If you identify as an Indigenous person, do you identify as:

**Snapshot**

- From the total of respondents who are Indigenous, a slight majority identified as First Nations (51%).

**Results:**

31 responses in total



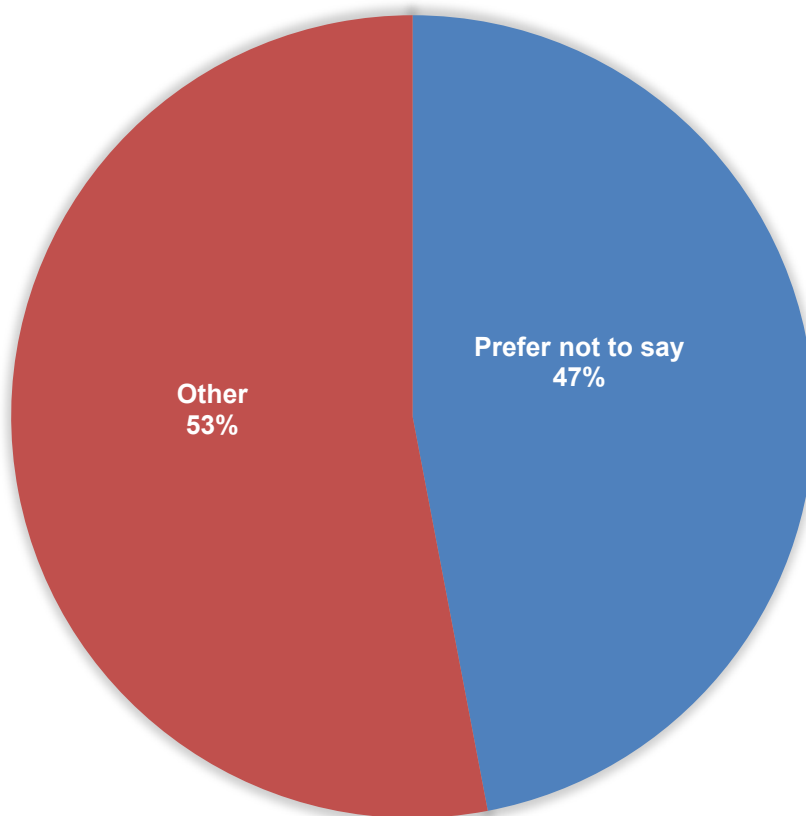
**Question 10 a:** Which Nation(s) are you from? (Please write in Nation)

### **Snapshot**

- The slight majority of respondents who were First Nations identified as “Other” (53%). Some common written in examples include: Ojibway or Cree.
- 47% of the respondents chose not to say which Nation they are from.

### **Results:**

15 responses in total



**Question 11:** What is your age?

**Snapshot**

- Respondents were in the mid age range: the median age range of respondents were consistent across the five parklets at 53 years old.

**Results:**

70 responses in total

|                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Median age</b> | <b>53 years</b> |
| Minimum age       | 30 years        |
| Maximum age       | 64 years        |

**Question 12:** What area do you live in?

**Snapshot**

- Most respondents live in the DTES (88%), with 48% identifying their specific sub areas and 39% identifying the area where they live as the “DTES”
- Only 12% of respondents live outside the DTES.

**Results:**

Total of 74 responses

| <b>Areas within the DTES:</b> | <b>88%</b> | <b>Areas outside the DTES:</b> | <b>12%</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| • DTES                        | 39%        | • Outside DTES                 | 3%         |
| • Gastown                     | 17%        | • Homeless                     | 1%         |
| • Chinatown                   | 11%        | • Close to 60th                | 1%         |
| • Strathcona                  | 8%         | • 59th Ave, Street             | 1%         |
| • Oppenheimer                 | 7%         | • Homer Street                 | 1%         |
| • Main and Hastings           | 3%         | • Terminal / Main St           | 1%         |
| • Victory Square              | 1%         | • Thornton Park                | 1%         |
| • Hastings                    | 1%         | • Upper East Vancouver         | 1%         |
| • UGM shelter                 | 1%         | • All areas                    | 1%         |
|                               |            | • Playland                     | 1%         |

