

2023

# Toronto Night Economy Review

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**Licensing and Zoning for Restaurants,  
Bars and Entertainment Venues**

Public Consultation Summary

## Land Acknowledgment

The City of Toronto acknowledges the land we live and work on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

## African Ancestral Acknowledgement

The City of Toronto acknowledges all Treaty peoples – including those who came here as settlers – as migrants either in this generation or in generations past – and those who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.

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This report was produced by VibeLab on behalf of the City of Toronto.

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# Executive Summary

**About the project | Over a four-week period in March–April 2023, over 3,300 people took part in a survey and consultation series as part of the *Toronto Night Economy Review: Licensing and Zoning for Restaurants, Bars and Entertainment Venues*.** This series consisted of an online survey, seven focus groups, and three citywide public consultation sessions, with the goal of soliciting input towards updated licensing and zoning regulations for bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues, and towards broader strategies to support and enhance Toronto’s night economy (NE).

**The *Night Economy Review* is one step in a City process that has been underway since 2018, with several related goals:** updating the definitions, rules, licensing, and zoning regulations for bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues to align with evolving business models and provide flexibility; supporting live music, entertainment, and social culture at night to reflect Toronto’s diversity; supporting livability for nighttime workers and those who take part in social culture at night; and promoting safe and enjoyable communities for all.

**This report, and the consultation sessions, were carried out by VibeLab, a purpose-driven consultancy agency focused on all things about the night, on behalf of three City of Toronto divisions** (City Planning, Economic Development and Culture, and Municipal Licensing and Standards) with support from the cross-divisional Night Economy Internal Working Group (IWG). City divisions partnered with VibeLab to conduct outreach, and led the development and implementation of the survey.

## Who took part

This project was undertaken with diversity, equity, inclusion, and geographic representation as priorities. **Consultations engaged 224 individuals:** residents, business owners and operators, culture and nightlife industry workers, and representatives of residents’ associations, Business Improvement

Areas (BIAs), and community groups that serve a variety of populations and perspectives.

**In terms of survey participation, 3,116 individuals responded to one or more survey “pathways,”** with questions posed to 1) members of the general public, 2) business owners and operators, and 3) cultural event producers. Survey respondents represented all City of Toronto wards, and based on available data, 23 of 25 wards were represented in consultations. Participation rates for surveys and consultations were strongest in the downtown area, particularly the Toronto Centre and Spadina–Fort York wards. Of the 1,504 survey respondents who provided optional demographic information, over 65% were between ages 30–54, 62% identified as white, 49% identified as male, and 44% identified as bisexual, gay, lesbian, queer, or Two-Spirit.

## Key findings

- **Torontonians participate strongly in hospitality and arts at night:** 92% go to restaurants, 85% to bars, 82% to live music, and 73% to cinema, theatre, and comedy.
- **Cost, transportation, and access to nearby activities are the most frequent barriers to participation in nighttime activities.** A higher rate of respondents outside the downtown core report lack of access to activities near them.
- **Most survey respondents (80%) agreed that nightclubs should be permitted outside the downtown core—**ideally along commercial corridors and near transit.
- **Consultation participants living outside the downtown area generally hoped to see more nightlife and social opportunities in their area.** Opinions varied about the nature of what that might look like, ranging from family-friendly and outdoor activities, to “supper club”-style offerings with dinner and music, to spaces supporting larger and later music events. Support for nightlife offerings not centred on alcohol is widespread.
- **Conflict related to sound and noise is one of the biggest concerns shared in consultations**

**Cost, transportation, and access to nearby activities are the most frequent barriers to participation in nighttime activities.**

**by operators, residents, and night economy patrons alike.** While operators describe proactive efforts to be good neighbours, some residents still experience frustration with existing noise bylaws and complaint pathways. Measures like more objective enforcement, local business-resident mediation, soundproofing support, and use of the Agent of Change principle<sup>1</sup> were repeatedly raised as essential.

- **Business owners and operators, as well as other participants, generally felt that the 6% floor area limit in the Zoning Bylaw for entertainment in restaurants and bars does not make sense** for current business operations. (Other consultation participants tended to agree.) Licence holders surveyed believe, on average, that 39% floor area is needed.
- **Operators emphasized the need for flexibility, hybridity, adaptability, and autonomy**, hoping to see updated licensing structures that allow multiple uses in one space.
- **While 60% of surveyed licence holders report a need for licensing changes, operators in consultations also expressed apprehension about regulatory change**, fearing that updates may lead to over-regulation, onerous additional bylaw compliance and enforcement, increases in insurance costs, police activity already perceived by some as excessive, or new obstacles in regulatory processes that are already felt by some to be expensive and unclear.
- **Cultural event producers surveyed most often use bars, restaurants, clubs, and coffeeshops for their events—but producers residing outside of downtown are less likely to do so.** Most of those surveyed produce events downtown. Less than 10% do so in North York, Scarborough, or Etobicoke. In consultations, residents of these areas praised the talent in their local communities, but emphasized lack of event space as a barrier to gatherings.
- **Particularly for small businesses and DIY (“do-it-yourself”) event organizers, the high cost of renting space and producing events, the lack of available spaces, and lengthy licensing and permitting application**

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1. A set of urban planning guidelines, followed by other cities worldwide and adopted by Toronto in 2017, that holds an incoming development (the “agent of change”) responsible for recognizing and mitigating potential future conflicts between sound-producing spaces, like music venues, and residential buildings or other businesses. For a more in-depth definition, please see Section 4.0.

**processes** are considered prohibitive barriers to the flourishing of creative communities and the ability of nightlife entrepreneurs to enter the sector. A significant majority of event producers wanted to see more flexibility around temporary use of space (81%) and faster permit reviews (72%). Participants offered a range of suggestions for how City divisions might provide financial, physical, and logistical support.

Key themes, topics, and findings from the survey and consultations are explored in greater depth in the respective sections (*Section III: Survey Findings and Section IV: Consultation Findings*). Notes from each of the 10 consultation sessions are summarized in the Appendix.

## **What the report contains**

This report first provides an overview of the *Night Economy Review* project and its history (*Section I*), as well as the outreach, engagement, and session design methods used by VibeLab in partnership with the City (*Section II: Methodology*).

*Section III: Survey Findings and Section IV: Consultation Findings* detail findings, feedback, and outcomes drawn from 3,116 survey responses, plus verbal feedback from seven stakeholder consultations and three public consultations engaging 224 participants. Each section begins with a high-level overview of key findings, which are then discussed in greater depth. The report *Appendix* also includes in-depth summaries of each of the 10 consultations, selected survey cross-tabulations, and other project materials.

The perspectives included in this report are relayed in their original form as much as possible, and should be regarded as the insights of participants rather than any endorsement of these opinions from the VibeLab project consortium or the City of Toronto.



# Project Consortium

vibelab



Penn  
Praxis

2. VibeLab: [www.vibe-lab.org/](http://www.vibe-lab.org/)
3. Berlin Clubcommission: [www.clubcommission.de/](http://www.clubcommission.de/)
4. Long Winter: <http://www.torontolongwinter.com/about>
5. PennPraxis: [www.design.upenn.edu/pennpraxis/](http://www.design.upenn.edu/pennpraxis/)

## VibeLab

VibeLab<sup>2</sup> is a leading, purpose-driven consultancy agency in all things about the night. Founded in 2018 by Amsterdam's former Night Mayor Mirik Milan and Berlin Clubcommission's<sup>3</sup> spokesperson Lutz Leichsenring, VibeLab is based between Amsterdam, Berlin and Sydney. VibeLab's expertise and international network of over 3,000 cultural and creative industry professionals, scientists and public officials in more than 100 cities on 6 continents helps all those seeking new paths to improve creative night ecosystems.

## Long Winter

Long Winter<sup>4</sup> is Toronto's essential all-ages, pay-what-you-can alternative music and arts series that takes place throughout the winter months. Long Winter has initiated multiple advocacy and capacity-building programs for DIY ("do-it-yourself") cultural scenes in Toronto, and across Ontario. These include international festivals and conferences, co-produced with academic and programming partners in Canada and France, and the DIY Space Project: a cross-sector advisory intervention for Toronto communities in support of more sustainable access to space.

## PennPraxis

PennPraxis<sup>5</sup> is the applied research, professional practice, and community engagement arm of the University of Pennsylvania's Weitzman School of Design. PennPraxis provides opportunities for multi-disciplinary student and faculty collaboration through fee-for-service projects in the fields of Urban Planning, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Historic Preservation and more. PennPraxis is an experienced global leader in nighttime urban planning and urban data analytics, and has been a part of the Creative Footprint, a benchmarking research project conducted with VibeLab, since 2018.

# City of Toronto



This report was prepared on behalf of three City of Toronto divisions, with a combined set of goals and objectives:

## **City Planning**

The City Planning Division leads the long term vision for the City's growth and physical form to enhance the quality of life for Toronto's diverse residential and business communities. City Planning is responsible for City-wide Zoning By-law 569-2013, which regulates the use of land, buildings and structures.

As part of the Night Economy Review, City Planning staff reviewed zoning regulations regarding eating and entertainment related uses, including where they are permitted across the City, the amount of space they can take up in a building, and defined terms for eating and entertainment related uses, under the framework of modernization and harmonization with the Licensing By-law.

## **Economic Development & Culture (EDC)**

The Economic Development & Culture (EDC) Division is responsible for a wide range of services that contribute to an economically strong and culturally vibrant city. EDC helps Toronto's business and cultural interests thrive, while advancing prosperity, opportunity, and liveability for its residents. The City of Toronto's Music Office (a unit of Film & Entertainment Industries) is located within EDC.

The Music Office represents the interests of Toronto's music community and musicians at City Hall, through policy, recommendations, and advocacy. As part of the Night Economy Review, EDC and Music Office staff helped promote engagement from entertainment venue operators, artists and cultural event organizers, alongside other stakeholder groups and the general public.

## **Municipal Licensing and Standards (ML&S)**

Municipal Licensing and Standards (ML&S) provides bylaw administration and enforcement services, including strategies to address noise, business inspections, parks regulations, and animal services issues. Services also include business licensing and permitting, property standards, and animal care including control, shelter and adoption services. The division is responsible for the enforcement of more than 30 bylaws and statutes.

Through Toronto Municipal Code, Chapter 545, Licensing, the City licenses bars, restaurants, and other entertainment venues. As part of the Night Economy Review, ML&S intends to modernize and clarify relevant licensing categories to better reflect the operations of these establishments across Toronto and to harmonize with zoning changes to assist businesses and support inspection and enforcement.



Photo: © City of Toronto



# Section I: Introduction

In spring 2023, VibeLab, in partnership with the City of Toronto (referred to throughout as the “City”<sup>6</sup>), led a round of industry and public engagement for the City’s Night Economy Review. This online survey and series of public, community, and industry consultations focused on modernizing Toronto’s zoning, licensing and regulation for businesses, and how City regulations can support balanced night economies<sup>7</sup>, culture and communities citywide. These consultations are a part of a broader review process, taking place since 2018, that examines the bylaws, regulations, and policies affecting businesses such as restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues operating at night.

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6. Throughout this text, “the City” (and variants of) refer to the City of Toronto municipal administration; “the city” (and variants of) refer to the geographic area of Toronto.

7. The **night economy (NE)** refers to activities, businesses and workers operating specifically at night, including nightlife, hospitality and leisure as well as night shift workers, late-night transportation, retail, etc.

## 1.0 Project Background

**Review & Consultation Goals:** The City's Night Economy Review has several distinct but related goals:

- Update licensing and zoning regulations and definitions for bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues to align with evolving business models and provide flexibility
- Examine regulations that define where these businesses can operate in Toronto
- Support live music, entertainment and social culture at night in a way that reflects Toronto's diversity, in alignment with Toronto's Official Plan and EDC's Strategic Directions Report, Music Strategy and Nightlife Action Plan
- Explore new ways to activate space and enhance livability for everyone who works at night or is interested in cultural or social experiences after dark
- Create strategies that promote safe and enjoyable communities for all.

**This project was undertaken with diversity, equity, inclusion, and geographic representation as priorities.** To that end, consultations engaged residents, business owners and operators from small to multinational, culture and nightlife<sup>8</sup> industry workers, residents' associations, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and community groups serving a variety of populations and perspectives, in order to solicit a wide range of expertise, insights, and feedback, and understand the issues most urgently affecting nighttime businesses, residents, and people who are active at night. Consultations were designed with input from multiple City divisions and adjacent departments including Toronto Police Services (TPS) and Toronto Public Health (TPH).

## What This Report Contains

**This report documents the 2023 Night Economy Review process, feedback, and outcomes.** It covers the research, outreach and engagement methodology used in both the consultations and survey process; results from a survey reaching 3,116 respondents; insights from seven focus group sessions and three city-wide consultations engaging a total of 224 participants. This report *doesn't* include recommendations, suggestions or next steps from VibeLab. VibeLab's goal as consultants was to listen, gather participants' insights and report them back as accurately as possible.

**The feedback reflected in this report is the result of the time and effort contributed by over 3,300 business operators, nightlife industry workers, artists, residents and members of the public** through their participation in either the online survey and/or one of 10 consultation meetings held in March and April 2023 by VibeLab in partnership with City Planning, EDC, and Municipal Licensing and Standards. We warmly thank the participants for their time, candour and insights that form the basis of this report.

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<sup>8</sup> **Nightlife** refers to social and creative culture expressed and experienced at night, and is part of the broader night economy.

# Project History

**2016:** City of Toronto's EDC adopted a motion requesting staff to explore the creation of a "Night Mayor Ambassador Program" to enhance the relationship between the entertainment industry and municipal government.

**2018:** Municipal Licensing & Standards (ML&S) and City Planning began a review of existing licensing and zoning regulations, in response to changing business models, directives from City Council, and recommendations from the Auditor General. That work was paused in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and re-commenced in early 2021.

**2019:** The Night Economy Internal Working Group (IWG), a cross-divisional collective, was convened to help prioritize and implement the goals of the Toronto Nightlife Action Plan and the Strengthening Toronto's Nighttime Economy staff report. This collective includes representatives from Toronto Public Health (TPH), Toronto Police Service (TPS), Toronto Paramedics Service, Toronto Fire Service, Transportation Services, Toronto Building, Municipal Licensing and Standards (ML&S), City Planning, EDC and the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO).

**2021:** ML&S and City Planning presented a framework report to City Council's Executive Committee, with recommendations for next steps including public and stakeholder consultations.

**2022:** ML&S, City Planning and EDC invited firms to submit bids to conduct community engagement and consultations, and VibeLab was selected as the successful bidder in fall 2022.

**2023:** Planning for the format and delivery of public consultations took place in early 2023. Night Economy Review consultations took place in March and April 2023, led by VibeLab in conjunction with ML&S, Planning and EDC. The City's Night Economy Internal Working Group (IWG), a broader cross-divisional collective<sup>9</sup>, provided support by advising on the inclusion of voices and viewpoints that reflect concerns related to safety, harm reduction, inclusivity, and tools for creating an accessible and equitable nightlife.

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<sup>9</sup> The Night Economy Internal Working Group (IWG) is a cross-divisional collective that includes representatives from Toronto Public Health, Toronto Police Service, Toronto Paramedics Service, Toronto Fire Service, Transportation Services, Toronto Building, Municipal Licensing and Standards, City Planning, EDC, and the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.



# Related Staff Reports

As indicated in the Project History above, the Night Economy Review built upon existing research, reports and directives from City Council, and recommendations from the Auditor General. The following reports and documents offer historical context into the development of policy and strategy related to night economies, nightlife and culture.

## **EX28.15 - Framework for the Review of Licensing and Zoning Regulations for Restaurants, Bars and Entertainment Venues (2021)**

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-173695.pdf>

## **EC24.6 (2021) - Emerging Entertainment Areas Outside of the Downtown Core (2021)**

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2021.EC24.6>

## **EC6.8 (2019) - Strengthening Toronto's Nighttime Economy (2019)**

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EC6.8>

## **Toronto Hospitality Zone Assessment (2019)**

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/ec/bgrd/backgroundfile-134957.pdf>

## **Toronto Nightlife Action Plan (2019)**

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/ec/bgrd/backgroundfile-134955.pdf>

## **PH9.6 (2019) - Live Music Venues**

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.PH9.6>

## **EC6.8 Attachment - DIY Events in Toronto (2018)**

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/ec/bgrd/backgroundfile-134956.pdf>

## **MA7.5 (2017) - Measures to Protect Music Venues in Toronto - Update**

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2017.MA7.5>

## **A Review of the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division's Management of Business Licences - Part Three: Eating Establishments and Nightclubs (2017)**

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/au/bgrd/backgroundfile-108174.pdf>

## **ED12.12 (2016) - Night Mayor Ambassador Program for the City of Toronto (2016)**

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2016.ED12.12>

## **MM22.5 (2016) - Protecting Live Music Venues**

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ma/bgrd/backgroundfile-101024.pdf>



# Section II: Methodology

This process engaged over 3,300 participants across a four-week period through either the online survey and/or one of 10 consultation meetings: 3,116 survey respondents and 224 focus group and consultation participants<sup>10</sup>. This section details this project's outreach strategy, as well as session design and consultation approaches.

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<sup>10</sup>. For comparison to other City engagement processes: For its 2018-2022 Divisional Strategy, EDC engaged 267 participants across 4 Town Hall meetings, an Indigenous circle, 3 focus groups, and an online survey. Similarly, its 2022-2026 Music Strategy process engaged approximately 1,100 participants across 23 individual interviews, an online survey, and a consultation with members of Toronto Music Advisory Committee (TMAC). City Planning's 2021 Multi-Tenant (Rooming) Houses study engaged approximately 1,405 participants across questionnaires and public and stakeholder meetings during a five week period.

## 2.0 Outreach and Consultation Design Overview

With a total of 10 consultations (seven focus group sessions and three citywide sessions), this project engaged a wide range of people: business owners, cultural and industry workers, community groups, and residents. These sessions took a multifaceted approach, involving existing groups such as Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), restaurant and tourism industry associations, and larger companies, as well as those who experience more barriers to participation in public consultation processes, such as less-commercial,

grassroots, or DIY<sup>11</sup> artists and organizations as well as equity-deserving groups. Following these 10 consultations, City staff organized an extra (11<sup>th</sup>) citywide consultation for Residents’ Associations in May. As this session was conducted independently of VibeLab’s planning and execution, its findings are thus not reflected in this report; however, insights and opinions from this additional consultation will inform the City’s Night Economy Review work alongside the findings in this document.

## 2.1 Timeline and Process

2023					
January	February	March	April	May	June
<b>Stage 1: Design</b> Jan.–early March 2023		<b>Stage 2: Outreach</b> March 2023		<b>Stage 3: Survey &amp; Consultation</b> late March–April 2023	
<b>Project plan development</b>		<b>Outreach to focus group participants</b>		<b>Stage 4: Analysis &amp; Reporting</b> April–June 2023	
Jan. 26–Feb. 21, 2023		March 9–24, 2023		April 2023	
<b>Development of VibeLab and City contact databases</b>		<b>Public communications &amp; outreach launch</b>		<b>Compilation and analysis of consultation feedback</b>	
Feb. 7–24, 2023		March 10, 2023		April 2023	
<b>Preparation of focus group participant list</b>				<b>Survey data analysis</b>	
Feb. 24–March 8, 2023				April–June 2023	
<b>Development of communications materials</b>				<b>Report development</b>	
Feb. 28–March 8, 2023				April–July 2023	
				<b>Two citywide virtual public consultations</b>	
				April 12–13, 2023	
				<b>One citywide in-person public consultation</b>	
				April 17, 2023	

11. DIY (“Do-It-Yourself”) events are arts and cultural events that repurpose unconventional spaces into live performance venues, potentially based on preference, lack of access to mainstream venues, or cost. For more information, see the report *DIY Events in Toronto*, hyperlinked in *Project Background* (Section I).

## 2.2 Outreach Planning

Sessions were designed to target various facets of local night economies, including specific industry actors, local Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), and Residents' Associations (RAs).

# Session Breakdown

<b>Date/Time (local time)</b>	<b>Focus</b>
Monday March 27, 2023 10 - 11:30 a.m. (online)	<i>Focus Group: Restaurants</i>
Monday March 27, 2023 2:30 - 4 p.m. (online)	<i>Focus Group: Bars, nightclubs, entertainment venues</i>
Tuesday March 28, 2023 2:30 - 4 p.m. (online)	<i>Focus Group: Business Improvement Associations (BIAs)</i>
Tuesday March 28, 2023 6 - 7:30 p.m. (online)	<i>Focus Group: Artists, DIY, event producers, cultural events and spaces</i>
Wednesday March 29, 2023 10 - 11:30 a.m. (online)	<i>Focus Group: Music Industry, Performance and Live Music Spaces</i>
Wednesday March 29, 2023 6 - 7:30 p.m. (online)	<i>Focus Group: Etobicoke, York, Scarborough, North York Community and Residents' Associations</i>
Thursday March 30, 2023 6-7:30 p.m. (online)	<i>Focus Group: Downtown-area (Toronto and East York) Community and Residents' Associations</i>
Wednesday April 12, 2023 6-8 p.m. (online)	<i>Citywide Public Consultation</i>
Thursday April 13, 2023 6-8 p.m. (online)	<i>Citywide Public Consultation</i>
Monday April 17, 2023 6-8 p.m. (City Hall, Committee Room 2)	<i>Citywide Public Consultation</i>

# Focus Group Outreach

A foundational goal of the Night Economy Review was ensuring diverse and equitable participation in all sessions. Working together, VibeLab and City staff developed and implemented a number of strategies to include the widest range of voices possible. Two phases of identification and outreach were conducted for participants in the seven focus groups:

## **i) Creating Stakeholder Databases and Tailoring Stakeholder Groups**

VibeLab created a 200+ person list of key stakeholders in Toronto's nightlife scenes, entertainment industries and DIY arts communities. Further, City staff compiled stakeholder lists of approximately 385 contacts for focus group outreach, based on existing relationships. Together, VibeLab and the City prioritized the selection of stakeholders from across Toronto's various populations and perspectives, conducting outreach to harm reduction groups, community groups, Residents' Associations, and BIAs. Key partners supported City efforts, including City-adjacent groups such as Toronto Public Health (TPH) and the Toronto Police Service (TPS), City Councillors' offices, the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA), Restaurants Canada, local arts, cultural, and music organizations.

Further, the City's Night Economy Internal Working Group (IWG), discussed in Section 1.0, recommended individuals and organizations to include in focus groups and consultations, reviewed proposed session content, and contributed questions and topics to the session design. In particular, TPS and TPH reviewed the City's stakeholder lists for comprehensiveness and to ensure that varied perspectives on public health and safety were included in consultations.

These lists were used to select up to 20 participants for invitation to each of the seven focus groups listed in the Session Breakdown table

above (page 22). These participants were chosen via an iterative shortlisting process that considered stakeholder type (e.g., businesses, artists, Residents' Associations and other categories), geographic region, and involvement with the night economy, while also aiming to achieve the equity and accessibility goals outlined in Section 2.4.

## **ii) Invitations and Follow-Up**

Participants were invited via email (or in some cases, by phone) either by the City or VibeLab to participate in specific focus group sessions. Participants in the BIA session were directly invited by Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA). City staff sourced emails via the City's Business Licence Database and other internal documents, as well as by referencing existing contact information. VibeLab's facilitator team drew upon their own existing relationships for up-to-date contact information for each stakeholder. In cases where the City and VibeLab did not have the relevant contact information, online sources were consulted.

Follow-up emails were sent to invitees who did not respond by a specified date. When individuals indicated they could not attend, invitations were sent to alternative participants. In cases of an undeliverable email, VibeLab and the City sought to correct contact information where possible. Participants that registered for these sessions were sent reminder emails leading up to the scheduled date and time.

# Public Session Outreach

As every Torontonians interacts with the night economy in some way, three public sessions, with capacity up to 60 participants each, were offered alongside the smaller-capacity focus groups. Promotion for these sessions included a separate geographic focus on both the downtown area (Toronto and East York) and the more suburban areas of Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke. Targeted outreach to suburban areas was conducted with the goal of better ensuring geographic equity. Promotion also focused on youth, community organizations and underserved groups (see Section 2.4).

## **i) Night Economy Review Webpage and Online Materials**

VibeLab and City staff developed public-facing materials, including a fact sheet and social media content to share information and advertise each session. A Night Economy Review [webpage](#) was created by the City and regularly updated to include details about the review and its engagement opportunities, through links to the Night Economy Review survey and dates, times and sign-up links for the public consultations. Social media outreach and other online correspondence directed the public to this webpage. Between March 27, 2023 and April 30, 2023, the Night Economy Review webpage received a total of 12,610 views (with 10,182 unique views).

## **ii) Connector Organizations and Social Media Outreach**

VibeLab worked with Arts Etobicoke, North York Arts, and Scarborough Arts as “connector” organizations to share information on the Night Economy Review, including the webpage, public session information and survey link. These organizations included this information in their monthly newsletters and social media, and conducted their own direct outreach with key stakeholders, with an emphasis on equity-deserving groups less frequently represented in consultation processes.

Further, the City promoted the survey and public sessions through their corporate and CityPlanTO social media channels. There were approximately 25 unique posts to Instagram, Facebook and Twitter that have a combined following of more than 750,000 users.

In addition, there were four paid ads paid on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter targeted to neighbourhoods in Etobicoke, North York and Scarborough. The ads reached 170,349 people, resulting in 6,672 click-throughs to the Night Economy Review webpage.

## **iii) Stakeholder Lists and Targeted Emails**

All contacts in VibeLab’s and the City’s previously developed databases were invited by email to attend the citywide sessions and complete the survey. At least 6,651 contacts were identified by the City for outreach.

Targeted emails promoting the survey and public sessions were sent to other equity-deserving, youth-oriented, and geographically varied organizations, such as youth arts organizations, economic-development non-profits dedicated to improving outcomes for people of colour and regional businesses associations.



## 2.3 Consultation Format and Design

Consultations had multiple goals: to gather input from the public and business stakeholders in order to effectively update zoning and licensing regulations; to identify gaps in access to nighttime activities; and to engage a diverse range of public opinion in envisioning a night economy that serves all ages and cultural groups. Attention was given to mitigating potential “consultation fatigue” among select stakeholder groups and setting a positive tone for further engagement between the City, industry and community stakeholders and the general public.

### Session Design

To create thoughtfully curated spaces where people felt respected, welcome, and able to share their expertise and experience, both the focus groups and citywide public sessions were designed with an emphasis on small-group discussion, with a maximum of 8-10 participants per facilitator and notetaker. Sessions were primarily virtual, with one in-person public session: this format was intended to minimize barriers to participation, and to allow participants to join without needing to travel or arrange for childcare.

Each consultation began with a presentation from City staff representing all three divisions. This presentation provided an overview of the key issues behind the Night Economy Review and the goals of the consultations. Following the presentation, the City answered clarifying questions, and then departed the session to ensure that participants felt able to speak freely during their consultation. An informal post-session feedback form was also shared with participants to allow them to anonymously share any thoughts that arose after sessions. Only 12 participants replied to this form; an overview of comments are included in the Appendix.

### Session Content

Developed from the top priorities of each division (ML&S, EDC and City Planning), the City and VibeLab worked together to create a list of key questions to be asked at every engagement to ensure a baseline level of consistency across consultations. Further questions specific to each session’s target group were also developed, to draw upon each group’s differing expertise and interests (see Appendix for details).

### Session Tools

Virtual sessions were run on the City’s preferred platform, WebEx, using the digital collaboration tool Mural as a platform for documenting small-group conversation. Due to a functionality issue limiting call-in users’ participation, VibeLab and City staff shifted to Zoom for city-wide public consultations.

### Session Audiences

Each focus group had a specific target audience drawn from the nighttime industries and/or community and resident associations (see sessions table in *Outreach Planning* (page 22)), while all three citywide consultations welcomed industry, community and the general public. Focus groups were capped at a participant number of 16, allowing for two breakout groups of up to eight people. Citywide sessions had a capacity limit of 60 participants, with five breakout groups of up to 10 people. Approximately 80% of the registrants who signed up via Eventbrite attended the focus groups, while 35-40% of those registered for city-wide public consultations took part.

## Session Preparation

Before the start of consultations, ML&S and City Planning provided two “crash course” sessions to the VibeLab team and all consultation facilitators to cover important zoning and licensing bylaws and local context. The goal was to provide facilitators a grounding in these topics, enabling them to answer basic questions and provide context to consultation participants. In addition to notes and recordings of these sessions, VibeLab provided facilitators with a facilitator guide, FAQs on the consultation questions, and a literature review overviewing key documents. Additional facilitator preparation included internal team discussions to share good practice around promoting equity in facilitation, and to collectively establish a shared course of action for dealing with conflict, disagreement, or disrespectful and unacceptable conduct in consultations.

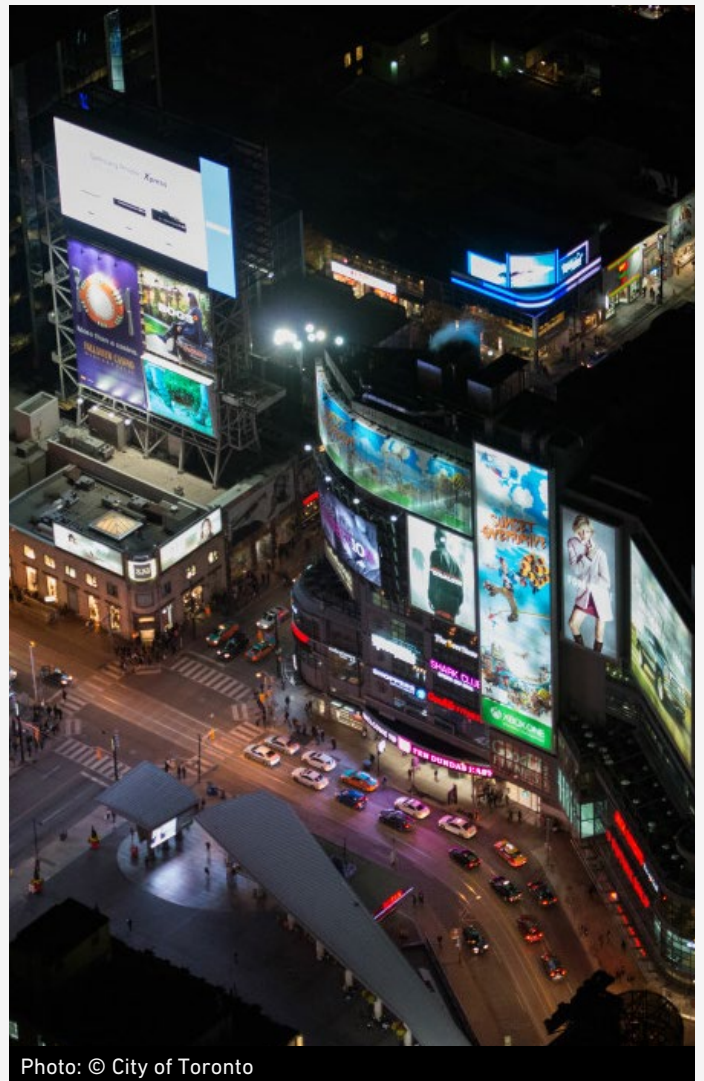


Photo: © City of Toronto

## 2.4 Ensuring equity, accessibility and geographic reach

Recognizing that people with low income, racialized communities, persons with physical and mental disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, youth, freelance workers and precariously employed people often experience barriers to participation in consultation processes, the project strategy included a multi-pronged focus around equity in both outreach and engagement.

