



# 2025 Business Friendly Construction Policy Focus Groups

Final Report

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# Research summary

## Most business owners feel that construction projects have affected their operations.



The main effects of construction raised by businesses were the loss of parking as well as impacts to traffic and commuting patterns.



Lack of access due to sidewalk closures and blocked entrances, as well as noise, garbage and construction debris were also concerns for businesses.

## Business owners view the challenges of construction from a holistic perspective – and expect The City to do the same.



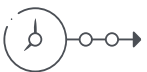
They recognized that their business has the potential to be affected by multiple and repeated construction projects across Calgary.



They made little distinction between public works completed by The City and private construction projects, such as condominiums, as the effects on their business are often similar.



They felt that construction may have long-term impacts on their business, continuing beyond the duration of a project.

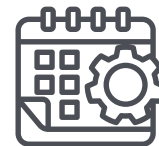


**For business owners, the most effective way for The City to support them is to find a way to shorten the length of construction projects.**

## Business owners want timely updates and communications about construction, with additional business supports throughout the life of a project.



**Pre-project:** Consultation on projects, not just communications about projects. Improved planning from The City that takes a holistic view of projects, and a City contact they can reach out to for information.



**During a project:** Regular updates and outreach on project schedules and work that directly disrupts their business, like sidewalk closures and parking limitations.



**Post-project:** Support for getting customers back to the area – through events, parking and transit subsidies, and timely clean-up of construction debris. Debrief meetings to review lessons learned for future projects.

# Key findings

## **Business owners identified several ways that construction projects in Calgary have caused challenges for their organizations.**

- The main challenges reported by businesses included parking limitations, poor access for vehicles and pedestrians, as well as the impacts of road closures and detours on traffic patterns and commute times. Short term disruptions such as sidewalk closures, reduced access to entrances and parking, as well as construction dust, debris and garbage were also concerns for businesses.

## **Timely communications were identified by business representatives as the main focus for improvements to their experience of construction projects and one of the most effective ways that The City can support businesses affected by construction.**

- Information about projects should be shared with business as soon as project timelines and planning allows – even a year or six months ahead of time – to ensure as much time as possible to consider the implications and make strategic business decisions.
- Businesses also felt The City should also share updates throughout the life of a project to keep them apprised of progress, especially about changing construction details, like sidewalk closures, access limitations and parking changes that have a short-term but significant impact on businesses. They stated these updates should be provided with at least a week's notice to allow for planning.
- On a scale of 1 to 10, business owners felt that The City's communications efforts have ranged from poor to excellent, with most rating The City between 5 and 7. This suggests that while current efforts are noticed and appreciated, The City can make adjustments to improve its communication practices about construction.
- Business owners felt that communications from The City should be distributed through a variety of means, from direct outreach via email and door-to-door discussions with businesses and their landlords, to pamphlets, flyers and street signs with project information and a contact name in case of additional questions or concerns.

## Key findings (continued)

### **Overall, representatives reacted favourably to recent non-financial initiatives by The City of Calgary to reduce and mitigate the impacts of long-term construction on businesses.**

- Business owners were very supportive of City representatives such as business liaisons as a source of information about projects and who serve as direct contacts for businesses with questions or concerns.
- Alternative parking options, bike parking and relaxed parking restrictions around construction zones were also viewed positively, although some business owners suggested that these solutions may negatively affect residential neighbours.
- Signage on the street, including maps and construction dates, as well as targeted signage directing customers to businesses or parking, were considered basic requirements by most businesses. They suggested that The City consider ways to work with local businesses to create specialized signs.
- The City's support for events and direct marketing to encourage and welcome customers back to affected areas were also generally viewed as positive by business owners.

### **While most business representatives appreciated the Main Streets Business Support Grant pilot, they suggested improvements to the program to better support businesses affected by construction.**

- Few business representatives in the focus groups had heard of the grant that was piloted in Marda Loop and Bridgeland in 2024, although they were typically aware of the construction issues that had affected businesses in the area.
- While they were told that the grant was not compensation for business losses, most business owners viewed the grant in these terms. Several felt that the grant should be larger, with a few suggesting a monthly or recurring payment. In several groups, participants felt that reducing business or property taxes would be a more effective support, especially during extended construction projects.
- Participants emphasized the need for The City to ensure that all eligible businesses are made aware of the grant (and other City initiatives) and most felt that application processes for the grant should be eliminated. They noted if a business is in an area affected by construction, they should be offered the grant without needing to apply.

# Recommendations from businesses

**Recognizing the long-term implications of construction on their operations, business owners recommended that The City expand its communication efforts and implement additional policies to create buy-in and support businesses before, during and after construction.**

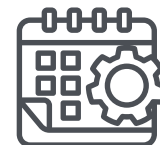
- Business owners felt that the challenges of construction often may continue after a project ends. They expected that supports from The City be continuous and that communication efforts go beyond sharing information to offer opportunities for business to provide feedback and ask questions. Consultation with business prior to construction decisions, continued contact and updates during projects, as well as opportunities to share lessons learned following completion of projects were popular ways for The City to go beyond its current communication strategy and support businesses affected by construction projects.

## Pre-construction



- Consultation with business prior to final decisions
- Better overall planning of construction projects
- Signage, pamphlets and other information about projects, including timelines and maps
- Shared information should include a City contact in case of questions
- Direct outreach to businesses

## During construction



- Frequent (monthly, biweekly, weekly) “real-time” updates on progress, delays and expected timelines
- At least 1-week advance notice of specific construction efforts that may directly affect business (access, sidewalks, parking)
- Continued outreach by City contacts

## Post-construction



- Special events to celebrate the end of construction
- Project debrief meetings with businesses to compile feedback and lessons for future construction projects
- Incentives like free or reduced parking and reduced or free transit to encourage customers to return following construction
- Timely clean-up of garbage, debris and construction materials (including signs, cones, etc.)

# Recommendations from business

**Viewing construction in a holistic manner and understanding the long-term disruptions of construction on businesses, business owners felt that reducing the length of construction projects should be a priority for The City.**

- One of the consistent themes that emerged during the focus groups was that business representatives viewed construction in Calgary from a holistic perspective. While they recognized that businesses closest to construction projects face the biggest challenges, they typically also identified ripple or knock-on effects of projects located farther from operations. They recognized that having many construction projects happening at the same time, sometimes repeatedly, can cause disruptions. Instead of treating each project separately based on location, they want The City to plan and manage construction with this broader view in mind.
- Business representatives also rarely differentiated between projects completed by The City or the private sector – from their perspective, regardless of the actor, these construction projects have the potential to affect their business operations. And because The City approves permits for private construction, they expect that it would offer local business owners (as well as residents) with information and support during this type of disruption.
- With this holistic perspective, many business owners felt that improved planning and reducing the length of projects could significantly improve businesses' experiences of construction. Several suggested increasing working hours into the night and on weekends in business zones, while a few also suggested considering ways to incentivize contractors to complete work more quickly.



