

RAILTOWN AREA PLAN

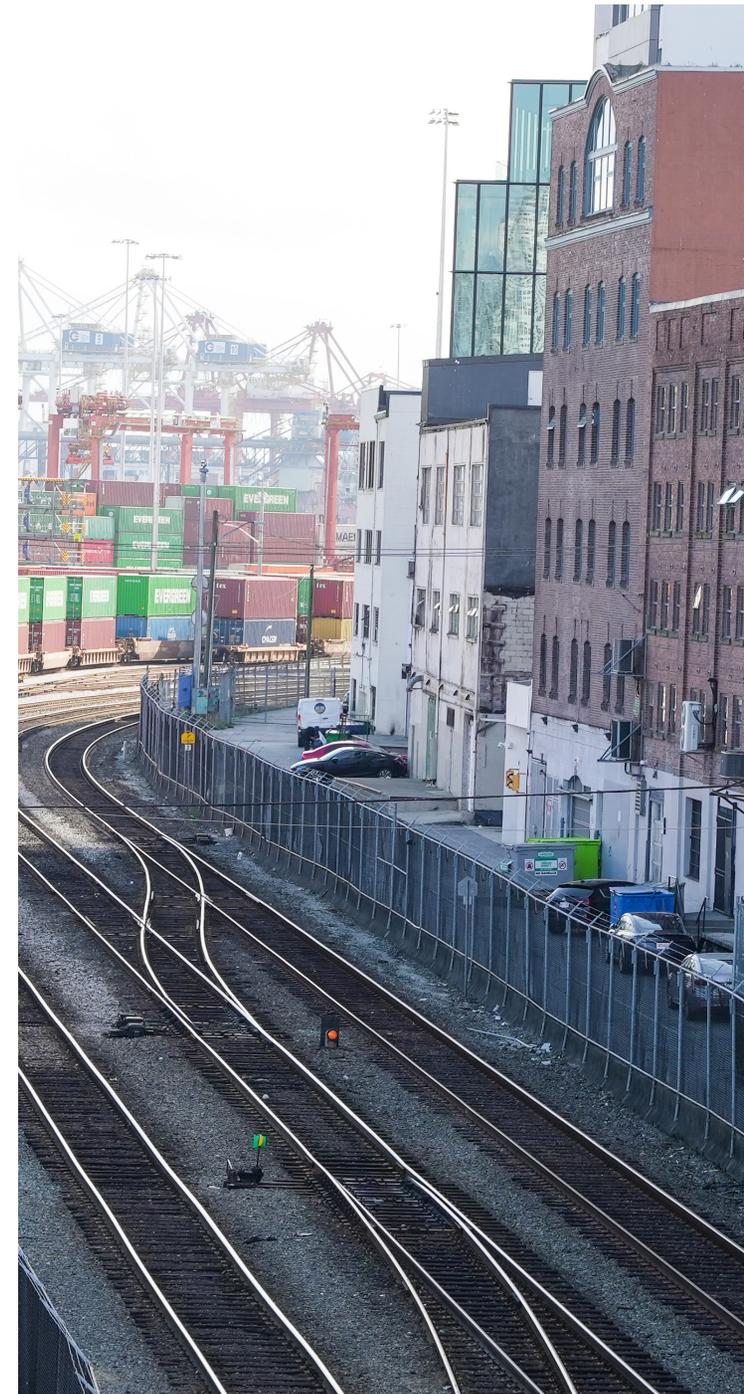
ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Identifying Challenges and Opportunities

March 2026

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Land Acknowledgement

The City of Vancouver acknowledges it is on the unceded and ancestral territory of the hən̓q̓əmi̓əŋ and Skwxwú7mesh speaking peoples, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nation), and has been inhabited and stewarded by them since time immemorial.

Through the Railtown area planning program and its implementation, we will work with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations to align and advance the City's commitment to Reconciliation.

Musqueam Indian Band:

musqueam.bc.ca

Squamish Nation:

squamish.net

Tsleil-Waututh Nation:

twnation.ca

Project Overview

The City of Vancouver is developing an Area Plan for Railtown following Council direction to explore potential zoning changes and options for mixed-use development. Staff are assessing ideas to support a thriving neighbourhood, including more flexible spaces for businesses and opportunities for housing.

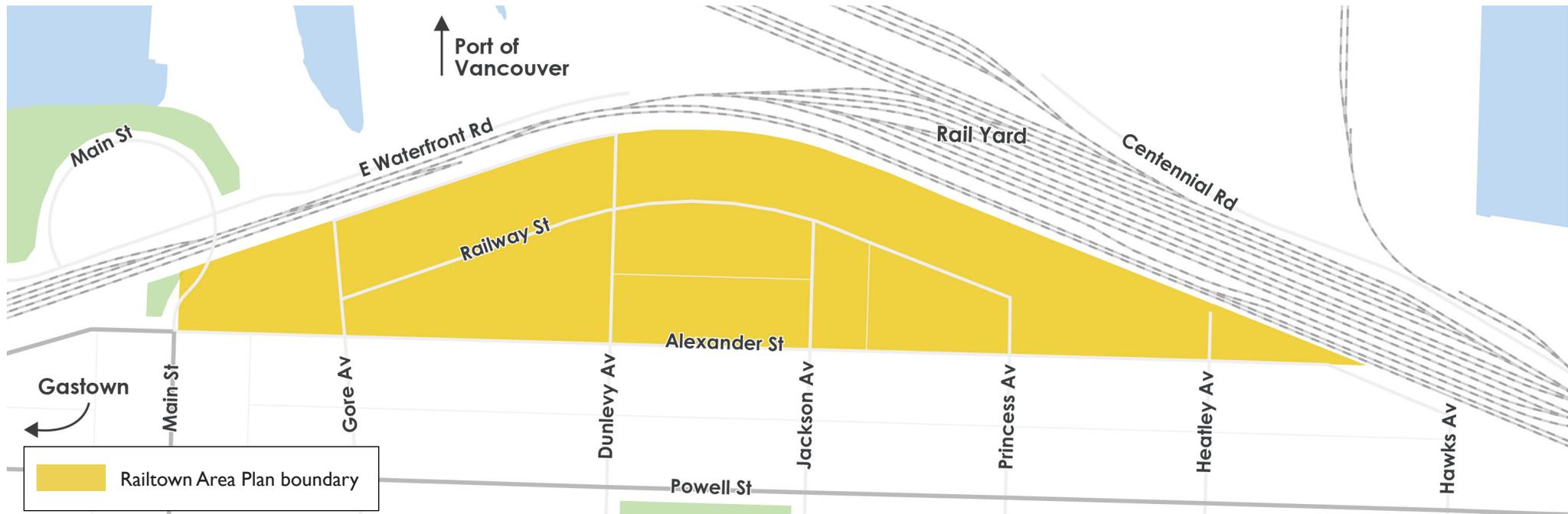
Initial community engagement took place in fall–winter 2025 to identify Railtown’s strengths, challenges, and opportunities. This feedback, together with technical analysis, will inform the policy directions of the Area Plan and guide the future of Railtown.