**1. Honoraria:** VibeLab reserved a portion of the project budget for honoraria to offset the cost of participation for marginalized participants in particular focus groups.

In addition to combating the “consultation fatigue” identified in the project bid, these honoraria helped prioritize diverse representation, by reserving space and support for equity-deserving members of priority stakeholder groups. Honoraria were offered to all eligible (self-identifying equity-deserving<sup>12</sup>) participants in focus groups #4 (music, industry, entertainment, DIY), #5 (live music venues and performance spaces), #6 (Etobicoke, Scarborough, and North York) and #7 (the downtown area). Of the 64 participants offered honoraria, 37 opted in<sup>13</sup>. \$60 honoraria were provided based on 2.5 hours of work at a living wage in Greater Toronto<sup>14</sup>. A local nonprofit partner, It’s OK\*, was engaged on a flat fee basis as the honoraria administrator, paying out stipends via invoice.

**2. Demographically-targeted outreach** included a focus on equity-deserving stakeholders from music/cultural communities, including Indigenous, Black, and racialized individuals; immigrant, disabled, queer/trans communities; youth).

“Connector” communities, individuals, and organizations including **Long Winter, the DIY Space Project**, and **It’s OK\*** helped to build expanded lists of targeted stakeholder groups focused around key demographics, with a particular eye to intersectional communities.

### 3. Geographically-targeted outreach

Invitations for consultations and promotion of the survey included a geographic focus on participants from both the **downtown area** (Toronto and East York), **Scarborough, North York** and **Etobicoke**. In addition to the City’s outreach through BIAs, restaurants/bars/clubs, and hospitality and resident associations, the consultation team engaged compensated “connector” organizations to conduct targeted outreach in each region. **Arts Etobicoke, North York Arts**, and **Scarborough Arts** were paid a fee to promote the three citywide sessions and survey through their newsletters, e-blasts, and boosted social media posts, and prepare curated contact lists that included local business, bars, restaurants, theaters, safety/non-violence/harm reduction organizations, and residents. ‘Connectors’ were encouraged to prioritize outreach to marginalized communities less typically represented in consultation processes, with the same categories identified as eligible for honoraria. Direct invites were also sent to personal contacts and communities from the team’s internal database.

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12. By the definition provided to invited participants, “eligible” participants included anyone who identified as equity-deserving, including persons with low income, racialized communities, persons with physical and mental disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, youth, freelance workers, and precariously employed people.

Participants were ineligible for stipends if they did not require compensation to attend, if participation could be considered part of their role as a member of a committee or association, and those participating on behalf of an organization in a salaried or paid role.

13. Self-identifying participants from equity-deserving categories may only reflect a portion of actual demographic representation.

14. As per <https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/rates>.

To assess the geographic implications of the night economy, this project gathered ward information wherever possible. 93% of consultation participants provided their ward information. Based on this data, 23 of 25 wards were represented in consultations, with the largest groups coming from Spadina-Fort York (45), Toronto Centre (34), Parkdale-High Park (23), Davenport (21), University-Rosedale (20), and Toronto-Danforth (15). Other wards were represented in consultations by 1 to 7 participants. Etobicoke North and Scarborough-Rouge Park were not represented in this ward data. Survey respondents represented all 25 wards, with strongest representation also coming from the Toronto-East York area.

#### **4. Accessibility** - in-session design

To reduce access barriers, virtual consultations were conducted through platforms that provided machine-generated captioning as needed. Email invitations and event postings invited participants to contact the team with access needs. Only one participant requested support in advance of a virtual session; the team provided accessibility options including screen-reader instructions for Mural, and pre- and post-meeting support. One City Councillor requested that the survey be provided to constituents in Korean. This request was accommodated, with a short extension to survey dates. These responses were then translated and included in the overall survey data.



# Section III: Survey Findings

### 3.0 Introducing Survey Findings

This consultation process included a survey alongside focus groups and public consultation sessions, and this section details the survey's structure, participation, and selected findings.

Developed primarily by City divisions with input from VibeLab and PennPraxis, the Night Economy Review Survey offered three sections, posing questions to 1) the general public, 2) business owners and operators, and 3) cultural event producers. Respondents were first guided through the section for the general public, and were then offered opportunities to answer questions as a business owner/operator (*"Do you also own or operate a business?"*), and/or as a cultural event producer (*"Do you produce cultural events?"*). In the final section, respondents were optionally asked to offer demographic information.

During the survey period from March 28 to April 21, 2023, 4,524 respondents began the survey, with 3,116 (68.9%) completing substantial portions of the survey, and 2,528 (55.8%) reaching the end.

### 3.0 Introducing Survey Findings

## Key Takeaways:

#### *Participation*

- Participation was significantly higher in downtown and urban core areas, with the highest rates of participation in Toronto Centre and Spadina-Fort York, and the lowest rates in Scarborough North and Humber River-Black Creek. In wards outside the downtown area, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Eglinton-Lawrence, and York South-Weston received the highest response rates.
- Roughly a third of survey respondents offered optional demographic information. These respondents were typically between ages 30-54. More than half self-identified as white, just under half identified as male, and 44% identified as bisexual, lesbian, gay, queer or Two-Spirit.

#### *General public*

- Torontonians participate strongly in hospitality and arts at night: 92% go to restaurants, 85% to bars, 82% to live music, and 73% to cinema, theatre and comedy.
- Cost, transportation, and access to nearby activities are the most often reported barriers prohibiting participation in nighttime activities. A higher rate of respondents outside the downtown core report lack of access to activities near them.
- Respondents overwhelmingly believe nightclubs should be permitted outside the downtown area (80% said yes), ideally along commercial corridors and near transit.
- A majority of residents (73%) report *never* or *rarely* experiencing safety or nuisance issues related to nighttime businesses, but those who *did* experience issues noted a mixture of concerns around general nuisance, vehicle and pedestrian traffic, noise, and anti-social behaviour.
- Patrons' and customers' experience of safety and nuisance concerns was more mixed; patrons' most often reported concern was getting home afterwards.

- Non-male survey respondents report higher levels of safety or nuisance concerns as well as higher levels of barriers to participation in nighttime activities.

#### *Business owners and operators*

- Licence holders believe, on average, that 39% of interior floor area for restaurants is needed for entertainment-related activities (e.g. a stage, dance floor, DJ booth, karaoke, gambling, etc.).
- 60% of licence holders take at least one step to ensure patron and public safety and minimize nuisance, such as providing security cameras, proactive neighbourhood communication, and plans for controlling litter, noise, and crowds.
- While 54% of licence holders feel their licence accurately reflects their business activities, licensing and other bylaws were reported as a hindrance by just under 40%, and over 60% report a need for licensing changes.

#### *Cultural event producers*

- The vast majority of respondents produce events downtown, with less than 10% producing events in North York, Scarborough and/or Etobicoke.
- Cultural event producers most often use licensed establishments like bars, restaurants, clubs, and coffeeshops for their events—but producers residing outside of downtown are less likely to do so, instead opting for non-traditional spaces.
- 47% of respondents reported having had challenges holding events, most often related to permitting, accessing venues and spaces and cost.
- Respondents would overwhelmingly like to see more flexibility with regulations related to temporary use of space (81%), and faster timelines for permit application reviews (72%).

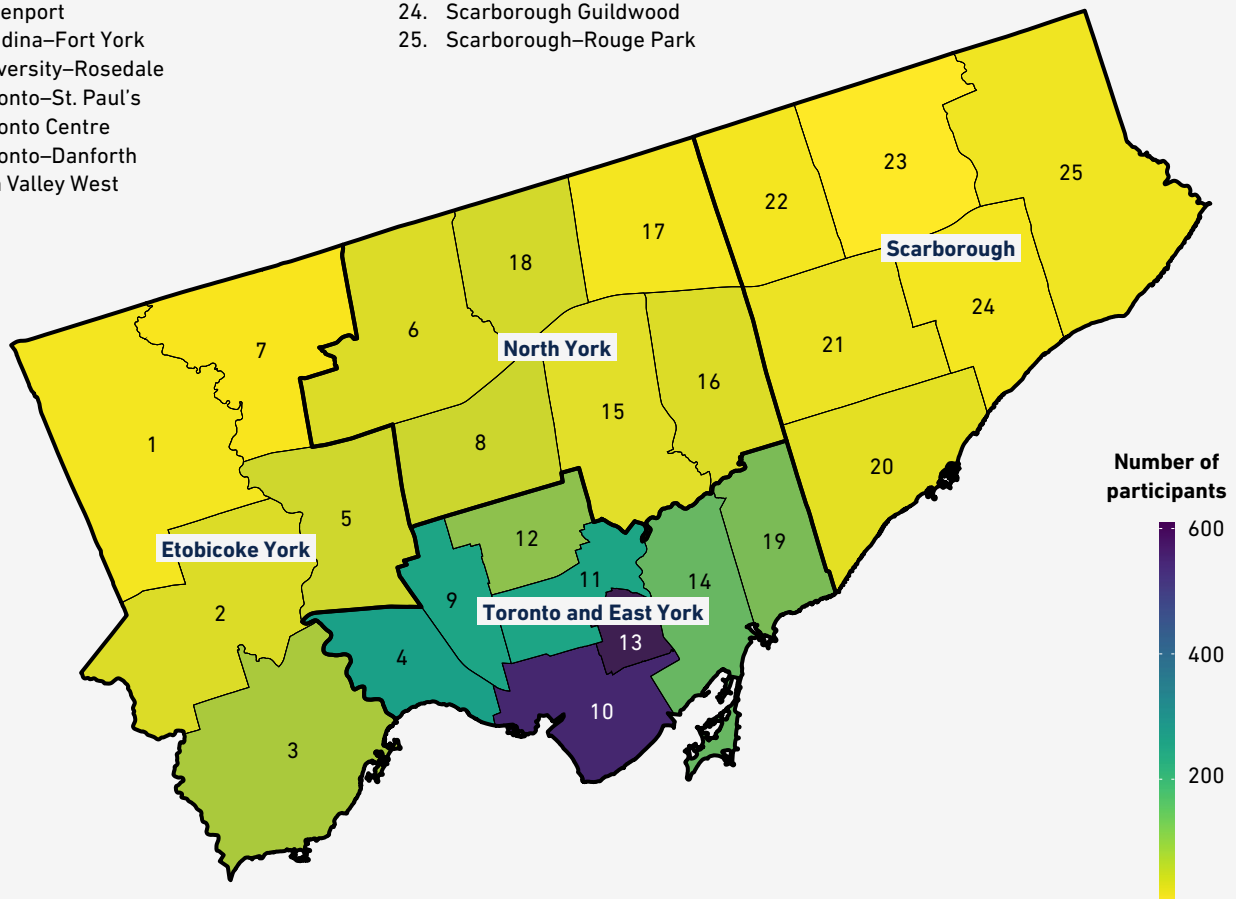


### 3.1 Geographic and Demographic Survey Participation

The findings in this section of the report are drawn from the respondents who completed substantial portions of the online survey (3,116 respondents). 1,504 survey respondents also provided optional demographic information, and this section details demographic information from these survey respondents only. It does not include a demographic breakdown of the seven focus group consultations or three public citywide sessions.

#### Survey Participation by Ward

- |                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Etobicoke North          | 16. Don Valley East        |
| 2. Etobicoke Centre         | 17. Don Valley North       |
| 3. Etobicoke–Lakeshore      | 18. Willowdale             |
| 4. Parkdale–High Park       | 19. Beaches–East York      |
| 5. York South–Weston        | 20. Scarborough Southwest  |
| 6. York Centre              | 21. Scarborough Centre     |
| 7. Humber River–Black Creek | 22. Scarborough Agincourt  |
| 8. Eglinton–Lawrence        | 23. Scarborough North      |
| 9. Davenport                | 24. Scarborough Guildwood  |
| 10. Spadina–Fort York       | 25. Scarborough–Rouge Park |
| 11. University–Rosedale     |                            |
| 12. Toronto–St. Paul's      |                            |
| 13. Toronto Centre          |                            |
| 14. Toronto–Danforth        |                            |
| 15. Don Valley West         |                            |



## Geographic spread

All participants were asked to provide ward information.<sup>15</sup> Participation was significantly higher in downtown and urban core areas, indicated in purple, blue, and turquoise on the above map (page 33), than in Etobicoke, North York and Scarborough. By ward, Toronto Centre had the highest rate of participation with 610 respondents (20% of all respondents), followed by Spadina-Fort York with 556 (19%). Scarborough North and Humber River-Black Creek had the lowest rate of participation, with 7 and 11 responses, respectively. Throughout this section, it is important to note that maps displaying responses by ward are reflective of these differing sample sizes, and wards with lower response rates may not be representative of all residents' sentiments there.

## Respondent demographics

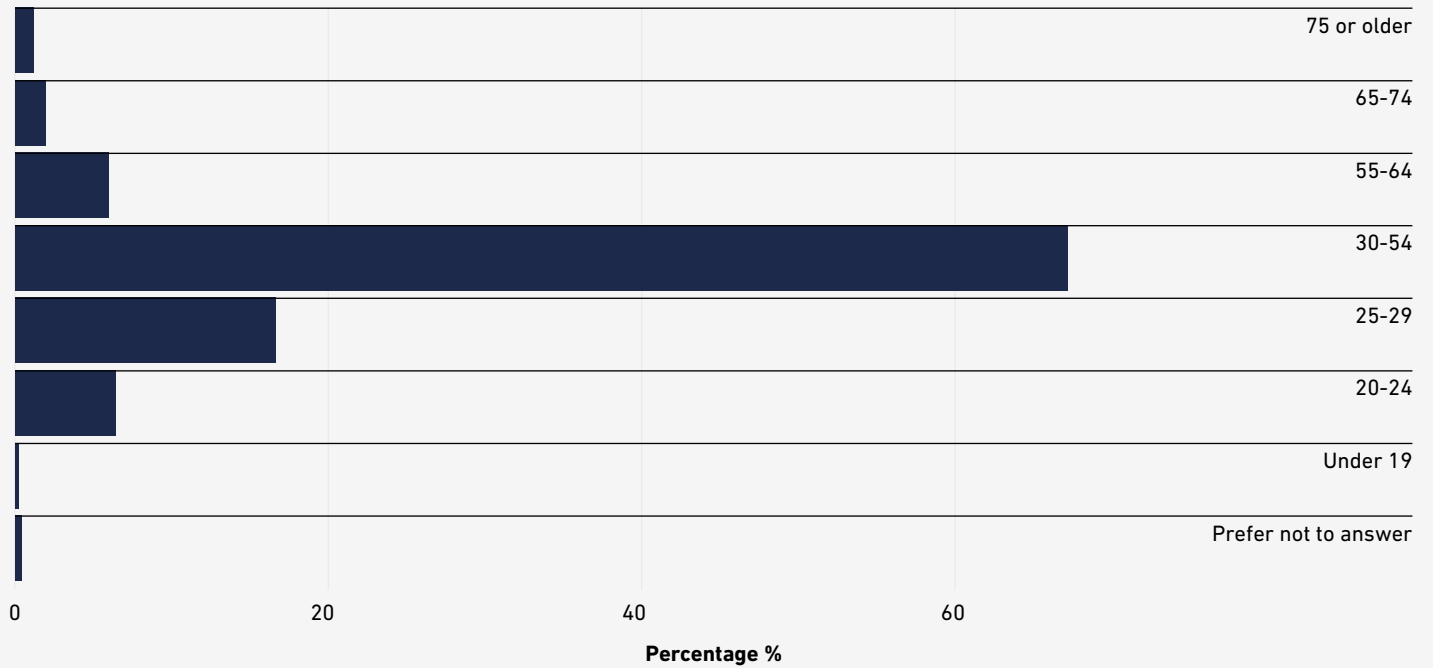
1,504 survey respondents offered optional demographic information (roughly half of the respondents who completed substantial portions of the survey). Of these respondents, over 65% were between ages 30-54, 62% self-identified as white and 49% identified as male. Over 80% come from households with two or fewer people, with approximately 50% of households earning over \$100,000 annually. Less than 50% self-identified as heterosexual or straight, with 44% identifying as bisexual, gay, lesbian, queer or Two-Spirit, suggesting a particularly strong representation of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents. As indicated above, the majority of responses came from those reporting residence in wards in the urban core. It is important to note that demographic insights and cross-tabulations in this report only draw from the sample who voluntarily provided this information.

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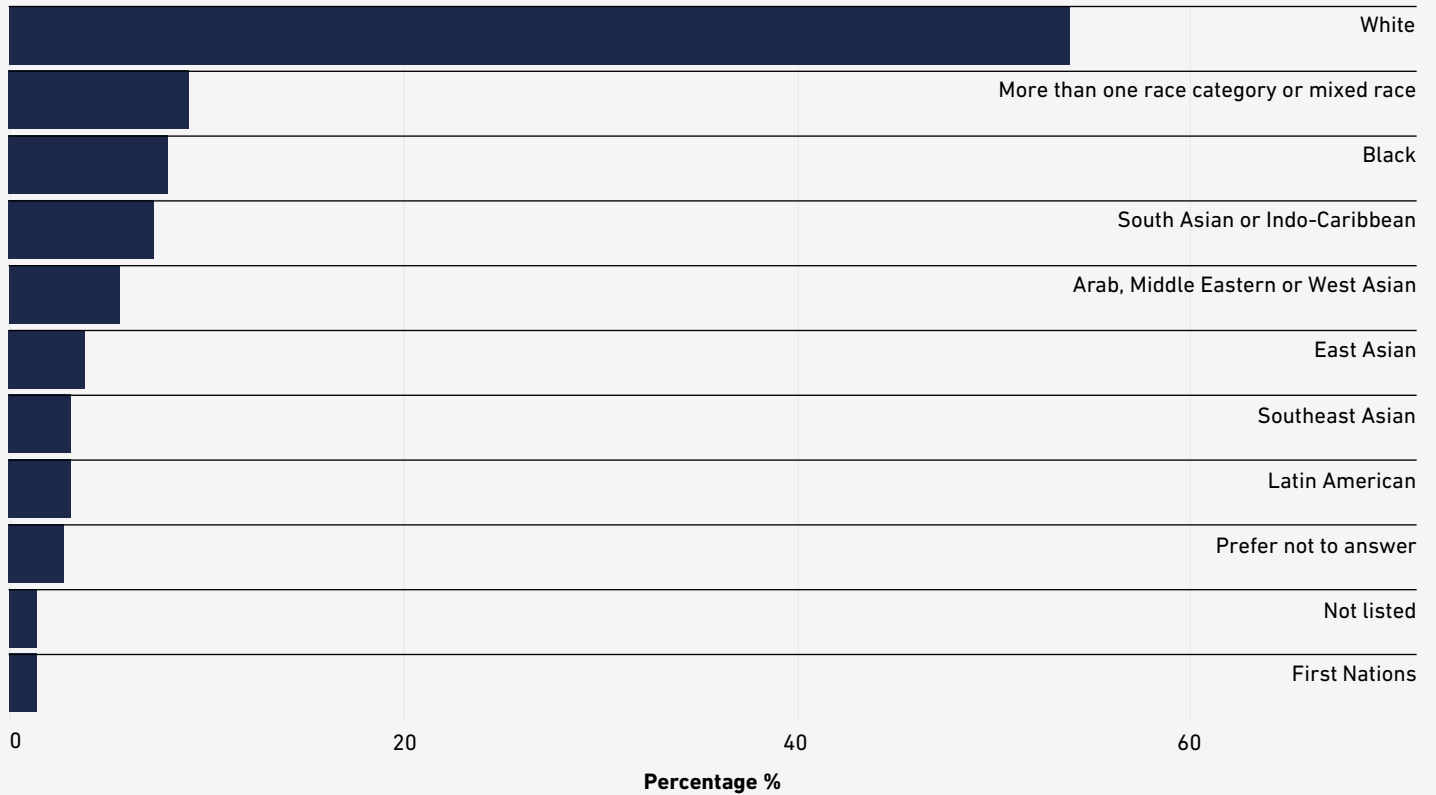
<sup>15</sup>. "Prefer not to answer" or "not applicable" were also available options, selected by less than 4% of respondents.