# Background and methodology

## Background

As The City of Calgary continues to invest in infrastructure and amenities for all Calgarians, The City is advancing business-friendly approaches and working to enhance the way businesses and customers experience City-led construction. In recent years, The City has been piloting and testing a variety of business-friendly approaches aimed at mitigating potential challenges from construction and supporting businesses leading up to and during planned City-led construction.

Also, at the direction of City Council, work is underway to establish a business-friendly construction policy that will clarify The City's approach to mitigating potential challenges from construction and improving how businesses and their customers experience City-led construction.

As part of this broader project, The City wished to better understand the experiences and perspectives of businesses that have experienced (or may soon be experiencing) City-led construction projects. Input gathered from a combination of research and public engagement will be used to help shape clear and effective policy objectives.

## Methodology

Probe Research was commissioned by The City to conduct a total of six focus groups with owners and managers of businesses that have been affected by construction or may be affected by construction projects in the future. This included both public-facing and non-public facing businesses. The table on the following page provides an overview of the participants recruited to each session.

Participants were recruited from a list of business owners and managers pulled from a commercial list (Dun & Bradstreet) as well as business owners and managers who belong to Trend Research's online panel. A customized screening survey was administered via telephone by Trend Research, and all participants were provided with a \$150 incentive in exchange for their participation.

These focus groups were facilitated by Erin Jonasson of Probe Research using a customized discussion guide, with Curtis Brown and observers from The City attending and taking notes. The focus groups were conducted online using Microsoft Teams, and were recorded with participant consent. Transcripts will be available once the final report has been submitted.

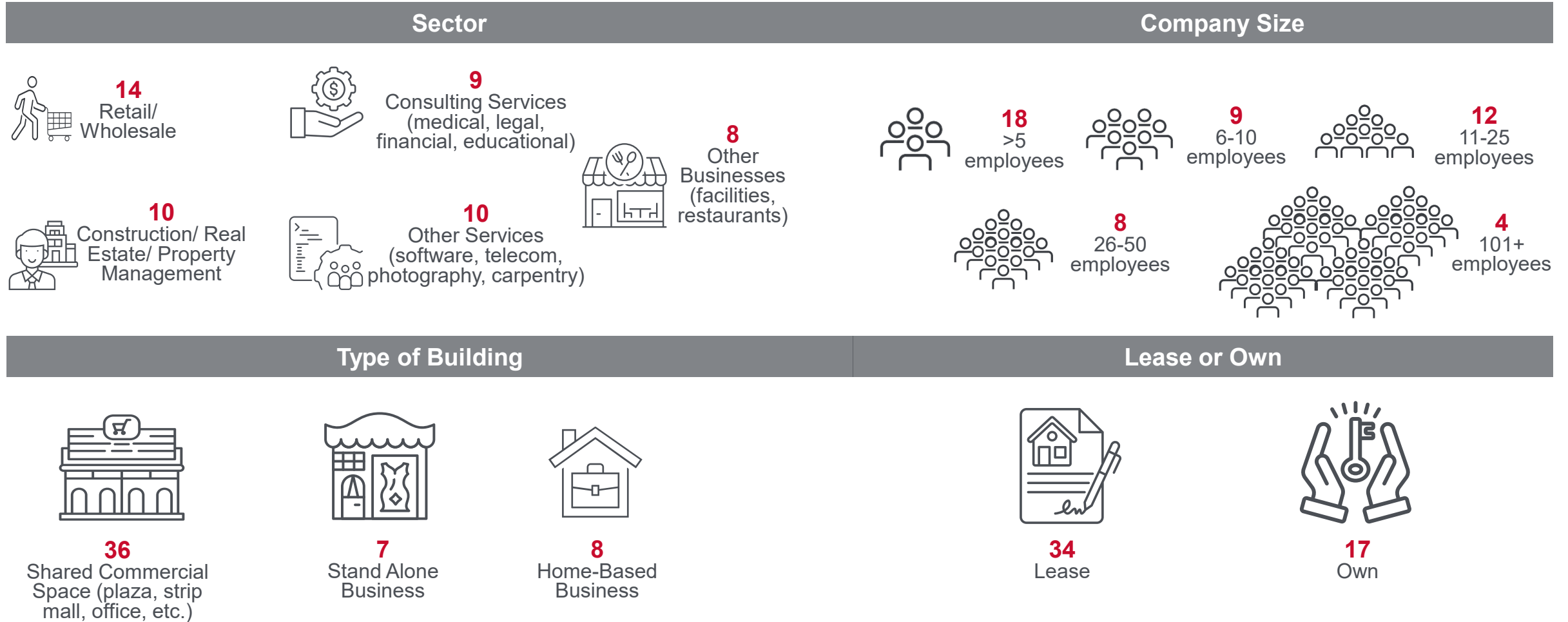
## Background and methodology (continued)

| Group | Time                        | Time     | Type of Business                  | Timeframe for Construction | Other characteristics                          |
|-------|-----------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Wednesday,<br>Feb. 19, 2024 | 11:30 am | Non-public facing                 | Recent (<5 years)          | Target minimum 2 businesses with 50+ employees |
| 2     |                             | 2:30 pm  | Public-facing/ walk-up business   | Not recent/never           |                                                |
| 3     |                             | 4:30 pm  | Public-facing/ takes appointments | Recent (<5 years)          |                                                |
| 4     | Thursday, Feb.<br>20, 2024  | 11:30 am | Non-public facing                 | Not recent/never           |                                                |
| 5     |                             | 2:30 pm  | Public-facing/ walk-up business   | Recent (<5 years)          |                                                |
| 6     |                             | 4:30 pm  | Public-facing/ takes appointments | Not recent/never           |                                                |

**Please note: The following findings are qualitative in nature. The work is exploratory as a result of the number of participants and the method by which the sample was drawn. The results should be regarded as directional and may not necessarily be projected to the larger population without further quantitative research.**

# Background and methodology (continued)

The following grid provides an overview of the characteristics of the business representatives who participated in this study:





## Overall experience with City-led construction

# Business disruptions due to long-term construction

Participants began the sessions by reflecting on their experiences of long-term construction and the disruptions that these projects have had on their businesses.

- For some participants, long-term construction occurred close – within a block or two, or directly adjacent – to their location. These businesses tended to have experienced more daily disruptions and challenges than those with construction projects at a greater distance from their operations.
- Other participants spoke about experiences with construction projects that were located at slightly larger distances from their operations, typically citing projects within a kilometre or so of their business or in areas they pass through during their commute or daily activities. While the challenges of construction on these businesses may have been felt less, participants nevertheless believed that the number of projects and extent of ongoing construction in Calgary affected their ability to conduct business.