Project Timeline



Area Plan Boundary

Railtown is located in the Downtown Eastside, on the north side of Alexander St and east of Main St. It is adjacent to the Port of Vancouver and the rail yard.



Engagement Process

This report outlines the feedback gathered during the initial phase of engagement. Activities included an online survey, community outreach, and focused meetings with interest holders, conducted both in person and online. Additional input was received through the dedicated email address for the Railtown Area Plan.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

In fall-winter 2025, staff provided several opportunities for the public to learn about the project scope and share how they use Railtown, along with the challenges and opportunities they see for the area. This input will help staff understand the community's priorities for the Area Plan.

Interested Partners

Staff held one-on-one meetings with representatives from not-for-profit organizations, service providers, local businesses, Business Improvement Areas, and public agencies.

Community Outreach

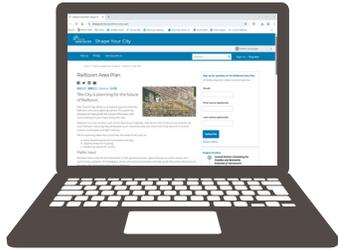
Two pop-up engagement events were held at the Carnegie Community Centre and the Evelyn Saller Centre.

Survey

An online survey on the Shape Your City platform was available from November 12 to December 3, 2025. The survey link was shared by email with community partners, on posters, and on the City's social media channels.



Overview of Engagement Activities



3,000+
website visits
the website was translated into
4 languages



389
postcards mailed
to 115 businesses and
274 residences



2
pop up events
with over 100 visitors



575
survey responses



20
meetings with
interested partners

Feedback from Interested Partners

Throughout the engagement period, staff met with representatives from not-for-profit organizations, service providers, public agencies, local businesses, Business Improvement Areas and Residents Associations, who have an interest or operate in and around Railtown. Representatives from these interested partners provided verbal and written feedback. Staff reached out broadly to community contacts, and those who participated are listed below. During these conversations, staff also asked whether there were additional individuals or groups who should be contacted.

Who we engaged with

- All Nations Outreach Society
- Canadian National Railway
- Community Coordinated Research network
- Community Impact Real Estate Society
- Eastside Arts Society
- Exchange Inner City
- Gastown Residents Association
- Hastings Crossing BIA
- John Steil Artist Studio
- Port of Vancouver
- Powell Street Festival Society
- Railway Association of Canada
- Railtown Coalition
- South Shore Community Liaison Committee
- Strathcona BIA
- Strathcona Residents Association
- TransLink
- Urban Development Institute
- Vancouver Coastal Health
- Vancouver Japanese Language School and Japanese Hall

WHAT WE HEARD

The following themes and bullet points represent a high-level summary of conversations with interested partners. Key themes and bullet points are presented in no particular order.

Key Themes

PROTECT JOB SPACE

- Create mixed use projects that retain employment space and ensure no net loss.
- Create low-barrier employment opportunities
- Retain and attract small businesses, small cafes and niche retail stores.
- Create spaces that are flexible and can be used by a range of businesses.

MARKET CONDITIONS

- Vacancies exist in both new and old buildings.
- The area is attractive to small start up type businesses because the rent is often cheaper than elsewhere.

“Railtown has high vacancy rates and a decline in business licenses.”

PRESERVE HERITAGE AND CHARACTER

- Preserve the uniqueness and creativity of the area.
- Retain the look and feel of Railway Street.

ENVIRONMENT

- Noise, physical safety and air quality concerns from the proximity to rail, the port and the roads.

IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVE SECTOR

- Increase affordable spaces for artists.
- New public art to draw people in.
- New spaces are too expensive for artists, consider ways of supporting artists and designers.

SENSE OF SAFETY

- The area is quiet after 5pm and can feel uncomfortable after dark.
- Supports for peer led street de-escalation.

“High crime and safety concerns...leads to business losses and public safety issues.”

DIVERSITY OF HOUSING

- Diversity of housing is needed, there is a lot of social housing in this area.
- Residential uses might improve the area, but it should be low to moderate income housing.
- Any new housing must serve the needs of DTES community.

PUBLIC REALM CONSIDERATIONS

- Improve street lighting.
- Enhance street cleaning.

“Public realm that is animated, attractive, available to all and safe.”

IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESS

- Limited parking for residents, workers and visitors in the area.
- The walkability of the area and connectivity between Railtown and other areas needs improving.

FLEXIBILITY OF ZONING

- The current zoning is incompatible with market demand.
- Employment space zoning is needed in Railtown.
- Industrial zoning restricts creative business and restaurant growth.

WHAT WE HEARD

The following summarizes the comments we received at Carnegie Hall and Evelyne Saller Centre.

What do you like about Railtown?



There's a lot of love here, everyone helps each other

The culture and creativity

Easy access on the bus

What do you want to see more of in Railtown?



Community support for people who need it

More lockers and shower facilities

Public washrooms

Extend DEOD zoning to Railtown

More low income housing

Co-op housing

More employment space

More restaurants

Maintain the first floor of housing for commercial uses

More parks and outdoor space for children

Parks with recreational equipment

More street lighting

Cleaner streets and garbage bins

Outdoor seating

Survey

Staff conducted an online survey on the Shape Your City platform from November 12 to December 3, 2025 to gather community feedback on the use of Railtown, including its strengths, challenges, and future opportunities. The survey link was shared by email with community partners, on posters, and on the City's social media channels.

The survey was offered in English with translation support available through 3-1-1. Residents, businesses, employees, and others who spend time in Railtown were invited to participate.

In total, we received 575 responses and more than 1,400 written comments.

1,045
survey views

575
survey responses

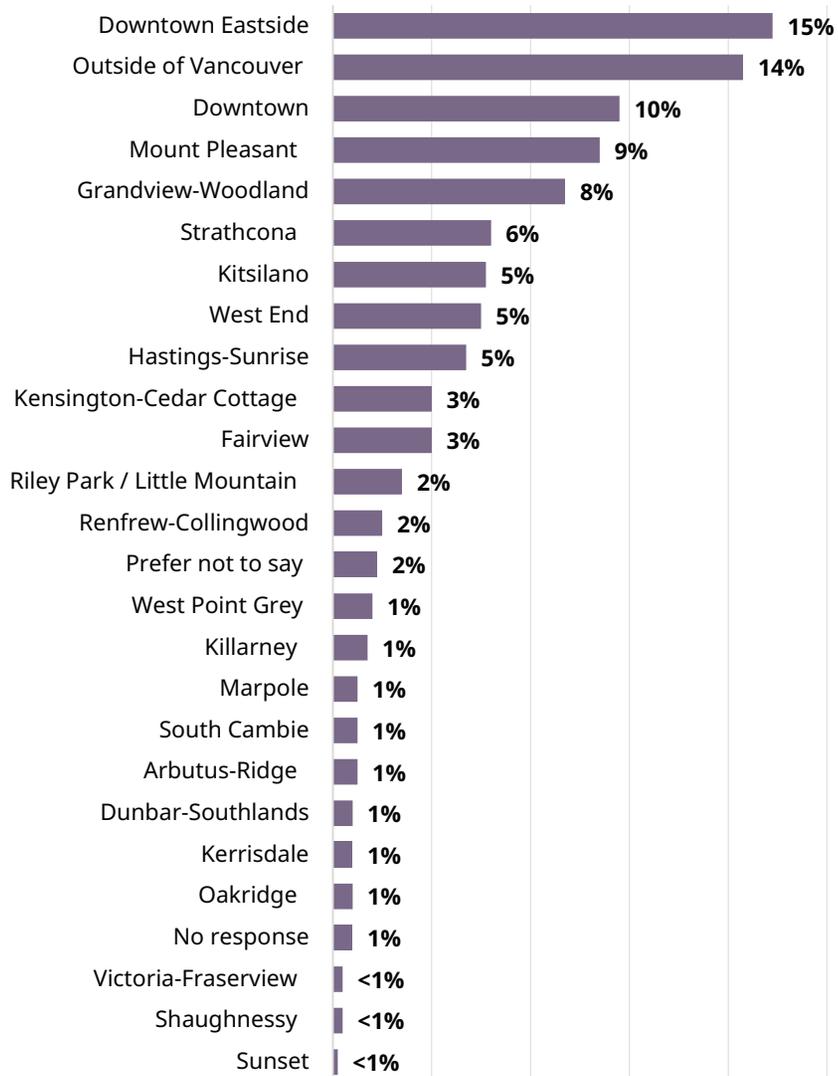
1,400+
comments



WHO WE HEARD FROM

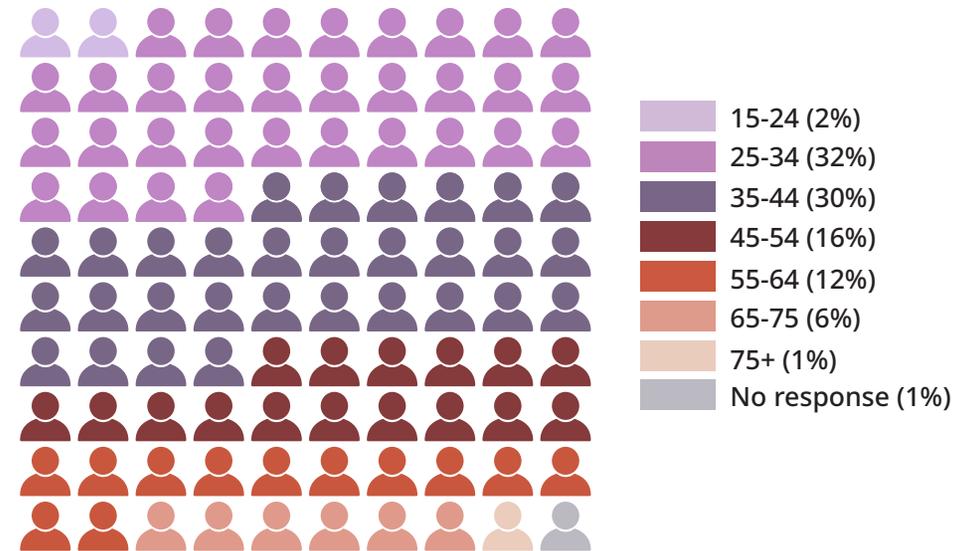
Where do you live?