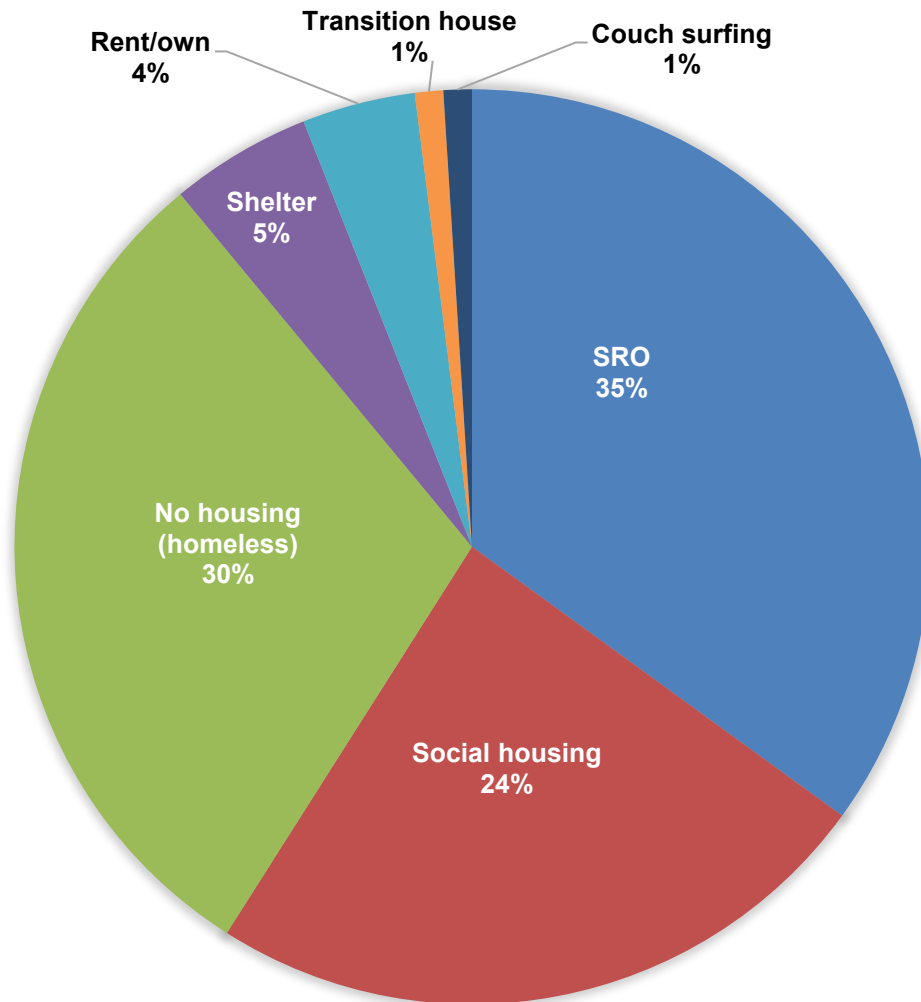
**Question 13:** What best describes your current housing situation?

**Snapshot**

- The parklet patrons most commonly identified as living in a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) (35%), no housing (30%) or social housing (24%).
- The one exception was that the majority of the PHS Outpatient Clinic parklet patrons who live in an SRO (64%).

**Results:**

Total of 83 responses



## 6.0 Conclusion

The engagement solidified ongoing partnership with organizations who steward the temporary public parklets and ensure they are serving the needs of the patrons. Community notification input demonstrates that interested community members are receptive to these parklets and encouraged the City to create more spaces where everyone can feel welcomed regardless of the condition.

This initial survey has demonstrated that the parklet patrons are looking for spaces to connect with community and access basic amenities, such as washrooms and sheltering from the weather. Since many are experiencing homelessness or live in small spaces such as SROs, and it is still unsafe to gather indoors due to Covid-19, **the parklets serve as essential public spaces**. Additionally, the demographic results indicate the opportunity for further, more targeted, engagement with those community members who may not access the parklet spaces. Next steps could include:

- Continued prioritization for culturally specific programming led by and for Indigenous community members
- Ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities is a priority for all community hubs.
- Further engagement with agencies addressing gender based violence to better action the needs of people of marginalized genders in accessing parklets. Explore how safety is being addressed in all of the parklets, and specifically learn from those hubs that are primarily accessed by women, non binary, gender diverse and Two Spirit people. How can these approaches be applied to all of the parklets?
- Further engagement to address the gap in family friendly parklets that children and their caregivers can access

Staff is currently in the process of designing and building the materials -railings, platforms, planters, barriers and more - that should be installed in the fall 2021 and winter 2022. Staff will work in the coming months to bring critical infrastructure to each parklet based on the survey results. Staff intend to explore the transformation of other temporary public parklets into community hubs in 2022, subject to the availability of additional resources and partner organisations willing to provide ongoing stewardship support to patrons.