A lot of our tenants were frustrated because their customers couldn't find parking. Access to the building was tricky, and people struggled to navigate the safety detours.

- Group 6 Participant

The road expansion took our parking spots and pylon sign for the loans business since it became City property. They often shut down our entrances for construction, but since we had two, I arranged for one to stay open. I had to extend hours due to access issues, adding costs. I also started shipping and online payments, which turned out to be a great benefit.

- Group 2 Participant

Our business is in Remington Park, just north of Deerfoot Mall. There was only one way onto Beddington and no way out, but they fixed that, creating another exit. The construction had very little impact — maybe the occasional speeding ticket — but it was short-term pain for long-term gain. Now, in winter, we won't be stuck for 45 minutes trying to get onto 64th Avenue.

- Group 1 Participant

It was horrible, but we had to manage. We rely on a lot of foot traffic, and access is limited due to the Plus 15. While there are alternate routes, people avoid them in bad weather. Closures for maintenance, though necessary, weren't well-planned and disrupted business. Construction and repairs took longer depending on weather conditions. The biggest issue was communication — we were never informed. Our landlords might have been, but we only found out when we saw City workers or realized an area was suddenly closed.

- Group 5 Participant

# Parking and access challenges

For most participants, the main challenges with construction near their business were related to **parking and business access** for customers and employees. In addition to construction projects limiting available parking spaces close to their operations, several participants noted that construction workers and other City vehicles parked in the few spaces that were available, further reducing the number of spots that could be used by their customers and employees.

- Similarly, a few participants said that City and construction vehicles used **drop-off and loading areas** in front of their businesses, limiting access for customers and staff. Some complained that when completing work, construction crews have **blocked multiple access points** at the same time – for example, both a front entrance and a side parking entry point – effectively eliminating all the ways for customers, deliveries and other services to access their business.
- While parking and vehicular access were the main concerns of participants, several also noted that the **removal or temporary closure of sidewalks** near their businesses affected foot traffic and customer access.

It's been years, and parking is the big issue — everyone says there's none. On 17th Avenue, you think you've found a spot, but The City has pyloned off sections for their vehicles. What about consumers? I don't want to visit a restaurant or shop if I can't park. City workers should park elsewhere and create alternative parking. There's space, but it's blocked off for City vehicles or certain timelines. They need to make it more user-friendly during big construction periods.

- Group 5 Participant

There's only one entrance in, so I don't know — maybe parking might help a little, but my type of business needs parking right up front. Parents don't want to drop their kids off in the back and have them walk far, especially in winter. I don't think there's much they could do, to be honest. Maybe finish that part of construction first while keeping it open. Safety is a concern, but I don't think they'll care. They'll do what's best for them.

- Group 6 Participant

How are you coordinating to minimize impact? That's where the investment should be. If you get it wrong, no amount of help later will fix it. The signage in Marda Loop during construction was laughable — just lip service. They put up signs to support local retailers, but when it looks like a war zone with no sidewalks or parking, those efforts mean nothing.

- Group 3 Participant

# Construction impacts on traffic and business

The other major challenges of construction mentioned by businesses was on **traffic and commuting patterns**. Nearly all participants believed they had felt the effects of rerouted streets or closed lanes on their businesses – if only in terms of their own travel time and navigating traffic congestion.

- Businesses that made deliveries and took appointments outside of the office, for example, noted that disruptions to traffic patterns could disrupt their service times or appointment schedules. A few participants also noted that changes to transit schedules and routes due to road construction had affected their customers' ability to reach their businesses and caused delays for employees commuting to work.
- Across the groups, a few participants raised **noise**, as well as the **debris left by workers**, as contributing to the challenges of construction near their business. While construction noise made it difficult to do their job, the garbage and debris, including construction materials, was considered unsightly and, in some cases, potential hazards to customers and businesses alike.

The biggest impact I felt is the traffic consequences and the commute. Not many organizations have a work-from-home philosophy now, and we've all returned to the office as well. So, it's really the commute impacts.

- Group 3 Participant

We had to be more accommodating when people were late because there was traffic. Sometimes the road would be closed, and people would have to walk a block or two rather than being able to just pull right into our parking lot. There was definitely an impact with deliveries and timing with staff – more accommodation on our end.

- Group 2 Participant

After construction finished, the workers left for the day but kept the signage and cones up, making it seem like work was still ongoing. We didn't realize for two or three hours that it was actually done. Some materials and cones stayed on the road until the next day. It would be helpful to know when work is officially completed and ensure all barriers are properly removed to avoid hazards for pedestrians, employees and customers.

- Group 2 Participant

Traffic coming in and out was quite a challenge. Many parents drop off their kids right at the front, which was a safety risk. With only one entrance, it stayed congested. The noise was also a big issue — these children need a quiet space, and it was really disruptive for months. There wasn't much we could do besides using noise-canceling headphones.

- Group 6 Participant

# Long-term and other effects of construction on businesses

Because of the construction delays, we didn't know how long it would last, and we ended up turning kids away for the whole school year. That affects you for years. It's a long-term impact. But I think this can apply to any business. Those longer-term customers who maybe have chosen to go elsewhere because it was difficult in the, in the interim.

- Group 6 Participant

I think if The City is going to inconvenience a business, whether it's a restaurant, a hair salon, or whatever it is, they should be compensating these people for lost revenue. (If) people can't find parking, they lose their customers, and they're down for two to three years. Then these businesses struggle to get their footing again, and some don't.

- Group 1 Participant

I think the same applies to them when it comes to reaching out. I get it, it's not just a City problem, but out of respect — because they're running a business and we're running a business — it's about mutual respect. One day, my business might impact them, so I would hope the same applies to them, even if they're outside of the City.

Communication really goes a long way. And you're right, as condos and housing go up — especially affordable housing—it definitely impacts traffic and the clientele coming in. So, I would say the same thing applies to them.

- Group 6, Participant

Many participants mentioned that construction projects can have **long-term effects** on current and potential customers. If a business is hard to reach because of construction, customers might go somewhere else. If the construction lasts a long time, these temporary choices can become permanent, and businesses might lose these customers for good.

Further, **construction projects place additional labour burdens on business** owners and managers to coordinate about potential construction challenges. These may include activities such as notifying and providing instructions about parking or detours to customers, rescheduling or moving meetings and planned events with clients and partners, and coordinating or negotiating with City representatives and construction workers on business access or other specific needs, for example. The efforts and time spent on organizing for construction enables businesses to stay operational during projects but may also take away from planned and day-to-day activities, adding new obligations to already busy schedules and responsibilities.