85% of survey respondents live in Vancouver and 14% live outside Vancouver. 1% of respondents skipped this question.

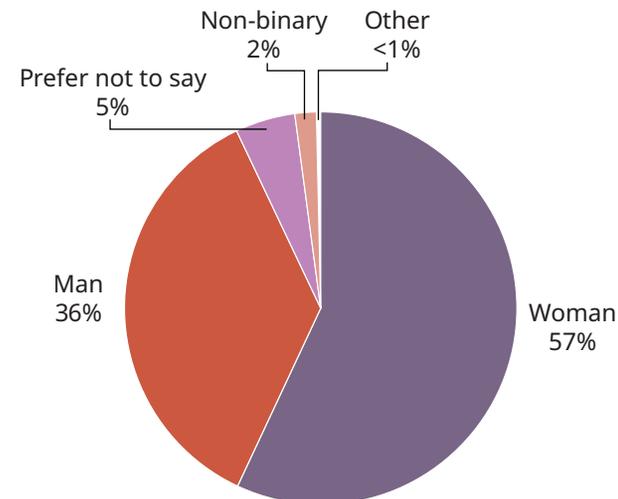


What is your age group?

Majority of survey respondents were between the ages of 25-44 (62%).



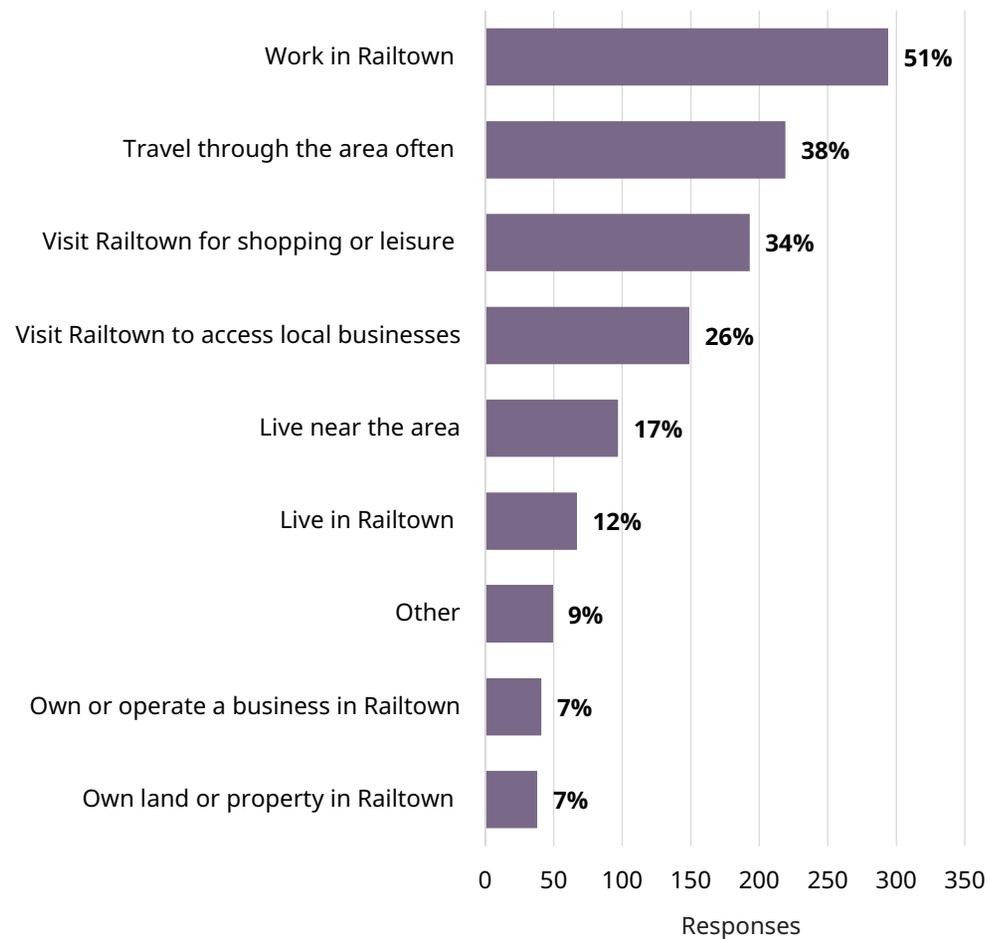
What is your gender identity?



WHAT WE HEARD

What is your relationship to Railtown?

This was a multiple choice question and respondents (n=575) could select all that apply:



9% of respondents selected “other”. Key themes included:

Community Participation including attendance at Japanese Language School classes, involvement in events, and volunteering.

Cultural and Historical Connections including visiting Japantown and attending religious ceremonies.

Personal Connections including previously living in Railtown and visiting friends who live/work in the area.

