

What we heard report

Summer 2018



HALIFAX

IMAGINE
SPRING GARDEN ROAD

Project kick-off public engagement

What

The Halifax Regional Municipality in partnership with the Spring Garden Area Business Association (SGABA) developed and deployed several surveys to gather input and feedback from the public. There was an on-street survey conducted by staff on Spring Garden Road at the stoplet located between Birmingham Street and Dresden Row, an online survey, and an engagement activity at Switch. Additionally, meetings were held with business owners along Spring Garden Road, as well as a kick-off meeting open to all members of the public. Although question phrasing had to be adjusted between the on-street and online surveys, there were some questions asked in all engagement sessions and the results of those questions have been described and summarized in this report.

Staff from the municipality and SGABA conducted on-street surveys throughout July and August to gather feedback on the stoplet pilot project, information on how people currently use the street, and how they wanted to see the street redeveloped in the future. Feedback was gathered from 380 pedestrians on Spring Garden Road. The online survey was conducted from July 3 to Sept. 24, 2018. Feedback was gathered from 866 participants. In these two surveys, participants were asked to share their favourite thing about the Spring Garden Road area and one thing they would change about Spring Garden Road. In both instances, these questions did not have a predefined list of possible answers and responses were open ended so participants could elaborate as necessary. These open-ended questions had similar results in both surveys and the thematic results have been summarized below.

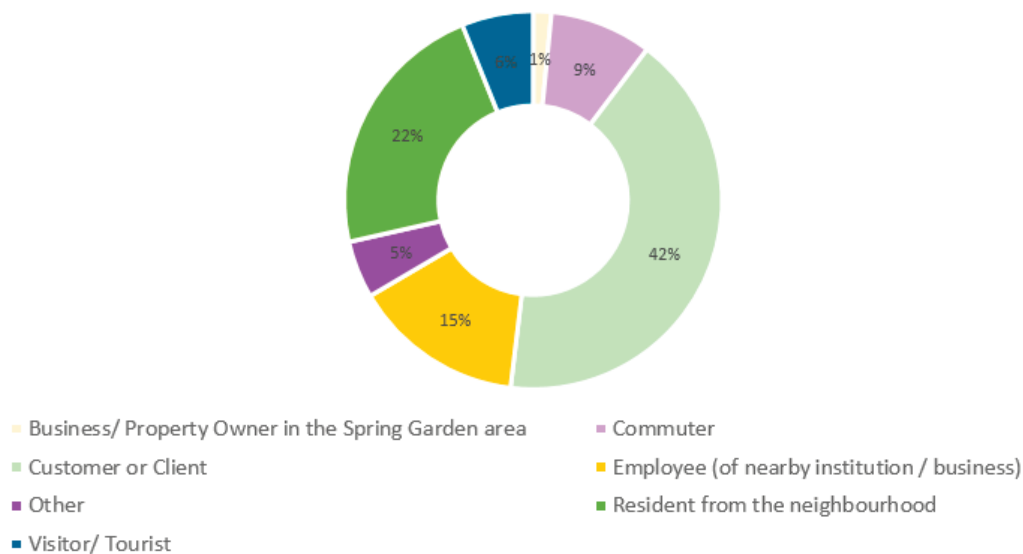


Summer 2018: On-street stoplet engagement

Survey Participants: Demographics and Activity

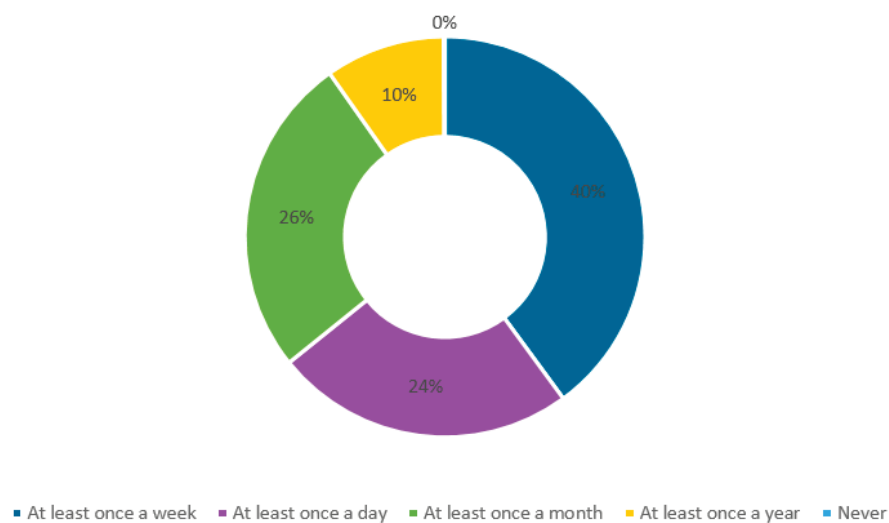
The following charts are a breakdown of who participated in the survey, how they travel to the Spring Garden Road area, and how they use the area.

HOW WOULD YOU BEST DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SPRING GARDEN AREA?



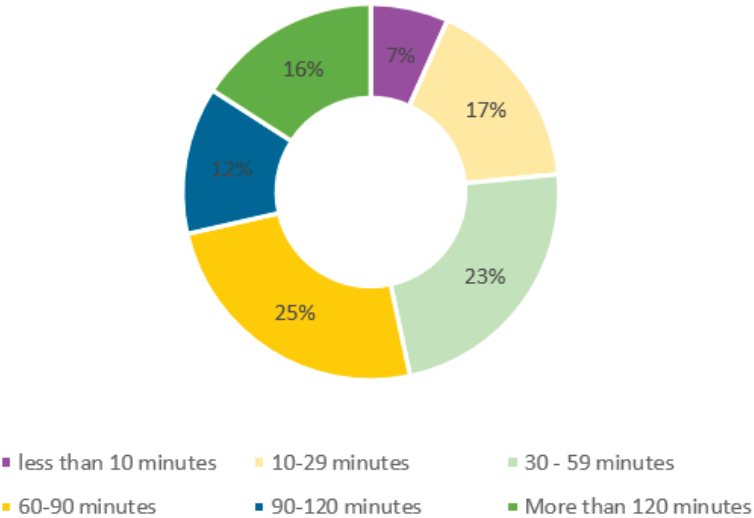
42% of survey participants were customers or clients of the area.

FINISH THE SENTENCE: I VISIT THE SPRING GARDEN AREA...