It should also be noted that when considering the potential effects of construction on their businesses, many **participants did not distinguish between City-led construction** in public spaces **and private sector construction projects**, such as condominiums or commercial buildings. When asked, participants typically felt that because The City is involved in zoning and permitting projects, it has a role in supporting local businesses and residents by sharing information about these projects.



## Perspectives on the business supports

# Overview of City of Calgary business support processes

## Business-facing City processes that would support businesses in construction zones

- Consult to gain buy-in and inform of project
- Communication and timely updates on construction
- Support uplifting and returning customer to the area (e.g., events)

Pre-construction

During construction

Post-construction

- Internal project planning with other departments working in the area
- Presence in the area to understand evolving nature of construction on businesses and to be a contact when needed
- Internal debrief and checklist to ensure area cleared of construction

## Internal City processes that would support businesses in construction zones

# Pre-construction business support

When asked what business support means to them, participants initially focused on communications and the need for more timely information regarding construction projects. However, several other suggestions emerged:

## Before construction:

- Business owners suggested that The City needs to do more to **consult with businesses** – particularly small businesses – prior to construction. They felt that a consultation process would give businesses **more opportunity to raise concerns** and discuss the potential effects of construction on their operations. Any meetings with businesses should explain the need and (public) benefit of projects and focus on **creating more buy-in**.
- There was also a desire for **better overall planning** of construction projects by The City. Participants noted the knock-on effects of multiple construction projects in an area and repeated projects in the same locations year after year. They suggested that **timing** and other aspects of planning could be improved to reduce the disruption on business. With many participants taking a **holistic view** of construction across Calgary, they expected that The City would also view projects “from 30,000 feet” and plan them in such a way as to **reduce compounding construction events and repeated disturbances on businesses**.

Everyone has different preferences for how they want to be communicated with about a project. For me, I'd prefer an email with advance notice. The lead time should depend on the scale of the project. For something major, like a new LRT or train line, that would have a big impact on my business, so we'd need time to get creative to survive. But if it's a smaller project, a month's notice might be enough. And the email should be comprehensive — what's the scope, when will it start, how long will it last, what's the expected completion date, and who's in charge? We need clear information and someone we can contact.

- Group 3 Participant

When it comes to projects, The City seems to do whatever they choose to (do), consult or not. It should be about actually listening and making sure that the Council follows through on what businesses and the community are interested in. To me, the notification of construction isn't as important. However, the consultation, the discussion, and making decisions about construction before it starts are much more important.

- Group 1 Participant

You have to just accept that this is happening, without enough time to prepare. I think, from the start, when a project is conceived, it would be great for business owners to have the opportunity to sit at the table and discuss it. That way, as the project progresses, we're all on the same page and not left behind, trying to pick up the pieces and figure out how to move forward.

- Group 5 Participant

# Pre-construction business support ideas

Participants offered a number of ideas, concepts and perspectives on ways that The City could support businesses prior to construction. The full list of ideas recorded during each group is presented below.

## Group 1

- QR code - project timeline/progress for street construction – planning events/meetings (parking)
- Hand delivered documents
- Emails re: area
- Listen to community – information is less important than consultation

## Group 2

- Stakeholder meetings
  - Alert businesses to upcoming construction so they can prepare strategies (staffing, hours, parking, etc)
  - Opportunity for business to give feedback
- Consultation with business owners/residents
  - Understand high activity days for business, other concerns of local businesses
  - Especially ahead of time, time to plan
- Proposal signs re: planned projects - visibility,
- Continuous ability to provide feedback

## Group 3

- Consultation
- Cost-benefit from (small) business perspective
- Signage – construction upcoming in this area
- Consider timing– shoulder season vs summer
  - Start times, planning at city/with contractors
- Traffic management plan re: lane closures, rerouting, intersections
- Vetting contractors
- Only so much that can be done after the fact – must think about project in advance – invest time here

## Group 4

- Signage
- App from City with construction zones (should be updated throughout project lifecycle)
- Interactive map on the city website
- Specific dates on signage, a week ahead
- Website update/interface, menus
- A “signage czar” (responsible for the life of projects)
- Minimize impacts with improved planning
- How to leverage Plus 15 networks
- Monitoring private developers

## Group 5

- Collaboration between service providers
- Faster, work longer hours (around the clock)
- Holistic approach to project planning
- Consider impacts, both temp & permanent, to parking
- Consultation, better dialogue, work with businesses
- Opportunity for businesses to contribute re: planning
- Grants/tax reductions
- Communications – timely on specifics – year out, 6 mos, 3 mos, 1 mo updates
- Business liaison/contact - quick responses
- Better planning re: construction impacts
- Direct contact with businesses, not just owner of buildings
- Work with BIA
- Get city reps & councillors to come down, see the impacts (across phases)
- Connect via business licensing
- Proactive communications is paramount

## Group 6

- Consultation - partner with businesses
  - Brainstorming on parking alternatives
- Transparency
- Need to recognize the different types of businesses, different kinds of impacts
- Compensation commiserate with impacts on business
- Sharing timing/methods re: deadlines for communication, sharing, feedback
  - Expectations and processes
- Minimally 3-month notice, 6 months would be helpful – as soon as you know!
- Contact person with direct responsibility – key point person for business
- Integrate information that might affect construction or outages, allow sign up for information
- Campaigns, using tools and information available – before, during and after construction
- Connect with BIA/work with business groups
- Boots on the ground to share information, talk to people
- Hosting information nights for local businesses

# Business support throughout construction

I always think it would be really helpful if The City had some kind of sign-up, like a newsletter or daily updates, for any planned projects. Not just for long-term construction, but also for things like outages. And during construction, real-time updates would be helpful. People aren't expecting the construction teams to always meet deadlines, but they would value regular updates.

- Group 6 Participant

It would be nice to get emails because text messages can be frustrating for certain people. So, the general one would probably be email, but again, the best of the best, it's to have an app and have notifications through the app. It's one more thing that will make life easier for everybody.

- Group 4 Participant

They could have someone from The City physically come out from behind their desk and actually go on-site. Right now, you're just talking to someone with their rule book who doesn't fully understand the real impact. If they had to go down, find parking, and visit these businesses themselves, they might have a different outlook on it.

- Group 5 Participant

## During construction:

- The main concern for participants during construction was staying on top of the progress being made as projects are being completed. In this sense, they felt that The City should provide accurate and **timely updates** throughout the duration of construction projects. Participants in the focus groups liked the idea of having a **centralized place for information** about construction that they could review at their leisure, whether this information was shared on The City's website, through a dedicated website for construction projects, or through an app that could alert them to activities in areas of their choosing.
- A few participants also suggested that **City representatives visit areas** affected by construction more regularly during the construction period to interact with business owners and see the effects of construction first-hand. Several suggested that this would help The City consider the potential effects of construction from the perspective of small business and could improve planning processes and outcomes.