# Survey Respondents by...

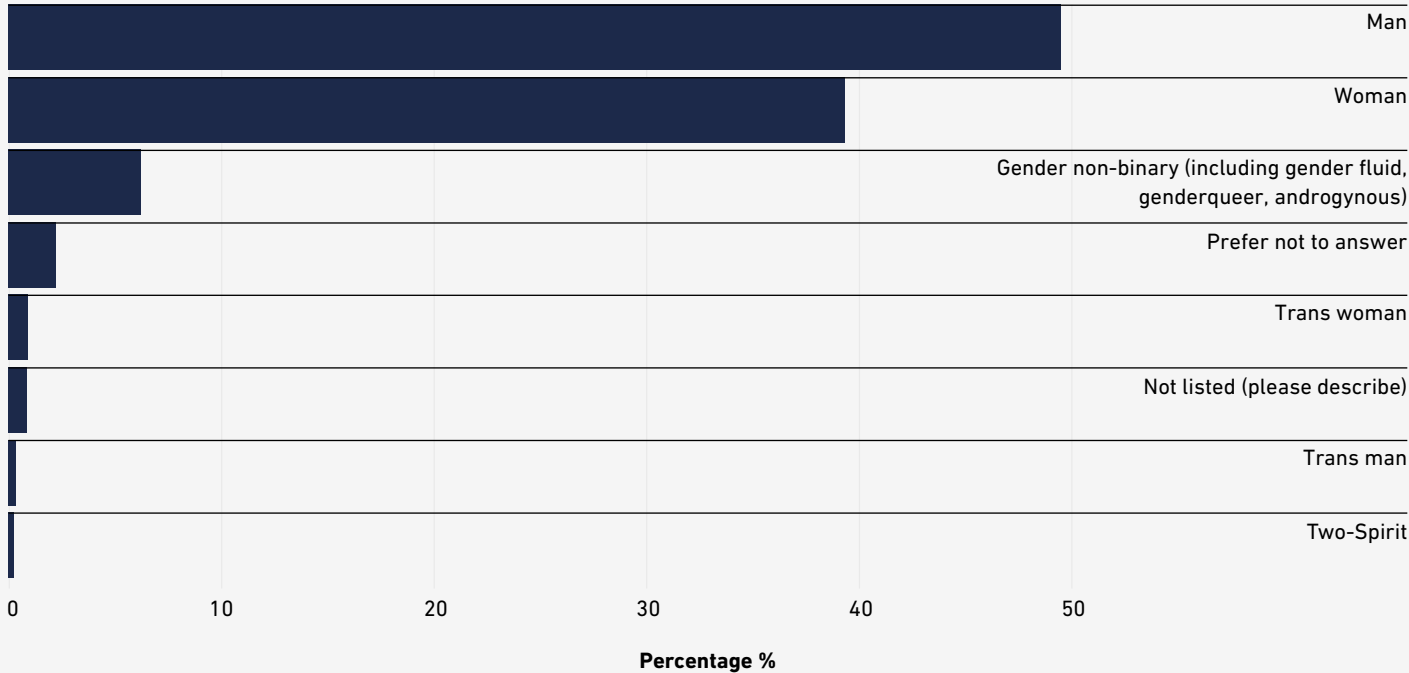
## Age



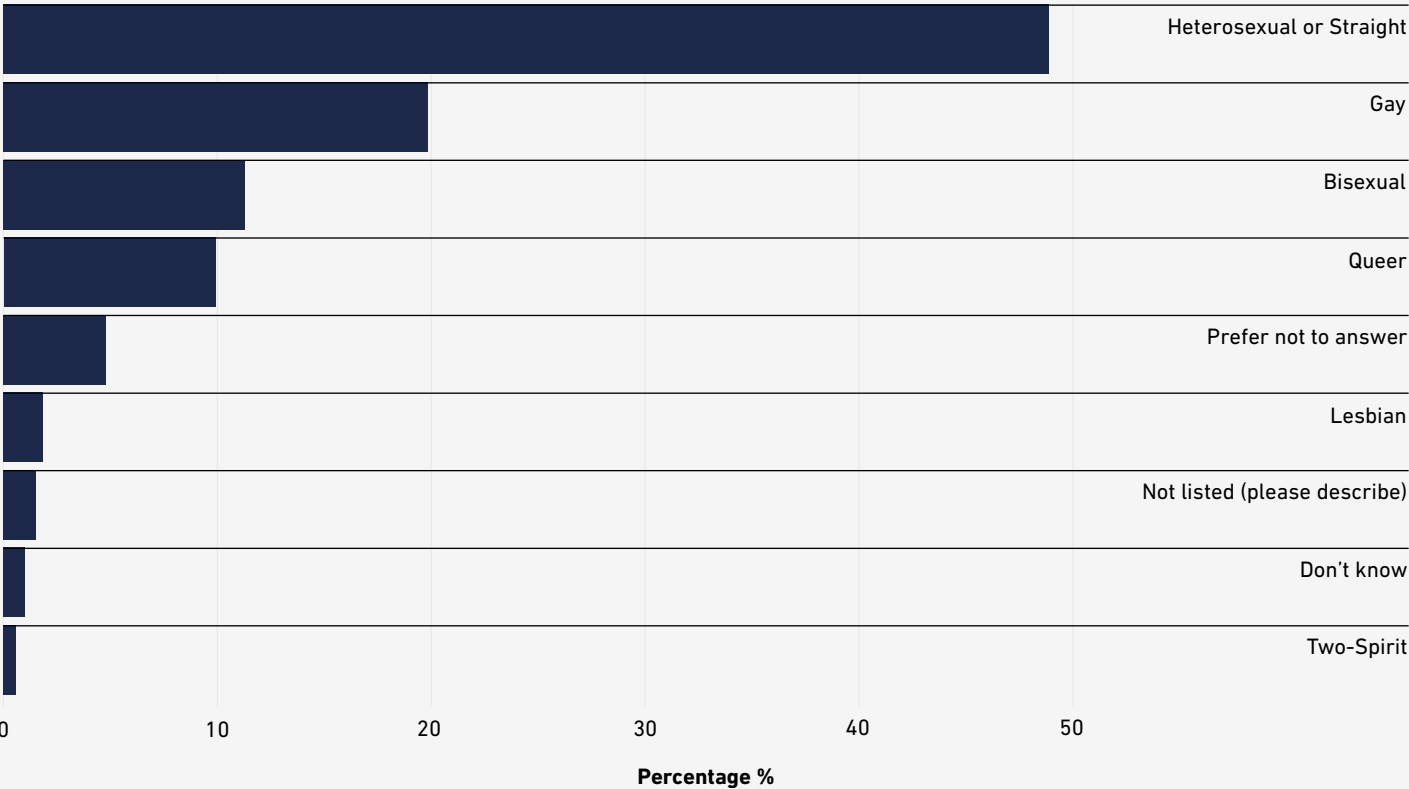
## Race or racial background



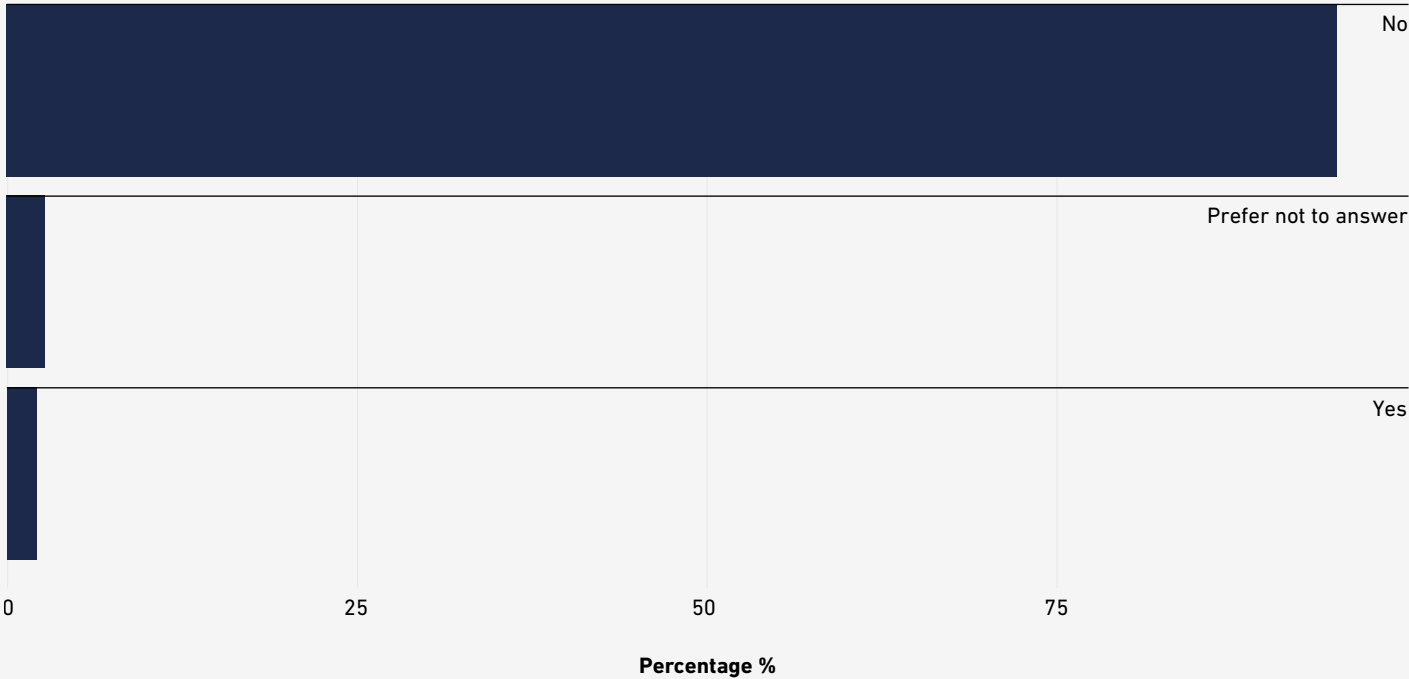
# Gender



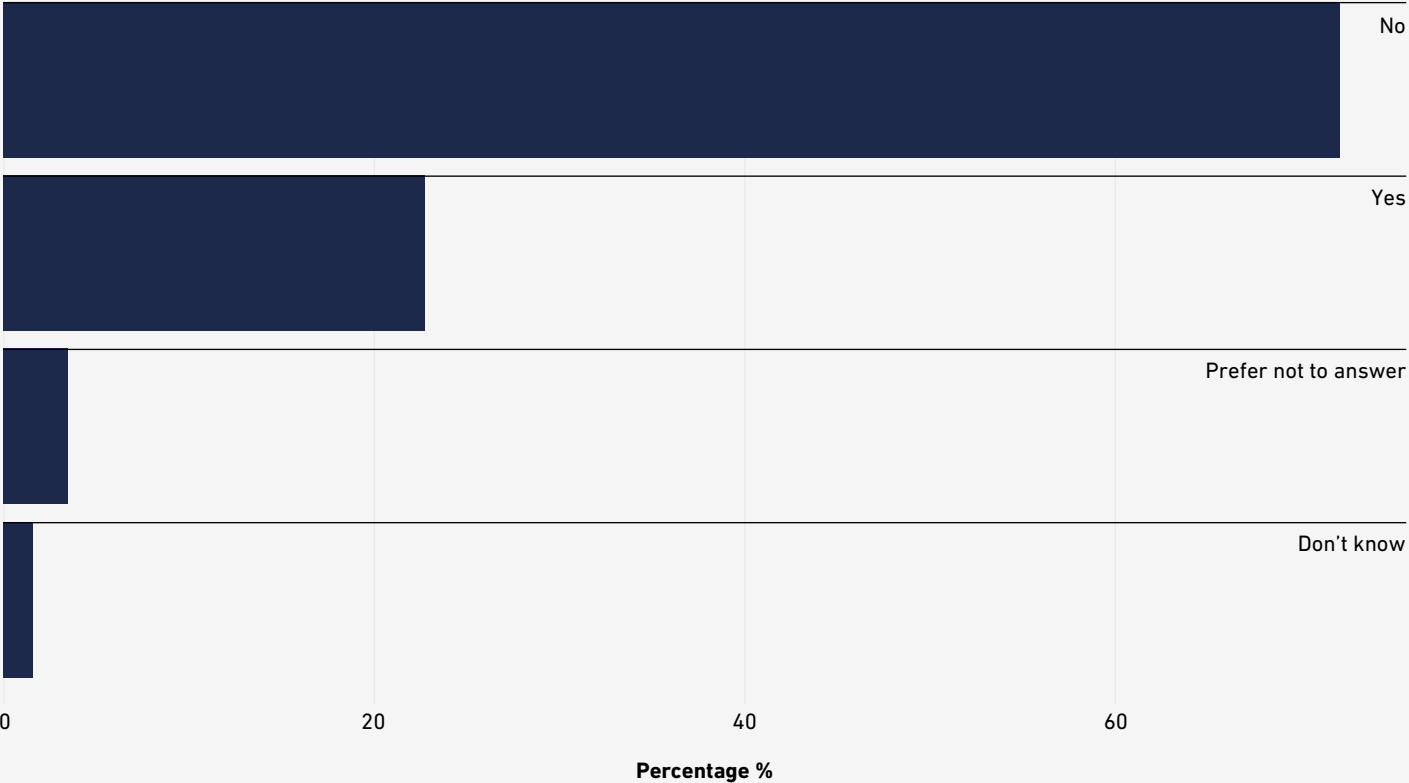
# Sexual orientation



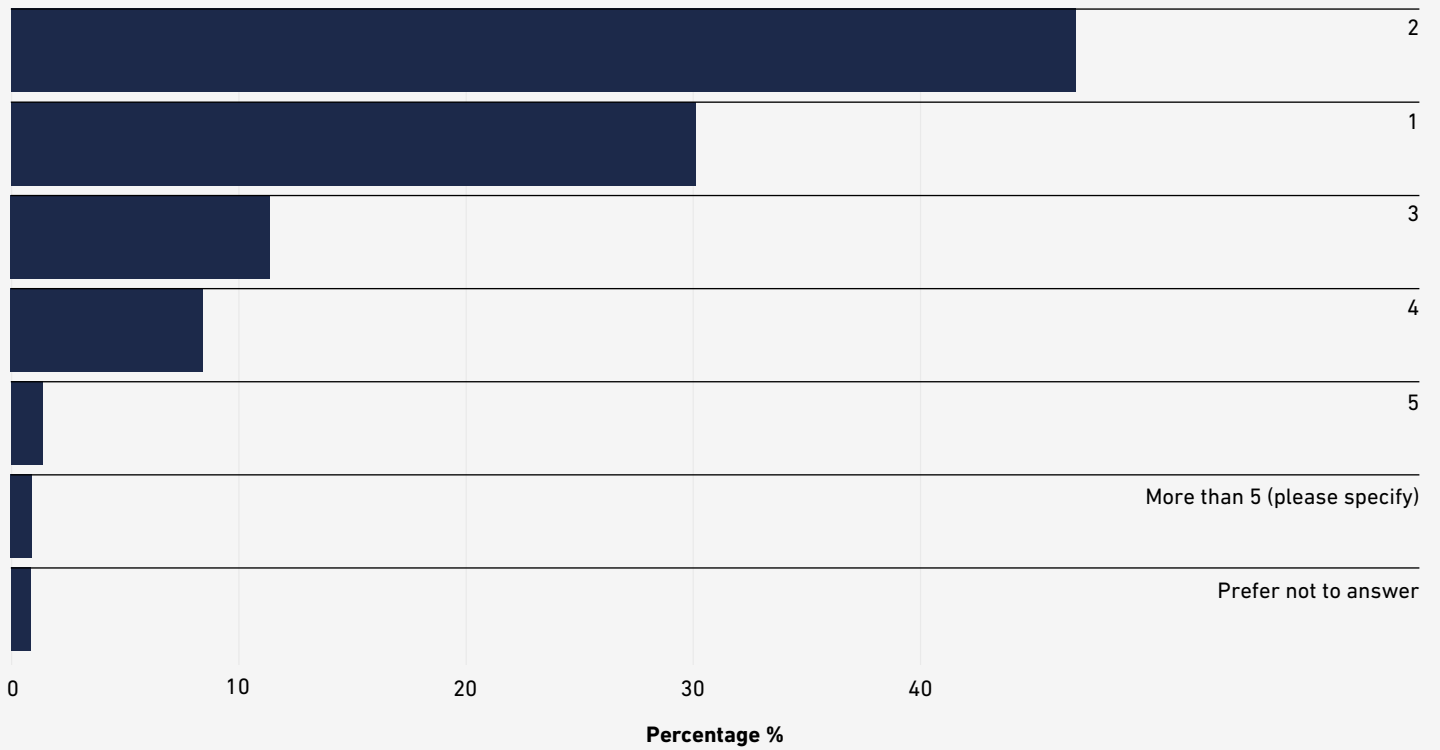
# Identifying as Indigenous to Canada



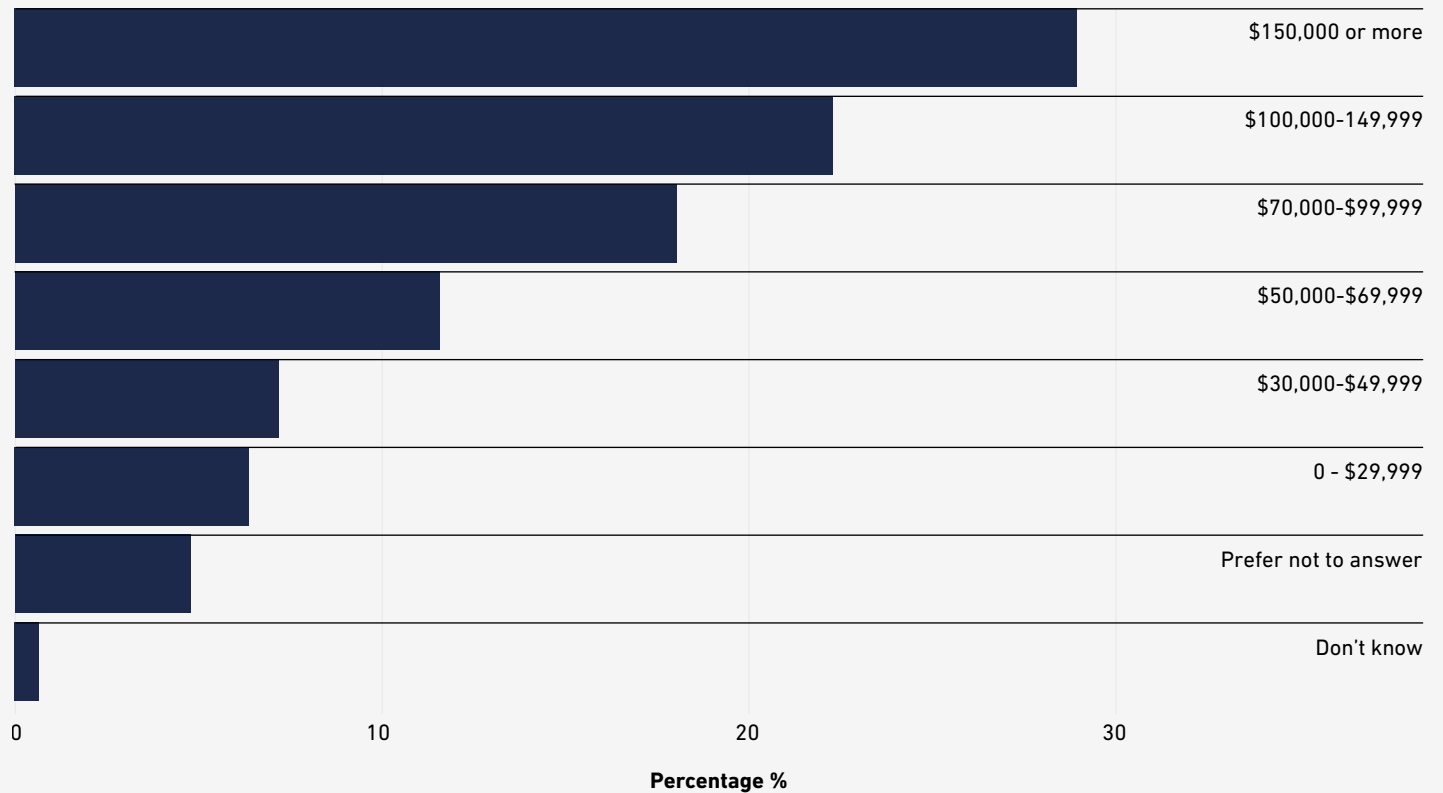
# Identifying as a person with a disability



## Household size



## Household Income



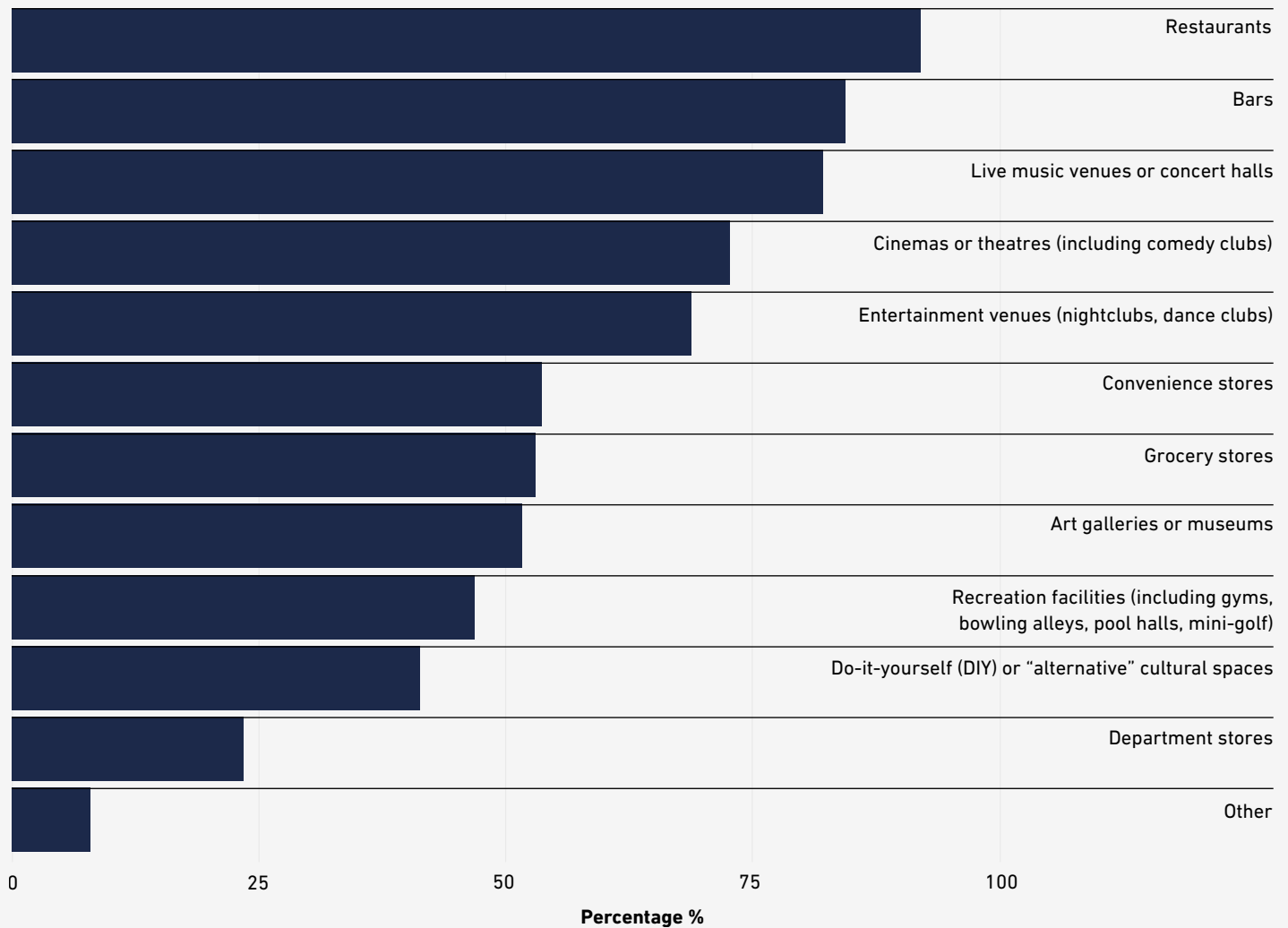
### 3.2 Findings: General Public

- **Torontonians participate strongly in hospitality and arts at night: 92% go to restaurants, 85% to bars, 82% to live music and 73% to cinema, theatre and comedy.**
- **Cost, transportation, and access to nearby activities are the most often reported barriers prohibiting participation in nighttime activities. A higher rate of respondents outside the downtown core report lack of access to activities near them.**
- **Respondents overwhelmingly believe nightclubs should be permitted outside the downtown area, ideally along commercial corridors and near transit.**
- **A majority of residents (73%) report never or rarely experiencing safety or nuisance issues related to nighttime businesses, but those who did experience issues noted a mixture of concerns around general nuisance, vehicle and pedestrian traffic, noise, and anti-social behavior.**
- **Patrons' and customers' experience of safety and nuisance concerns was more mixed; patrons' most often reported concern was getting home afterwards.**
- **Non-male survey respondents report higher levels of safety or nuisance concerns as well as higher levels of barriers to participation in nighttime activities.**

This section details answers from the first pathway of the survey, intended to gauge experiences and sentiments of the general public. All survey respondents, including those who completed the following sections, were asked 20 questions. This section details key findings from this survey pathway.

## Where Torontonians visit when going out at night

Which types of places do you visit when you go out at night?



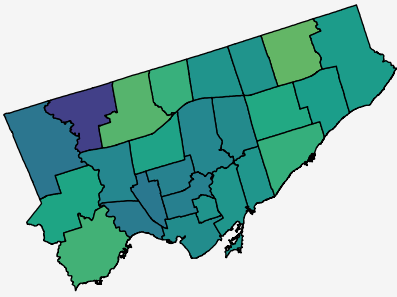
Most respondents participate in hospitality and arts at night. The majority of people in the survey report visiting restaurants (92%), bars (85%), live music spaces (82%), cinema, theatre and comedy (73%), and nightclubs or dance clubs (69%). Slightly fewer (~50%) report visiting galleries and museums, grocery stores and recreation facilities at night. Roughly 40% report visiting DIY venues—a significant proportion of survey respondents, suggesting that these are a strong

component of Toronto's night economies. "Other" night destinations noted by participants include parks, beaches, houses of worship, sporting events, techno and rave events, shisha and karaoke bars, one-off or pop-up events, private clubs, libraries, night markets, dispensaries, sex clubs, bathhouses and spas. The 16 heatmaps below (page 39) offer a geographic representation of the activities Torontonians take part in at night, visualized by the wards they live in.

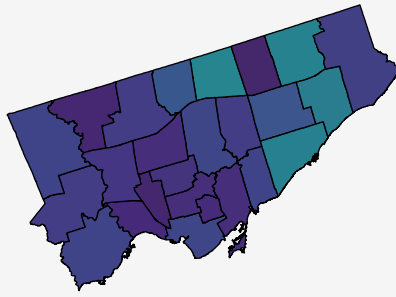


# Which types of places do you visit when you go out at night?

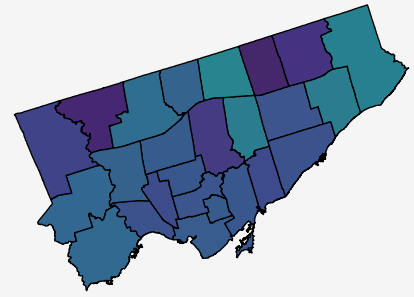
Art galleries or museums



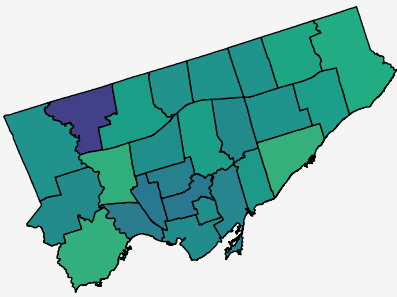
Bars



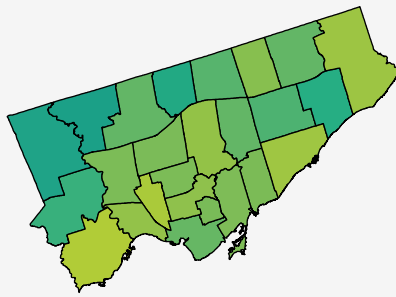
Cinemas or theatres  
(including comedy clubs)



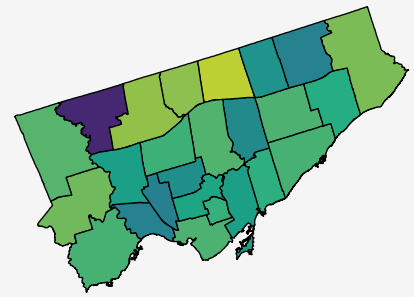
Convenience stores



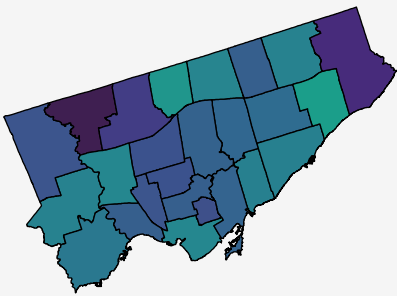
Department stores



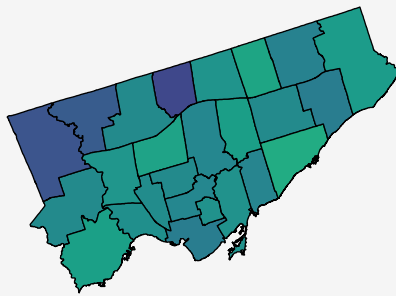
Do-it-yourself (DIY) or  
"alternative" cultural spaces



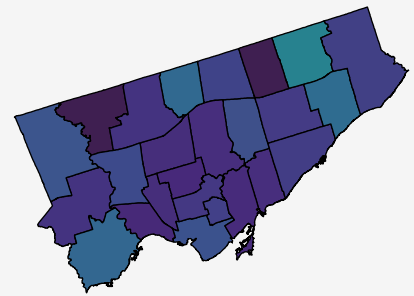
Entertainment venues  
(nightclubs, dance clubs)



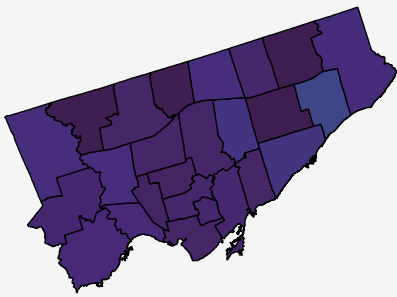
Grocery stores



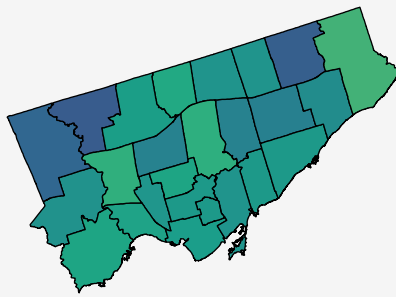
Live music venues or concert halls



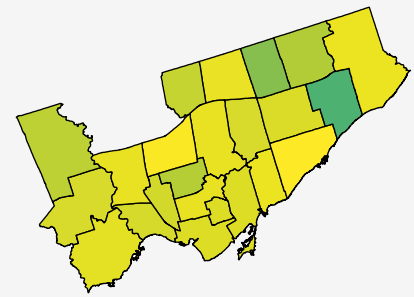
Restaurants



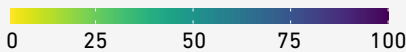
Recreation facilities (including gyms,  
bowling alleys, pool halls, mini-golf)



Other



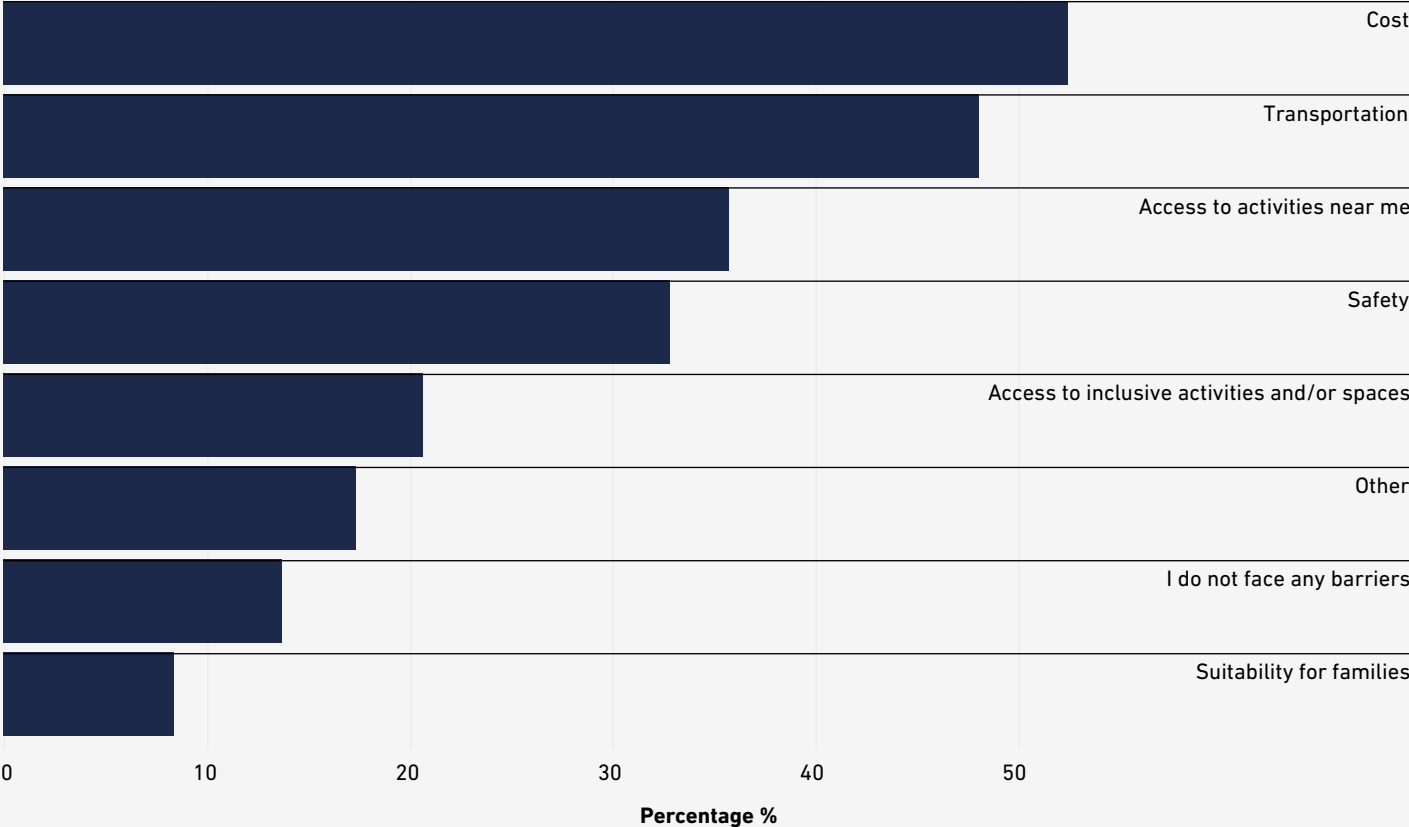
Percentage %



# Barriers to access when participating in nighttime activities

**Cost, transportation, and access to nearby activities are the strongest barriers prohibiting participation in nighttime activities.** Barriers are experienced differently by respondents from varying geographic and demographic identities. In particular, respondents in neighbourhoods far from the urban core report a lack of access to cultural amenities. Survey respondents who identify as men have reported both lower levels of safety concerns and fewer barriers to participation in nightlife than people who do not identify as men. Cost is particularly acute with younger respondents. Survey respondents under 19 years old express dissatisfaction with the availability of nightlife options for families. See the Appendix for further data visualization of these cross-tabulations by gender and age.

What barriers do you face in participating in nighttime activities, whether it be entertainment, cultural, social, or for work?

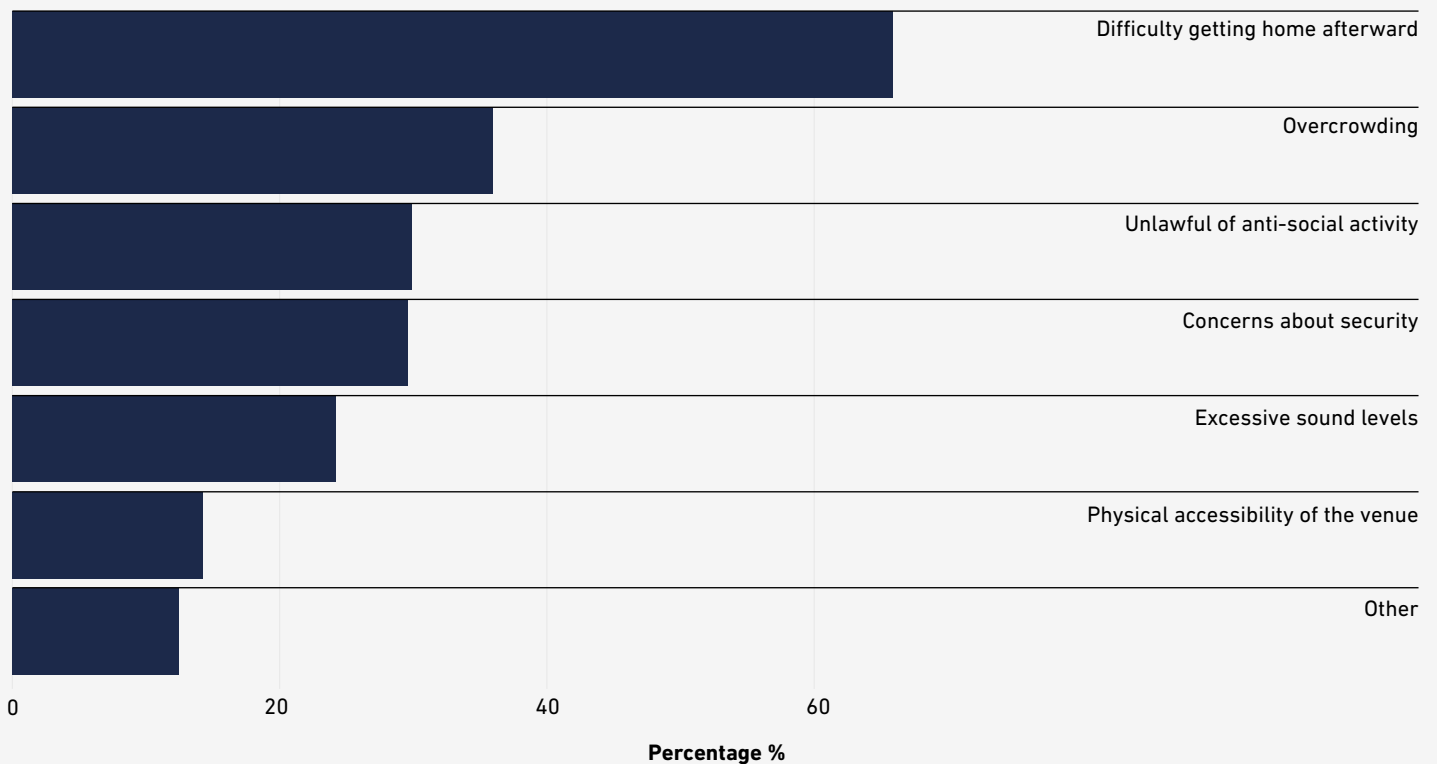


## Safety and nuisance concerns at night

Survey respondents were asked to indicate how often they experience safety or nuisance concerns related to restaurants, bars, nightclubs or other entertainment venues, as customers or patrons, and then as residents.

**As patrons or customers of nighttime businesses, experiences of safety or nuisance were mixed:** while 13% had *never* had these concerns, others experienced issues *rarely* (39%), *sometimes* (33%), or *frequently* (15%). Among those who had experienced these concerns, the central issue expressed by a majority of respondents: *Difficulty getting home afterward* (66%). Dissatisfaction with transport service late at night as a safety concern was geographically widespread.

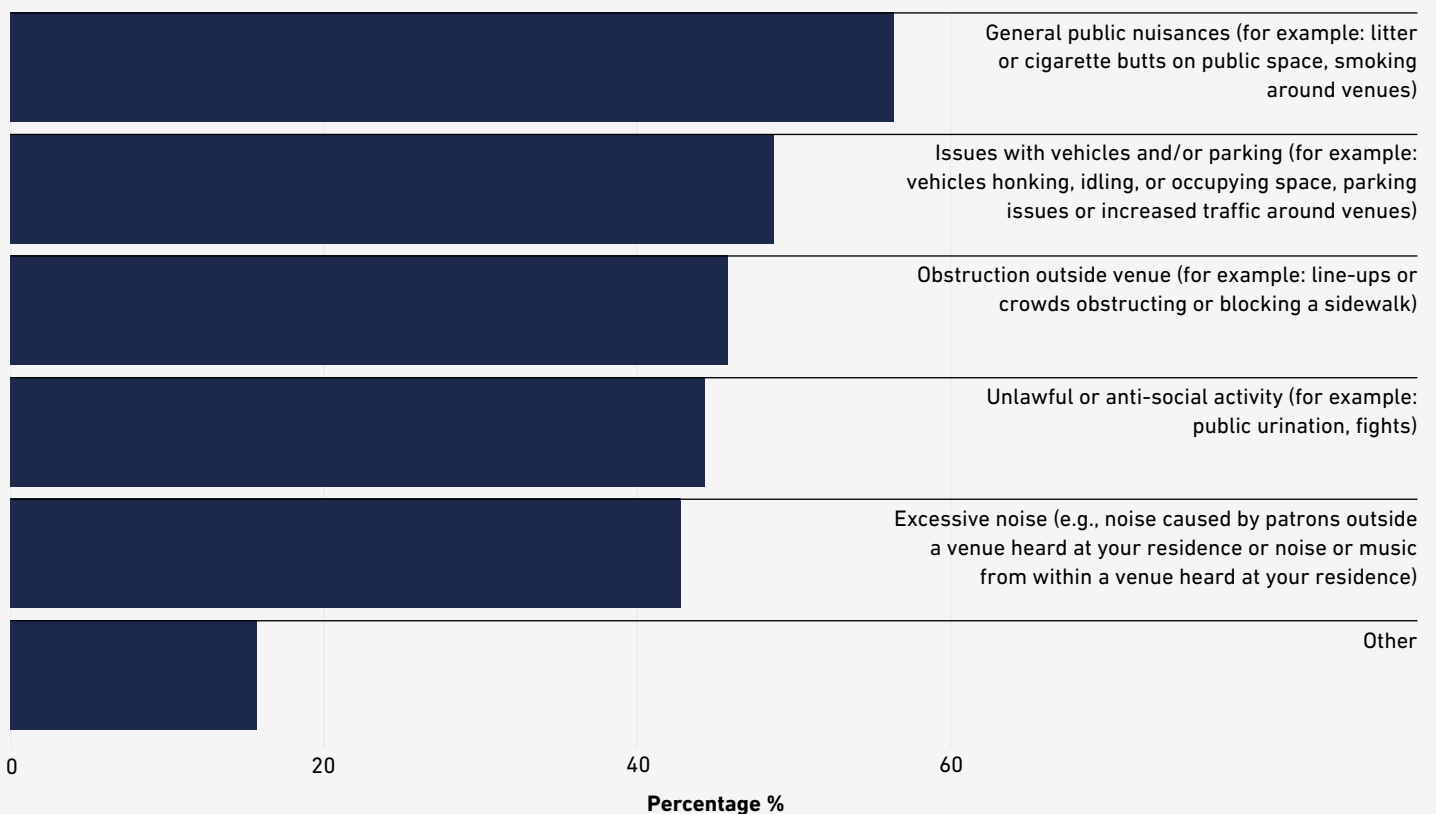
Please specify the issue(s) you have experienced [as a customer or patron, regarding safety or nuisance concerns while visiting a restaurant, bar, nightclub, or other entertainment venue].