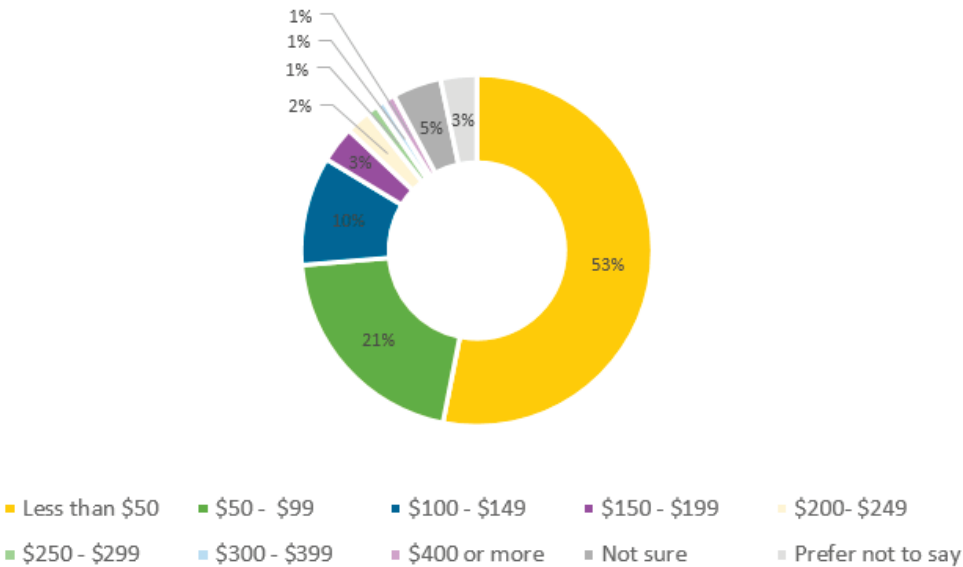


Over 60% of survey participants visit the Spring Garden Road area regularly with at least one visit per week.

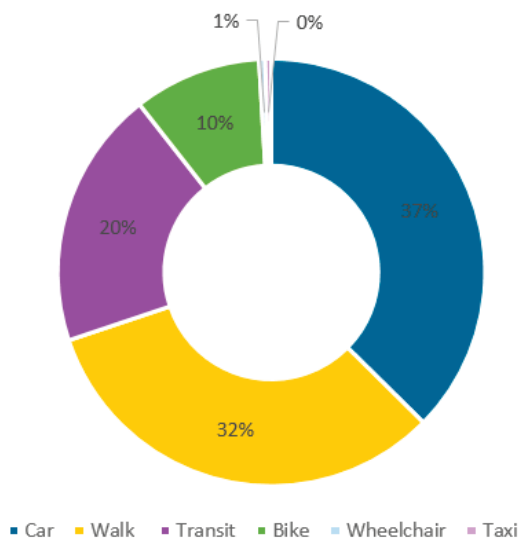
HOW MUCH TIME DID YOU SPEND IN THE SPRING GARDEN AREA ON YOUR LAST VISIT?



APPROXIMATELY HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU SPEND IN THE SPRING GARDEN AREA ON YOUR LAST VISIT?

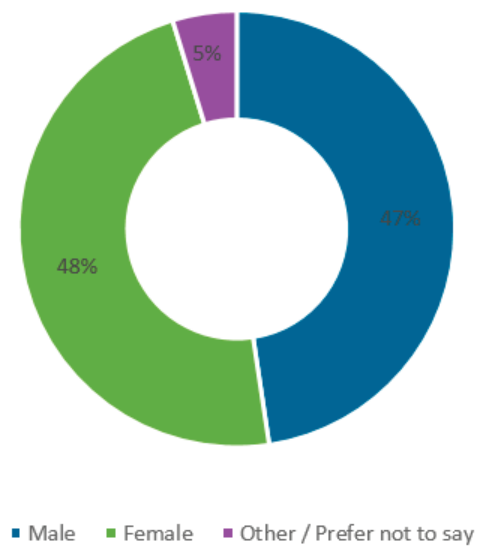


HOW DID YOU GET TO THE SPRING GARDEN AREA ON YOUR LAST VISIT?

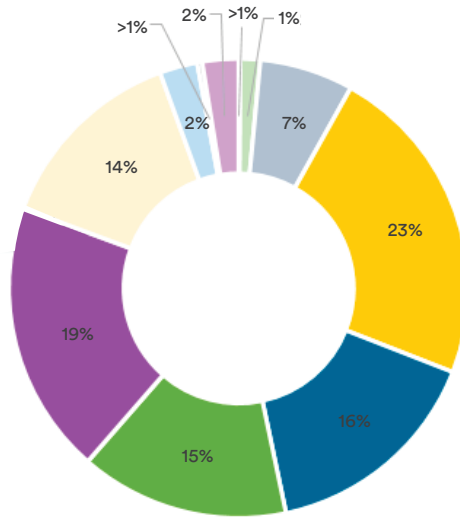


Over 60% of survey participants used a form of active transportation to get to the Spring Garden Road area in their last visit.

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY?

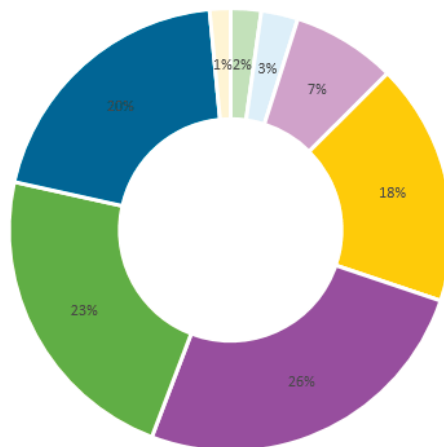


WHAT IS YOUR AGE?



- Under 15 years of age
- 15 to 19 years of age
- 20 to 24 years of age
- 25-34 years of age
- 35-44 years of age
- 45-54 years of age
- 55-64 years of age
- 65-74 years of age
- 75-84 years of age
- 85+ years of age
- Prefer not to say.