When the project starts, if the project manager could visit in person as well and assess the situation, it would be great. That way, if there's anything to add, we can explain it to him in person.

- Group 2 Participant

# Business support ideas for during construction

Participants offered a number of ideas, concepts and perspectives on ways that The City could support businesses during construction. The full list of ideas recorded during each group is presented below.

## Group 1

- Closures, signage
- Communications on timeline – changes, updates, how closely adhering to timeline
  - Communicating reasons for adjustments to timing
- Deadlines/dates
- Text alerts
- Signs with website links
- Compensation for lost revenues

## Group 2

- Signage for customers/employees, rerouting information
- Staggering activities
- Ability to contact someone, ask questions, get info, provide feedback – continued outreach
  - Person must be senior with ability to make mid-/high-level decisions in short time frame (24 hrs)
- Timing of communications and construction
- Indexing on Calgary website & information shared with businesses – contact details on all
  - Consider the level of projects for inclusion/omission on website

## Group 3

- Once work started, keep going
- Decide on/stick to number of projects in a season – re: resources, labour vis-à-vis planning
- Contractual incentives to meet timelines
- “Communication helps; results are better”
- Surfacing the why, strategic planning – lack of understanding
- Sidewalk access is paramount
- Ability to provide feedback – to someone who can make a decision and act quickly

## Group 4

- Return speed limits during off-hours
- Workers on-site should have better knowledge of project as a whole
- Live data on project (maps, etc.)
- Project progress updates/schedule – stages of progress

## Group 5

- Communications of delays asap
- Multiple means of communications
- Better enforcement – traffic, parking
- Alternate routes, transit, bikes, etc
- Regular meetings
- More parking, finding other ways to offer parking – and don’t clog with City vehicles/construction vehicles
- Proactive approach – reaching out (from beginning) to update on progress
- Night construction (in non-residential areas)

## Group 6

- Updates on where things are, delays
- Biweekly updates to businesses
- Signage – businesses open, logos/names
- Better wayfinding – earlier in the approach/where visible and allowing for reaction
- Daily/weekly updates on website
- Formidable marketing supports and strong effort to keep people coming to area during projects
- Emails – maps, show area affected – can share with customers

# Post-construction business support

## After construction:

- Although the long-term challenges of construction were recognized by most participants, it was somewhat difficult for them to think of supports that The City might offer after construction. When prompted, many liked the idea of having **activities to celebrate milestones** in construction, including efforts like street festivals or special events to get customers back to areas that had experienced reduced access from construction.
- In keeping with their desire for improved communications, several suggested that The City reach out to affected businesses to conduct a **project debrief discussion following construction**, take feedback and consider lessons learned for future projects.
- With most participants identifying parking and access as the main impacts of construction, some suggested that The City consider **offering free, reduced or otherwise incentivized parking** (“pay for one hour, get a second hour free”) in areas where construction had recently concluded, even suggesting that it partner with private parking to extend offers beyond public spots. Similarly, a few thought The City could offer **reduced or free transit** to encourage customers to return following long-term construction.
- In terms of potential quick wins post-construction, participants also suggested that The City should ensure timely **clean-up of garbage and debris** in the aftermath of construction. This would ensure everyone’s safety and be a clear indication that a project had ended.

Every time I do a project — and it's probably the same for everyone's business here — the last step is a debrief with the team to see what worked well and what didn't. It wouldn't be difficult for The City to do the same. They could go to businesses and residents in the area and ask, 'What worked? What didn't? How can we learn from this so we don't have the same problems next time?'

- Group 5 Participant

I think events to celebrate construction milestones like a street festival or a 'come back to these businesses' event where The City promotes the progress made would that be nice. Anything that brings people back and psychologically reinforces that progress has been made and the end is in sight.

- Group 1 Participant

Maybe for that area, The City could offer free street parking instead of requiring people to pay. It would help encourage people to go there, right? If a store with frontage loses clientele due to construction, the solution isn't just to prop up the business afterward — it's to find ways to restore that clientele so they can keep operating as usual.

- Group 1 Participant

# Post-construction business support ideas

Participants offered a number of ideas, concepts and perspectives on ways that The City could support businesses following construction. The full list of ideas recorded during each group is presented below.

## Group 1

- Readout – this is the input from community, what we did, reasons, results and impacts
- We're finished – benefits gained
- Summary – learnings
- Publish information

## Group 2

- Contact should come to businesses to say project is finished
- Leaving site clean, debris removed
- Post-project stakeholders meeting
  - What happened? What could have been done better?
- More up to date information on website

## Group 3

- Communicating that the construction is over
- Grand openings, events after project is over
- Ensure clean-up, signs and construction debris
- "Work the feedback" - review feedback from the community, including businesses, and develop strategies for improving future construction projects
- Free parking – further: parking CREDIT – hour free elsewhere
- Create incentives and enthusiasm for an area

## Group 4

- Info that job is done
- Collaboration after the fact – not one and done
- Get rid of traffic control/signage, etc right after project is done
- Inspections, city walk through, review and follow-up

## Group 5

- Debrief on completed project, consultation with businesses in area following
- Community newsletters – use to connect
- Promotions at reopening
- Show appreciation – reduced tax
- Ensure that businesses know about reductions to landlords
- Public announcements, use advertising budget – over several weeks
- Work with BIAs/Downtown Strategy
- Free transit to affected areas

## Group 6

- Input/feedback after the fact
  - Understanding the stats on the impacts, customers, revenues
  - Impacts and possible better ways of doing
- Events/bringing people back

# Reducing construction disruptions and timelines

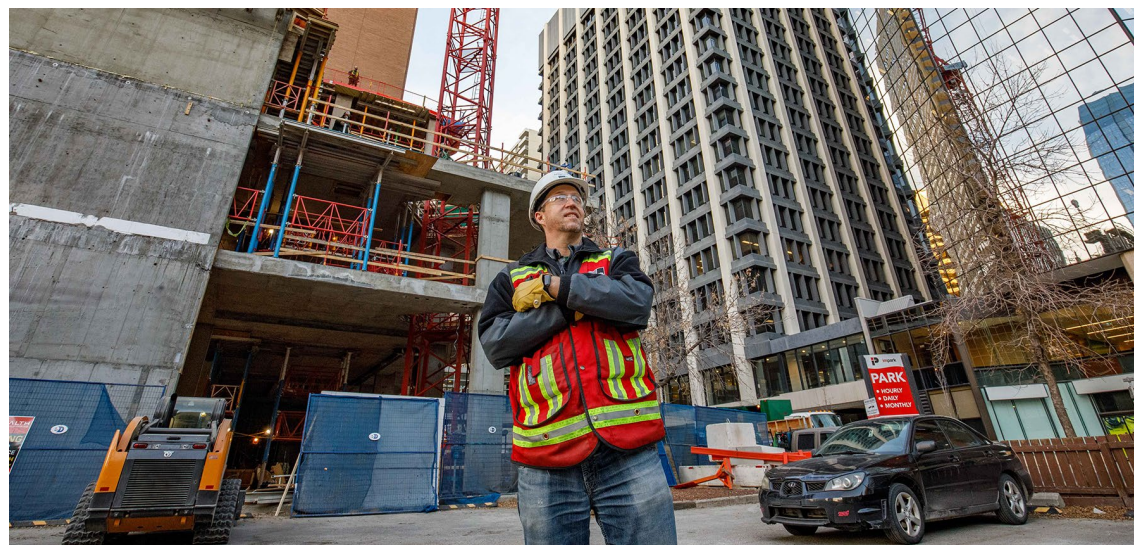
I didn't know there was any money being given out. My thought is, if you have that budget, why not allocate it to the construction to speed up the process? You could pay the crew overtime to work overnight or use that budget to speed up the process. \$5,000 is nice, but for most businesses, it's not much.