**As residents (rather than patrons), most respondents (73%) have *Never or Rarely* experienced safety or nuisance concerns.**

When these concerns were experienced, general public nuisance (i.e. litter, smoking) was the type most commonly reported via the survey. Of the respondents who *did* experience concerns, slightly over 40% noted that their concerns included excessive noise. (This topic was also covered in consultations; please see Section IV for further discussion.)

Please specify the issue(s) you have experienced [as a resident, regarding safety or nuisance concerns related to a restaurant, bar, nightclub, or other entertainment venue].



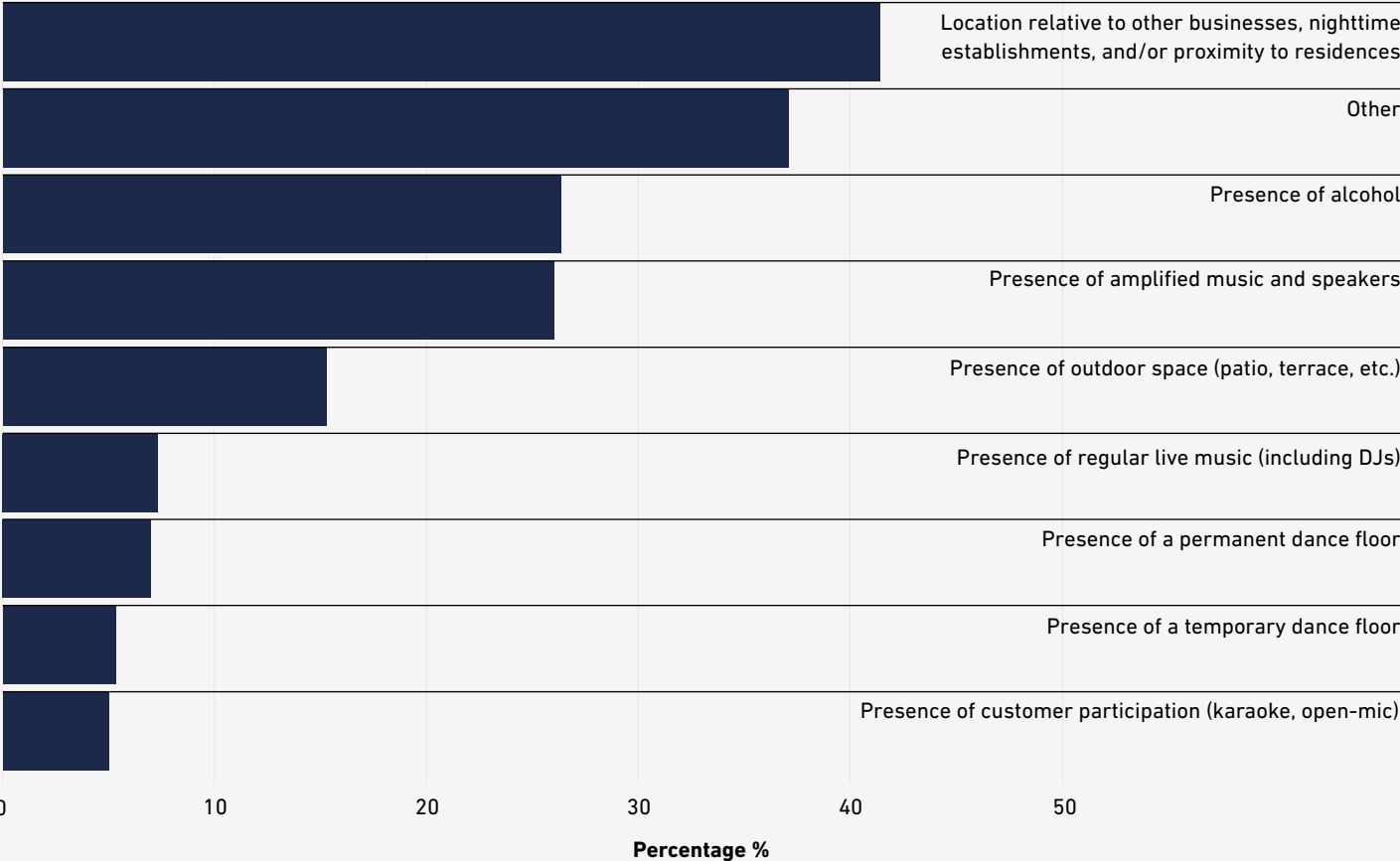
This analysis did not find particular differences between groups regarding concerns about the nature of particular nuisance, so further cross-tabulations or demographic breakdowns are not shown here.

# Factors contributing to safety or nuisance

Survey respondents most often recognized that the location of nighttime businesses have a significant impact on safety and nuisance (41%), more than other factors like alcohol, (amplified) music, outdoor space or a dance floor. However, this question generated more critiques from survey respondents than others: it is notable that while “Other” normally captured a small number of responses in other questions, it was the second-most selected option here. In the free-response

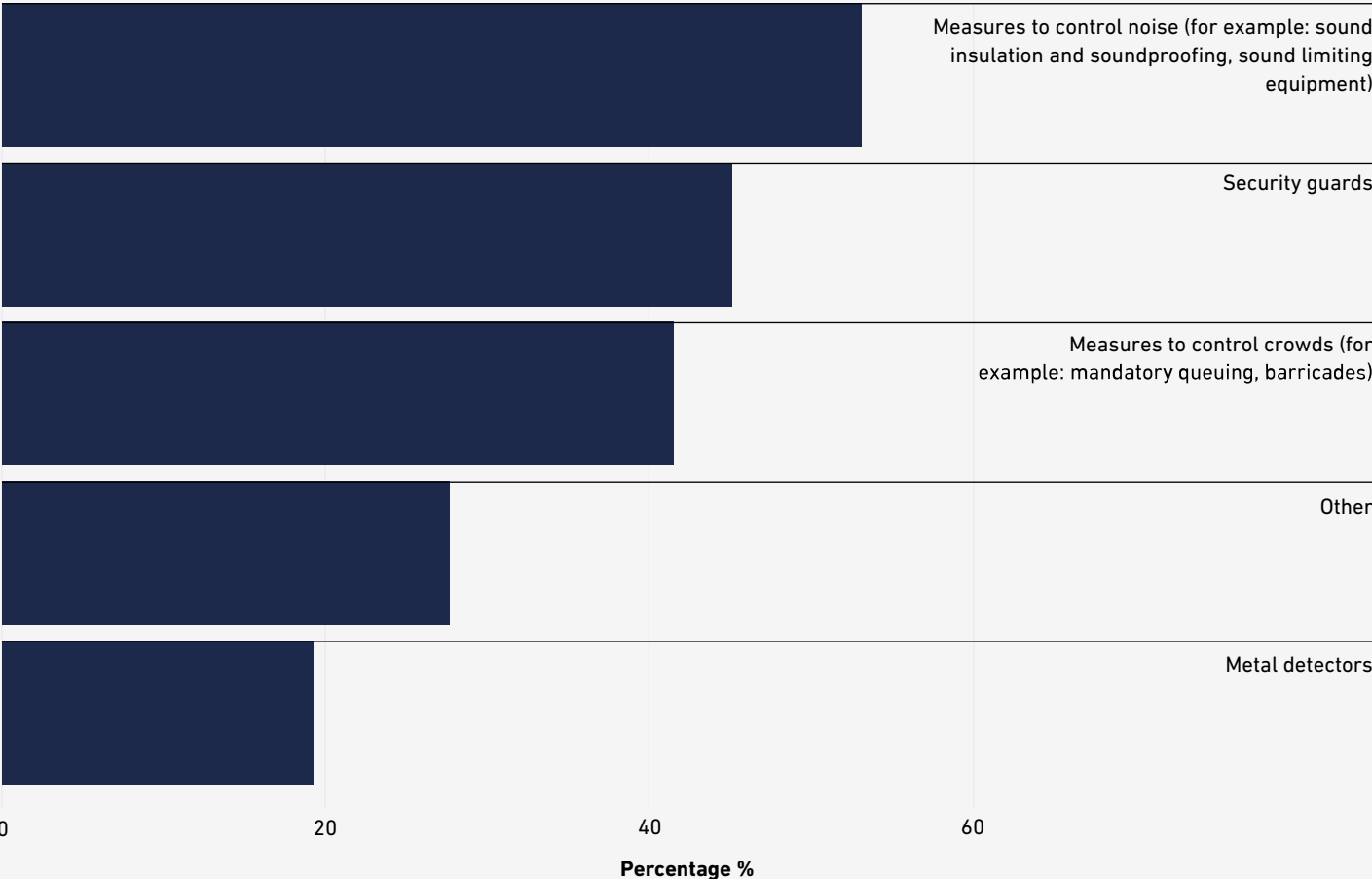
section, a number of respondents expressed disagreement with this question’s formulation, and highlighted a wide range of other factors most influencing nuisance, from police presence, to individual patrons’ or individual venues’ behaviour, to crowding at venue closing time (especially in areas with many venues), to addiction and mental health issues, to lack of services such as public washrooms, sufficient transit, and trash cans.

When thinking about your experiences in a restaurant, bar, nightclub or other entertainment venue, which factors do you think have the most impact on public safety and community nuisance?



To mitigate these and other issues, **participants saw noise control measures (e.g. sound insulation, soundproofing, sound limiters) as the top priority**, over security guards, crowd control measures, metal detectors or other actions.

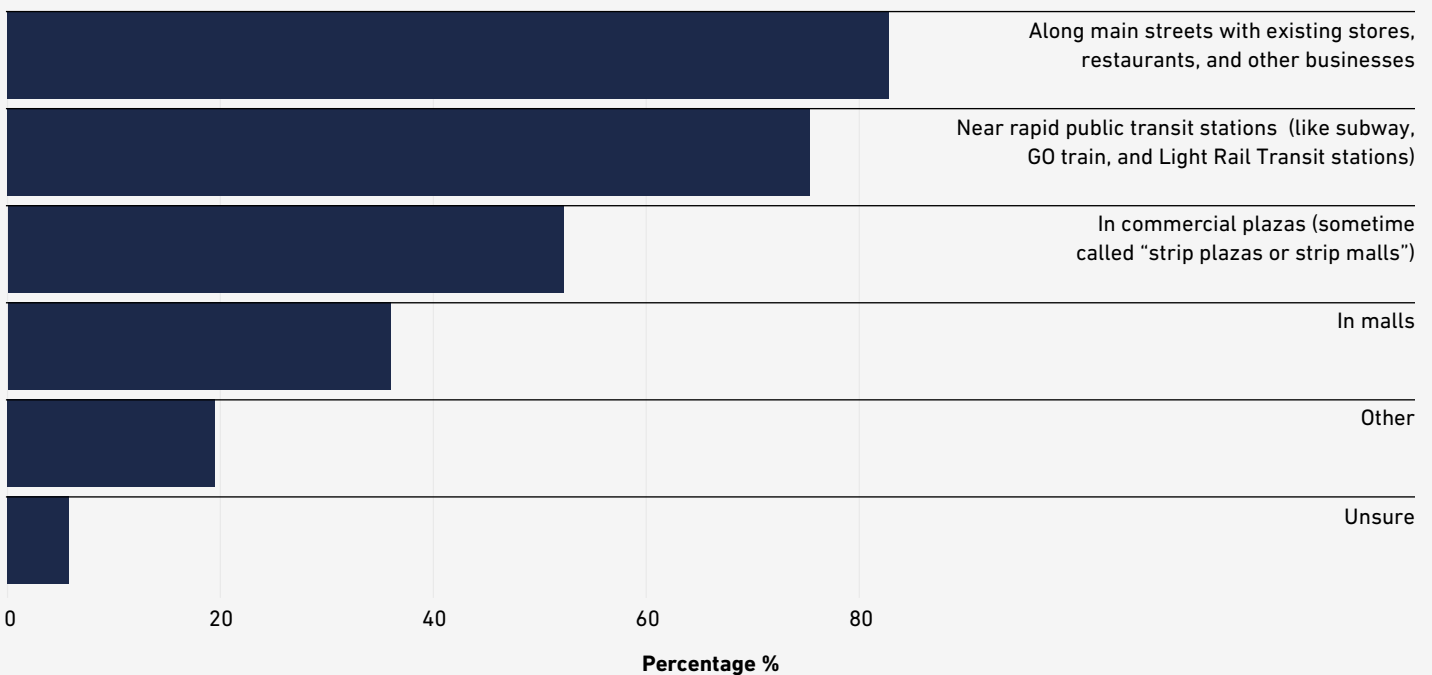
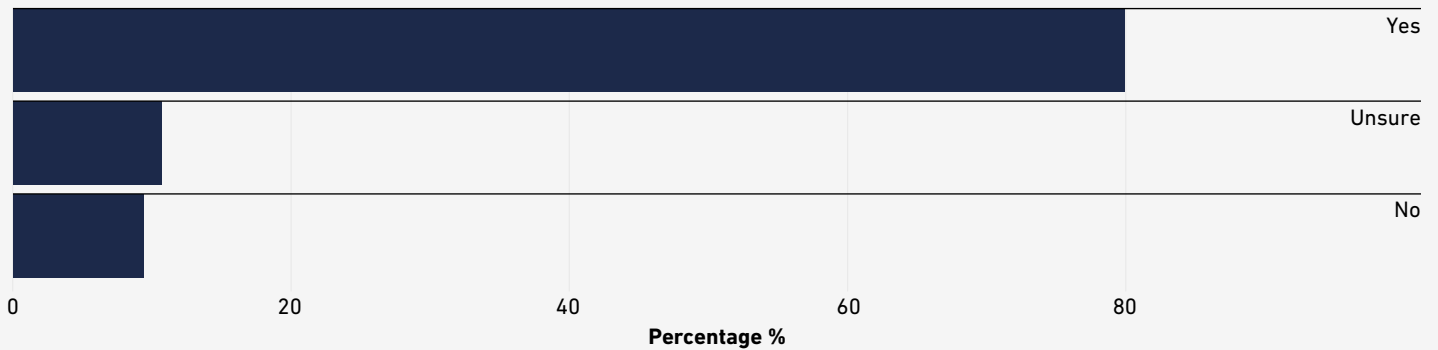
## What measures should be used by businesses to reduce or minimize nuisance or public safety issues?



## Nightclubs Outside of Downtown

**Respondents overwhelmingly believe nightclubs should be permitted outside the downtown area—80% said yes, 9% no, and 11% were unsure—but along commercial corridors and near transit.** This sentiment was slightly less strong in outer wards, but still a majority view. When expanding upon the “other” option, participants most frequently stated light industrial areas as preferred locations for nightclubs.

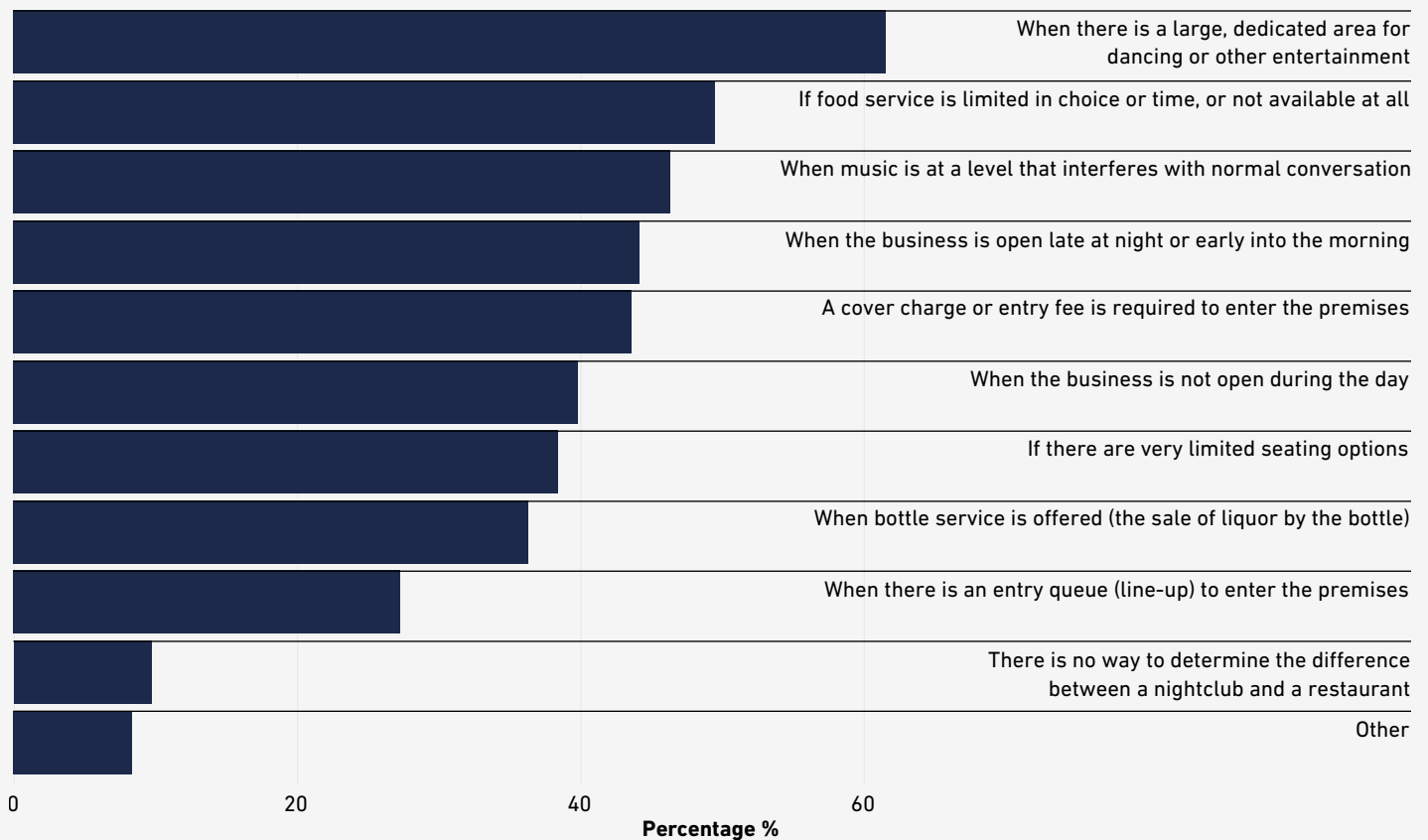
Should nightclubs be permitted outside the downtown area? In what areas do you think they would be most appropriate?



## Defining a “Nightclub,” and Conditions for Establishing Clubs

When offered multiple options of what distinguishes a nightclub from a restaurant or bar, no one conclusive answer strongly emerged. A slight majority of respondents selected the presence of a large, dedicated area for dancing or entertainment, and other options (limited food service, higher volume music, later business hours, and cover charges) earned between 30-50%. These answers were geographically mixed.

Under what circumstances should a business be described as a “nightclub” instead of a “restaurant” or a “bar”?



In considering conditions for establishing new nightclubs, a majority of people (over 60%) believe new nightclubs should develop noise and crowd control plans. A smaller proportion believe they shouldn't be located near residences (45% opted

to limit nightclubs just above, below, or next to residential units in the same building, 37% wanted to see residential and nightclub buildings separated entirely, while 31% agreed with limiting nightclubs next to residential lots).



### 3.3 Findings: Owners and Operators

- Licence holders believe, on average, that 39% of interior floor area is needed for entertainment-related activities (e.g. a stage, dance floor, DJ booth, karaoke, gambling, etc.).
- While 54% of licence holders feel their licence accurately reflects their business activities, licensing and other bylaws were reported as a hindrance by just under 40%, and over 60% report a need for licensing changes.
- 60% of licence holders take at least one step to ensure patron and public safety and minimize nuisance, such as security cameras, proactive neighbourhood communication, and plans for controlling litter, noise and crowds.

This section details answers from the second pathway of the survey: 20 questions aimed at owners and operators of businesses related to the night economy. 233 respondents described themselves as business owners, but only a small subset of respondents (79) reported holding key licence types identified in the survey<sup>16,17</sup>. In order to present the most applicable findings, this section's analysis reflects responses from only the licence holders. The proportion of these licence holders who voluntarily reported demographic information is too small to be representative, and thus is not reported here.

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<sup>16.</sup> Eating or Drinking Establishment (B71), Entertainment Establishment/Nightclub (B97), Retail Food Store (B50), Public Hall (B70), Billiard Hall (B36).

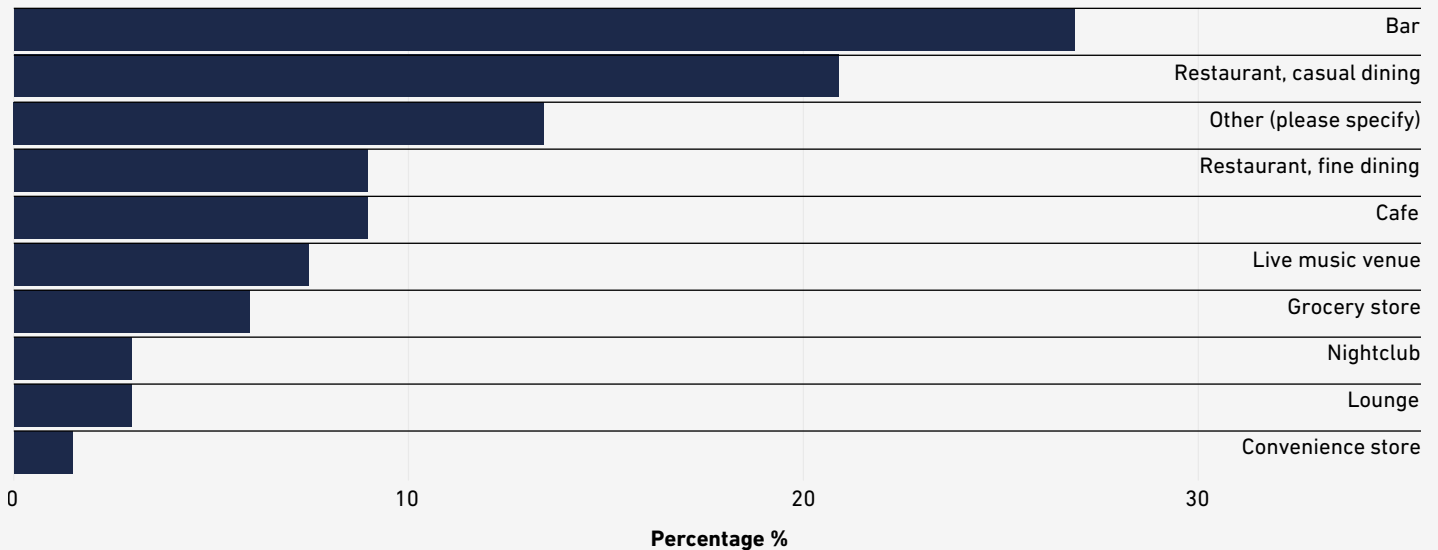
<sup>17.</sup> Other respondents may be affiliated entrepreneurs or own other types of businesses: respondents who described their business elsewhere in this survey pathway noted business types including waste management, health services, photography, event management, hairdressing services, sound engineering and DJing, legal practice, music services, and a community centre.

## Business types and activities

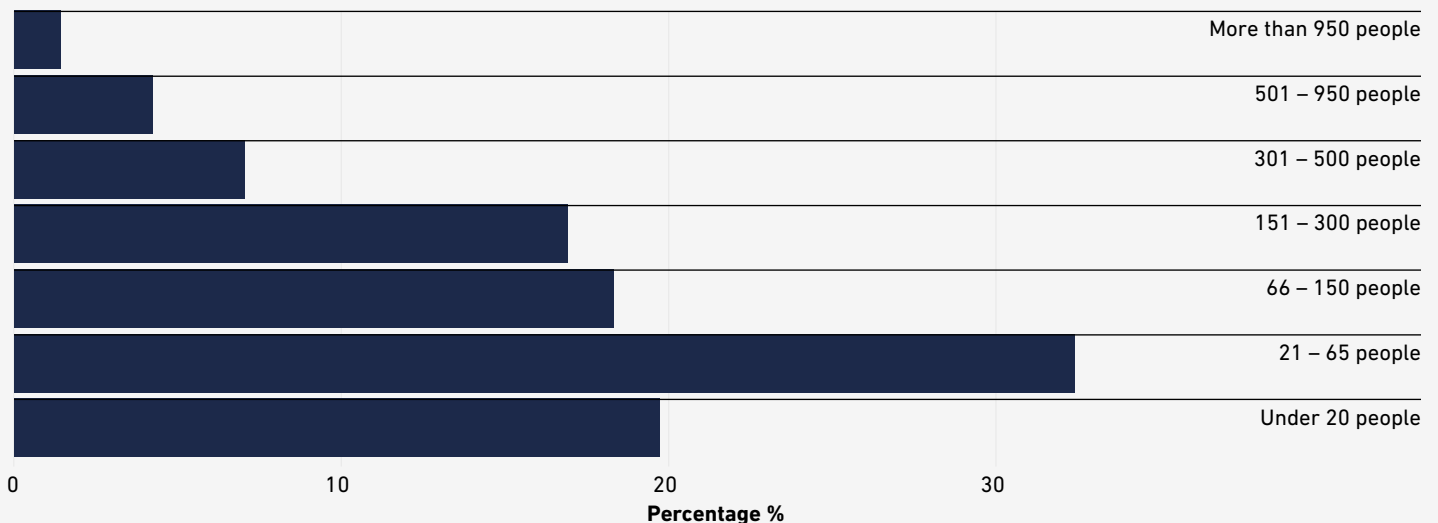
The largest proportion of licence holders are bars and restaurants (48%), with “other” businesses including a variety of concepts, such as a combination community space-nightclub-performance venue, indoor golf, a pastry shop, a live theatre venue, and a combination bar-live music venue, among others. Operators holding the licences in this survey’s focus area reported mostly owning relatively small bars, cafes, and restaurants. Most

of these (over 60%) had some type of amplified sound and used varying amounts of floor area for entertainment. 65% of respondents hold only one business licence for restaurants, bars, nightclubs or other entertainment venues. 25-30% of respondents’ businesses operate past midnight (dependent on weekday/weekend hours), and over 60% report holding liquor licences.

## Business activities reported



## Business capacities reported



## Licence compatibility with business activities

Respondent sentiments on whether their licence category accurately defines and permits their primary business activities were split: 54% felt that their licence category suited their primary business activities. Some respondents further described their challenges with the licensing process, finding it “vague,” “confusing, expensive and unclear,” or found the existing descriptions partly or wholly inaccurate for their activities. For businesses who hope to offer multiple types of services, licence categories present a particular challenge. In the words of one survey respondent:

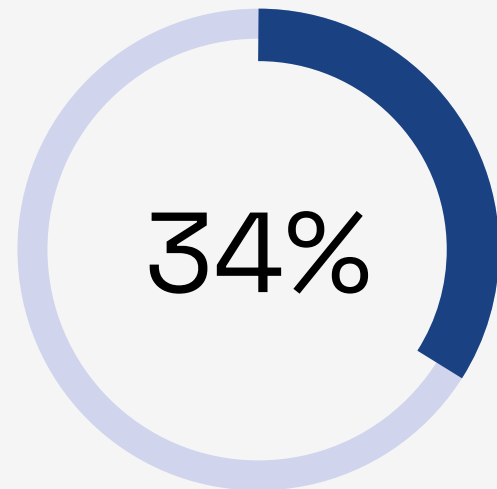
*“The issue with these licences is that you can’t define cultural gathering spaces in boxes...Especially for venues that support marginalized communities. With the introduction of condos and less and less venues, the existing venues are having to take on more and more “hats” to fill a crucial need for certain communities...The venue is at times hosting dance parties, then we have live music, then...workshops... live entertainment performers, plus we have a bar... and host brunch parties among other things. The licences do not encapsulate all these hat[s]...It’s impossible to. [Trying to define it] complicates the process for new and old venue owners that are just trying to support communities and survive during this unprecedented time.”*

A large minority of respondents (just under 40%) reported licensing and other bylaws as a hindrance in providing the environment desired by business patrons. The majority (over 60%) report a need for licensing changes.

When asked what percentage of floor area eating and drinking establishments need to access for entertainment, respondents in this section (not just licence holders) reported an average of 34%—more than five times the currently allotted 6% in the Zoning Bylaw. On average, licence holders placed this figure at 39%.