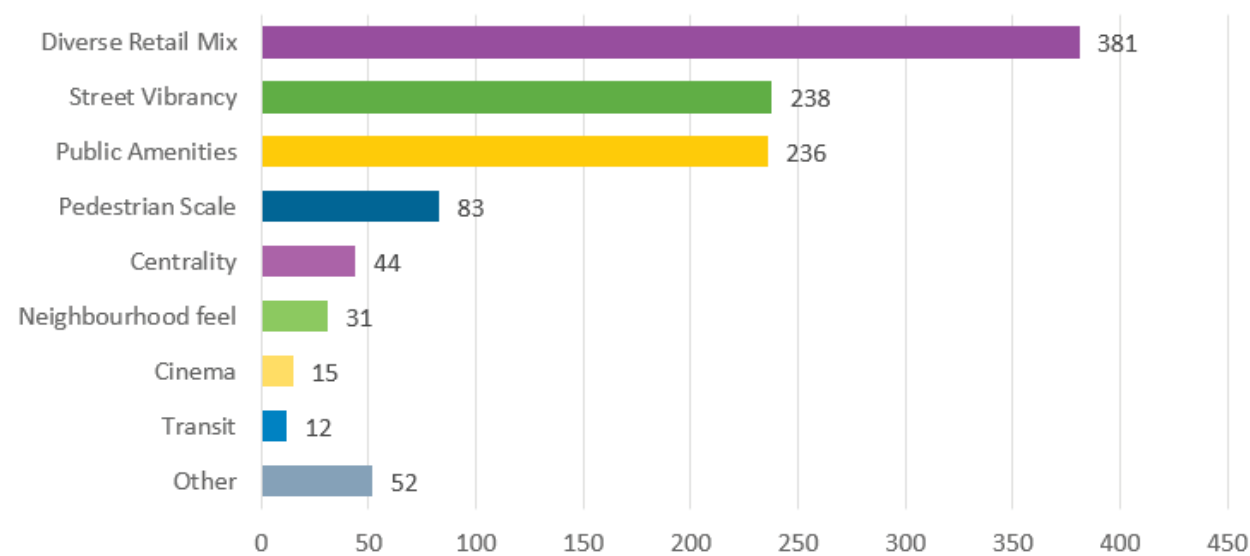
WHAT IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD INCOME BEFORE TAX?



- Less than \$10,000/ year
- \$10,000 to \$19,999
- \$20,000 to \$39,999
- \$40,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$119,999
- \$120,000+
- Prefer not to say
- Unsure

What is your favourite thing about the Spring Garden Area?

Of the responses provided, the top answers by count have been broadly categorized and graphed into the following themes: diverse retail mix, street vibrancy, public amenities, pedestrian scale, centrality, neighbourhood feel, cinema (specifically Park Lane), transit, and other. Responses in the “other” category, although not included in the graph below, highlighted many other important features of the Spring Garden Road area, such as history and special events, that the public values. The top three responses were diverse retail mix, street vibrancy, and public amenities categories.



Diverse Retail Mix: The businesses and services in the area have been identified as a positive feature in the Spring Garden Road area. The public mentions that it is not simply that there are shops and services provided, but the quality and mix of shop and service types that exist make the experience positive. Furthermore, many people valued the number of independent businesses in this area and appreciated that this provides a unique experience reminiscent of historic streetscapes.

Street Vibrancy: The vibrant character of the Spring Garden Road area was often identified as a favourite feature by survey participants. Responses made frequent mention of people being a contributing factor to this vibrant street culture. The diversity of people and the number of people help make this street bustling and active. Many people made mention of the fact that they enjoy that this is a friendly street and there are lots of locations along the street that make for an ideal meeting spot. It was also often described as a great place to sit and people watch. The busy and bustling nature of the street gives an atmosphere to the area. Many participants stated that there is a special energy about Spring Garden Road.

Public Amenities: Public spaces, specifically the Halifax Public Gardens, Victoria Park, and the Halifax Public Library were identified as the third most favourite thing about the Spring Garden Road area by survey participants.

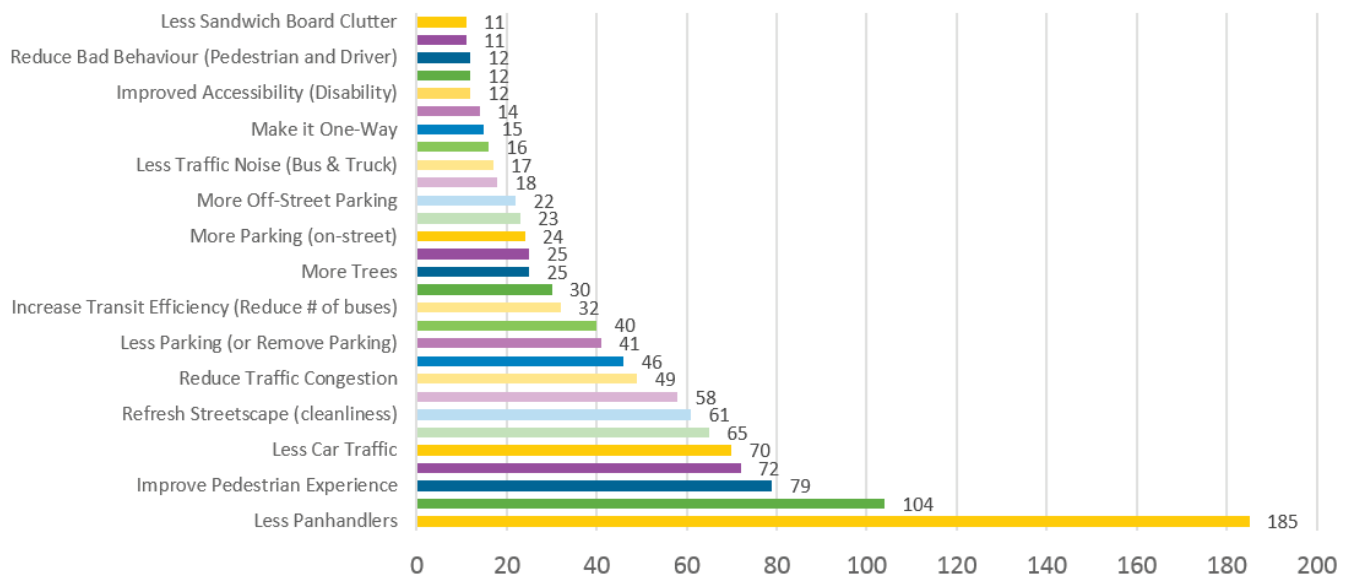
Pedestrian Scale: The scale of the architecture and the compactness of the community contribute to the pedestrian scale in the Spring Garden Road area that was identified by numerous survey participants. Responses made mention that the area is walkable and that the street is accessible, active, and that you can get to everything you need without a car. One participant highlighted that they value that the street is almost entirely universally accessible with barrier-free access to businesses, amenities, and services. Building heights and the clustered storefronts also contributes to the pedestrian scale.