- *Group 5 Participant*

A lot of people are complaining about how long these projects take, and I agree. For example, Stoney Trail's southwest corner took forever. I think incentivizing contractors with bonuses is a great idea. Even if it costs more, I'd rather they finish faster. The City wastes a lot of money anyway, so I'd rather it be spent on incentives to finish projects quicker.

- *Group 3 Participant*

- While supports from The City were broadly viewed as beneficial, many participants felt that the single biggest thing that The City could do to support businesses and improve their experiences of construction would be to **shorten the length of time that construction projects interrupt their operations.**
- For some, this meant considering ways for construction crews to work later into the evenings and overnight to complete projects more quickly. A few participants also suggested that The City might consider ways to incentivize the timely completion of construction projects among crews and contractors.





# Perspectives on information flow

# Ratings of The City's construction communication

Although not all participants in the groups had experience with construction near their businesses, those who did were asked to provide their rating of The City's communications about these projects on a scale of 1 to 10, where a 1 meant it did a poor job and a 10 meant it did an excellent job.

- Participants had a wide range of responses, from a few who felt they had received little notice from The City and rated its communications at 2 or 3, to participants with excellent experiences who rated The City highly, between 8 and 10. Most business owners felt that The City's communication efforts warranted **between a 5 and 7**, suggesting that there remain opportunities to improve and extend outreach and information delivery about construction to local businesses.

| Group | All ratings            | Average |
|-------|------------------------|---------|
| 1     | 7, 8, 7, 7, 8          | 7.4     |
| 2     | 8, 10, 3, 8, 8, 5/6, 6 | 6.75    |
| 3     | 5, 7, 8, 7             | 6.75    |
| 4     | 7, 4, 2, 6, 5, 4       | 4.7     |
| 5     | 9, 6, 7, 6             | 7       |
| 6     | 3, 6, 7, 7, 6          | 5.8     |

I'd say 7. There (are) probably improvements that can be made, leaving some room for that. But certainly within the range of no complaints.

- Group 1 Participant

5 or 6. I think just because of the number of businesses where we're located, it's pretty difficult for them to do it one-on-one. It always seems to be a last-minute thing where there's no time to adjust. So, that could be improved.

- Group 2 Participant

8. I think they did a pretty good job. Once again, I travel a lot, and, man, we've got nothing to complain about, believe me. There are other cities that are just messed right up.

- Group 2 Participant

I give it a 5. I empathize with The City — communication is tough with multiple street-front retailers. If you tracked every piece of communication and every website The City created, it's very thorough. But the devil is in the details. Take Marda Loop — every business was informed, but it was more like, 'Here's the project, here's the beautiful sidewalk enhancement.' I'm not sure the right people were at the table when decisions were made.

- Group 3 Participant

# Communication challenges for leased spaces

Part of their business process is to distribute information to our office manager, who then sends out communications to the leadership. There are a couple of potential failure points here — if either the building manager or office manager doesn't communicate that, we, as the office staff, may not know. It wouldn't hurt to directly go to the tenants as well as the building itself. Street signs are what I rely on for information or looking out the window and seeing a road being torn up.

- Group 1 Participant

I need at least 48 hours notice about construction coming near my office. As everyone has mentioned, the main concern is parking. Parking and the commute are the key issues.

- Group 4 Participant

For larger construction projects, how much notice is there before they start? Is it three months, a year, or even two years for projects that take months to complete? They don't decide on these things quickly unless it's an emergency. If my lease is up for renewal and I know construction is coming in a year, I might not want to renew it. Since we pay our business licenses annually, maybe there should be something included with the business license letter if a project is even on the radar.

- Group 5, Participant

- Among participants who lease or rent their business space, there was some uncertainty about whether they had received communications from The City prior to nearby construction projects. Although a few noted that information had been passed on by their landlords, others could not remember receiving these notices and some questioned whether their landlords had received them. Most felt that when information must pass through multiple hands, there is a strong **possibility of delay**.
- A few participants in the groups noted they own and/or manage commercial spaces. In general, these participants said that when they receive notifications from The City, they pass this information to their tenants immediately. However, some felt that notifications from The City can come with **short notice**, leaving little time to share and even less time for tenants to take action.
- Especially among those that lease their spaces, participants felt that The City should be more diligent in **communicating directly with both building owners as well as tenants**. They suggested that The City inform them by letter and/or email, as well as have business liaisons or City representatives go door-to-door and leave pamphlets or other information at individual business entrances. These measures would increase the likelihood that more businesses receive information about construction in a timely manner.

# BIA involvement and communication

- Participants who are active in their local **Business Improvement Area (BIA)** generally felt that BIAs do a good job of sharing written information from The City about construction, as well as convening **opportunities to work together** with other businesses on strategies to mitigate the challenges of construction in the area. They encouraged participants with active BIAs in their area to become more involved in these organizations.
- Participants noted that **more City engagement could be organized through BIAs**, using them as avenues for proactive involvement to connect with business. For example, they suggested that City Councillors could offer town hall sessions to discuss construction challenges with business and City representatives could improve coordination on construction efforts through BIAs to ensure projects take specific needs into account in construction planning.
- There was acknowledgment that not all businesses are in areas with active or strong BIAs. In these areas, participants indicated that The City needs to do all it can to **reach out to businesses individually** and provide them with timely notices and updates of construction projects.

The BIA covers a large area, so it's hard to communicate all the small construction updates. They send newsletters, but there's only so much info they can include. I'm not sure how well they stay updated, especially with staff turnover. The BIA's focus is mainly on collecting taxes and making streets more vibrant, not necessarily on construction updates. So, long story short, no, I don't hear much through them.