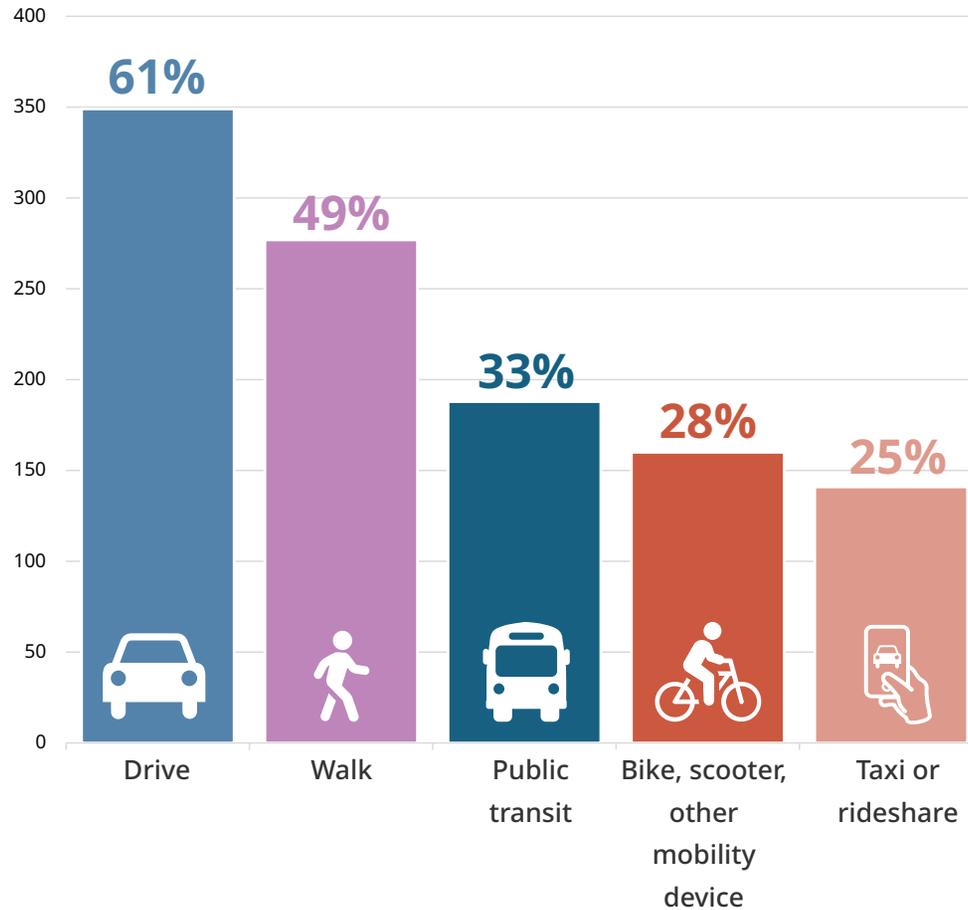
“*I take weekly language classes at the Vancouver Japanese Language School. I also regularly attend their community events.*”

It is a part of my community's history.

I lived in railtown until recently, and may do so again in the future.

How do you access Railtown?

This was a multiple choice question and respondents (n=571) could select all that apply:



What do you like about Railtown?

This was an open-ended question. Respondents (n=477) shared a variety of things they like about Railtown, often discussing multiple topics:

CURRENT LAND USES

- Commercial and retail uses
- Artistic spaces
- Industrial land use
- Office space
- Housing
- Overall diversity in uses



CHARACTER

- Heritage architecture
- General vibe of the neighbourhood
- Community
- Views
- Quietness

PUBLIC REALM

- Green space

CONNECTIVITY

- Location
- Transportation options
- Bikeability

CULTURE

- History
- Events

SOCIAL SERVICES

- Social housing

POTENTIAL

- Lots of opportunities in Railtown



“Mix of industrial and commercial spaces, eclectic business mix, history, gritty urban feel, very interesting restaurants and arts venues.

It has a really nice historic character with some of its older buildings, and great examples of adaptive reuse. Also the mix of unique businesses and occupancies is a real strength, providing a useful mix of creative studios, light industry, and service.

Historic Neighbourhood for the Japanese Canadian community. The annual Powell Street Festival is awesome also!

For the residents, it's a small unique and vibrant community full of friendly and often familiar people.

The opportunities that exist for the area are exciting. It is well located in the city, with amazing views of the north shore, and has a unique character and feel that can be leveraged into a world class neighbourhood benefiting the entire region.

What could be improved in Railtown?

This was an open-ended question. Respondents (n=511) shared a variety of things they think can be improved in Railtown, often discussing multiple topics:

LAND USES

- More commercial and retail spaces, artist spaces, office spaces, and housing
- More services and affordable housing across the City for people experiencing homelessness
- More flexibility in zoning

PUBLIC REALM

- Improve cleanliness
- More green spaces
- Utilities repairs
- More street trees
- Preserving heritage and historical assets



SENSE OF SAFETY

- Increase active frontages and street level activity
- Better manage open drug use
- Improve crime rates and police presence
- Improved street lighting



CONNECTIVITY

- Better parking options
- More transportation options
- Enhanced bike infrastructure

ENVIRONMENT

- Improve noise and odours from Rail and Port

“

Strengthen it as a mixed use destination including support for cultural and entertainment opportunities.

We need to bring more industry, food services, and economic development to the area. We should find a way to celebrate its history while at the same time bringing in business and housing options to elevate the community.

Public parking is limited.

Safety needs to be improved. More presence of security, better lighting, and clearer public safety measures.

More people live in the area would help create that critical mass that would bring people in, and live here. Right now, after 5, it's a ghost town.