Centrality: Spring Garden Road is a complete community and survey participants made mention of the convenience and the variety as a favourite feature about the Spring Garden Road area. Many people stated that their favourite thing about the Spring Garden Road Area was that they could do everything in one part of the city. People enjoyed that this part of the city truly is a “Live-Work-Play” neighbourhood. The mix of shops, restaurants, services, public amenities, homes, hospitals and health care, the courthouse, and activities provides not only convenience but also creates a “neighbourhood” atmosphere that is bustling. The 10-minute neighbourhood that is Spring Garden Road gives a character to the existing streetscape that is valued in the community.

Neighbourhood Feel: Responses described the friendliness of the area and made mention of the area being a great place to run into friends or meet with friends. The proximity of the area to home was also mentioned in these responses.

Public Transit: Although public transit was not a predominant response, some members of the public valued the availability of buses and routes. The convenience of frequent buses to all parts of the city provides a valuable amenity in the area. One survey participant said the stoplet was their new favourite feature.

What is the one thing you would change about Spring Garden Road?



In both the on-street and online surveys, participants were asked to identify one thing that they would change about Spring Garden Road. These were open-ended questions with no predefined responses and participants could elaborate on their response. Over 1300 suggestions were made by survey participants and those suggestions were categorized based on theme.

Among the top categories of improvements for Spring Garden Road were:

- [Less panhandlers](#)
- [Increase sidewalk width](#)
- [Improve pedestrian experience](#)
- [Reducing traffic congestion / decreasing personal vehicle traffic / improving transit efficiency](#)
- [Refresh streetscape](#)

Concerns regarding panhandlers in the area were frequently raised in both surveys. Many participants commented that additional support services in the area should be considered to alleviate the broader social issue at hand.

Increasing sidewalk width and improving pedestrian experience were frequently suggested by survey participants. Specific comments included improving crosswalk safety, eliminating sandwich boards from the sidewalk, and sidewalk widths that can accommodate outdoor restaurant seating.

Both on-street and online survey participants most frequently cited traffic as the one thing they would change about Spring Garden Road. Comments and feedback on the topic of traffic included concerns about traffic flow and traffic congestion, safety concerns for pedestrians due to traffic flow bottlenecks, safety concerns for cyclists, eliminating vehicular traffic, the potential for car-free days, times, or areas, and making the street more pedestrian, bike, and transit friendly.

Refreshing the streetscape included comments regarding additional green space on the street. Additional green space was also a top priority in Question 14 in which participants were asked on a Likert-type scale how important certain elements were in imagining the future of Spring Garden Road.

One significant difference that could be noted is that online participants more frequently by percentage (8% online versus 2% on-street) cited parking as the one thing they would change about Spring Garden Road. Some of the comments regarding parking included reducing or removing parking, increasing parking availability, increasing off-street parking, free parking, and car-share parking.

Question 14: When imagining the future of Spring Garden Road, especially in the business area between Queen and South Park Street, how important are the following elements to improving your experience on the street?

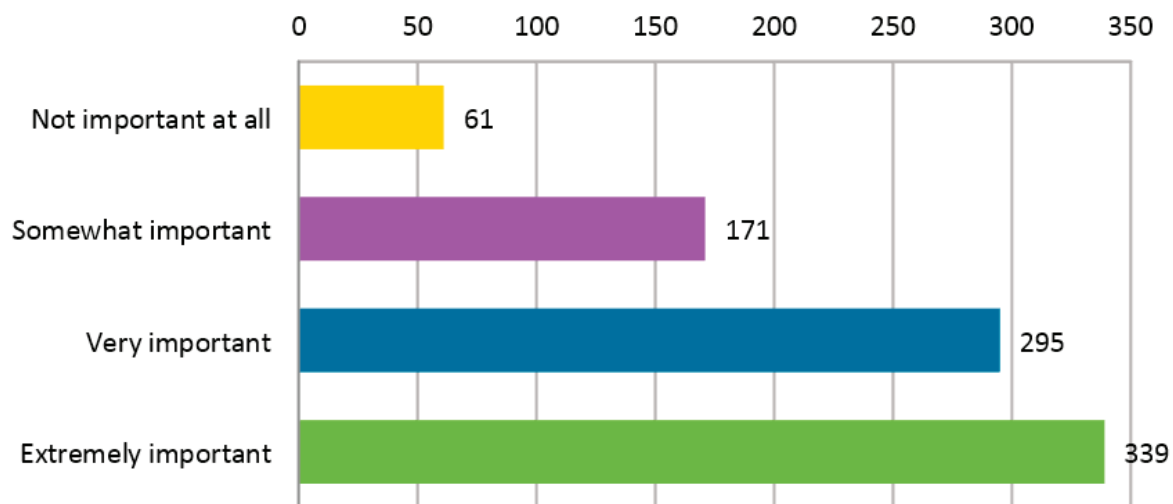
In the online survey, participants were asked to indicate how important the following elements were to improving their experience by selecting “Not important at all”, “somewhat important”, “very important”, “extremely important”:

- Bus shelters;
- Benches / more places to sit;
- Using high quality materials, such as paving and ornamental lighting;
- Greening the street – more trees and flowers;
- On-street loading on Spring Garden Road;
- Relocating loading to side streets;
- Restricting loading to certain times of the day;
- Nearby off-street parking;
- Nearby on-street parking;
- Better information to help you find your way around;
- Bicycle parking;
- Better pedestrian lighting;
- Additional decorative lighting, such as string lighting;
- Reducing sandwich board clutter;
- Placing utility wires underground;
- Public art;
- Drinking fountains;

- Notice boards;
- More space on the sidewalk for patios / sidewalk sales;
- More space on the sidewalk for transit passengers and pedestrians;