- Group 6 Participant

I'm not involved, but our owner is. We're on email chains with other local businesses, which is helpful. I'd recommend starting those. The BIA is active in our community, especially with big projects near the (Event Centre) and Stampede (Park). For major projects, it would be helpful if the City Councillor held information sessions. There's little contact from the Councillor or senior management for big developments, so a town hall for business owners to discuss traffic and parking would be useful.

- Group 2 Participant

We had a situation where they were finally redoing the sidewalk in front of my shop. We were shocked to learn they weren't planning to fix the sidewalk after all these years. It was part bricks. We are in BIA on 17th Avenue, and many have a business improvement area along with a coordinator and so forth. I contacted the BIA, and they immediately contacted the head coordinator for the project, and they came out that afternoon and that entire sidewalk was replaced. So, they are responsive. But again, we need to know who to call. And for those who are in a BIA, I would strongly recommend you get more involved because the more we get involved with our BIAs, the better these work.

- Group 5 Participant

# Project information and timeliness

- While receiving information ahead of construction projects was part of the issue for participants in the focus groups, just as importantly – if not more important – for business owners and operators is the **timeliness of continued communications and updates throughout the project's timeline**.
- Overwhelmingly, participants in the focus groups want to receive initial information about projects **a few weeks, if not months, ahead of planned construction**, giving them time to prepare for impacts and make important business decisions for the season ahead. Because The City plans for projects years in advance, several participants suggested that it should not be difficult to ensure that businesses learn of planned activities early – as soon as specific plans are funded or a timeline for construction has been attached to the project, for example.
- When focusing on potential operational disruptions, participants suggested The City needs to do more to give businesses **notice on changing aspects of construction during the course of a project**, like short-term sidewalk closures, changes to parking access, or updates to traffic routing. Indeed, some participants felt that the timing of this type of notice is often not adequate from a planning perspective. For example, several said that they have received notices on a Friday for sidewalk closures or parking changes beginning the following Monday, leaving them scrambling to notify clients and employees and come up with solutions to keep their operations running smoothly. These participants wanted to receive information about specific activities with more notice – **at least a week ahead** – which they felt would still allow for construction schedule changes but also let them better plan around day-to-day inconveniences.

"I'm not sure if they're avoiding a commitment to a date on purpose, but I'm willing to give some grace on moved deadlines if issues arise. However, it would be helpful to know upfront that construction will last for the next few years. Even though I can't change anything, it would help mentally prepare for it. This might reduce pushback if they communicated it better, like offering text alerts or other methods."

- Group 1 Participant

"I imagine these things are decided in advance, from a year out to six months, three months, a month, and a week out, as you approach the date. On that note, for communication and advance notice, alternate routes for drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and any affected transit routes would be helpful. I say this because we have multiple locations, and how people get there varies depending on where they are in the city. I've seen all forms of transportation be affected by construction in various parts of town."

- Group 5 Participant

"Knowing in advance allows business owners to prepare. For example, if I had known 6-8 months ahead, I could have shifted my business online or offered curbside pickup sooner. Now, I'm just starting to do that, but it's a bit late. More notice would have helped."

- Group 2 Participant

# Effective construction communication

In general, participants felt that the best way to reach them about projects was by **direct communications**. Further, there is a need for repeated communication through a variety of means – including The City website – to ensure that The City’s notices reach them.

- For most, an **email notice of construction** was typically enough if construction was planned for a few blocks or farther away. Some participants suggested that they receive a lot of email and may miss this information if it is only sent once.
- **Signs** were one of the primary ways that business owners in the groups learned about nearby construction projects. They viewed City of Calgary signs as an important sources of information about projects, though most participants said that signs should be **placed early** (in the weeks ahead of construction) and should start at least **a few blocks away** from planned work in order to be more effective wayfinding tools. These two adjustments would ensure that information was better understood by business owners and customers. Participants also felt that **key project details**, like maps of affected areas and planned project timing, should be ~~prominently~~ displayed on these signs.

I don't receive any notifications because I'm a tenant in a building. My only notice is the signs on the street, often just a week before an event. This can lead me to reschedule or move client events outside the downtown core.

- Group 1 Participant

People can't understand why things are happening, but there are reasons. It would just be helpful if there was better communication during construction. For example, with the Deerfoot construction, I signed up for email alerts, and they send periodic summaries—like what was completed and what was started that season. That's great.

- Group 1 Participant

Sometimes you just don't notice the signs, even if they have valuable info, because you're not paying attention. Not everybody likes signs, not everybody likes email, and not everybody likes traditional mail. At the very least, we all know how to look something up on any one of our connected devices. So, more up to date information on that calgary.ca website I would find helpful.

- Group 2 Participant

If there's construction, just send me [an] email. Showing me the map of what kind of detours you are providing, and I can just send it off to my clients so they would never have to call me [while] driving around... complaining and mad about it. I can just forward that [email] to everyone who might want to come to the shop and problem solved.

- Group 6 Participant

# Communication tools and business support

The letter came through the post, and it was very well planned. It included the project coordinator's name and details on when the construction would start and end. It was really well-briefed. Sometimes unpredictable things happen, but the communication from The City was really well done.

- Group 2 Participant

Business liaisons were engaging with the community where large, long-term construction projects were expected — whether through events, consultation meetings, or direct visits to businesses.

- Group 4 Participant

I understand they're busy, but for major developments like the Safeway in the Sunnyside area, there's no contact from the Councillor or senior City management. A town hall for business owners would be helpful, especially when projects impact street traffic and parking. We've been a large store since 1958, in our location since 2001, yet only one city councillor or MLA has ever spoken to us.

- Group 2 Participant

- **Pamphlets, letters and leaflets** were also identified as key tools for The City to share information about construction projects, particularly for businesses located very close to planned projects. Like signage, these should provide **key project details** to help businesses plan for the impacts of construction.
- While few had experience interacting with **business liaisons/City representatives** during construction projects, participants liked the idea of having someone that they could turn to with questions or issues besides contacting their City Council representative. Further, participants felt that printed materials, including pamphlets delivered to businesses, should include the **representative's contact information** (name, email, phone number) for this purpose.
  - It was more common for participants to discuss their interactions with **construction workers** working around their business than with City representatives. These interactions were typically due to specific issues with immediate operational disruptions, like construction vehicles or activities blocking entrances. Most participants with these experiences felt that construction crews were usually responsive and accommodating when they raised concerns.

As noted in the previous section, the idea of **communications as a two-way street** resonated deeply with many participants, who would like to be consulted more throughout proposed construction projects that may have potential effects on their livelihoods. While there was appreciation for the communications efforts undertaken by The City, there was also a sense that more effort could be placed on outreach and **consultation** that would seek input from local business owners ahead of The City making construction project decisions.