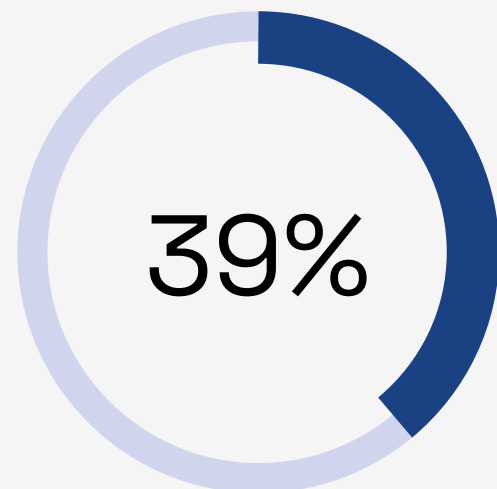
### All business owners/operators

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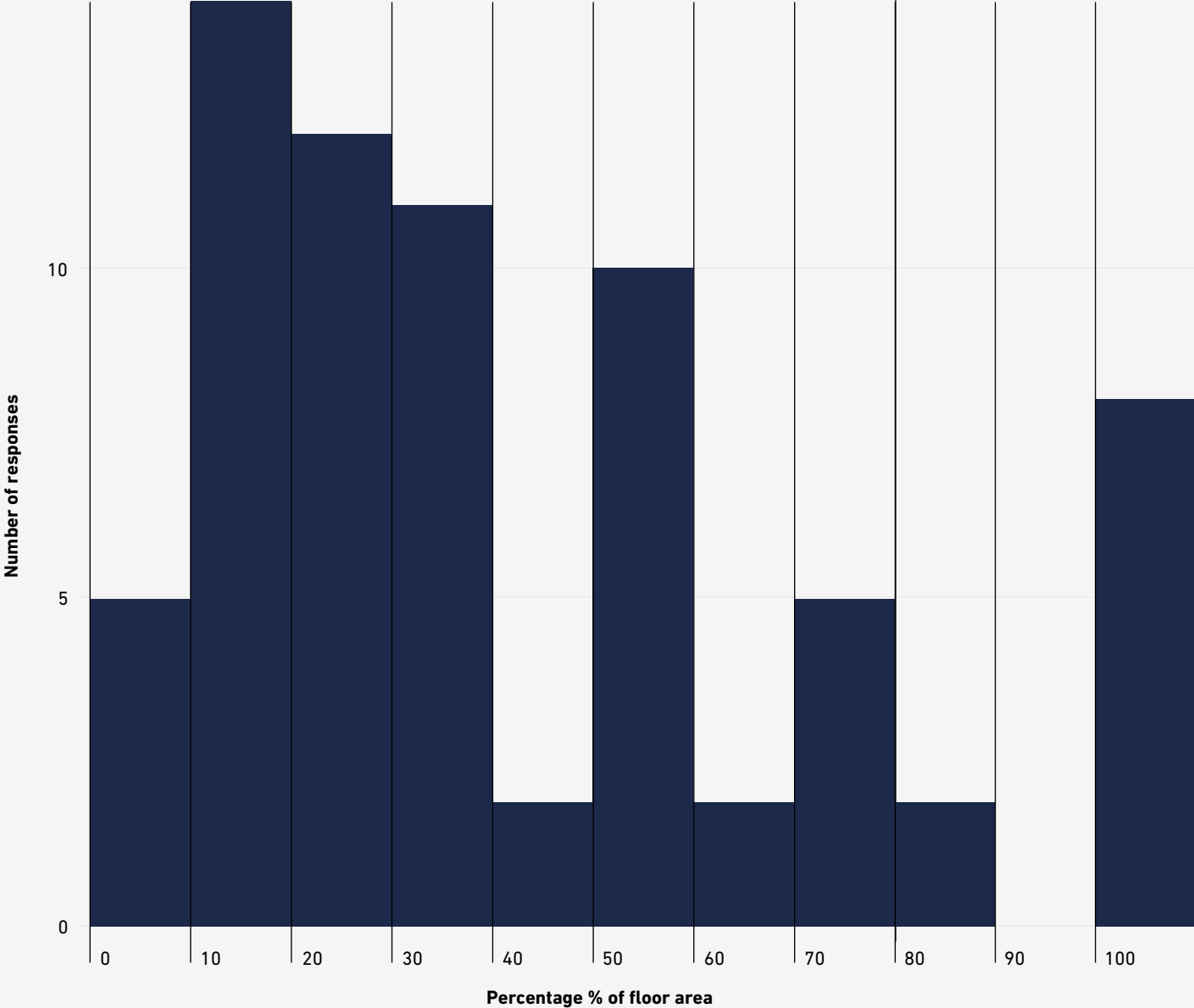
### Licence holders

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Currently, the City restricts entertainment uses in eating establishments to 6 per cent of its interior floor area. How much space (as a percentage of the interior floor area) inside an eating establishment is needed for entertainment-related activities?

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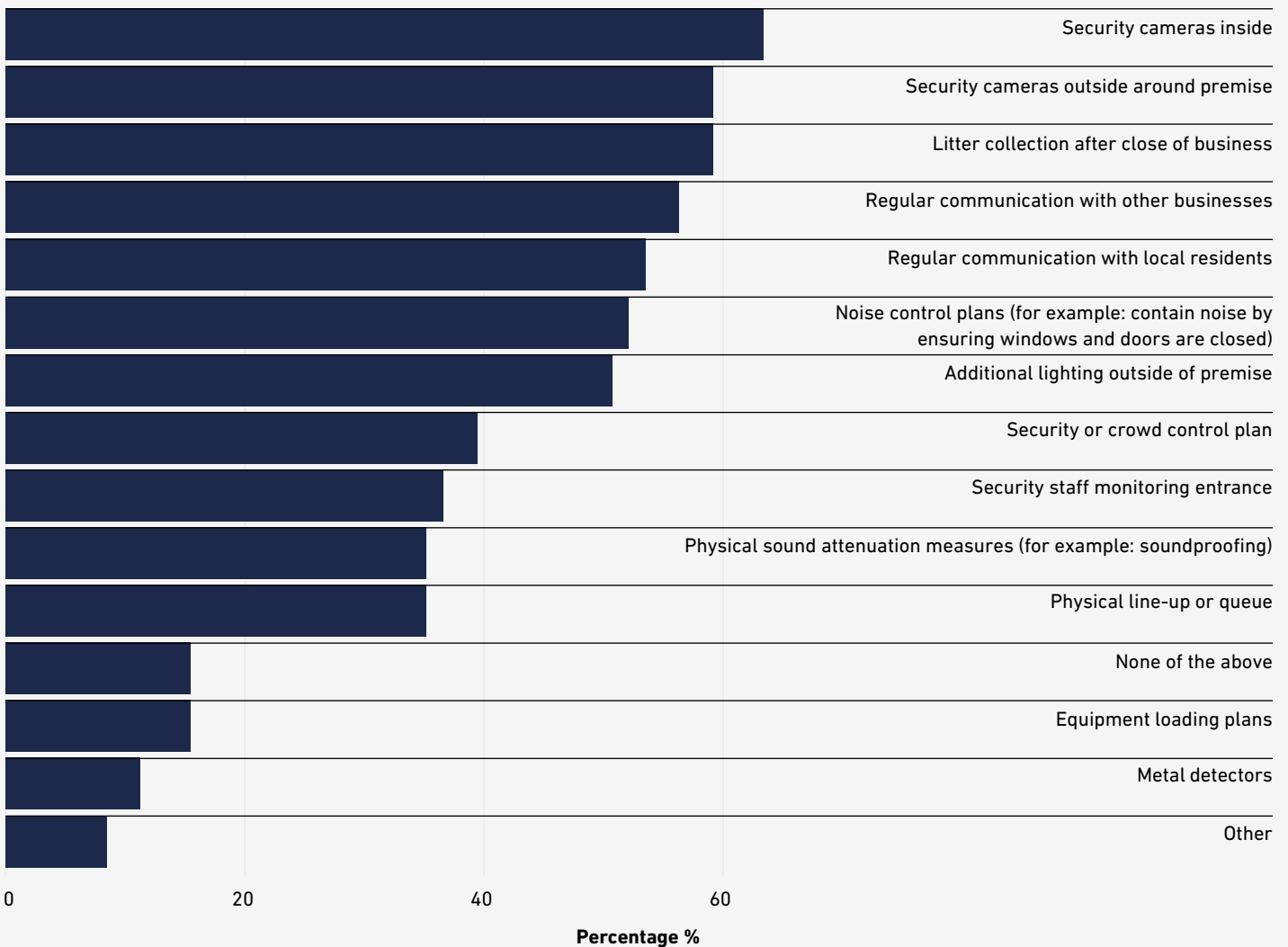


## Managing nuisance and safety concerns

More than half of licence holders reported taking steps to ensure patron and public safety and minimize potential nuisance. These most often included security cameras (over 60%), litter collection in addition to City services, regular communication with neighbouring businesses and residents, noise control plans, and supplemental outdoor lighting (all between 50-60%). A smaller proportion also indicated using a security or

crowd control plan, security staff at the entrance, physical sound measures (such as soundproofing), or controlled queueing outside. It is important to note that these licence holders generally operate smaller bars and restaurants, with half of respondents reporting occupancy capacities under 65 people; it is possible that practices may differ at larger establishments.

What measures (formal or informal) do you utilize in your business/operation to minimize potential community nuisances and ensure patron/public safety?



Some licence holders suggested additional ideas to be used in conjunction with businesses' existing safety and nuisance-mitigation measures. These included increased police presence in high-traffic entertainment areas, particularly with community-based approaches; support from and collaboration with BIAs; additional public transport frequency and public washrooms; reducing ride denials and "fare hunting" from taxi or rideshare drivers; improved soundproofing for residential buildings and venues; management of patio policy near residences; and potential for extended hours or staggered closing times, in order to reduce nuisance at one single closing time.



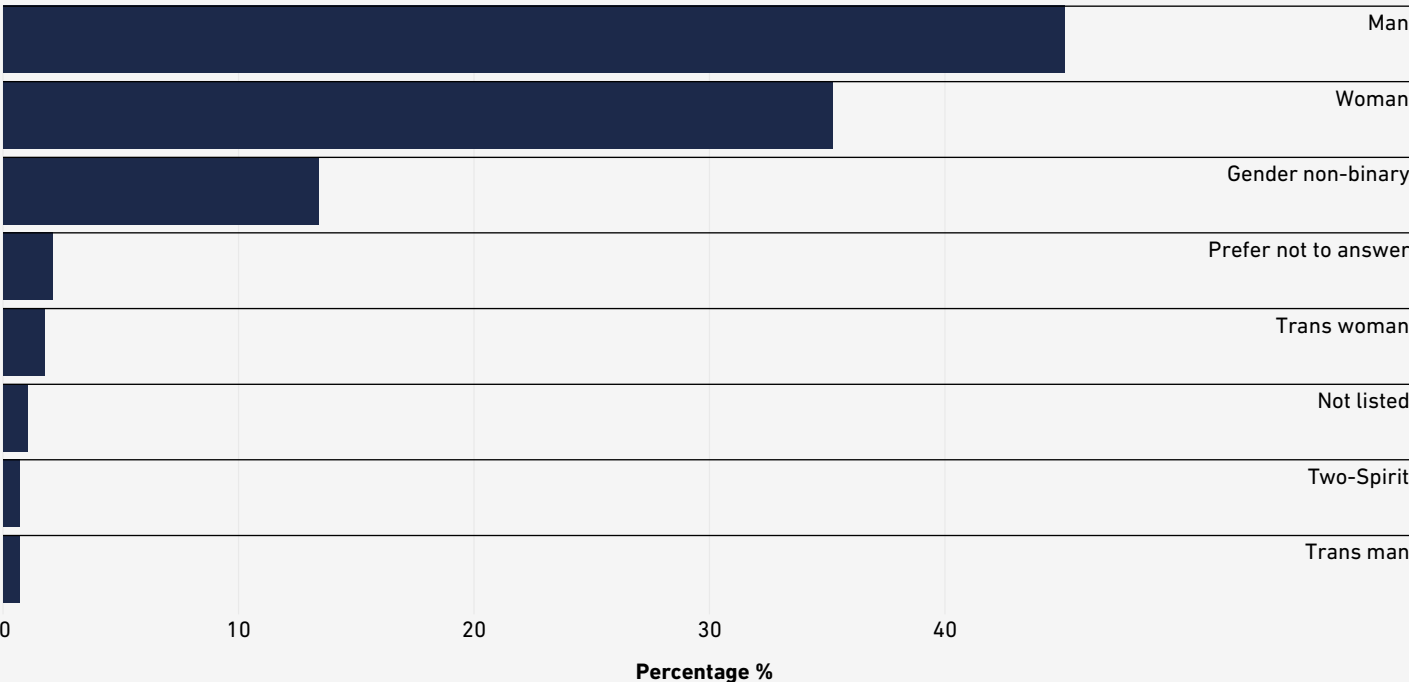
Burdock Brewery, Toronto (Photo: © Burdock Brewery/ Jason Stein)

### 3.4 Findings: Cultural Event Producers

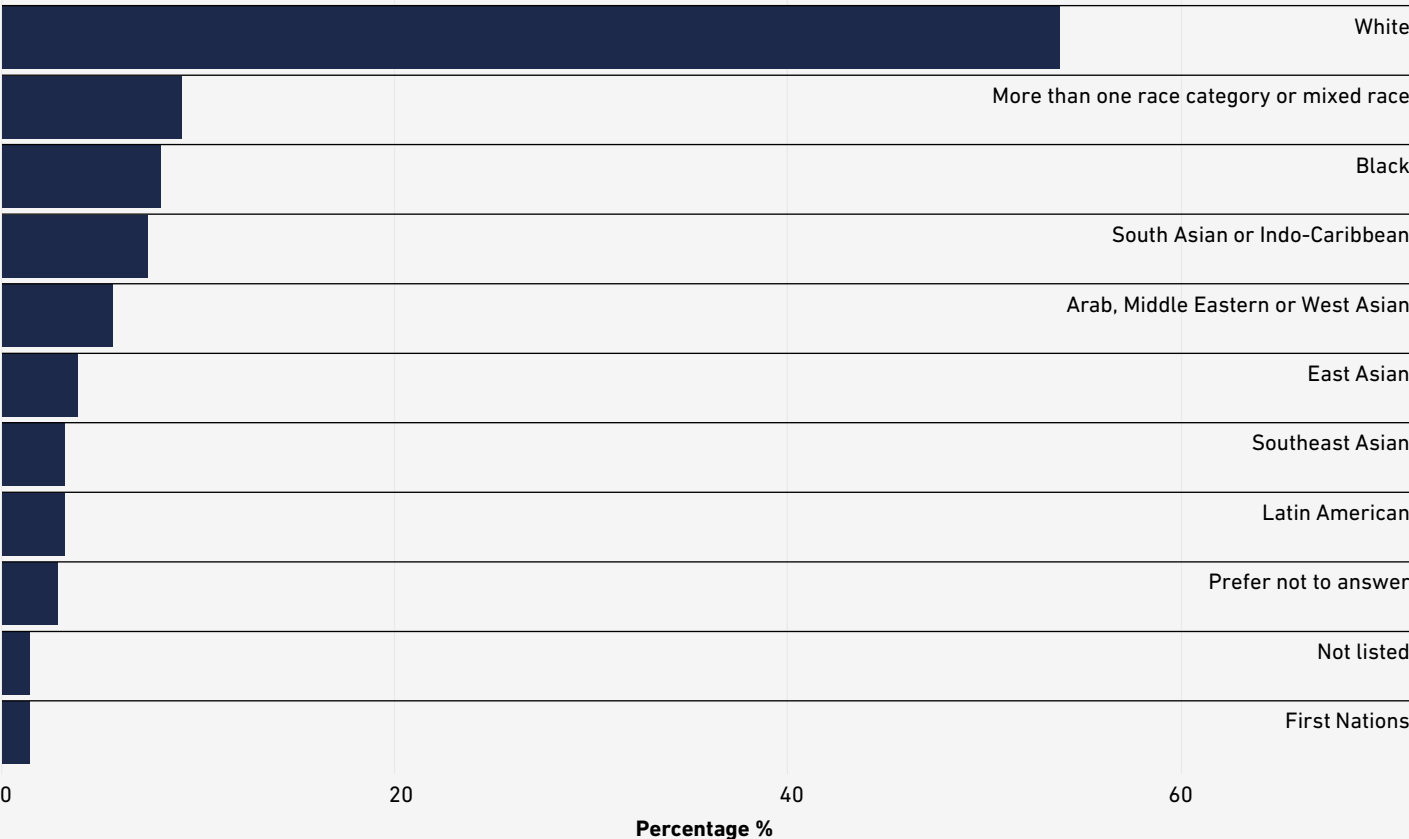
- The vast majority of respondents produce events downtown, with less than 10% producing events in North York, Scarborough and/or Etobicoke.
- Cultural event producers most often use licenced establishments like bars, restaurants, clubs, and coffee shops for their events—but producers residing outside of downtown are less likely to do so.
- 47% of respondents reported having had challenges holding events, most often related to permitting, accessing venues and spaces and cost.
- Respondents would like to see more flexibility with regulations related to temporary use of space (81%) and faster timelines for permit reviews (72%).

This section details findings from the final pathway of the report, focused on cultural event producers. With seven questions, this survey path was the shortest of the three. 462 respondents reported involvement with producing cultural events. Of those who provided demographic information, the plurality identified as white and male.

## Survey respondents by gender



## Survey respondents by race or racial background

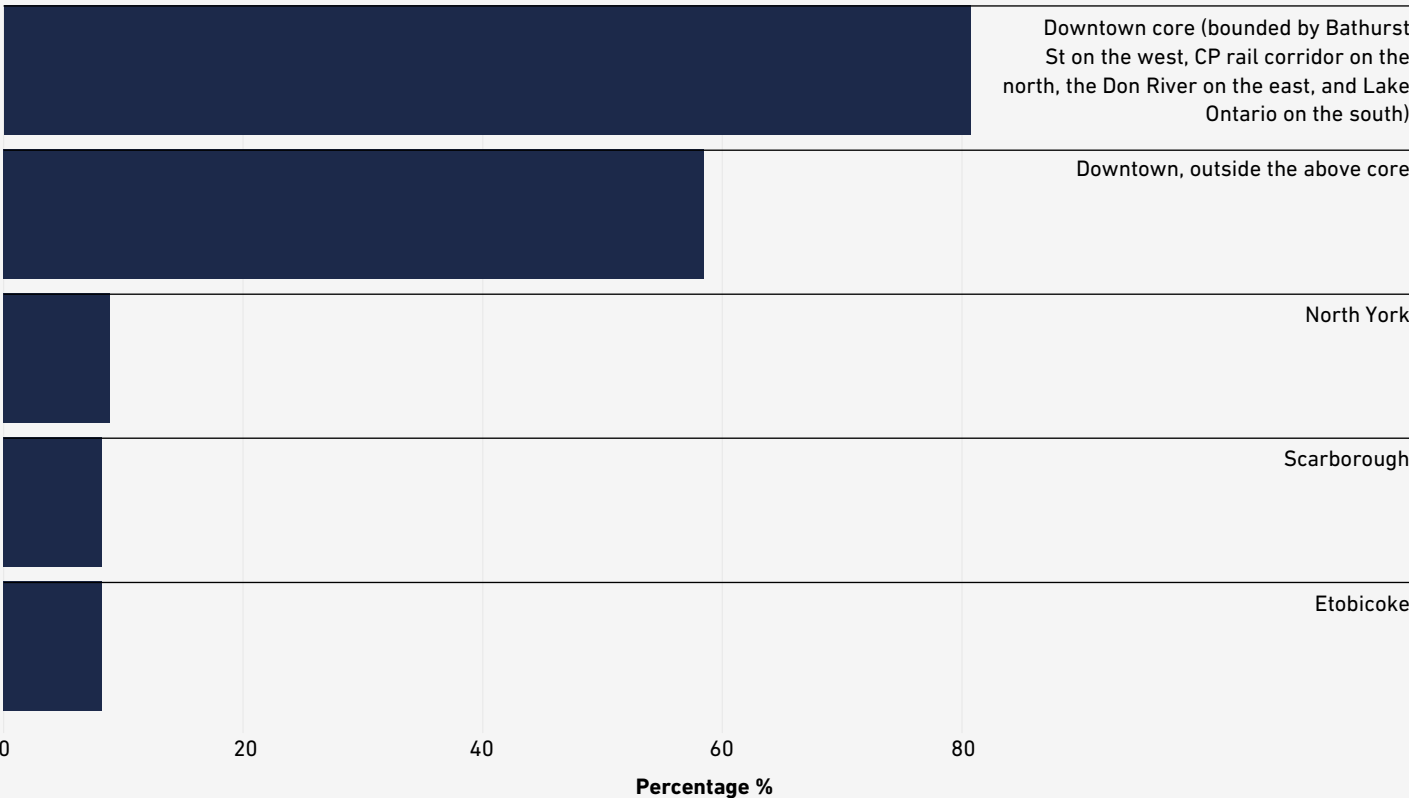




# Events and Locations

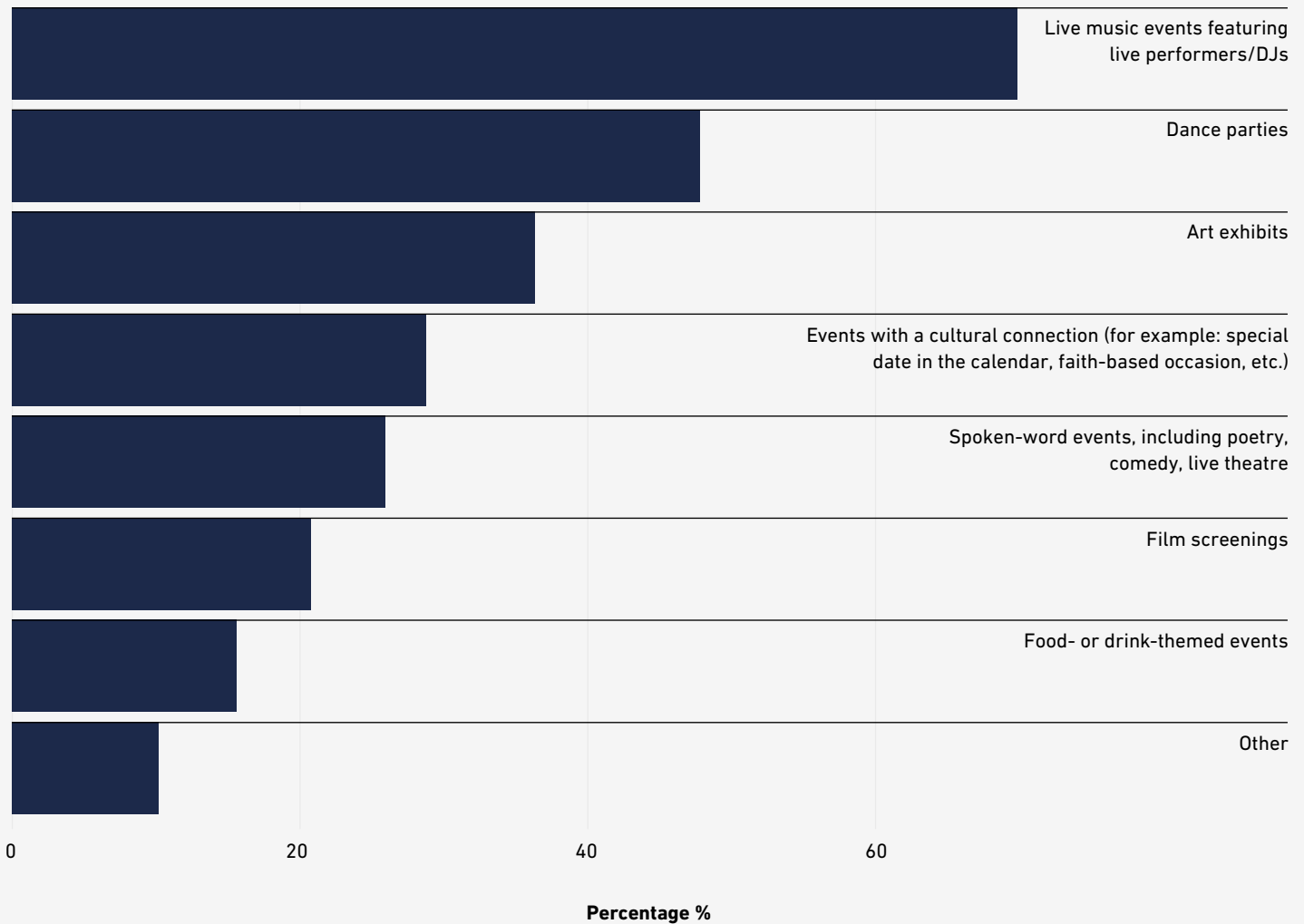
**The vast majority of respondents produce events downtown:** 81% reported producing events in the downtown core (the area bounded by Bathurst, CP rail corridor, Don River, and Lake Ontario) and 58% in other areas of downtown. Less than 10% of respondents produce events in North York, Scarborough and/or Etobicoke.

In which area(s) of Toronto do you most frequently hold events?



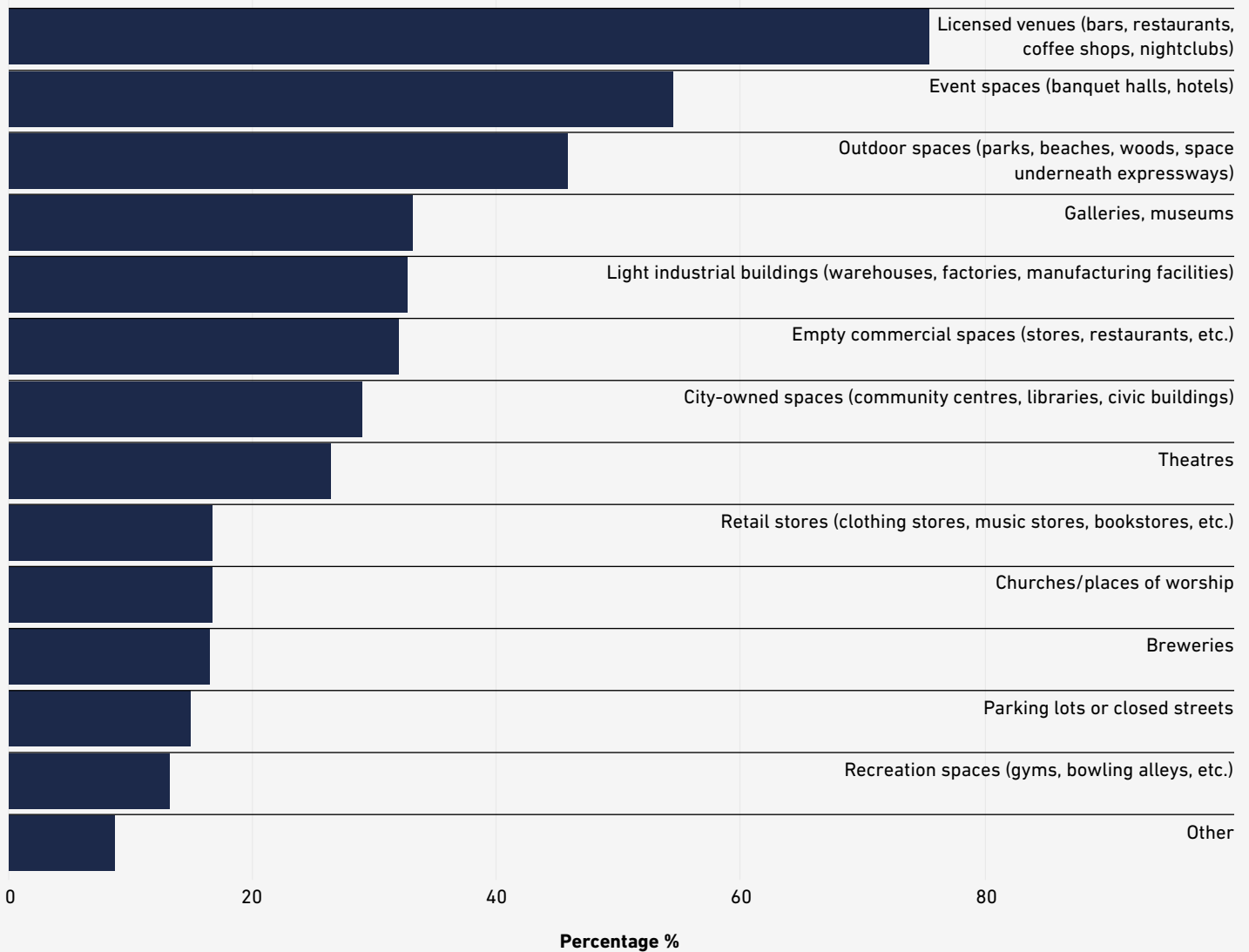
The majority of respondents produce live music events (70%), but a wide variety of events were reported, particularly from respondents reporting residency in Scarborough, North York or Etobicoke. Those reporting “other” event types of events described a wide range that included sports, circus and aerial arts, theatre, dance, competitive gaming, drag shows, parades, karaoke nights, outdoor education for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) adults, historic events, art workshops and events serving specific queer and ethnic communities.

## What kind of cultural events do you produce?



**Cultural event producers most often use licensed establishments like bars, restaurants, clubs, and coffeshops for their events:** 76% of respondents reported doing so. 55% use event spaces like banquet halls, and 46% reported producing events in outdoor spaces. Galleries and museums, industrial spaces, and vacant commercial spaces are each used by about a third of respondents; numbers shrink further for City-owned spaces (29%), theatres, houses of worship, retail stores, breweries, recreation spaces, and parking lots or closed streets. Those who indicated using "other" locations indicated options like community centres, DIY spaces, private spaces like homes, or even virtual spaces.

# What kinds of spaces do you use for your events?



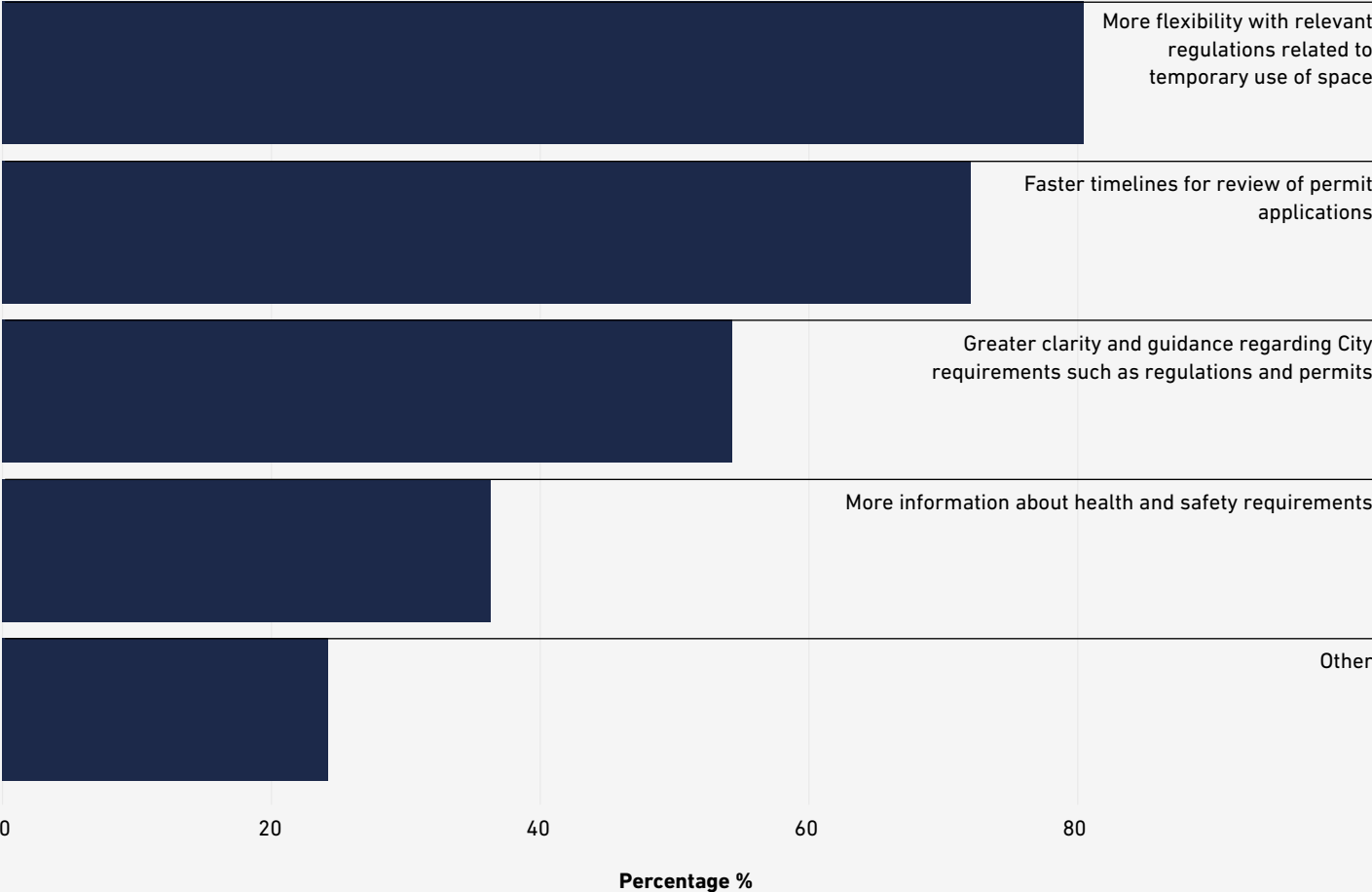
**Patterns of use differ between respondents living in the downtown area and those living in other areas of Toronto.** While sample sizes for this group are relatively small, respondents reporting their residence as outside the downtown area report using a variety of non-licensed spaces for their events more often than respondents in the urban core. Producers using more conventional spaces (such as licensed venues) are more likely to be based in the downtown area. This finding aligns with sentiments reported in the focus group, with participants perceiving that cultural event spaces are more challenging to locate and access in Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke.