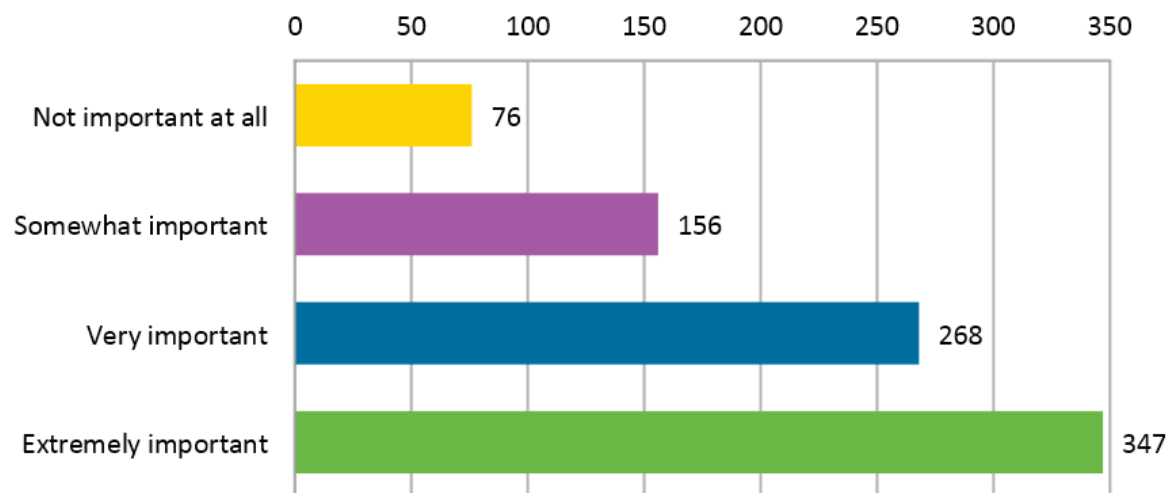
Of these, the top five most important were determined to be those with the most “Extremely Important” votes as well as the most combined “Very Important” and “Extremely Important” votes. These top five have been summarized and outlined below.

Greening the street (e.g. Trees and Flowers)



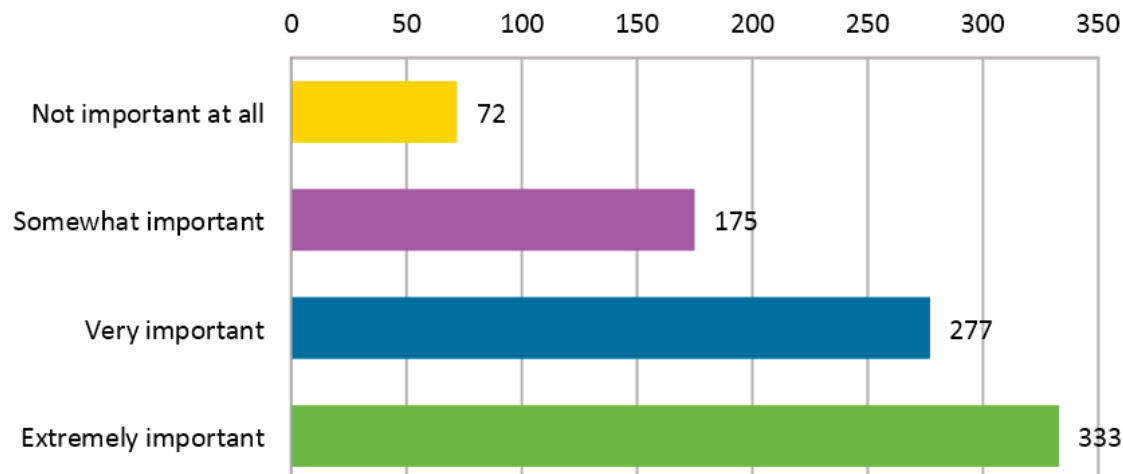
73% of survey participants indicated that greening the street with more trees and flowers was very important or extremely important to improving their experience. Given that Victoria Park and the Halifax Public Gardens were frequently referenced in the on-street and online surveys as a favourite feature of the Spring Garden Road area, there appears to be high value placed on vegetation and green space amongst survey participants.

Restrict loading to certain times of day



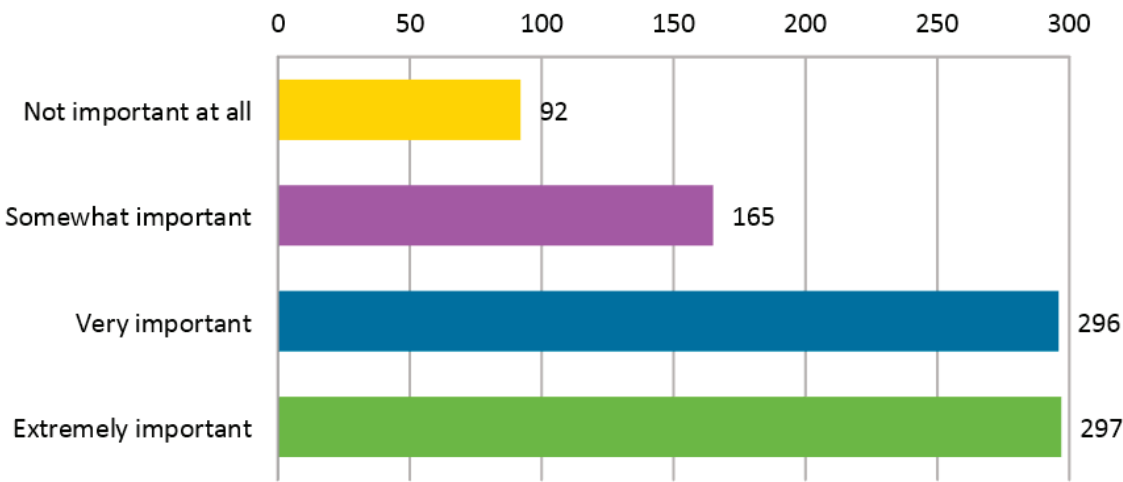
73% of survey participants indicated that restricting loading to certain times of the day was very important or extremely important to improving their experience.