## Towards business-friendly construction policy

# Views on non-financial business supports

Participants in the focus groups examined a variety of initiatives that The City has implemented to support businesses affected by major construction projects.

- Participants had largely favourable views of The City of Calgary's **non-financial initiatives**.
  - The most well-received of the non-financial supports offered by The City were **business liaisons/City representatives** that would share information and serve as direct contacts for businesses with questions or concerns.
  - **Parking alternatives**, including bike parking and the relaxing of parking restrictions around construction areas, were also viewed positively by most participants in the focus groups. However, some raised **concerns for their residential neighbours** who may be impacted by these parking changes. Several also expressed concern that construction projects in Calgary did not just reduce parking during construction but eliminated parking spaces as part of the plans themselves. They cautioned that with Calgary's seasonal weather and large number of vehicle drivers, The City should be careful about approving major projects that take away parking space.

Stakeholder meetings would be a great way to communicate with those affected, because then you know how to adjust your business, prepare your employees, and inform your customers. That gives us a chance to provide feedback on disruptions. Anyone here, based on their experience, could offer valuable input. No one knows your business better than you. If you can point out issues – like both entrances being closed – that could seriously impact your business. The City may not have even considered that. Knowing upfront helps prevent lost sales and income instead of scrambling to adapt when it's too late.

- Group 2 Participant

City workers need to find a place to put their vehicles somewhere else and create alternative parking, because you go up there and there's so much room on the street. It's blocked off for City vehicles only or certain timelines. That's what they really need to work on to make it a lot more user friendly during these big construction periods.

- Group 5 Participant

The City planner should assess the affected area and look at surrounding spaces. If there's a park with restricted parking for one or two hours, remove that restriction at least for the duration of construction. Identify adjacent areas that can be utilized for additional parking. It's a case-by-case situation, but most definitely, I'm sure there are solutions.

- Group 6 Participant

# Construction signage and marketing expectations

- Participants felt that things like **signage** – whether signs on the street indicating construction sites and dates or targeted signage to direct customers and clients to businesses or parking – should be considered a basic and expected thing for The City to provide. They suggested that The City might consider ways to work with local businesses to create specialized signage – for example, signs with the names and logos of businesses open during construction.
- Participants also typically liked the idea of **direct marketing** to encourage Calgarians to visit areas affected by construction and The City's support for **events** to celebrate the end of construction and welcome customers back to the affected area.



Signage should always be present. If I'm driving on John Laurie (Blvd.) from point A to B, there should be signage a week in advance saying construction will start on this date so drivers can plan ahead. Then, during construction, contractors and workers should have better knowledge of signage and traffic flow to ensure everything runs smoothly.

- Group 4 Participant

They could make signage tailored to the business, or maybe they could also have a website where they put those on to help promote those businesses. Especially retail type businesses to just help make things easier for people that want to go there.

- Group 2 Participant

They could have a celebratory day when the project is finally done. Maybe have some food trucks in the area to create kind of a buzz. If The City was willing to pay for that, I think that would be wonderful. It would attract people into the area given the loss a lot of businesses face during construction. It would be a nice way to invigorate some foot traffic.

- Group 2 Participant

# Main Streets Business Support Grant Pilot: awareness and impact

In 2024, at the direction of City Council, The City implemented a one-time Main Streets Business Support Grant pilot in Marda Loop and Bridgeland, with the objectives of helping businesses prepare for planned Main Streets construction and implement strategies to encourage business patronage during construction. The Main Streets Business Support Grant was implemented as a pilot to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving these objectives.

While a number of participants cited the construction in Marda Loop and Bridgeland – typically as a cautionary tale or to express empathy with the experiences of those businesses – few had heard of the Main Streets Business Support Grant that was piloted in these areas.

- While the grant was not compensation, it was seen this way by some participants, and most participants felt that the size of the grant was inadequate to make a dent in the losses that businesses would have incurred due to the long duration and direct effects of construction. Participants suggested that **larger and/or repeated payments – or even better, reduced business or property taxes** – would have a more lasting and greater effect on continued business operations.

That's great, and any amount of money helps, but first, businesses need to know the grant exists, and they have to apply for it. And also if you're a business in Inglewood, Marda Loop, or 17th Avenue, \$5,000 won't go far — it won't even cover rent. I believe that when major construction projects tear up roads in these areas, property taxes for affected businesses should be automatically suspended.

- Group 1 Participant

Well, if your business has been basically hamstrung for two years, \$5,000 is like a gnat in a windstorm. And the reality – sure, why not give people \$5,000? They're paying huge taxes and all they're getting is a little bit of it back. What you got to focus on is minimizing the inconvenience to those businesses.

- Group 4 Participant

I think this \$5,000 grant program is excellent because if it allows for that autonomy for us to be able to use that money in a way that we see fit. I mean. it's not an earth-shattering amount of money. But I think there's a lot of smaller businesses, coffee shops, pet stores. \$5,000 is a very reasonable amount of money for them. That's a big marketing budget.

- Group 2 Participant

When it comes to business support, I would probably think of a grant or a leeway on property tax for the landlords to be able to pass through to the customers, things like that.

- Group 5 Participant



# Main Streets Business Support Grant Pilot: awareness and impact (continued)

I think it'd be very helpful. I just wonder how many businesses heard about it. I mean, the news was inundated with these companies crying the blues and saying 'my business is gone, and I've lost clients'. And that made the news almost daily. My business wasn't affected. But how many of those businesses' construction affected their incomes? Did they know about this? Because I've spoken to a number of people in Marda Loop, they never mentioned that they got a grant from The City of Calgary.

- Group 1 Participant

It is tricky to offer grants and not everybody knows about it. Everybody's always watching the news, so how come we're not talking more about these grants and they're not being put out to the public then. Why are they being so secretive about it? I think putting that out there, whether it's on The City of Calgary website or even on news websites or even Facebook groups. When I think of like groups, I think of Facebook groups. Put it out there.

- Group 6 Participant

- A few participants suggested that the grant was little more than a **public relations move** on the part of The City, introduced to smooth over relations due to poorly planned and implemented construction activities. These participants questioned whether all affected businesses had **awareness of the grant**, noting that despite local media coverage about the construction and the challenges businesses experienced, they had not heard about this initiative. Many also felt that it was **unfair and unnecessary to make businesses apply** for something that should have been offered to all businesses in the area.
- Although they had critiques of the grant program, most participants were glad that The City recognized the burden placed on business in Marda Loop and Bridgeland, particularly the burden on small businesses, just as these operations were emerging from the shadow of COVID-19 shutdowns. They appreciated that The City had implemented programs especially for businesses and hoped that support programs like this might exist when and if they ever experienced long-term construction projects in the future.

The business has to know that that grant exists. But it requires them to do something and apply for it, and I just think it should be automatic.

- Group 1 Participant



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