# Challenges and Barriers to Access

47% of respondents reported having had challenges holding events. In 50 free-response answers describing these challenges, **permits** (including alcohol permits) were identified as a key issue by more than half of respondents (26), **venues and spaces** by 21 respondents, and **cost or expense** by 8 respondents.

Relatedly, the vast majority of respondents would like to see **more flexibility with regulations related to temporary use of space** (81%), and **faster timelines for permit reviews** (72%). Free-response answers highlighted other needs, with many alluding to cost in different ways: calls for more funding and grants overall, financial support for launching events or supporting struggling venues, and access to more affordable indoor and outdoor spaces.

## How could the City best support your work in producing cultural events?



### 3.5 “In their words”: Torontonians speak up

As part of this survey, respondents shared hundreds of free-response answers to questions covering everything from the value of Toronto nightlife to barriers, concerns, and visions for the future. Some insights have been summarized in the previous pages. A sample of further responses (lightly edited for spelling and grammar) are shared here to convey Torontonians’ thoughts, priorities and hopes in their own words.

**How do bars, restaurants, entertainment venues, and nighttime culture contribute to the vitality, livability and economy of the city?**

“They are vital to making Toronto a world class city that people want to live in and visit.”

“It is what makes a city a city but also brings a sprawling community together.”

“I believe they support community and togetherness. Especially in queer spaces and cultural circles. This in turn is good for tourism, events and the city in general.”

“The all important “third place.” It is where people go that isn’t home or work and these places are so important to the identity and culture of a city...This is how residents socialize, learn, and access the arts.”

“Simply put, it’s the only reason I pay the exorbitant cost to live in the city.”

“The city’s nightlife, culture and entertainment are a crucial part of the life of every single resident and every visitor. These businesses have a great potential to bring a large amount of money to the city’s economy, and a large number of job opportunities for residents.”

“In a city the size of Toronto, half of the “life” takes place between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.”

“They don’t. Entertainment venues and nighttime culture in particular negatively affect the livability of the city. They should be totally banned from residential areas, especially in the downtown core with its high density of apartments and condos.”

“Absolutely necessary for a healthy city. Not everyone lives 9-5.”

“Yes but they should respect the neighbourhood.”

“A city is nothing without its nightlife. The purpose of living in a city versus the suburbs is to be able to have and experience a nightlife scene, whether it be bars, nightclubs or restaurants.”

“This culture also provides lots of jobs for performers, production crews, bar and restaurant staff, etc.”

“They make the city alive and worth living in. We need more of these spaces!”

**What barriers do you face in participating in nighttime activities, whether it be entertainment, cultural, social or for work?**

“A lot of venues have removed all masking mandates and have not been transparent about their ventilation and/or if they have upgraded air filtration. This is an access barrier for people like myself who would love to go see live music or theatre but don’t feel comfortable doing so while we are still in an active pandemic.”

“Many nighttime activities are subject to unnecessary restrictions that limit their ability to occur or be sustained. Why can’t small pop-up events get park permits and outdoor venue permits easily for a before-11 p.m. music or arts or culture event, which may or may not include alcohol?”

“There (are) not nearly enough public spaces that are open at night, and are free or low-cost to attend. This city should not just be a playground for the rich.”

“There are fewer such activities near me because of SFH (Single Family Home) zoning and because of the high cost of living and rent pushing out the working artists and arts workers who create the city’s vibrant culture.”

“There are fewer and fewer spaces and venues that offer a safe place for people to engage in nightlife culture.”

“Bars close early, transport closes even earlier - it’s ridiculous for a large city... Toronto needs to keep up with cities like NYC, Miami and Montreal even...We should look to adopt what other places do around the world and allow our nightlife to extend further.”

“As the real estate market sees rents skyrocketing, venues are being priced out.”

“The power bouncers have against patrons. I’ve had multiple experiences where club bouncers have abused people I know for doing nothing wrong. And when the police are called, they can’t do anything about it because “it happened on their property.”

“Access to late night services like TTC routes with more buses and street cars on [TTC] Blue Night routes and shorter wait times as well as access to subway routes that run longer than 1:30am.”



**How could nighttime activities be made more inclusive for equity-deserving/marginalized groups?**

“Make space available at night that has different uses in the day time. This might be done through hours-related permits or zoning so that the same space can be used.”

“Let actual members of marginalized groups develop a strategy and plan. There isn’t an easy fix. Don’t let people from non-marginalized groups override or “manage” the marginalized groups.”

“Free events, welcome even if you don’t drink alcohol, activities or entertainment that invite you to linger, lighting, benches [that] say sit [and] rest, low-volume areas with plenty of seats so elderly, children and hard of hearing people can stay a while.”

“More queer spaces!”

“We also need more venues in the city—alternative spaces, community spaces. We are continuously getting shut out by closing venues [and] warehouses. Rent has become unaffordable for many, so the creation of new spaces is minimal. Community spaces are

constantly being shut out by big developers. This needs to stop!!!”

“More non-cops helping out during and after hours to make sure queers and POCs are safer because we tend to get targeted when some people who already don’t like us get inebriated or otherwise more courageous.”

“There needs to be easier access to create DIY spaces for culture and entertainment activities. There simply aren’t enough venues to support the city’s emerging talent.”

“Better transit service: just as frequent if not more than day time. This would also be beneficial for anyone who works outside of the 9-5 workday.”

Is there anything else that this survey didn't cover that you would like to share?

“Increasingly there are new forms of entertainment spaces that don't look like a typical restaurant or nightclub. Perhaps it is a community hall that turns into a dance hall at night; or a nightclub that rents out its kitchen for a ghost kitchen during the day.”

“Noise is a serious concern. As I learn more about the deleterious effects of noise on human health, and on the health of other organisms that share our urban environment, I'm increasingly alarmed that the City does so little to protect its residents from the harms caused by noise.”

“Homelessness needs to be addressed as a major factor that influences the quality and safety of nightlife in Toronto.”

“The focus was heavily on nightclubs and restaurants, what about other types of venues that might operate at night (i.e. supporting other spaces for people to congregate that are not dancing or alcohol driven).”

“Parking is an issue in our residential area, as patrons to restaurants tend to park on our street and block access in and out of our street.”

“I cannot stress enough how crucial I think the element of the city failing to keep the city “livably” affordable has resulted in an utter shutdown of imagination. When everyone has unfathomably high bills and costs to cover, only the most consistent and risk averse offerings are produced.”

“Much of the survey seems focused on further limiting nighttime culture as it relates to proximity to residential or other areas. It would be great to see some follow up and know more about the intention behind the survey and how the city can work with residents who are trying to put on special events with integrity.”

“Treat mental health, poverty, isolating zoning laws, make every neighbourhood awesome and you will have an amazing city! People think they can act however they want downtown because it’s a wasteland, you’re giving them permission by the emptiness of it. Build infrastructure, build community, make it so no one needs to drive an hour to have fun.”



# Section IV: Consultation Findings

## 4.0 Summary of main consultation themes and issues

As described in Section II: Methodology, 10 consultation sessions were held over a four week period. Seven focus groups were each capped at 16 participants, and following presentations from City staff, broke into two discussion groups to enable approximately 50 minutes of in-depth, small-group conversation. Public sessions were capped at 60 participants, and broke into either five or six smaller discussion groups for 60-70 minutes.

Questions covered detailed licensing and zoning topics to gather participant input on current zoning and licensing regulations, and also prompted reflection on broader topics of equity, economic development, and public health topics relevant to night economies in Toronto. This section provides a high-level overview of key insights (below), and the following section (*4.1 Summary of feedback and findings*) offers more in-depth explanations of topics sorted by four broad categories of zoning, licensing, promoting neighbourhood coexistence at night, and inclusion and barriers to access. For further detail, readers may refer to the *Appendix*, which provides reports from each of the 10 consultation sessions.

A number of overarching themes arose in consultations:

1. **Managing conflict related to sound and noise was one of the topics most frequently discussed in consultations.** While a majority of survey participants (73%) indicated that they have *never* or *rarely* had safety or nuisance concerns related to nighttime businesses, managing nighttime sound remained a major theme of consultations. Operators, patrons, and residents were generally aware of the differing perspectives and interests related to the creation of sound and noise in the night economy. Sound emanating from inside and around businesses at night were considered by many residents to be a nuisance that in some cases infringes on daily life. Many participants from across these groups expressed that they felt at odds with each other, with some operators sharing concerns that enforcement pathways too strongly favour residents, while many residents recounted frustration with existing noise bylaws and current complaint pathways. Some residents believed that venues could violate noise bylaws without regard for the surrounding neighbourhood, while many participating operators described proactive efforts to be good neighbours. Participants hoped to see more **objective enforcement**, stronger application of the **Agent of Change**<sup>16</sup> principle, **mediation** for businesses and residents, and **financial assistance for noise insulation**.
2. **Aligning with the 80% of survey respondents who supported nightclubs outside of downtown, consultation participants generally supported further nightlife opportunities beyond downtown, but did not favour dedicated “nightclub zones.”** Currently, existing regulation as well as pressures from development and rising costs currently incentivize primarily commercial nightclub actors to operate downtown. Multiple participants described this as a “monoculture” that they felt lacks diversity, is not always welcoming to marginalized

groups, prevents small and independent venues from flourishing, and leads to a more crowded downtown nightlife district. Drawing from this, more participants recognized the downsides of hyper-concentrating nightclubs and nightlife in dense areas, rather than the potential advantages.

3. **While a review of Toronto’s zoning, licensing and bylaw regime was generally welcomed and encouraged, operators are concerned that additions to the regulatory regime may lead to over-regulation,** including additional bylaw compliance and enforcement, police activity already perceived by some as excessive, prohibitive costs and further neighbourhood contention. These participants stressed that any new licensing structures should be business-oriented and avoid overly burdensome regulations.

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<sup>16</sup> **The Agent of Change principle** is a set of urban planning guidelines followed by many cities worldwide. It holds an incoming developer (the “agent of change” in a given area) to certain expectations to help minimize potential future conflict between existing live music venues and new residential developments proposed nearby. Toronto adopted its own version in 2017, which consists of the following:

Applications received by City Planning for residential developments that are located within 120 metres of existing live music venues are reviewed by the Music Office. Applicants (developers) must complete a noise study noting existing sound levels in the area and are required to include an advisory that notifies purchasers, lessees and tenants of possible noise that may arise from its proximity to live music. Applicants are also encouraged to consider building design and construction elements that will help reduce the impacts of nearby live music and associated nightlife activity on residents.

The Agent of Change guidelines can also apply to a music venue newly established near pre-existing residences or other businesses. As the “agent of change,” that music venue would be responsible for mitigating future conflict between itself and the surrounding community, through sound mitigation and other strategies.



4. **Operators stressed their top priorities for licensing, zoning, and other regulatory reforms: preserving as much flexibility, hybridity, adaptability and autonomy as possible.** In particular, many operators noted that a one-size-fits-all regime does not afford businesses enough leeway to set their operations based on their needs and interests. As it stands, they believe that they must fit their business operations into a rigid interpretation of what they are licensed to carry out, rather than allowing them the flexibility to provide multiple uses of their spaces to patrons. They suggested the creation of a **flexible licensing system with individual “à la carte” options for additional uses**, with corresponding regulations and conditions.

5. **Particularly for small businesses and DIY promoters, the high cost of renting space and other operational expenses, lack of available spaces, and drawn-out licensing and permitting processes were noted as prohibitive barriers** to flourishing creative communities and the ability of nightlife entrepreneurs to enter the sector. Some participants suggested it would be beneficial for the City to provide **support such as a soundproofing grant system, insurance subsidies, streamlined temporary and outdoor event permitting processes and making municipal spaces available for rental below market rates.** Participants communicated that these types of actions will help new cultural spaces to get off the ground and remain more sustainable over time.

6. **While some participants associated nightlife—and particularly nightclubs—with crime, nuisance, and noise, others disagreed, pointing to their social and cultural benefits.** Some operators were concerned about City councillors’ stances on nightlife-related developments that they perceived as being biased towards residents. Councillors’ role in the issuance of new liquor licences in their

wards<sup>19</sup> was raised as an example: some participants felt councillors sided too strongly with local residents who express opposition. Some operators expressed frustration with related difficulties in opening new venues and sustaining existing venues. **Accordingly, live music venue operators stressed the difference between their businesses and “nightclubs” in order to distance themselves from potential negative connotations.**

7. **Adhering to the City’s regulations is of top priority for many operators.** Across industries, a large number of **owners and operators recognize the importance of working with their neighbours** to pursue a respectful dynamic and promote peaceful coexistence. Residents and operators both take issue with **“bad actor” operators** who do not follow regulations or engage with the community.

8. **Participants strongly support more nightlife offerings not centred on alcohol** (allowing for more all-ages and intergenerational participation)—**but profitability is a concern** for businesses and event organizers. Participants suggested support strategies like grants and the provision of affordable, culturally-appropriate spaces.

9. **Barriers to accessing nightlife include distance from current nightlife areas, cost (particularly travelling to and from nightlife), a lack of nighttime public transit, and perceptions of safety**—while some participants desired more police presence in nightlife areas, others felt less safe with increased police presence. Individuals in equity-seeking groups related a number of further barriers including physical accessibility, feeling unwelcome or unsafe related to race and class identity, and a lack

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19. As part of the public comment process the province takes when issuing new liquor licences, councillors may request that the provincial liquor licensing authority place conditions on operators prior to licence approval.

of safe, affordable, and accessible space to produce events in and for one's own community. **Physically accessible space, streamlined access to land and space for Indigenous groups, and affordable, flexible space** (300-500 capacity) for DIY events were identified as major priorities for more inclusive night culture.

10. **The City has a major opportunity to plan for more equitable, inclusive nighttime by drawing upon the existing expertise and experience of equity-deserving organizers, operators and patrons in organizing events and operating spaces for their communities.** Participants identified good practices and specialists (organizations, professionals, communities; see session notes in the *Appendix* for specific details) focused on community-based care and services such as de-escalation and harm reduction. Participants communicated that these alternative approaches can reduce pressures and reliance on traditional policing or bylaw enforcement, and are safer and more welcoming for equity-deserving communities than current nightlife spaces and safety infrastructures.

11. **Residential and large-scale commercial development were perceived by many participants as threats to a diverse nightlife.** Some operators raised displacement by residential development as a significant concern ("we can't keep shifting around the city, finding areas where we can open nightclubs"). Meanwhile, residents also noted that independent and "mom-and-pop" establishments seem to be increasingly replaced by international chains and franchises, and/or perceived their areas becoming overwhelmingly residential, which they felt detracted from local character and community feeling.

12. Participants including residents, small business owners, cultural workers, as well as organizers and patrons from equity-deserving

groups reiterated that **it is essential that the City understands and honours the vibrant and diverse nightlife that already exists in Toronto.** It is important to ensure that any policy decisions to steer nightlife into new areas will not cause harm to existing operators already providing nightlife in these areas, and will provide opportunities for new independent and equity-deserving operators. These participants encourage City staff to recognize that Torontonians already experience the night in many ways—according to different cultural customs, as night workers, etc.—and to accommodate this in future decision making.

Across consultations, the varied topics participants raised in conjunction with consultation focus areas emphasized that **nighttime planning topics are tightly interconnected. All aspects of planning for the night must particularly consider nighttime transit and safety** (with the recognition that increased police presence does not automatically create feelings of safety for all). **A holistic approach recognizes safety, affordability, transportation, and accessibility as key themes, while also recognizing the specificity of different areas.**

*Note:* In discussing some of the current gaps in Toronto's night economy, participants generously offered a variety of ideas and suggestions for how policy makers may wish to move forward. While many of these proposals are listed below for general consideration and discussion, these solutions may not be feasible for a number of reasons. Recommendations made by the public in this report should not by themselves be considered directives or a roadmap for the City's night economy development; and many of the suggestions, if developed further by City staff, would require formal Council approval before becoming City policy.

# Locating nightclubs beyond the downtown area

With 80% of survey respondents in favour of nightclubs being allowed outside the downtown core, participants amenable to nightlife expansion beyond the downtown area believe that such a shift could present a number of opportunities: **showcasing Toronto’s cultural and musical diversity, diversification of venue types and programming, and increased tourism and investment.**

In considering new locations for nightlife, a majority of survey respondents felt that nightclubs would be most appropriate **along main streets with existing stores, restaurants, and other businesses (83%)**, where public life is already active, or **near public transit stations (75%)**. This sentiment was echoed in consultations, in which residents stressed that expansion into Toronto suburbs should not disturb residential areas, nor bring nuisance and violence.

**Enabling nightlife in warehouses and industrial/employment lands** was a frequent suggestion in both consultations and survey responses. Participants stressed the advantages of **locating sound-intensive uses away from residential areas** (with a lower risk of future displacement by residential development). However, they also noted **concerns over safety, lighting, and transit connectivity**. In consultations, specific safety points identified for nightlife in industrial areas included fire safety, safe access for people with physical disabilities, and safety for women and 2SLGBTQ+ people.

**Many residents raised some potential new locations for nightlife, such as Scarborough Town Centre, Etobicoke’s Dundas strip and Long Branch and Lakeshore**, noting that expansion to these areas can bring **diversification of nightlife and entertainment options and enrich local economies**. Residents of these areas of the city believe that **expansion of nightlife is being inhibited by a lack of incentives and support for both operators and patrons**. Some called for the creation of **funding, protection and investment programs** from the City so that operators can be confident in taking the risk of opening a new business in new nightlife areas.

**Conversely, in Toronto-East York, some participants noted some areas of overconcentration of nightlife.** These participants expressed a hope that opening up new areas for nightlife would relieve some of this crowding. However, at least one residents' association expressed concern about nighttime activity (and related noise and violence) being relocated from downtown areas into York.

**Participants recognized the potential benefits of changes to both licensing and zoning, particularly in enabling new areas for nightlife.** Many communicated that by regulating for more diverse, layered and complementary businesses, the night economic sector mutually benefits adjacent businesses in other sectors, promoting **synergy and enrichment** between neighbouring businesses.



Nightowl, Toronto (Photo: © Nightowl/Reese Malyon)

# Examining the 6% floor area limit for entertainment in restaurants

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<sup>20</sup> Zoning By-law 569-2013, Regulation 150.100.20.1(1) states:  
(1) Eating Establishment - Other Uses  
Other uses combined with an eating establishment are subject to the following:  
(A) The following may occupy a maximum of 6% of the total interior floor area of the eating establishment to a maximum of 50 square metres: (i) dance floor; (ii) stage; (iii) teletheatre gambling; (iv) disc jockey; (v) sound room; (vi) areas dedicated to recreational activities; and (vii) any other entertainment area;

## **Eating establishment operators appreciate the ability to use their space for entertainment.**

It provides an important revenue stream for operators and musicians, allows operators to cater to **hybrid nightlife trends combining dining and entertainment** in the same space and evening, and permits flexibility in the face of volatility (for example, evolving neighbourhoods or pandemic restrictions).

Zoning By-law 569-2013 states that eating establishments can occupy a maximum of 6% of their total interior floor area for various entertainment uses.<sup>20</sup> **Many respondents do not believe that the 6% rule makes sense; operators found it a hindrance and felt it does not provide enough floor space for their desired scope of entertainment.** Operators said the 6% regulation does not allow them the flexibility to respond to music and entertainment industry trends—for example, the different types of spaces and equipment required by a DJ compared to a live band; or the shifting use of space for a drag brunch, where performers move around the entire establishment.

**The current percentage is especially limiting for small businesses:** as one entrepreneur put it, “Entertainment space is highly limited in small venues, which does not permit me to provide musical entertainment to more customers.” BIA representatives echoed this cost-benefit analysis, noting that many operators do not feel the return on investment is worth the expense of providing live entertainment under this regulation.

**Non-operator participants were less inclined to give strong feedback on the 6% rule, but those who did largely agreed that it does not make sense for providing entertainment:** one (non-operator) participant in session #6 described it simply as “ridiculous and very limiting.” One participant noted the contrast between Toronto and Montreal, where the absence of a 6% regulation allows for “restaurants with good dance floors ([where you] could eat, dance, and come back to sit).” Two breakout groups in the in-person public session

had groups “near consensus” in favour of maximum flexibility for entertainment in restaurants, while another public session’s participants (#9) brainstormed replacement proposals. Proposals raised by participants ranged from expanding the floor space percentage (up to 20% was voiced in session #9, a public consultation), to abolishing a percentage limit entirely and allowing individual businesses to decide what is best for their business models. In some sessions, the importance of soundproofing and ensuring good relationships with neighbours also accompanied these discussions.



Adelaide Hall, Toronto (Photo: © The MRG Group)

# Defining characteristics of bars, restaurants, and nightclubs

Participants were asked to identify the key characteristics that distinguish bars from restaurants from nightclubs. (This exercise did not include live music venues; see the next paragraph for further discussion). The participants proposed a range of differentiations, mostly around the **presence of food, alcohol, music and dance floors**. For example, a restaurant serves primarily food but also alcohol; whereas a bar serves alcohol, only some food and may provide music. In short: a restaurant serves more food than alcohol, while a bar is the reverse. In these conversations, the presence of a dancefloor was seen as one determining condition of a nightclub (as opposed to a bar or restaurant). **Other participants shared that hours of operation, the ratio of liquor and food sales** (no specific figure was provided), **and capacity and seating are important factors**. Nightclubs tend to have later hours of operation than bars or restaurants. **Liquor licences, physical size and music volume** also came up as further points of distinction. Finally, different **security and staffing** needs can distinguish these categories: some participants articulated that nightclubs need security, but restaurants do not. Some participants also articulated that nightclub and bar staff need specialized training including DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion), whereas this may be less applicable in a restaurant context.

However, it is important to note that **this differentiation exercise did not incorporate live music and concert venues, which are generally regarded as distinct from nightclubs**. In multiple consultations, a number of live music and venue operators stressed the distinction between their businesses and nightclubs. Some of these operators expressed strong concerns of being grouped into the same category as nightclubs, expecting that this could lead to unnecessary and unsustainable regulatory and financial burdens. In particular, some live music and concert venue operators noted that insurance tends to be more costly and/or extremely difficult to obtain for nightclubs; they feared that their own already challenging rates would further increase accordingly or become no longer accessible.

Despite these opinions, participants' strong consensus was that **strict licensing categories based on the above factors are not only irrelevant to the existing nightlife landscape of Toronto, but do not reflect present and possible future trends and are restrictive to business.** In one operator's eyes: "The **grey zone** between restaurants, bars and clubs is blurred, so defining this is a challenge." Participants generally agreed that the **current licensing system is especially difficult for small and new businesses** to navigate, and that more can be done to support them.



"Everything I Wanted to Tell You" Hiba Abdallah, Nuit Blanche Toronto, 2018 (Photo: © City of Toronto)



# Promoting flexibility through licensing

**The strongest repeated theme: licensing should enable multiple uses within one establishment** (for example, meal service and musical entertainment at a “supper club”). Participants repeatedly mentioned these multi-use spaces as a primary example of the current mismatch between licensing categories and actual usage. Currently, they identify that the closest fit to these business models is a restaurant licence. Participants recognized that because a restaurant licence allows a business to operate closer to residences, **the grey areas in the current licensing system give rise to neighbourhood conflicts** over noise. Many participants communicated that this “morphing” **multi-use model** needs the most support and should be recognized in the revision of current licensing bylaws so venues can operate legally and profitably. Participants noted that these kinds of establishments, with restaurant licences, are already bringing nightlife to new areas across the city, including North York, Etobicoke and Scarborough.

**Participants across sessions seemed to recognize the importance of common themes like safety, nighttime transit, and accessibility to be considered alongside regulatory change and expansion.** One resident association representative in session #6 raised the idea of licensing “per neighbourhood zone,” recognizing that different areas have different existing challenges, opportunities, and dynamics (operators in session #2 echoed this need for nightlife decisions at the local scale). A Scarborough resident in the same session voiced the desire for “vibrancy,” while recognizing “the idea is not for that to create problems.” In various sessions (#6, #9, #10), participants described ways to promote long-term coexistence of venues and residents: incentivizing and ensuring that clubs and night spaces are using good practices (e.g. harm reduction strategies); planning for sufficient nighttime transit alongside new nightlife areas; focusing on soundproofing (as a potential licence condition, revisions to building code for residential construction, and ideally via a municipal fund for venues).

**Some operators also hoped to see new licensing structures recognize or account for the proactive steps they take to be responsible businesses,** as well as their good track records of operation. They suggested that this might include tying particular allowances or incentives to the amount of training that bar and door staff receive (including conflict de-escalation, cultural competence, diversity, equity and inclusion), and/or impact- and outcome-based metrics.



The Painted Lady, Toronto (Photo: © The Painted Lady)

# Key priorities for updated licensing categories

In focus groups, some operators articulated the value that they strive to offer their neighbourhoods and communities:

*“All of our businesses are anchors for communities.”*

*“As living space decreases (ie. condos), bars, venues, restaurants, [and other] businesses become the living rooms of residents.”*

*“Venues are safe and secure environments for nighttime activity. Without venues operating late at night people will congregate more often elsewhere, in private residences or illegitimate spaces.”*

Generally speaking, operators held compliance with local regulations in high regard, and emphasized their own commitments to ensuring their businesses do not unreasonably interfere with the lives of residents and neighbourhoods. Many operators recognized the importance of public safety, harm reduction, and “keeping the peace,” as further demonstrated in Section 4.1.4 below. However, several key priorities for businesses emerged when factors related to the City’s regulatory review were discussed:

- **Flexibility:** Operators overwhelmingly made it clear that they would prefer more **flexibility** from licensing so they can better provide the kinds of services and entertainment they and their customers want. Operators spoke about a broad range of types of mixed nighttime entertainment that is not possible under current licensing and zoning regulations, such as hosting larger ensembles (ex. 7-piece bands), karaoke nights, or “supper club”-style programming. (Please see the previous section for further discussion of zoning-related restrictions.) Operators **adapt their business models** to keep up with industry trends and demographic changes in nightlife, and feel that the **current licensing system is prescriptive rather than responsive to the industry**, which **prevents creativity and autonomy** for nightlife production. Small

business operators repeatedly stressed that allowing **hybridity** will allow them to remain competitive and operational, and provide the types of mixed nightlife Toronto residents want. Many participants feel current regulation is not operating from the perspectives of **common sense and balance**, meaning that licensing is getting in the way of diverse and enjoyable nightlife and that the city is not equally prioritizing businesses' and residents' needs. For many operators, "the pandemic showed us we need to stay flexible": more flexible licensing was seen as essential to **weathering Covid-19 recovery and other potential future disruptions**.

- **Reducing "red tape"**: A majority of operators also related that the licensing system is burdensome, with **too much red tape and too little assistance** in navigating the process of obtaining a licence, especially for small and new businesses. Most participants urged that **any licensing revision should decrease barriers to operation rather than lead to additional burdens and limitations**. Overall, operators are concerned that new regulation will automatically equal over-regulation. They want any new licensing structure to support business rather than add additional cumbersome compliance regulations. Venue operators (session #5) articulated that the ideal relationship with City offices would be more based in being able to seek advice and guidance to operate in compliance, rather than fearing punitive consequences. Two operators commended the Music Office's work to solve issues and support businesses.
- **Enforcement and Implementation**: Overall, operators fear that **updates to licensing regulations may not match their operations**. They articulated concerns such as **additional onerous bylaw compliance and enforcement, inundation with noise and other fines, and neighbourhood contention**. A number of operators also stressed that both police

activity and bylaw enforcement should be primarily concerned with protecting safety rather than controlling behaviour. Similarly, BIA representatives (session #3) expressed concerns that standardizing bylaws across the city may inadvertently stifle creativity and individuality in entrepreneurship.

- **Outdoor, pop-up, and 24-hour licensing**: Many operators identified needs for accessible and streamlined **temporary outdoor and pop-up event licences**. Others proposed **24-hour liquor licences** (regulated at the provincial level). However, these same operators questioned how spaces could remain profitable throughout the day and night without reliance on a steady stream of alcohol sales to make a profit. Participants, especially residents, also questioned what impact 24-hour spaces may have on the surrounding area. (Note that the topic of 24-hour space was not extensively discussed in consultations; future consultations could explore this concept in a more detailed way.) A number of participants agreed that **sound insulation standards** should be attached to licensing conditions.

**Participants proposed several licensing amendments and improvements**: The most frequent suggestion was to create a broadly applicable, **tiered licensing system with individual "à la carte" options for additional uses, with corresponding regulations and conditions**. Some participants felt that such a system would allow a restaurant licence to be modified or scaled based on desired add-on use (for example supper club entertainment) by providing a relevant safety and security plan to accommodate.

In general, operators want more leeway to determine what kind of business they'd like to run, what kind of patrons they expect, and how patrons could use the space. They want a **single multi-use licence** that would allow businesses to **move through and between uses** if they fulfill

certain conditions required for a particular use (for example, security and DEI-trained staff for a nightclub night). Participants supporting this idea asserted that this would allow hybridity and transformation, offering one example of a restaurant organically changing from seated dining to entertainment in the course of a night. Some participants discussed a **needs-based approach**, where instead of the metric of floor space, venues could be given a system of allowances for entertainment and music based on the distinct needs of business activities (restaurant, bar, nightclub). Some participants suggested that these allowances could be periodically updated based on sector needs assessments; ideally, a flexible licensing system enables businesses to respond dynamically to emerging needs over time.

Some operators hoped to **see the City look to venues' existing measures and safeguards to determine licensing allowances. For example, when discussing later operating times, one participant suggested that the presence of a security plan or particular capacity thresholds could be taken into account**, as based on businesses' concepts and events. However, resident participants noted that **sound mitigation** (particularly in the form of soundproofing infrastructure, as mentioned throughout) is a key consideration in any amendments to the licensing regime, to ensure that multi-use venues do not cause new disturbances.



Photo: © Destination Toronto

# Neighbourhood-level nighttime conflicts: sound and safety

A challenge for Toronto, as in other cities around the world, is balancing the varied needs of residents, business operators, and users of the night, to ensure that those who work, commute, play, and sleep at night can do so undisturbed.

One key topic across sessions was how nightlife and residential areas can share the city. **The primary conflict: sound produced by nightlife activities.**

Residents were vocal about their frustration with **restaurants (which can be located near residences) operating as music venues and producing noise and street nuisance.** As spaces for improperly licensed nightlife have developed, many residents express concerns for their ability to live peacefully and quietly in a city experiencing development and change. While some residents see operators as solely responsible, others are aware of the licensing and financial realities that push restaurants into these forms of business.

Another frequently mentioned resident concern is **public safety:** feeling unsafe due to existing nightlife, and expecting that expanded nightlife may exacerbate safety issues. Many residents are **concerned about intoxicated and unruly patrons queuing and crowding sidewalks, and violence** perceived to be connected to some types of nightlife. At the same time, some operators expressed frustration with media attention on nightlife focusing on perceived negatives for patrons and residents. Participants held varying positions on police activity and keeping the peace. **Some operators believe it is important to maintain close ties to local police, while others feel there is over-policing and would like to see more alternatives** such as mobile units, community-based safety strategies, community development and harm reduction teams. **Good Night Out Vancouver** was highlighted as a successful example.