Relocating Loading to side streets



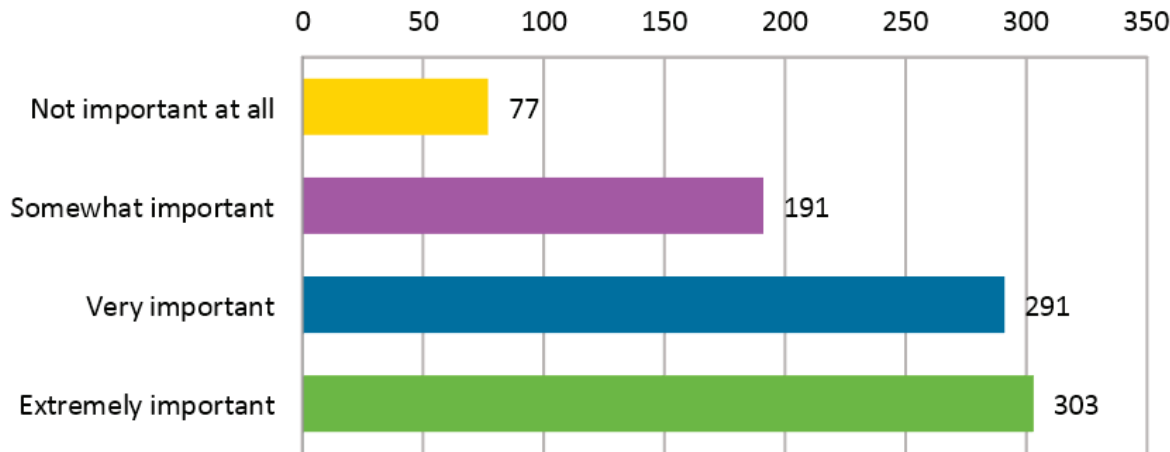
71% of survey participants indicated that restricting loading to certain times of the day was very important or extremely important to improving their experience. Given that two of the top five responses related to loading restrictions, addressing this issue should be a high priority in the area. The issue of loading on Spring Garden Road affects the quality of user experience in the area.

Nearby off-street parking



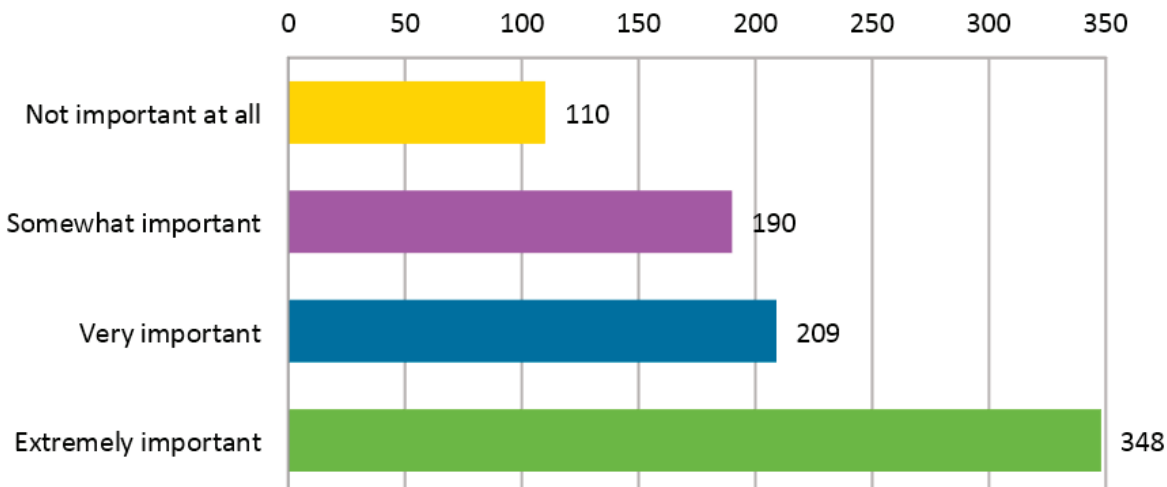
70% of survey participants indicated that nearby off-street parking was very important or extremely important to improving their experience.

More space on the sidewalk for transit passengers and pedestrians



69% of survey participants indicated that more space on the sidewalk for transit passengers and pedestrians was very important or extremely important to improving their experience.

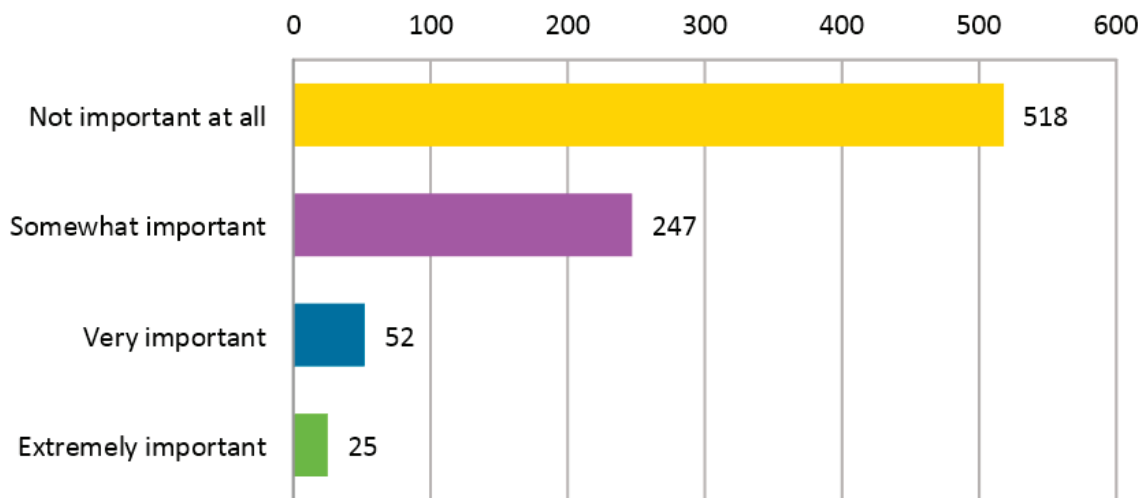
Placing utility wires underground



65% of survey participants indicated that placing utility wires underground was very important or extremely important to improving their experience.