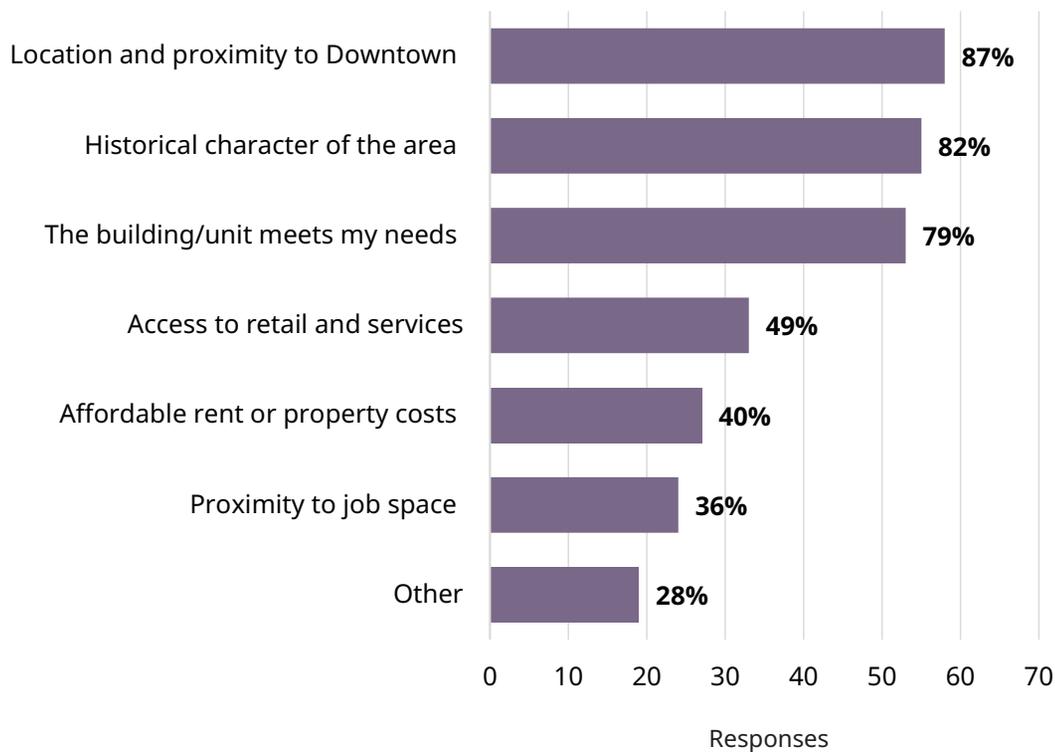
Would love to see more restaurants, storefronts, perhaps a workout class studio, and more (green!) places to sit and have lunch.

Residents

Respondents who selected “live in Railtown” were given the option to provide insight and feedback on what they like about living in the area.

What do you like about living here?

This was a multiple choice question and respondents (n=67) could select all that apply. There was also space to provide more information on their experience living in Railtown:



For respondents that selected “other”, or provided more information for this question, the key themes discussed included **Community** and **Character**.



We love being a part of the Railtown community, surrounded by other small businesses, families, and people who want to build a better future in our area.

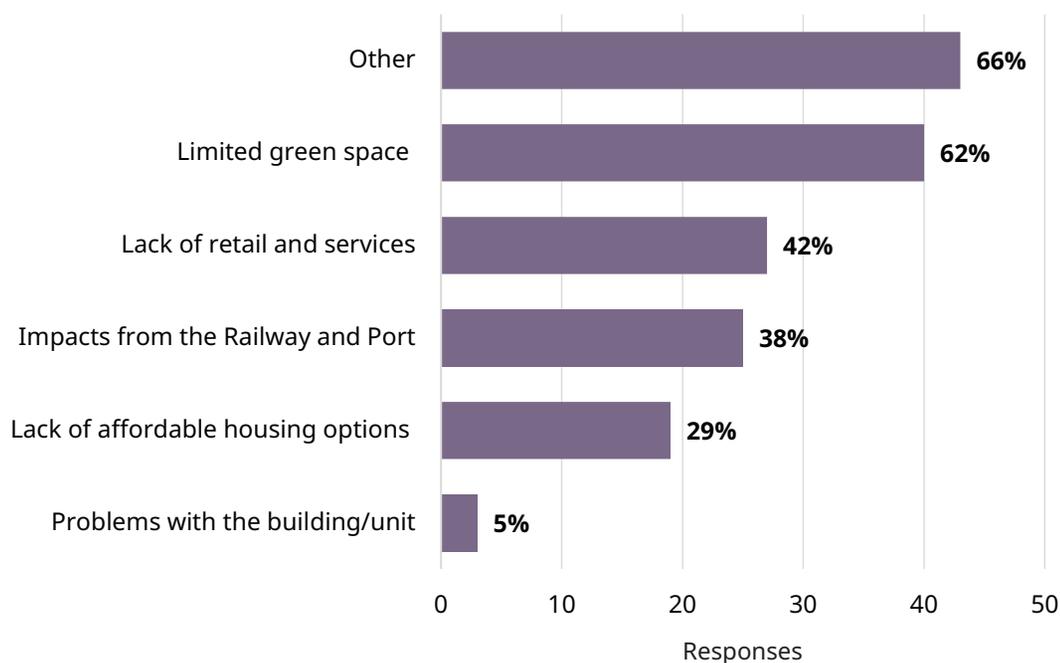
I love the diversity and creative vibe the area has.

I enjoy the community feel of the neighbourhood, the diversity, the history and the uniqueness.

Respondents who selected “live in Railtown” were given the option to provide insight and feedback on what they dislike about living in the area.

What do you dislike about living here?

This was a multiple choice question and respondents (n=65) could select all that apply. There was also space to provide more information on their experience living in Railtown:



For respondents that selected “other”, or provided more information for this question, the key themes discussed include:

- Sense of safety
- Discomfort over presence of homelessness
- Discomfort with open drug use
- Cleanliness on sidewalks
- Crime
- Parking challenges
- Noise from police presence

“*Opioid usage on the streets, concerns about the well-being of the unhoused population in the area.*

Local residents do not feel safe.