While residents generally were not averse to growing Toronto's nightlife sector, many underscored their dissatisfaction with the noise and

nuisance already emanating from nearby venues. Some participants voiced that any new nightclub or nightlife expansion should be allowed **only in industrial or mixed-use** areas, while others from North York, Etobicoke and Scarborough would **welcome nightclubs and nightlife closer to their areas.**



The Rex, Toronto (Photo: © Kristie Macor)

# From “never-ending battle” to prevention and mediation

Simultaneously, many operators described feeling a sense of local **opposition to their nightlife establishments and activities near residences**: “Sometimes it seems like a never-ending battle, the divide between businesses and neighbours.” These operators expressed frustration about **residents who move into nightlife-rich areas because they want proximity to these options**, but who then feel frustrated by the noise and nuisance of the area, and issue complaints that then **put those existing nightlife businesses and operators at risk**. They believe some residents have also moved into nightlife areas during the COVID-19 pandemic (whether knowingly or unknowingly), which have become more vibrant (and louder) as businesses resume regular operations after lockdowns. They also believe that other residents (knowingly or unknowingly) move into buildings not properly insulated against noise—what some participants called “waffle condos.” These experiences cause frustration for the residents as well as the businesses already existing in the area.

**Some operators believe that this opposition materializes in processes by the City that favour the needs of residents over businesses, or give businesses little recourse to address issues.** These operators noted that the bulk of their fines are the result of enforcement stemming from complaints from just one or a few neighbours. Many operators explained they do their best to not disturb their neighbours. However, due to the prohibitive expenses of soundproofing and other mitigation measures, operators are not always able to control the noise emanating from their venues due to the nature of their business. These operators fear that repeated fines can put them out of business instead of leading to lasting solutions. A few individual operators expressed interest in **taking decibel measurements at the point of the sound’s origin (venue), rather than at the point of reception (residence of complainant)**, as the sound emanating from the establishment is easier for venues to track and control, in comparison to the noise measured by a complainant. Relatedly, another operator shared their practice of **recording**



**decibel ratings hourly from point of origin, as well as distributing decibel readers directly to nearby residents,** as a means to preclude conflict.

**Operators generally would like to see a move from enforcement to prevention: particularly mediation and noise insulation funding.** In one participant's words, "Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods—everywhere we have residents in close proximity to venues." Participants in both the focus groups and public consultations (sessions #2, #5, and #9) noted the importance of applying the Agent of Change principle more broadly across urban space, so that construction or relocation of any new nightlife and residences does not disturb existing neighbourhood use and character: "If our goal is to have music and entertainment [be] part of the fabric of the whole city, [it] shouldn't [only] be developments where there's an existing live music venue [being required to] do good soundproofing, it should be all [development]."

# Mitigating local nighttime noise conflicts: proactive steps

Operators highlighted a number of ways they are mitigating negative impacts on neighbours, mediating, and seeking creative solutions for neighbourhood coexistence. Operators generally want to operate legally, and want to coexist peacefully with residents. Some operators described their methods of **“hands on” and “on the ground” neighbourhood engagement**. This means proactively reaching out and engaging with nearby residents: as one operator put it, “going door to door” to negotiate and resolve potential conflicts before the need to involve police or City enforcement services arises. One operator described their approach as **“thinking as residents”** in order to preempt noise and other complaints: “If someone makes a complaint, we try to deal with it head on with the neighbour, we don’t let it go out [of control]...we’re always in communication with them.” Several described specific measures such as **holding load-out until after music has ended, or clearly specifying parking areas to visiting acts, to reduce the neighbourhood impacts of sound bleed from open doors or the sound of idling tour buses**. Other approaches shared by operators include **getting involved with resident associations** or, in one operator’s case, **voluntarily shortening hours** (after observing that most noise complaints came after 2 AM).

**Maintaining open communication channels between operators and residents was identified as an essential effort involving both sides.** Many residents and operators took issue with **“bad actor” operators** who do not follow regulations or engage with the community. They observe that these bad actors create division, and operators fear this gives the industry a bad name: “Those who play by the rules are the ones that are going to be overshadowed by those who don’t.”

Residents do also recognize the regulatory, business, and enforcement burdens that operators shoulder, especially given the challenges of Covid-19, inflation and rising costs in recent years. In one public session (#9), the Horseshoe Tavern was offered as an example of exemplary

neighbourhood engagement. Two non-operator participants in session #7 emphasized the need to “show love to the responsible bar owners and reward the ones who are making an effort,” while another seconded this need to reward and recognize business owners who maintain good relationships with their local neighbourhoods.



The Dakota Tavern, Toronto (Photo: © The Dakota Tavern)

# Access to varied cultural and social activities in local areas

**When participants were asked whether they feel they have easy access to a variety of cultural and social activities in their areas, distance from current nightlife areas emerged as a determining factor for access**, in both surveys and consultations. Residents who live closer to downtown generally saw nightlife as more accessible, while those farther away generally recounted barriers to access, particularly due to inadequate public transit or lack of car ownership.

**In general, participants living in Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke felt they had to leave their area for cultural, social, and nighttime activities.** However, there are a handful of local examples of vibrant nightlife in these areas. One Etobicoke resident highlighted PlazaPOPs, a City- and province-funded activation of parking lots as entertainment spaces in Albion-Islington. One Scarborough resident provided the example of evening culinary tours in their area as an example of alcohol-free local nightlife. Some participants positively noted hybrid restaurants featuring entertainment that are already bringing nightlife to North York and Etobicoke.

Participants identified a number of other prohibitive factors to accessing Toronto nightlife and culture:

- **The cost of getting to and from nightlife as well as cover charges, drinks, and other expenses.** As inflation and other trends impact businesses, rising operating costs are passed down to patrons. Some participants felt nightlife will become inaccessible as the **cost of living** continues to rise.
- **Safety was voiced in a number of different contexts depending on participants' identities, roles, or geographic location.** Some participants perceive nightlife areas as unsafe in terms of **criminal activity**, and would like to see a larger and more targeted police presence, particularly in areas like King Street West in the downtown core. These

participants are concerned that nightlife expansion may bring similar concerns closer to home. Conversely, some participants feel less safe in nightlife areas with a large police presence, as it is perceived as threatening and unwelcoming to many communities, including those who may face **discrimination and violence** due to their marginalized status. Physical factors such as **the presence or lack of street lighting** also impact feelings of safety at night for many.

- **Public transportation was very widely regarded in both surveys and consultations as a major barrier in accessing nightlife.** Participants across consultations felt that the TTC is too expensive, does not operate frequently enough at late hours, does not connect enough parts of the city and is not safe enough to easily access nightlife. Many participants advocated for **24-hour train service**, with increased safety staff. Some participants mentioned instances of violence on public transportation that deter them from using it at night and alone. Others proposed **increasing night bus service and frequency** as a more efficient solution than train expansion. To participants from outside downtown, improved transit must not only connect suburbs to downtown, but within and between suburbs.
  - **Nighttime transit access is a significant need and equity concern for night workers as well as users of the night.** At least one industry participant referenced the lack of public transit access outside the core as a threat to their staff and business, citing staff retention and geographic restriction issues: those who do not live directly in the area do not feel they are able to get home safely, with long waits for buses at late hours.
- Some participants (particularly in Etobicoke and North York) pointed to the **increase**

**in both residential development and international commercial franchises** as pushing out the more local, independent businesses and social and cultural spaces.



Photo: © City of Toronto

# Inclusive nightlife for equity- deserving groups in Toronto

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<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile-use spaces can be understood as spaces that take on a particular use (e.g., artist studios or event spaces) before their final use is determined or achieved (e.g., redeveloped into residential spaces).

In addition to the above section, participants from equity-deserving groups communicated a number of other access barriers:

- **A lack of safe, affordable, accessible and available spaces in the city.** These participants reported difficulty finding existing nightlife that feels appropriate for them, looking for new spaces, and organizing their own events. Some participants identify these gaps as a key barrier to artistic production and expression. As one participant shared, “Scarborough has a lot of artistic talent but little event space.” Many suggested opportunities around unused and meanwhile-use spaces, municipal property and parks, and outdoor spaces.
- **Racialized and class-based nature of nightlife:** participants shared the experience that, when concentrated downtown, nightlife access feels less reachable for Indigenous, Black and other equity deserving groups living further outside the core (particularly those who are reliant on transit). Downtown nightlife may feel unsafe or unwelcoming for those who are not white and affluent. **Police activity** contributes to this feeling: heavy police presence around nightlife, particularly in the downtown area, discourages participation of some groups who feel less safe around police. Participants from these groups communicated that there is a need to expand nightlife **closer to where equity-deserving communities live**, particularly outside of the downtown area.
- **Promoting physical access and centering disability:** Those experiencing physical access barriers and older participants pointed to needs around more late night transportation, improved walkability and bikeability (e.g. clear, accessible sidewalks and bike lanes), benches and seating in public spaces and universal design in public and nightlife spaces—especially accessible,

gender neutral, legal and well-maintained washrooms. Participants in one focus group called for **more spaces actually shaped by individuals and communities with disabilities and neurodivergence**, and for venues to work closely with communities with disabilities to develop **venue accessibility guides** (e.g., physical and sensory accessibility, harm reduction, and artist relations) to normalize access standards.

- **Ventilation and continued Covid-19 measures:** One artist spoke powerfully about the impact that repeated Covid-19 infections and long Covid have had on them and other culture workers, significantly limiting their ability to work as before in the music industry. Particularly in small or crowded spaces, they saw continued attention to ventilation and other measures (e.g. CO2 monitoring, UVC lighting) as essential to protect workers, artists, and patrons.
- **Cost** was echoed as a continual barrier for low-income Torontonians to access nightlife, and participants hoped to see more initiatives to promote affordable nightlife options regardless of financial situation. Many participants recognized that **rising costs to attend events are related to rising venue rents, operational costs and property taxes**; they believe these issues need to be addressed together. Some participants raised examples of civic organizations' good practices, like Friends of Kensington Market's "My Friends' Tab" initiative, while other participants requested municipal support through event subsidies or access to City-owned venues at below-market rental rates.
- Barriers to **Indigenous communities' access to their own land** was raised in at least one session, and is further discussed in the following section (*Barriers for Event Organizers*).

- **Safety:** marginalized and equity-deserving participants expressed a number of the same safety concerns as other patrons and operators. Many are made to feel uncomfortable with police presence at nightlife events, and **female-identified participants repeatedly mentioned feeling unsafe using late night public transportation** (night buses). Some participants voiced feeling **less safe in venues where staff and security are not adequately trained** in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); harm reduction; conflict mediation and culturally-specific knowledge and conduct. Conversely, it is seen as a strength when **ownership, staff, and security are reflective of the audiences frequenting establishments**, or have lived experience as members of that community themselves.
- **Nightlife mismatch and exclusion:** some participants communicated the sense that Toronto's **current downtown nightlife options "aren't for me."** One participant brought up the example of **high-end art spaces being privileged in new development** over nightlife and cultural options that cater to a broader audience (including equity-deserving communities). Another participant pointed to municipal support for private parties connected to the Canadian National Exhibition as an example of the City prioritizing "**VIP services**" rather than widely accessible cultural programming; they hoped to see the City direct its **support to more "equity-focused" cultural programming** and provide affordable **access to municipal space**.

To some participants, the needs of unhoused people, drug users, and those living with mental health conditions are seen as tightly intertwined with the night economy and nighttime activities. One participant recognized foundational support (like supportive housing and other services for unhoused people) as core to nightlife safety: **"we can't make nighttime activity safer without**

**addressing the systemic issues.”** Another public-session participant advocated for support for drug users and unhoused individuals, including services such as **drug testing, support and counseling; more sober events** and a **harm-reduction (rather than user stigmatization) approach**.

Among these participants, community-based and care-focused alternatives to police were seen as especially important for those experiencing mental health crises (who may be drawn to nightlife areas, having nowhere else to go). Ontario 211 helpline service was perceived by individual participants in two focus groups as being unavailable and unresponsive.

However, others saw these issues as competing financial priorities. One participant stated that the City needs to prioritize measures such as homeless shelters or later nights, but cannot address both at once. In the words of one focus group member: **“your inclusivity goal is admirable, but the City needs to prioritize where it is spending its money.”**



Photo: © City of Toronto



# Barriers for event organizers

Consultation with artists and DIY organizers (Session #4) focused particularly on barriers faced by event organizers.

A number of the barriers already articulated in this section were echoed here: **venue rental and event production costs** can be entirely prohibitive for small event organizers, particularly **liability insurance** for events. A frequent barrier is also **availability and accessibility of space**. Weather-proofed outdoor spaces are seen as particularly desirable for pop-up and DIY events (access to waterfront area venues in particular was also raised in session #5). Both established DIY organizers and **entrepreneurs seeking to develop new events struggle** to do so under current conditions. Furthermore, DIY organizers cited **difficulties in navigating City licensing and permitting processes**. To early-career and small event organizers, this administrative burden can be prohibitive. Many participants would welcome a more **centralized and accessible support service** from the City for event permitting, including the **streamlining of temporary event permits**.

**A central theme that arose in this consultation session was the speed of response from City offices**. Participants noted both short-term concerns, such as lengthy waiting times for permit applications to be processed, as well as larger-scale concerns around City response to DIY spaces under pressure. Respondents voiced that threats to existing spaces and DIY space closures have been an urgent, crisis-level issue for many years. While the City has consulted with DIY organizers regularly throughout that period, many participants in this session felt that tangible change has been limited, while spaces continue to disappear and face increasing challenges to their sustainability over time.

**Organizers and artists from equity-deserving groups communicated their experience of additional challenges**. One participant brought up **historic race-based barriers to property ownership** in Toronto, which have made it very

difficult for Indigenous, Black, and racialized organizers to buy and own venues. In an industry where venue operators are already more likely to be renters than owners, Indigenous, Black and racialized organizers and business operators face further disadvantages as a result, compared to white organizers who have not faced barriers to property ownership on the grounds of race.

**Participants in this session brought attention to barriers faced by Indigenous communities seeking access to (their own, unceded) land.** Examples included **difficulties obtaining permits** for sacred fires (in spaces such as Dufferin Grove Park) as well as **harassment and disruption by law enforcement** at these events. Participants observe that these events have led to tension and mistrust between local Indigenous communities and enforcement bodies, and increased frustration around City permitting processes and regulations. One Indigenous participant expressed that the most significant barrier preventing Indigenous communities from holding events is the complexity of the permitting process: “I don’t think a lot of community groups for Indigenous events know where to start, even.” This participant observed the irony of facing lengthy bureaucratic permitting processes in order to hold cultural events on their traditional land, and expressed the need for Indigenous communities to be able to hold events free from disruption.

Organizers also shared **challenges to running events that are safe and welcoming for equity-deserving communities.** Many feel that the presence of **police does not ensure safety** at their events and is instead focused on fines: “their presence signals an unwelcoming, unsafe space for marginalized folks.” These organizers advocate for more **community-based, care-focused services** as alternatives or additions to police enforcement. They often prefer to hire security staff from within their communities, who are trained in community-informed practices, over outside security services who may be less sensitive to the specific needs of marginalized communities.

Some organizers expressed that they would benefit from **incentivization, support and funding to contract or conduct their own harm reduction, conflict de-escalation and gender bias training** for bar staff and security services, citing active professional practitioners. They offered that support from the City could take the following forms: **racial justice and cultural competency in planning; race-based data and community consultations; training in diversity, equity, and inclusion, and community-informed practices for City staff; and public space activations especially for racialized minorities.**

# Possibilities for low- or no- alcohol nightlife events

Across the board, **participants expressed broad support for more nightlife options centred less on alcohol (or without alcohol at all)**. It was expressed that these events can and should cater to a **wider age range**, including families with children, residents over 50, and young people. Participants believe that these events also provide a more **welcoming nightlife environment** for people who do not drink. One participant in session #7 raised a personal observation that alcohol consumption appears to be declining somewhat among younger demographics, with more young adults requesting “thoughtfully curated” non-alcoholic beverage options. Some operators and other participants, as in public session #9, anecdotally observed this shift to a “new nightlife culture.”

Providing options for communities who do not drink alcohol, who want to gather in ways not focused around alcohol or consumption (e.g. for Muslims fasting during Ramadan), or who are living with addiction, was seen in some sessions as **one potential action for more equitable, inclusive and accessible nightlife**. In a number of consultations, **participants stressed the need for events and venues for young people and teenagers under the legal drinking age, seeing this as an investment in “social good.”**

Some participants believe that a **reliance on alcohol leads to monotony**, and that more non-alcohol centred events will diversify nightlife. They suggested that these events can instead **centre artistic expression, education and other non-commercial activities**. Participants named a number of possibilities including theatre, art spaces, festivals, board game cafés, bingo, experiential businesses like escape rooms or VR, teen discos, all-ages music shows, culinary tours of local areas, late-night cinema and film screenings, late-night or 24-hour food options like ice cream shops or cafés, extended hours at art galleries, libraries, and science centres. Outdoor activities are particularly welcomed by some, like ice skating and other outdoor winter programming, picnic or community meals such as events at The

Depanneur and the Bentway or at Dufferin Grove Park, and outdoor movies like the Christie Pits Film Festival. Some participants believe that creating more nightlife spaces that de-emphasize alcohol, substances and loud music are more needed than new nightclubs or bars.

**However, operators communicated that many business models of nightlife depend upon alcohol and bar sales to remain profitable.**

Even if interested in providing dry spaces and events, many operators are unwilling or unable to take the associated financial risks. Some organizers expressed interest in these alternative business models, which can offer more freedom in programming and audiences, if they can be profitable. Food can also be decoupled from alcohol, with one participant mentioning that a number of successful restaurants in Scarborough already don't serve alcohol.

**Some participants expressed the need for public intervention to subsidize, incentivize or otherwise support viable alcohol-free nightlife business models.**

Many participants felt that outdoor and public spaces have untapped potential for these events, and that the City should make them accessible and affordable to organizers. Some participants also noted that even if an event doesn't have alcohol, it can still drive the surrounding economy by bringing people to the area and nearby businesses. Some participants would welcome entrepreneur grants to support emerging dry event organizers.

Participants discussed the success of nightlife venues, such as Nowadays in New York City, that provide **diverse programming and varied use of space to remain profitable without reliance on alcohol sales.** Following this example, participants believe that these additional functions could include community programming, indoor and outdoor dining and community gardens. A number of participants asked whether **24-hour licences that allow the serving of alcohol at all times** could create events less reliant on alcohol by spreading

purchase over more hours and creating a less alcohol-heavy environment.

The insights offered in this section have been condensed from the 10 individual session reports, and summarize the insights of those sessions' 31 breakout group discussions. Given the breadth of topics discussed in these groups, not all insights and themes can be fully represented here. For further information on findings, please refer to the session reports in the *Appendix*.



# Next steps

In parallel with the preparation of this report, a public information session was conducted in June 2023 to share preliminary outcomes from this consultation series with Torontonians.

**Following this report, Municipal Licensing and Standards and City Planning will produce their own reports, each with input from EDC and other City divisions, in fall 2023. These reports will include proposed zoning and licensing bylaw amendments for consideration by City Council and specific Committees. An additional public session outlining proposed licensing and zoning amendments is slated for early fall 2023, prior to staff reports going to Standing Policy Committees and City Council later in 2023.**

# Project Team

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**Connector Organizations (Regional):** Arts Etobicoke (Wendy Rading), Scarborough Arts (Derek Spooner), North York Arts (Christina Giannelia)



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# NIGHT ECONOMY REVIEW

## Licensing and Zoning of Bars, Restaurants and Entertainment Venues

The City of Toronto is exploring strategies to support Toronto's night economy - the social, cultural and business activities that occur at night. The goal is to create a vibrant, safer, and more inclusive night economy, with an updated approach to licensing and zoning bars, restaurants and entertainment venues in communities across Toronto.

The City is looking for input from the general public and from groups including industry professionals, business owners, cultural event producers and residents.

As part of this review, the City intends to:

- explore new ways to activate space and enhance livability for everyone who works at night or is interested in cultural or social experiences after dark
- create strategies that promote safe and enjoyable communities for all
- update the definitions, rules, and licensing for bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues
- change regulations that define where these businesses can operate in Toronto

## HAVE YOUR SAY!

Take the survey or attend a consultation to share your feedback.

Your insights and experiences will inform strategies for enhancing Toronto's night economy, as well as recommendations on licensing and zoning amendments for bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues.

Get Involved: [toronto.ca/NightEconomyReview](https://toronto.ca/NightEconomyReview)

Questions: [NightEconomy@toronto.ca](mailto:NightEconomy@toronto.ca)



# Social Media Example Content

## Facebook

The #CityofTO is looking for input to inform a review of licensing and zoning regulations for bars, restaurants and entertainment venues, as well as strategies to support Toronto's night economy. Take the survey or attend a public consultation to have your say at <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/get-involved/public-consultations/licensing-zoning-review-for-restaurants-bars-entertainment-venues/>

## Instagram

The City of Toronto is exploring strategies to support Toronto's night economy - the social, cultural and business activities that occur at night.

We're looking for input to help create a vibrant, safer, and more inclusive night economy with an updated approach to licensing and zoning bars, restaurants and entertainment venues in communities across Toronto. Take the survey or attend a public consultation session to share your feedback. More details: <http://toronto.ca/NightEconomyReview>

## Twitter

Have your say! Take part in the #CityofTO Night Economy Review survey to help shape the future of Toronto's nighttime culture. [toronto.ca/NightEconomyReview](http://toronto.ca/NightEconomyReview)

The #CityOfTO is looking for input to help modernize licensing and zoning rules for bars, restaurants and entertainment venues. Take the survey to share your insights. Learn more: [toronto.ca/NightEconomyReview](http://toronto.ca/NightEconomyReview)

## B. Participating Organizations

**Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all. This list includes the organizations that consented to have their affiliations listed, followed by those who opted to be listed in an anonymized format. Some participants' organizations are not listed here, per their preference.**

159 Manning  
Arts Etobicoke  
Bar'kada  
Bayview Village Association  
Beaconsfield Village Residents Association  
Best In Town Sound  
Black Creek Arts & Culture  
Bodyshopstudios  
Box of Kittens  
Brock University  
CCS Rights Management  
Cafe on the Hill  
Carpenters Regional Council Local 27  
Church-Wellesley Village BIA  
Collective Concerts Inc.  
Combo Breaker  
Confederation of Resident And Ratepayer Associations in Toronto (CORRA)  
Crip Rave  
Daytripper Songs  
Don Mills Residents Inc.  
Edmund Burke  
Federation of North Toronto Residents Associations (FoNTRA)  
Gerrard India Bazaar BIA  
Greater Yorkville Residents' Association  
Guildwood Village Community Association  
Gusto 54 Restaurant Group  
Iconic Arts & Entertainment & Breaking Down Racial Barriers Initiative  
Indie Week  
Ink Entertainment/Rebel Cabana  
International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 58  
K-tel Records  
Kuya Joe's Kitchen  
Lakeshore Village BIA  
Liberty Village BIA (2)  
Lost & Found  
McGill Granby Village Residents' Association (MGVRA)  
Mister Wolf  
Mount Dennis BIA  
Music Gallery  
New Ho Queen  
New Nails  
Night Life Guard project  
Not Dead Yet

Ontario Restaurant Hotel & Motel Association (ORHMA)  
PM Strategies Inc.  
Parallel  
Pocket Community Association  
Promise  
Queen Street West BIA  
SOAK Collective  
SPIN/Sub Division  
Scarborough Arts  
Scarborough Rosewood Community Association  
Story Arts Centre Campus at Centennial College  
Sunny's Chinese  
Swansea Area Residents Association  
TRIP! Project  
The Drake Hotel  
The Duke Pubs  
The Group Project  
Toronto Downtown West BIA  
Toronto Hardcore  
Toronto Music, Arts and Nature Alliance (TMANA)  
Toronto Noise Coalition  
Tranzac  
Trinity Bellwoods Community Association  
Uma Nota Culture  
Wavelength Music  
West Queen West BIA  
Wexford Heights BIA  
Willowdale BIA  
Yonge & St Clair BIA  
Z Bar & Grille  
iSLAS Filipino BBQ & Bar

### **Further organizations electing to be listed in an anonymized format:**

Afro-Caribbean and Latin music platform  
Downtown concert hall  
Downtown jazz music venue  
Downtown pub and live music venue  
Downtown-area BIA (2)  
Downtown-area resident associations (2)  
Etobicoke-area residents association  
Haitian-fusion restaurant  
Hospitality association  
Independent artists, DJs, radio hosts, event producers, and musicians (6)  
International restaurant group  
Jazz venue and lounge  
Kensington Market bar and café  
Large North American entertainment company  
Large music and entertainment venue  
Mid-size alternative theatre  
Mid-size live and electronic music venue  
Multi-purpose live music, performance, restaurant/bar venue

Multidisciplinary arts and music event production company  
Music advocacy organization  
Music venue and restaurant  
National music association  
North Midtown-area resident association  
North York-area BIA  
Performance festival organization  
Provincial music association  
QTBIPOC-focused music event collective  
Queen West restaurant and cocktail bar  
Regional arts service organization  
Small West End music venue  
West End live music venue  
West End-area resident association

## C. Focus Group and Public Consultation Session Summaries

Ten summaries of individual sessions are provided here. Each summary includes basic session information, followed by a briefer session summary and a list of organizations and participants, followed by more in-depth notes. The list of topics in each summary were agreed-upon in advance by VibeLab and representatives of City of Toronto divisions City Planning, Economic Development & Culture (EDC) and Municipal Licensing & Standards (ML&S), with input from other City divisions..

# Focus Group #1: Restaurants

**Session Date and Time:** 2023.03.27 , 10:00–11:30 a.m. EDT

**Format:** Online via Cisco WebEx

**Facilitators:** Mirik Milan, Chris Wilson

**Notetakers:** Maarten van Brederode, Amir Salem, Jess Dymond Barber, Bengi Güven

**City Presenters:** Mitchell Thibault, Jamie Atkinson, Mike Tanner

**Session Report Prepared by:** Diana Raiselis, Maarten van Brederode

## Session summary

This session was attended by a mix of restaurant representatives, ranging from owners of individual establishments, Toronto chain restaurant leadership and larger restaurant groups. Topics covered included:

1. Where else in the city participants would like to see nightclubs outside of the downtown core, their reasoning, and whether this expansion makes sense in or near their communities;
2. Licensing for restaurants, bars and nightclubs to reflect current operational realities for operators, including differentiation of venue uses and licence conditions;
3. Whether the existing regulation that restaurants are limited to using 6% of floor space for entertainment makes sense, how it impacts their businesses and how (or if) this should be regulated at all;
4. Best practices for safe environments for employees, customers and surrounding communities;
5. Best practices for promoting positive, respectful and sustainable relationships with local residents;
6. Regulatory and other barriers to ease of operation and participation in the night economy, and envisioning what zoning and licensing flexibility could look like.

**Overall, participants felt that the current licensing and zoning framework for nightlife and gastronomy does not allow for enough creativity, experimentation and vibrancy.** These operators want to contribute to the cultural vibrancy of the city, but feel restricted from doing so within the current licensing and zoning system. They recognise that their patrons look for the same variety.

**What is needed from the City is more flexibility in licensing and zoning.** This could look like new mixed-use licences or adaptation of current licences. Businesses are already shifting to an adaptive model, “morphing” between or blending food and entertainment. Operators also want more zoning flexibility (in relation to the 6% floor area regulation for restaurants) to decide what works for their establishments, highlighting that this would further benefit pandemic recovery. The majority believe current licensing feels prohibitive, antiquated and not suited to today’s night economy.

**Participants see many opportunities for synergy between nightlife sectors.** By allowing the expansion of nightclubs into areas outside the downtown core where restaurants and bars already exist, operators can support each other, promoting street security and safety as well as ensuring late night food options. One participant pointed to Montreal as an example, where “the synergies between nightclubs and restaurants can be very magical.”

**Operators suggested allowing nightclubs to expand into low density industrial areas** (for example, southwest Toronto). These areas would then need to be served by safe **late night transportation**. Many agreed it makes most sense if nightclubs were allowed in high density **mixed-use neighbourhoods** (for example, King Street West and Yorkville). In one participant’s words, “people want to have things to do and go to in their own neighbourhoods and communities...they want vibrant places to go out.” All operators expressed being mindful of **neighbour relations** surrounding noise and safety complaints. A collaborative and “neighbourly approach” involving business, residents and the city is required to address the basic conflict between “not in my backyard” sentiments and the desire for accessible attractions.

**Participants want more and clearer communication channels between businesses and the city in terms of licensing, zoning and neighbour mediation.** They observe that the city has the right intent, but wrong approach: “the city is moving in the right direction but there’s still a lot of red tape to jump through...”. Operators repeatedly suggested the creation of a **concierge** position within city government to help business owners navigate department structures and mediate with neighbours. Personal relationships between businesses, residents’ associations, BIAs, and local councillors support cohesive nightlife districts.

## Attendees: 14

<b>Organizations Represented (alphabetically):</b> <i>(some attendees reported more than one affiliation)</i>	<b>Wards Represented (alphabetically):</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gusto 54 Restaurant Group</li> <li>• Kuya Joe’s Kitchen</li> <li>• ORHMA (Ontario Restaurant Hotel &amp; Motel Association)</li> <li>• Parallel</li> <li>• Sunny’s Chinese</li> <li>• The Duke Pubs</li> <li>• <i>International restaurant group*</i></li> <li>• <i>Kensington Market bar and cafe*</i></li> <li>• <i>Haitian-fusion restaurant (2)*</i></li> <li>• 4 attendees opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University-Rosedale (4)</li> <li>• Eglinton-Lawrence</li> <li>• Scarborough-Guildwood</li> <li>• Toronto Centre</li> <li>• Toronto Danforth</li> <li>• 5 attendees opted for their wards not to be listed.*</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p> <p><i>(5 attendees reported technical issues that impacted full participation in session. Organizers conducted individual follow-ups with invitations to future meetings and alternative modes of participation.)</i></p>	

## New Areas for Nightlife

- **Key idea: nightclub expansion must be served by safe transportation options.**
- **Areas accessible by public transportation outside of downtown core** are best suited for nightlife expansion; **late night public transit** is necessary (currently last train at 11:35 PM).
  - Nighttime mobility must be considered holistically (public transit - trains, bus, automobile) to enable both staff and patrons to get home safely, avoiding drunk driving.
- *Specific areas mentioned:* industrial land east and west of the downtown core, southwest Toronto.
- The city is ripe for zoning review.
- **Expansion into mixed-use and residential areas** increases urban vibrancy but also runs the risk of conflicts with residents.
  - “nightclubs should be everywhere across Toronto,” “nightlife and residential can coexist”.
- **Existing successful examples:** King Street West (primarily residential), Yorkville (CafeTO - 25 years, has to close at 10 PM), other neighbourhoods have shifted from all-residential to mixed-use.
- Operators observe that residents want to be able to **enjoy nightlife in their own neighbourhoods** instead of having to travel all the way downtown.
  - “Vibrancy and variety allows people to jump from a jazz club to a nearby restaurant.”
  - “People want to have things to do and go to in their own neighbourhoods and communities. ...They want vibrant places to go out.”
- **Challenges:** noise in densifying neighbourhoods, conflict between NIMBY (“not in my backyard”) sentiments and wanting accessible attractions (community and keeping the peace) .
- “Synergy” between nightlife businesses: **enabling clubs in areas with existing restaurants and bars** can make for better nightlife ecosystems and allow businesses to support each other - ex. nighttime safety and late night food options for patrons and workers.
  - **Montreal** can offer an example: “the synergies between nightclubs and restaurants can be very magical”.