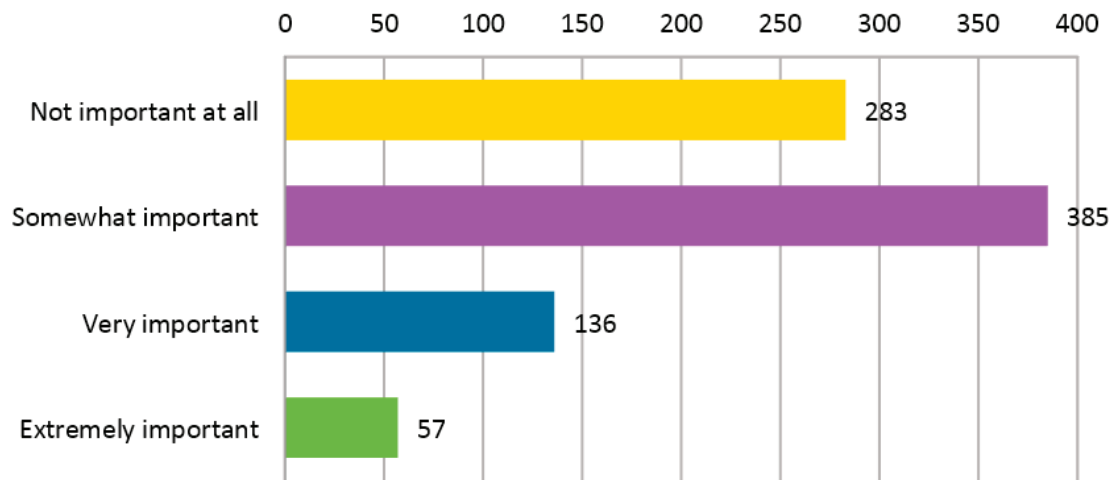
The five least important were determined to be those with the most combined “Not important at all” and “somewhat important” votes. These bottom five have been summarized and outlined below.

On-street loading on Spring Garden Road



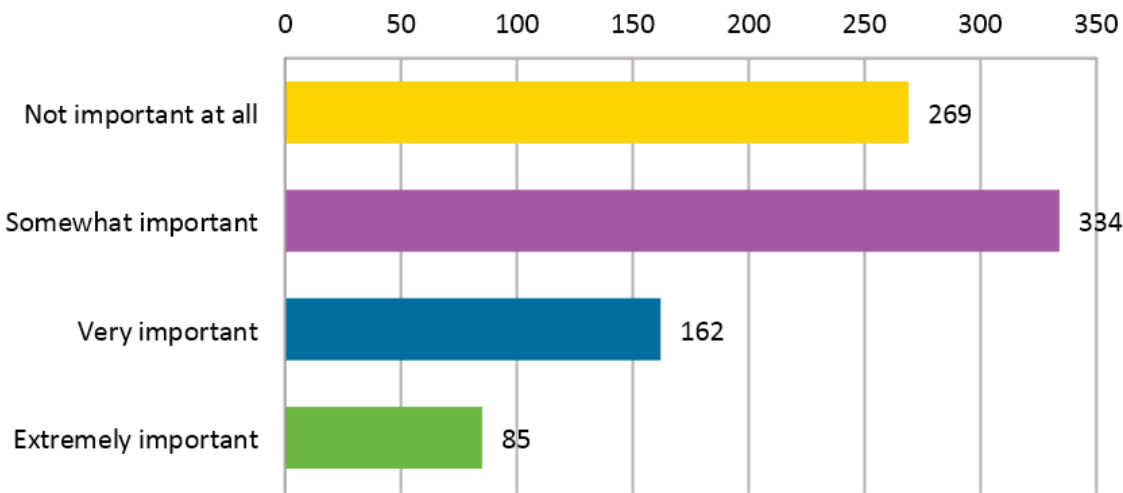
91% of participants indicated that on-street loading on Spring Garden Road was not important at all or somewhat important. Given the relative importance of relocating loading to the side streets amongst participants, the functional and schematic designs will have an important opportunity to address the issue of Spring Garden Road loading zones and improve experiences for area users.

Notice boards



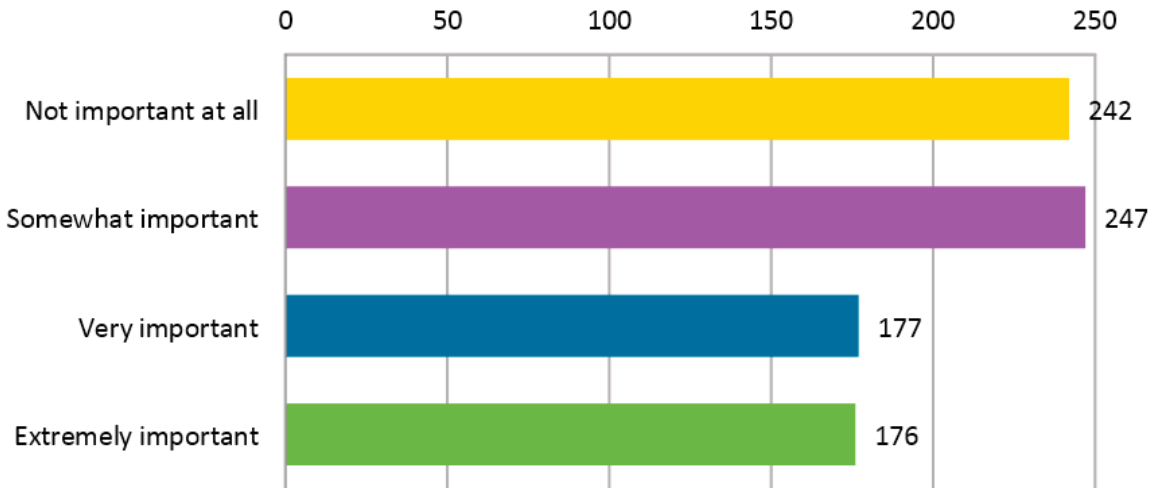
78% of participants indicated that notice boards were not important at all or somewhat important.

Better information to help you find your way around



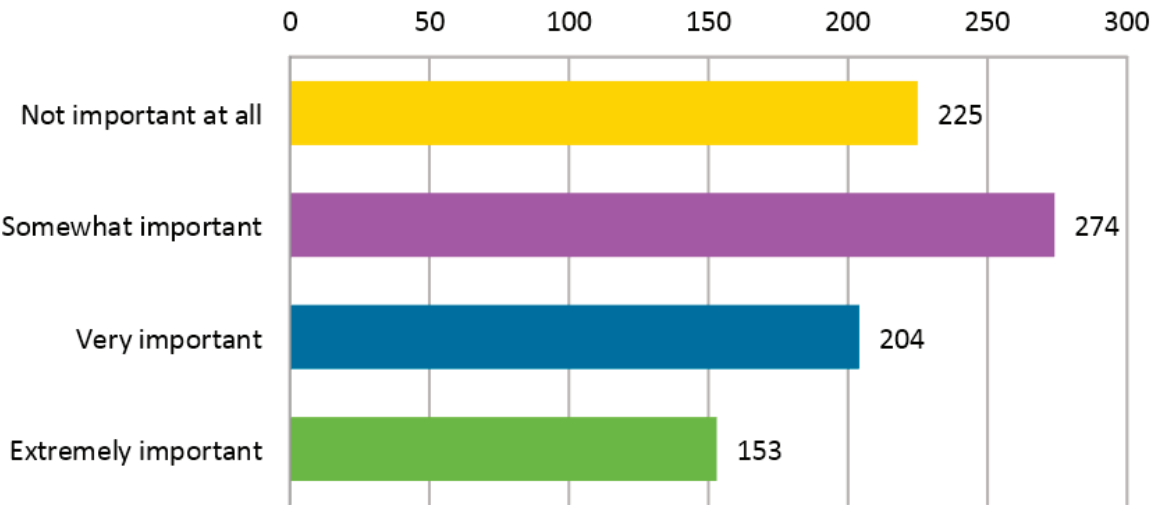
71% of participants indicated that better information to help you find your way around was not important at all or somewhat important.