## Appendix I: Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! The City is interested in your experience using the parklet. This is part of an evaluation to help us understand how we can improve parklets over time. The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes. It will be confidential and your name will not be used anywhere. **By completing this survey, you are giving permission for your responses to be used in the evaluation report. Thank you for your time.**

Location: (please check one):  Aboriginal Front Door  Kílala Lelum  New Evelyne Saller  
 PHS Outpatient Clinic  Union Gospel Mission

### PART 1: Survey Questions

1. On average, how often do you use the parklet? (Check all that apply)
- More than once a day  A few times per week  
 Once per day  A few times per month  
 Less than once a month

2. What time of the day do you use the parklet? (Check all that apply)
- Morning  Afternoon  Evening

3. How do you use the parklet? (Check all that apply)

- A place to feel safe (e.g. from substance use, violence, harassment, etc.)  This is a place I go to access: water, food, services, etc.  
 A place to sit and hang out  A place to wait c.)  
 A place to be with friends  Other: (please share your reasons below)  
 A place to be with family (including children)

4. Overtime, the City hopes to improve this space. How can the City make the parklet more welcoming to you? Is there anything that you would like to see in the space? (Check all that apply)

- More or better places to sit  Charging station for phones or scooters  
 More plants (rather than planters)  Water fountain  
 More accessible (e.g. flush with sidewalk, better ramps, etc.)  More opportunities for socializing or programming  
 More art, colour, or uniqueness  Access to washrooms  
 Cover for the sun or rain  Sharps container  
 Access to wi-fi  Other (please specify):

5. Is there any other comments you would like to share about improving the parklet? (Comment below)

## PART 2: Socio-Demographic Information

Please tell us a little bit about who you are. We want to make sure we've included a diversity of experiences in the evaluation.  
**This information is confidential and will not be used to identify you.**

|                                                                                                                                                               |                                                  |                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Woman                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary                                                         |
| <b>6. What is your gender identity?</b>                                                                                                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Man                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say       | _____                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Straight/Hetero         | <input type="checkbox"/> Bisexual <input type="checkbox"/> Two Spirit                       |
| <b>7. What is your sexual orientation?</b>                                                                                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lesbian                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Pansexual <input type="checkbox"/> Queer                           |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Gay                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Asexual <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning                       |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                                       |
| <b>8. Do you identify as a person living with a disability?</b>                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes                     | <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say                      |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Arab                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> West Asian                       |
| <b>9. How would you describe your ethnocultural/racial identity? (Please check all that apply)</b>                                                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Black                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean <input type="checkbox"/> White                              |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese                 | <input type="checkbox"/> South Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____ |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Filipino                | _____                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous              | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say _____                                            |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> First Nations           | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say _____                                            |
| <b>10. If you identify as an Indigenous person, do you identify as:</b>                                                                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Inuit                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Metis                   | _____                                                                                       |
| <i>Which Nation(s) are you from? (Please write in)</i>                                                                                                        | _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |                                                                                             |
| <b>11. What is your age? (Please write in)</b>                                                                                                                | _____                                            |                                                                                             |
| <b>12. What area do you live in? (e.g. Gastown, Chinatown, Oppenheimer, Strathcona, Victory Square, Thornton Park, outside of the DTES) (Please write in)</b> | _____                                            |                                                                                             |
| <b>13. What best describes your current housing situation?</b>                                                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> SRO                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Couch surfing <input type="checkbox"/> Rent/own                    |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Social housing          | <input type="checkbox"/> Transition house <input type="checkbox"/> Other                    |
|                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> No housing              | <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter _____                                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                               | (homeless)                                       | _____                                                                                       |

**Thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughts today!**