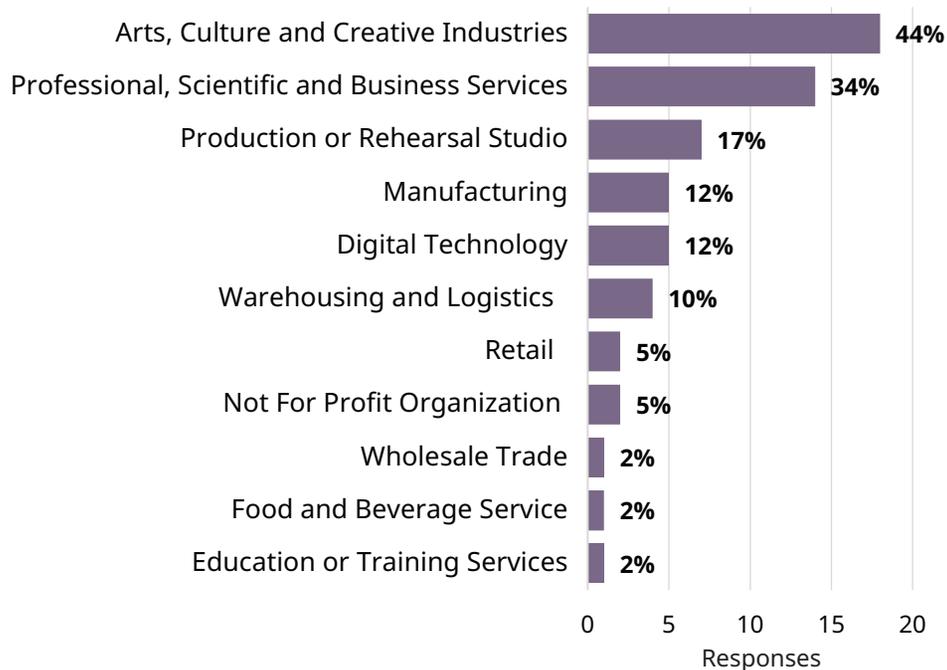
Lack of residential street parking options and the ongoing reduction of available parking.

Business Owners and Operators

Respondents who selected “own or operate a business in Railtown” were given the option to provide insight and feedback into what type of business they own or operate and why they chose to locate in Railtown.

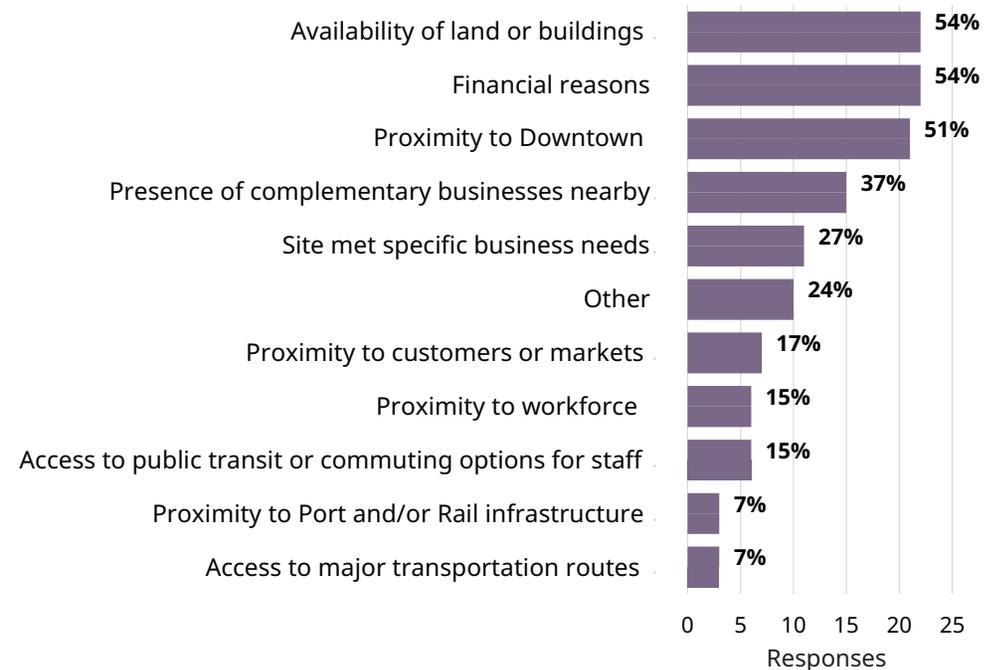
What type of business do you own and/or operate?

This was a multiple choice question and respondents (n=41) could select all that apply:



Why did you choose to locate your business in the area?

This was a multiple choice question and respondents (n=41) could select all that apply:

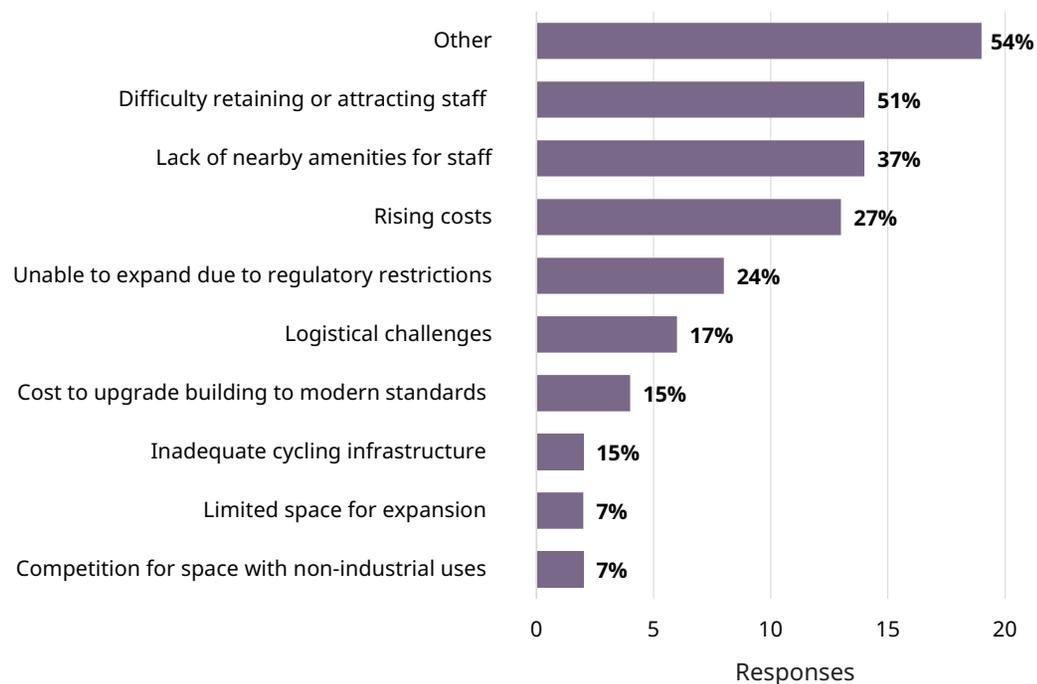


24% of respondents selected “other”. Other reasons for locating a business in Railtown included: zoning, availability of live-work studios, and land ownership.

Respondents who selected “own or operate a business in Railtown” were given the option to provide insight and feedback on challenges they experience.

Does your business have any challenges that are specific to the area?

This was a multiple choice question and respondents (n=35) could select all that apply. There was also space to provide more information on challenges and opportunities for businesses in Railtown.



For respondents that selected “other”, or provided more information for this question, the key themes discussed include:

- Sense of safety
- Discomfort over presence of homelessness
- Discomfort with open drug use
- Cleanliness on sidewalks
- Parking challenges

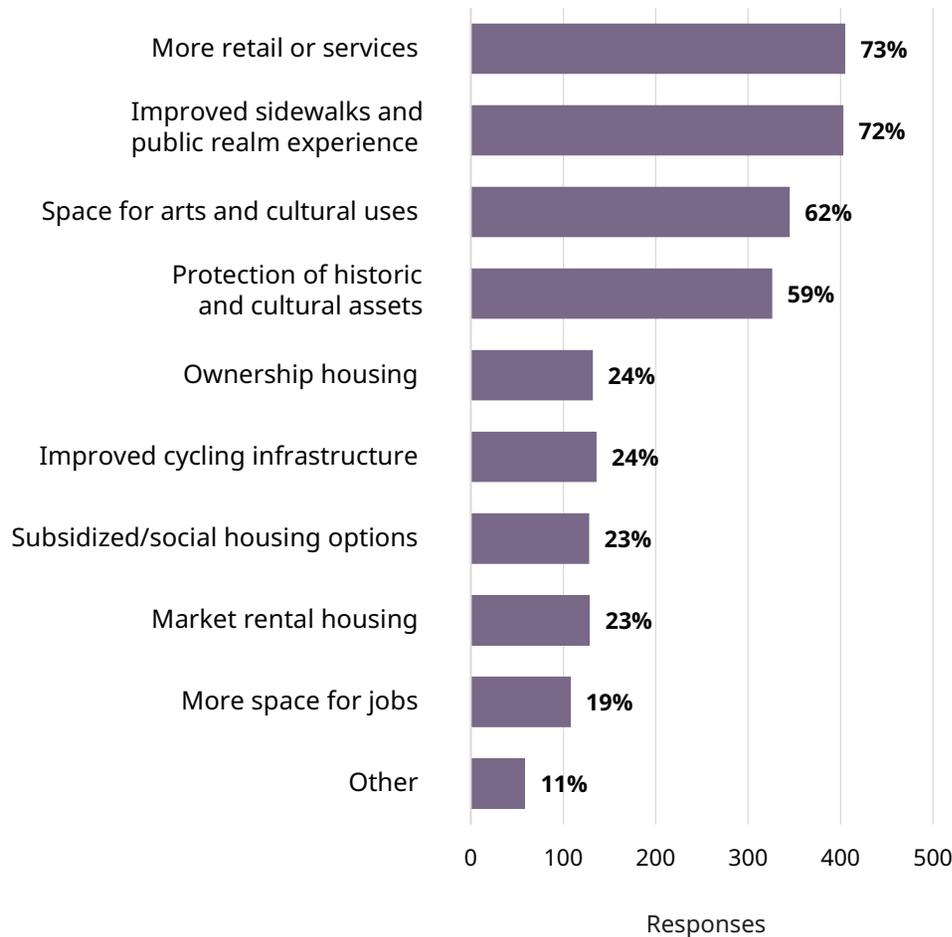
One opportunity was also identified:

- Updating zoning

“The challenges include the security and safety concerns that inhibit business and talent attraction and retention. Opportunities include allowing a diverse mix of market residential and commercial uses to increase 24/7 vibrancy.”

What would you like to see in Railtown?

This was a multiple choice question and respondents (n=556) could select up to 5 choices. There was also space to provide more information on what respondents would like to see more of in Railtown.



For respondents that selected “other”, or provided more information for this question, the key themes discussed include:

- Parking improvements
- Transportation improvements
- Safety improvements
- Increased vibrancy
- More green space
- Increased social support
- Utility upgrades
- Zoning updates

“Diversity, economic growth, safe street activity, music and food venues, vibrancy.

Free parking for people who live and work in the area, and expanded public transport options.

Adding greenery and improving sidewalks and cleanliness would be a simple change in enhancing the overall feel in the area.

As much as I would like the area to be cleaner and safer, I would also like the area to remain affordable for families like us.