Nearby on-street parking



58% of participants indicated that nearby on-street parking was not important at all or somewhat important. Nearby off-street parking was a top choice for survey participants so the design phases of the project will provide an important opportunity to address how to better offer off-street parking nearby. As it has been identified that there are approximately 2095 parking spaces in close proximity of the commercial area, improved clarity on where parking currently exists may also need to be considered.

Additional Decorative Lights, such as string Lighting



58% of participants indicated that additional decorative lighting, such as string lighting, was not important at all or somewhat important. Better pedestrian lighting, although not in the top five elements, placed high amongst the elements for very important to extremely important. This could indicate that elements of a more functional nature may be a higher priority for survey participants. This sentiment appeared to be reflected in the comments provided at the public engagement session with regards to visibility safety concerns for all users at all times of the day.

Public Engagement Results

A public meeting was held at City Centre Atlantic on Spring Garden Road on Monday, Sept. 17, 2018 at 6 p.m. There were 80 people in attendance. A variety of exercises were completed with the public to collect information on what the public sees as the future vision for Spring Garden Road and areas where they would like to see improvement.

What's Your Vision

"What is your vision for Spring Garden Road?" was an open-ended question in which participants were asked to provide three ideas for how the new street might look and feel and three ideas for how they would use this street.

Some of the general themes identified in the vision exercise include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Improved wayfinding and signage for all modes of transportation;
- Public art;
- Inclusive and friendly;
- Clean;
- Car-free at times
- Safe and secure;
- Enhanced lighting / lighting styles;
- Reduced congestion;
- Public gardens through street / more green space;
- Events and programming;
- Parking / improved signage for parkades;
- Bus stop comfort;
- Fun and social;
- Wider sidewalks;
- Cohesive facades that are welcoming and have improved overhangs;
- Spring Garden Road as a destination;
- 10-minute neighbourhood.

“What will improve your experience?” is similar to Question 14 asked in the online survey however votes were based on dot-mocracy style input with voting transparency so opinions may be influenced by others.

Participants were provided six color-coded dots, categorized into residents, customers, business owners, employees, to indicate which of the following streetscape elements would most improve their experience on Spring Garden Road:

- Places to sit
- Bury utility lines
- Better pedestrian lighting
- Restrict loading times to certain times of day
- On-street loading on Spring Garden Road
- Directional Signage
- Clutter reduction (e.g. restricting sandwich boards)
- Relocate loading to side streets
- Bus shelters
- Drinking fountains
- Notice boards
- Bicycle parking
- Nearby on-street parking
- Additional feature lighting
- Accessibility improvements
- Nearby off-street parking
- Extra commuter and pedestrian space
- More space for patios / sidewalk sales
- More trees and flowers
- Public art
- Use high quality materials for street treatment

The dot-mocracy did not have an overwhelming winner. Lots of different things are important to people. Examples of some popular choices: commuter and pedestrian space, trees and flowers, street treatments, accessibility, lighting, seating, and signage.

Switch

On Sunday Sept. 23, 2018 between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. during the annual Switch Open Street Sunday event in Halifax, a dot-mocracy board gathered votes from the public asking the same question as the public engagement meeting: “What will improve your experience on Spring Garden Road?” Approximately 538 participants were each provided six dots for a total of 3,230 dots placed on the board.

The top five based on number of votes were:

- Places to sit (269 dots);
- Trees and flowers (235 dots);
- Public art (219 dots);
- Space for patios & sidewalk sales (198 dots);
- Additional feature lighting (196 dots).

The bottom five, not including the additional ideas added by the public, based on number of votes were:

- On street loading on Spring Garden Road (9 dots);
- Notice Boards (50 dots);
- Restrict loading to certain times of day (58 dots);
- Nearby on-street parking (65 dots);
- Directional Signage (78 dots).

There were several items added by the public throughout the day for which votes could be cast. These were:

- Closed to vehicles on weekends / entire summer (137 dots);
- Public washrooms (107 dots);
- Keep buses / more garbage and recycling bins (39 dots);
- Re-route buses off Spring Garden Road (38 dots);
- More activities or places for children (33 dots);
- Closed forever; pedestrian only (8 dots);
- Limit amount of construction in a neighbourhood (1 dot).

Although restricting loading times and locations was significant in the online survey, the dotmocracy survey result showed that members of the public at the Switch event voted much more for pedestrian amenities (places to sit and space for patios and sidewalk sales) and streetscape elements (trees and flowers, public art, additional feature lighting) than did those who voted in the online survey. As with the online survey, increasing trees and flowers on the street received a high number of votes.

Conclusion

In on-street and online surveys, the municipality asked, “What is your favourite thing about Spring Garden Road?” as an open-ended question. Although in both instances many participants provided thorough answers, the results could be categorized into several recurring themes. Both the on-street and online surveys indicated that the top three responses for favourite things were the business and services, street vibrancy, and public spaces categories amongst participants. These elements will be key to enhance through the design work.

In the online survey, when participants were asked to indicate how important various elements were in improving their experience on the street, the top five indicated different types of elements. Two related to loading on Spring Garden Road, one related to greening the street, one parking, and finally sidewalk space. All of these can contribute to a positive streetscape experience if addressed tactfully in the design phases of this project. Gathering more feedback on approaches to addressing these issues to make it functionally and experientially desirable for residents, business owners, customers, and employees will be an important step in the project process.

Both elements to enhance and elements to improve along the street highlighted by the public will influence the next steps of the project, and will be reflected in proposed plans.



Switch Dot-mocracy 2018



September 2018 Public Meeting