## Flexible licensing as a priority

- Essentially all participants pointed out **flexible licensing** as a priority, allowing operators to determine opening hours, types of music, alcohol and food service.
- Nightlife thrives on **creativity, experimentation and variety** - “if you want creativity, you have to have flexibility”.
- Participants pointed to **European cities with later opening hours** as examples (e.g. Berlin).
- **Current licensing is irrelevant**, feels “prohibition style”, “antiquated” and not suited to nightlife business needs today.
- Many businesses in Toronto are already shifting to a “**morphing**” model where they provide not only food but also other entertainment options like music and dancing; City should support this transition with licensing changes.
- One 500-cap restaurant owner related, “The **grey zone** between restaurants, bars and clubs is blurred, so defining this is a challenge.”

## Zoning must offer flexibility in floor area

- Essentially all participants agreed that **more flexible zoning (not only limited to the 6% rule)** is important to allow for the same creativity and experimentation enabled by more flexible licensing.
- This flexibility is also important for **continuing pandemic recovery**; operators should be able to define and determine what percentage they use.
- There is **frustration with bureaucratic backlog** and difficulty in accessing people and information: “The city is moving in the right direction but there’s still a lot of red tape to jump through...”
- **Communication between city authorities, BIAs, and operators** can be improved. A dedicated person within city government (for example, the **temporary concierge system during COVID**) can lead to logical zoning and increase access and trust.
  - Relationships between BIAs and local City councillors are also very important.

## Good neighbours

- **Safety** is a key theme across nighttime transportation, new venues and licensing, in nighttime venues and on the street. However, harm reduction approach/practices did not come up in this discussion; it focused on safe environments and sustainable relationships with the neighbourhood.
- “You need a neighbourly approach so all can coexist”—but a positive relationship requires the **buy-in of both sides**, business and residents.
- Ideally, collaboration means considering the needs of nearby neighbours, listening to employees, customers and neighbours.
- The **role of the city in mediating noise complaints and other neighbourhood relations** (as the mediator between nightlife and residents) is important and can be improved. Some repeated noise complaints come from just one neighbour.
- European example of noise management: **Best Bar None Program**, Manchester and other UK cities (this could potentially be replicated in Toronto).

## Role of the City in supporting nightlife

- Participants hoped to see the City continue to more fully recognize the role of nightlife in bringing vibrancy, creativity, and experimentation to the urban fabric.
- Participants acknowledged that the **city has the right intent but the wrong approach**: City departments work in silos, limiting effectiveness; stronger communication channels between venues, BIAs, city zoning and licensing authorities are essential.
- **Operators do not know where to turn** in the city government for help with neighbourhood relations. In particular, a local councillor can potentially play a key role for the city, as communicator to and for operators and residents.
- One proposed solution raised: a **city concierge** to help businesses navigate through department structures.
- One operator questioned how these consultations align with the initiative coming up from the city on the new business classification.



# Focus Group #2: Bars, nightclubs, and entertainment venues

**Session Date and Time:** 2023.03.27 , 2:30–4:00 p.m. EDT

**Format:** Online via Cisco WebEx

**Facilitators:** Mirik Milan, Chris Wilson

**Notetakers:** Maarten van Brederode, Amir Salem, Bengi Güven, Jess Dymond Barber

**City Presenters:** Mitchell Thibault, Jamie Atkinson, Mike Tanner

**Session Report Prepared by:** Diana Raiselis, Maarten van Brederode

## Session summary

Participants in this session represented nightclubs, pubs, DIY spaces and entertainment groups in both the downtown core and surrounding wards. Topics covered included:

1. Sharing experiences opening and operating nightclubs and where it might make sense to open one now;
2. Best practices for safe environments for employees, customers and surrounding communities and best practices for promoting positive, respectful and sustainable relationships with local residents;
3. Licensing for restaurants, bars and nightclubs to reflect current operational realities for operators, including differentiation of venue uses and licence conditions;
4. Whether the existing regulation that restaurants are limited to using 6% of floor space for entertainment makes sense, how it impacts their businesses and how (or if) this should be regulated at all;
5. Regulatory and other barriers to ease of operation and participation in the night economy, and envisioning what zoning and licensing flexibility could look like.

**Participants would like for more trust and autonomy to be afforded them in opening and operating nightclub and nightlife spaces in the city.** Operators affirm they know how to best run their establishments, and that the city can listen better to understand the needs of this business community. Operators are tuned in to socioeconomic and demographic changes in Toronto that impact nightlife, such as residents having children later in life and wanting to go and stay out later—resulting in more of a demand for nightlife activity. They feel constricted in catering to emerging customer preferences such as **mixed use and interdisciplinary spaces**, and proposed potential licence categories like “supper clubs” that might promote more flexible business models and operation.

**This session was the first to bring up the Agent of Change principle.** However, participants were unsure whether the principle applied only to protections for live music venues, or if other entertainment spaces are also protected.

Consultation staff observed that participants in this session seemed **more engaged with the topics than the restaurant-oriented group in the first session**—we attribute this to these topics having a more direct relevance to these businesses’ activities (i.e. these businesses have a stronger emphasis on live music and entertainment; for some of the first consultation’s participants, this was less of a central aspect of their business activities).

Breakout groups were roughly divided between more club and live-focused spaces, versus bars with entertainment, and **discussion and sentiments also varied between the two breakout groups**. Public transit only arose as a topic in the bar-oriented group, whereas local councillors were only mentioned by the club/live-focused group. Sentiments around policing varied between groups (more positive views from bar-oriented than club-oriented group).

### Attendees: 13

Organizations Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ): <i>(some attendees reported more than one affiliation)</i>	Wards Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 159 Manning</li> <li>• Edmund Burke</li> <li>• Ink Entertainment/Rebel Cabana</li> <li>• Lost &amp; Found</li> <li>• Mister Wolf</li> <li>• Queen Street West BIA</li> <li>• SPIN/Sub Division</li> <li>• <i>Downtown jazz music venue*</i></li> <li>• <i>Midsized live and electronic music venue*</i></li> <li>• 6 attendees opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spadina-Fort York (3)</li> <li>• Toronto Danforth (2)</li> <li>• Toronto Centre</li> <li>• University-Rosedale</li> <li>• 6 attendees opted for their wards not to be listed in this summary.*</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p>	

### Local decision making and councillor relations

- Operators highlighted the importance of **making nightlife decisions at the local scale**, as each neighbourhood comes with its own challenges, opportunities and neighbourhood dynamics.
- Participants communicated a number of **challenges and frustrations in working with local councillors**, who have a high level of decision making power: many even feel they do not have any access at all.
- **Business owners feel they are “at the mercy” of councillors who are biased toward the demands of the residents** who elected them rather than to the concerns of nightlife operators, creating a bias against nightlife development.
  - One club and event space operator has been dealing with persistent noise-related issues from neighbours in newly built condominiums. Despite efforts at noise mitigation, the operator expressed frustration that the local councillor was unwilling to help mediate these conflicts.
  - A participant representing a large entertainment group described prior difficulties when seeking to open a new BIA business. After the local councillor opposed the City’s issuance of the licence in deference to the wishes of a small group of neighbours concerned over noise, the participant described ultimately giving up, out of concern that the same councillor might not grant a licence for an annual event in another space.
- Participants expressed **concern about the sustainability and longevity of their businesses**, as each new councillor may feel and operate differently towards nightlife, for example blocking important processes.
  - Operators are frustrated with the **lack of continuity inherent in changes between councillors**: “if it was zoned one way, it should continue to be.”
- Solutions were discussed: **dedicated nightlife councillors** who make localized decisions around nightlife; bylaws allowing nightclubs to continue operating regardless of the ward’s councillor; a decision making committee rather than a single councillor.

## Good neighbours and safer nights

- **Nightclub operators are actively engaging with neighbours** and strategizing how best to manage noise disputes and other potential conflicts of cohabitation in the city.
- **Operators recognise the importance of public safety**, harm reduction and “keeping the peace” and **would like more engagement from the city** on this - more training, education and workshops tailored to different types of venues.
- Operators are already **making programming and management decisions to try and minimize conflicts**, “thinking as residents” and minimizing impacts.
- Operators are thinking constantly about safety, both within and outside their venues. Many are in conversation with the police already, with one stating “if they [police] see you’re operating with best standards all the time, then it does lend towards having a reliable system - they can rely on and you can rely on them as well.”
  - Venues view **waste management** as a safety concern as well, and some do their **own street clean up** in addition to what the city provides.
- Participants believe that **broad partnerships with other community organizations** and businesses outside nightlife can lead to better cohesion and resident relations.

## New space for nightlife

- One participant related the challenge of **displacement due to residential development**: “We used to have a very big nightlife district, and then slowly, the buildings turned into condos. That needs to stop. We can’t keep shifting around the city, finding areas where we can open nightclubs. If you were able to do it, you should be able to continue doing it.”
  - One participant representing an entertainment group with several venues described a shift over past years: while this operator had previously found it possible to operate in areas around the city, they have in more recent years observed nightlife businesses being limited to downtown by increasing restrictions.
- Participants recognize the **potential of “off the beaten path” industrial and waterfront areas** for new nightclubs outside the downtown core: this would solve many noise issues, would enliven and diversify these areas and could pair well with design and art spaces opening alongside.

## Licensing and zoning regulations

- Current licensing and zoning **regulations do not allow for the flexibility to operate venues with more than one usage**, with one participant summarizing that “when it comes to licensing, everyone is just trying to make the shoe fit”.
- Licensing needs to be modernized, more categories for nightlife are needed and categories need to be differentiated more clearly so businesses can clearly select the correct licence.
- Operators feel that current licensing and zoning **regulations police the behaviour of, rather than protect the safety of, patrons and staff**.
  - One operator perceived that onerous restrictions can feel nonsensical in the context of the entertainment and hospitality industry - operators strive to balance being in compliance while also providing excellent hospitality, avoiding the feeling of “giv[ing patrons] restrictions every step of the way once they’re in the club.”

- Current restrictive **licensing prevents growth and evolution of existing spaces**, especially creative and innovative DIY spaces that aim to cater to multiple uses.
  - Participants proposed the creation of a special category for **interdisciplinary venues** that would allow flexibility in usage of space - for example floor space allocated to entertainment.
  - One participant suggested a “supper club” licence to enable an emerging trend, where restaurants host DJs playing music while patrons are eating.
- Operators feel they can be accountable to licensing and zoning flexibility, and **in exchange for this flexibility, operators are willing to take accountability and abide by standards on safety**, “being a good neighbour,” etc.

## Needs from the city

- Participants hope to see the City make a clearer **commitment to nightlife**: “Toronto is the economic capital of Canada, the nightlife economy needs to be recognized as a part of that. Either we’re going to be a world-class nightlife city, or not.”
- Better street lighting for pedestrians.
- Greater clarity from the city is needed on:
  - **Messaging around nightlife planning** (so that the 2019 nightlife strategy is clearly communicated to and reaches all operators).
  - **Noise bylaw**: some businesses would like clear decibel regulations that they can measure at the point of emission (i.e. in the business) to remain in compliance.
- Existing rules and regulations (to lower entry barriers for new operators).
- Participants articulated a wish for **greater community engagement from the city**—a perception was expressed that the City does not usually consult communities enough, though these sessions are a good start.

# Focus Group #3: Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)

**Session Date and Time:** 2023.03.28 , 2:30–4:00 p.m. EDT

**Format:** Online via Cisco WebEx

**Facilitators:** Mirik Milan, Amy Gottung

**Notetakers:** Maarten van Brederode, Amir Salem, Bengi Güven, Jess Dymond Barber

**City Presenters:** Mitchell Thibault, Jamie Atkinson, Mike Tanner

**Session Report Prepared by:** Diana Raiselis, Maarten van Brederode

## Session summary

This session was attended by BIA representatives from across the city of Toronto, ranging in demographics and size and geographic location (small to large and the downtown core outwards). Topics covered included:

1. Where else in the city participants would like to see nightclubs outside of the downtown core, their reasoning, and whether this expansion makes sense in or near their communities;
2. Licensing for restaurants, bars and nightclubs to reflect current operational realities for operators, including differentiation of venue uses and licence conditions;
3. Whether the existing regulation that restaurants are limited to using 6% of floor space for entertainment makes sense, how it impacts their businesses and how (or if) this should be regulated at all;
4. The roles of BIAs in supporting the night economy, the benefits of the night economy for other businesses and the opportunities and challenges faced by BIAs supporting nightlife;
5. Best practices for safe environments for employees, customers and surrounding communities in BIAs and ideas for how the city can support.

**All BIAs present are concerned for small businesses and the challenges they face.** They are dealing with changing characteristics and habits of residents, as well as housing and condominium development. They recognise the importance of **balancing the needs of residents** and business for cohesion and peaceful neighbourly relations. BIAs view the night economy **holistically** and want to be permitted to approach planning as such - for example by recognizing and supporting **all uses of the night**, including those other than nightlife and entertainment, and planning for taking advantage of **seasonality**. BIAs would like a permitting and zoning environment where the city places more **trust in businesses** to know the best solutions for themselves. Participants want to make sure that **creativity and individuality** won't be lost in this process of homogenising/standardising the bylaws across the city.

# Attendees: 17

Organizations Represented (alphabetically):	Wards Represented (alphabetically):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church-Wellesley Village BIA</li> <li>• Gerrard India Bazaar BIA</li> <li>• Lakeshore Village BIA</li> <li>• Liberty Village BIA (2)</li> <li>• Mount Dennis BIA</li> <li>• Queen Street West BIA</li> <li>• Toronto Downtown West BIA (2)</li> <li>• West Queen West BIA</li> <li>• Wexford Heights BIA</li> <li>• Willowdale BIA</li> <li>• Yonge &amp; St Clair BIA</li> <li>• <i>Downtown-area BIA*</i></li> <li>• <i>North York-area BIA*</i></li> <li>• 2 attendees opted for their organizations not to be listed in this summary.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Etobicoke-Lakeshore</li> <li>• Scarborough Centre</li> <li>• Spadina-Fort York (6)</li> <li>• Toronto Centre</li> <li>• Toronto Danforth</li> <li>• Toronto-St. Paul's</li> <li>• University-Rosedale</li> <li>• Willowdale</li> <li>• York Centre</li> <li>• York South-Weston</li> <li>• 2 attendees opted for their wards not to be listed in this summary.</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p>	

## De-centralization and expansion of nightlife

- With BIA representatives in attendance from a diverse spread of Toronto neighbourhoods, this consultation was able to gather localized and contextual opinions from the very areas where nightlife expansion is being considered outside of the downtown core.
- In some wards, **a thriving nightlife is already happening that caters to the local community** and their preferences. For example, a representative from the Gerrard India Bazaar BIA highlighted the unique nightlife sociability of South Asian culture, including **late night dining**. In these communities, restaurants often remain open unofficially until 2 or 3 AM. There is opportunity for the city here to allow later opening hours for restaurants.
- **Some BIAs in wards in between the dense downtown core and more residential suburbs are also keen for nightlife development**, so that residents have no need to travel as far as downtown. The Willowdale BIA already brands itself as the “downtown north of highway 401” and sees the benefit of allowing nightclubs to complement existing businesses like restaurants.
- Participants noted that **the city can examine more than just industrial land and consider permitting nightclubs where existing nightlife is already concentrated**. These areas are often already serviced by public transportation, making them more safe and accessible for nightclub patrons.
- Participants expressed **confusion about the way the city has handled permitting decisions**, requesting clearer communication on what they see as permitting inconsistencies - i.e. why a restaurant was denied a permit in Etobicoke but not downtown.

## Adaptive and common sense licensing and zoning

- BIA representatives would like to see the city **shift to a more adaptive licensing and zoning environment**, where flexibility is offered so that businesses can respond to changes in consumer demand. This would also make it easier for BIAs wanting to develop nightlife for the first time, or redevelop nightlife, to do so.
- **Participants agreed that licensing and zoning allowing venues to switch between uses and to use their space creatively will be beneficial.** This is especially needed for small businesses who feel constricted by regulations such as the 6% floor space rule. If the allowed space cannot accommodate anything but individual performers, restaurants are limited in the entertainment they are legally allowed to provide.
- **A number of justifications and examples were given for why the 6% rule is not relevant and should be changed or removed.** For example, during a drag brunch or drag performance, the performer is moving around the restaurant and not staying in a designated stage area. Another participant highlighted the fact that the **6% rule does not allow for enough ROI for operators to think it is “worth it” to have live music.**
  - Participants floated the idea of a **“supper club” licence** that would allow restaurants to transform from seated dining to evening entertainment throughout the course of the night. You don’t need to be a large venue to provide nighttime entertainment.

### *Making best use of space (at a premium):*

- Participants recognise that in Toronto, **space is at a premium.** Rent and other expenses are already high and rising. For this reason, businesses are looking for ease in making decisions about how to best utilize their own space.
- Participants would like to see a bylaw allowing the creation of licenced dining patios on city sidewalks. This would allow restaurants to extend operation and take advantage of seasonality via public space.

### *Staggering business hours/complementarity:*

- A number of participants recognised the **negative impact of strictly limited operating hours, particularly the intensity of “spill-out” at a single closing time.** By extending operating hours, “spill-out” will be staggered and likely less impactful. Operators would be able to decide for themselves which opening hours make the most sense for their business, and the safety of patrons and staff.
- Participants recognise the ways in which **different night economy businesses complement each other, and that the night economy has phases.** For example, late night food options should be allowed so that patrons leaving bars and nightclubs can have options to eat, easily moving from one activity to the next.
- This is especially important for **small businesses competing with large chains.** One participant said “All these other things are open late at night, chain superstores...I’d rather be buying my apples from the mom and pop as I’m walking home at 9pm, munching on a cookie, rather than go to the big chain place. I think it really makes it a destination.”

## Densification and changing neighbourhoods

- Toronto is densifying, creating both opportunities and challenges for the night economy. Areas that were previously residential are now becoming more mixed use, and this transition needs to be supported by appropriate regulation.
- Participants pointed to the **potential for expanding CRE zoning beyond the downtown core to mixed use areas**, in order to complement and support the development of night economy.
- BIA representatives are acutely aware of the **sensitivities between businesses and residents and the need to balance the needs of both for harmonious neighbourhoods. Noise remains one of the biggest areas for conflict**. One participant described the dynamic as follows: “sometimes it seems like a never ending battle, the divide between businesses and neighbours”.
  - Support for **small, new businesses is extremely important around developing relationships between businesses and residents**, as smaller or newer businesses may not be as financially stable as older and larger businesses to handle noise complaints and other operational hurdles.
- To describe changes in neighbours and clientele, one longtime business owner noted that “new people have different expectations for the neighbourhood...social habits are changing and it’s having an impact on small business owners.” While mixed-use areas can be highly desirable for walkable, accessible city life, new neighbours may not expect nighttime sound, and this mismatch between expectations and reality can put extra pressure on small businesses and restaurants offering nighttime activities like live music, bingo, and so on.
- Businesses are implementing the usual “being a good neighbour” standards but still experience **frustration with conflicts over noise and permitting barriers that do not allow them to evolve** with trends in the kinds of entertainment experiences wanted by patrons.

## Safety and pandemic recovery

- Overall, participants agree that **safety can be achieved by encouraging people to utilize public space at night**, including travelling to and from nightlife activities. The more people there are out and about, the more “eyes on the street,” the safer people feel.
- One way to increase safety at night is **better lighting**. If places are well lit, including sidewalks and parks, people will be encouraged to fill them. However, this is often met with resistance from neighbours.
- In discussing nighttime public safety, participants posed **questions about crime prevention through environmental design and culturally sensitive law enforcement**.
- Participants recognized that **opening up the night economy to more businesses will help with pandemic recovery**. The more options a business has for how to operate, the more resilient they can become.



# Focus Group #4: Artists, DIY, event producers, cultural events and spaces

**Session Date and Time:** 2023.03.28 , 6:00–7:30 p.m. EDT

**Format:** Online via Cisco WebEx

**Facilitators:** Amy Gottung, Tennesha Joseph

**Notetakers:** Travis van Wyck, Lauren Goshinski, Tom Piekarski, Lea Rose Sebastianis

**City Presenters:** Jamie Atkinson, Mike Tanner, Mitch Thibault

**Session Report Prepared by:** Diana Raiselis, Maarten van Brederode

## Session summary

This session was attended by a mix of individual performing artists, representatives from cultural producing organizations and platforms, and those working in the DIY scene. Topics covered included:

1. Opportunities participants would like to have for cultural events, how these events would benefit communities, and how the City can support these visions;
2. Barriers to organizing pop-up events in alternative/unconventional spaces and what might make it easier (particularly support from the City side);
3. Steps organizers take to create safe(r) space and how the City might support these steps;
4. What a more inclusive nighttime would look like in Toronto (and what barriers to access marginalized or racialized groups face);
5. The experience of getting around and performing at night;
6. What non-alcohol-centred nightlife can look like.

**Toronto’s need for—and lack of—events in alternative spaces** was emphasized throughout the session. Organizers echoed past consultation findings that the **permitting and application process for events** is still a barrier, and that more support is needed, especially for small businesses and independent cultural producers who produce events in different types of venues or outdoors. **Cost** is also seen as a major obstacle: between space rental and other event costs (insurance, permitting, equipment rentals) organizers struggle to break even. Session notes contain various suggestions where subsidies, grants, or funding would be most impactful. Participants hoped for underused, meanwhile-use (i.e., spaces that can be used temporarily while awaiting later conversion to more permanent use), and/or City-owned spaces to be made available below market rate particularly for marginalized groups, early-career actors, and cultural producers with a positive track record (i.e. proven good/responsible actors).

**Rather than centralized “club zones,” participants want to see better-distributed access to event space** (“in all areas, so people have something in their backyard”), but recognize that nightlife development should not be pushed on communities. Furthermore, denser **nightlife development brings the potential for displacement**: there’s concern that new entertainment zones’ commercial activity, such as in the city’s west end, or increased development like on Geary Avenue, will displace DIY communities (“Avoid King Street 2.0”).

**Participants provided extensive suggestions on addressing barriers to inclusive and equitable nightlife**, with particular focus on community-based alternatives to policing, funding and supporting existing good practice in community settings, promoting accessible spaces for a range of access needs, and removing barriers to Indigenous use of land and space.

**There is marked frustration and the perception that the City has not taken action after years of asking questions and consulting:** “When the city hears our wishes and can’t act or react, what are the options left for DIY spaces and artists?” This **inaction, or slowness to act, has had consequences:** “**Speed is a factor.**” “We’ve been working on trying to ‘save’ DIY spaces for years and while doing so, spaces have disappeared.”

### Attendees: 16

Organizations Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ): (some attendees reported more than one affiliation)	Wards Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best In Town Sound</li> <li>• Crip Rave</li> <li>• DIY scene</li> <li>• Not Dead Yet</li> <li>• Promise</li> <li>• Toronto Music, Arts and Nature Alliance (TMANA)</li> <li>• SOAK Collective</li> <li>• Combo Breaker Toronto</li> <li>• Brock University</li> <li>• Uma Nota Culture</li> <li>• Wavelength Music</li> <li>• <i>Mid-size alternative theatre*</i></li> <li>• <i>Afro-Caribbean and Latin music platform*</i></li> <li>• <i>Performance festival organization*</i></li> <li>• <i>Indigenous musician*</i></li> <li>• 2 attendees opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davenport (7)</li> <li>• Parkdale-High Park</li> <li>• Spadina-Fort York (2)</li> <li>• Toronto Centre (2)</li> <li>• University-Rosedale</li> <li>• York South-Weston</li> <li>• 2 attendees opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p>	

### Easing and expanding access to space

- **Easier access to space** for “celebration and art expression” is a high priority. Specific types of space mentioned: **300-500 capacity spaces, mixture of indoor and outdoor spaces (weatherized), multi-use spaces, and particularly below-market-rate—cost is a major barrier.**
- Participants hoped for a “balance of events in all areas so people have something in their backyard.”
  - **Overly-defining a “club zone” can have more negative impact than positive** for local residents and grassroots presenters, and communities should have ability to define what kind of night economy makes sense there.
  - **Displacement is a concern:** designating areas as creative or nightlife districts can result in displacement of existing communities, both residents and those who create DIY events in the area.
- Participants called for the City to look at possibilities of **accessing underused spaces** on nights and weekends (e.g. school gyms, libraries), as well as meanwhile use. **City-owned property that could become cultural space** is a major opportunity in a city with a scarcity of affordable and accessible options for alternative/community-run events. In one participant’s words, there is “so much bureaucratic red tape around being able to throw events at these venues.”

## Barriers to space: City processes, cost, transit, and sound

- For events, **application processes and processing time** were both cited as barriers (“the city moves at a glacial pace”): participants’ suggestions included 1) “a **nightlife division** to dish out grants, review applications *faster*, made up of people *in* nightlife culture”; 2) “a **specific page or website with easy links** to all resources, contact people, etc.”; 3) “**straightforward**” **permit applications** of no more than 2 pages, ideally processed within 2-3 weeks—particularly for “community-sized” events.
- **Funding** is a concern, and participants wanted to see more **rolling deadlines** for grant opportunities, and more funding for electronic music events.
- For permanent spaces, participants fear that licensing processes and rezoning costs **make access to permanent (or even long-term) spaces prohibitive for small local and community focused actors.**
- As DIY spaces are pushed further from downtown, **transit** (and cost of transit) is a growing concern.
- **Noise and sound** are also concerns for spaces’ long-term existence: “In the last 5-7 years, there [have been many examples of] spaces operating as venues, and then people move into the neighbourhood, make complaints...these spaces were operating before anyone decided to move into that ‘noisy’ neighbourhood.”
- The **harm reduction approach does not extend to bylaws** regulating space. Both bylaws and cost can drive events further afield, to less safe and less accessible spaces—resulting in **exclusion** of those with mobility access needs.
- **Liability insurance** can be prohibitively expensive for organizers, particularly post-Covid and given the City’s \$5M requirement. This, in addition to the other costs of acting in regulatory compliance (insurance, rent, SOP, equipment rentals) makes it nearly impossible for organizers to break even.

## Licensing, zoning, and bylaw concerns

### *Barriers to access in processes:*

- In addition to a lack of protections for existing DIY spaces, participants noted that **prohibitive costs, processes, and zoning restrictions** stop new possible spaces.
- **Regulatory processes** (pulling event or space permits, rezoning, liquor licensing) were broadly seen as needing to be “**open, less expensive, and take less time.**”
  - “I would personally love to be able to go to one website and click ‘I would like to hold a pop up event’; [I would like to get] a liquor licence’...Why shouldn’t there be easy access for [the community to throw community] events?”
  - More than a few participants advocated for more flexibility with support for events (cultural funding accessibility and permit timelines). The importance of “rolling deadlines” and relatively quick turnaround (ideally within a few weeks) was repeatedly cited.
- These processes dissuade would-be entrepreneurs from starting new spaces. “Many people are trying to make spaces, but it’s too hard.” The cost and extended timeline of licensing, permitting, or re-zoning efforts place **community members/independent operators at an insurmountable disadvantage** in relation to more commercial actors.
  - “[An alternative bar/venue in development] ... was shut down because it could not get a liquor licence...I think [due to]...an archaic zoning bylaw around this specific building. [Liquor licences] ... take so long to apply for...and [are] just expensive.”
- Participants asked **how updated licences will directly serve artists and independent promoters**—this connection is not necessarily clear.

### *Zoning-specific:*

- **Zoning amendments are “unattainable”** for smaller spaces (due to cost, as noted above), resulting in spaces running dance/DJ events when they are not zoned to do so, “which makes zoning sometimes feel very arbitrary and only presents an additional barrier to doing live music.”
- One participant called for **flexible/inclusive zoning** (“making zoning more inclusive to a variety of activities/purposes within one space or area”), with Japan’s inclusionary zoning as a reference.
- Participants hoped to see **extensions to the noise bylaw** until events end (beyond 11 pm).
- The **6% floor area** rule for restaurants was not formally discussed in this session, but brief mentions highlighted that participants **do not see its logic** - rather, restaurants should be able to use their space as they wish.

### *Support for existing spaces:*

- There is a feeling that the **City does not provide sufficient support to bring existing spaces up to code** (e.g. Soybomb HQ, Double Double Land). “A lot of these spaces...even though they operated for years and years and years with no problems... When they were...brought to authorities’ attention [they] were shut down.”
  - There was general advocacy for **supporting Toronto’s few existing alternative/community-focused cultural spaces from a “where they are” standpoint**: “How are [these] spaces currently operating? Can we just go in and grant them the licences? Should there not just be a [feasible] way to send in an application for rezoning [or licensing]?”

## **Promoting inclusivity and safe(r) spaces**

### *Policing was seen in this session as a major obstacle to safer space:*

- Participants perceived **police presence at events to be “ineffective” in ensuring safety**, and mostly about fining participants. They pointed out the disproportionate and negative effect of enforcement on Indigenous, Black and racialized groups (particularly those who are also queer and trans).
  - In particular, **events with road closures** require paid duty officers to be present, which is not only prohibitively expensive for organizers, but can be triggering for some groups: “their presence signals an **unwelcoming unsafe space for marginalized folks.**”
- Participants called for the City to clearly understand the role that police play (“police are not creating safety”), and to **invest in community-based and care-focused alternatives to police** enforcement. This was especially voiced in terms of care for mental health crisis—211 service was seen by one event organizer as “unavailable and unresponsive.”

### *Supporting community care work:*

- **The importance of trained, community-specific care for marginalized communities** was referenced. Existing community efforts to ensure safety at parties include trained and dedicated staff (known as safety, awareness, or “vibe” teams), as well as drug awareness, testing, and peer support. (Pieces to Pathways was one example mentioned).
  - “Many resources [already] exist [within Toronto’s community groups, DIY scenes, and care worker sectors]” that could be supported, prioritized and expanded.
  - Participants hoped for these **initiatives to be better supported and funded by the City**—perhaps even out of the existing police budget.
- There is a desire for **more harm-reduction services (and funding for existing efforts)**, which would raise overall safety and wellness for communities at large in and out of event space.

#### *Safe(r) Spaces:*

- Participants hoped to see **training for bar staff and security guards** in topics such as combating gender bias and discrimination as well as conflict deescalation techniques.
  - One participant pointed out that **“legitimate” security staffing companies may actually provide lower-quality service than “people we know and trust”**; another mentioned that promoters are often compelled to hire certain companies that provide subpar service.
- Participants hoped to see **“proactive” financial support for for Queer, Indigenous, Black, and equity deserving promoters** that create safe(r) spaces, and/or financial incentives for inclusive events (accessible, all-ages, etc.).

#### *Access Needs:*

- One participant called for **more accessible spaces, as well as spaces that can be shaped by individuals and communities with specific access needs** (self-identifying as “mad”, disabled, sick, Crip, Deaf” and others).
- One participant suggested that **established venues work with intersecting communities with lived experience to develop guides for venue accessibility** (including physical and sensory accessibility, harm reduction, artist relations, navigation...) to normalize such standards.
- One participant emphasized the “the absolute need for **better ventilation and masking** in venue spaces,” particularly small spaces with less air circulation. The continued and cumulative impact of Covid-19 has posed significant challenges for some artists to remain active in performing careers. Measures such as CO2 monitoring, regular **ventilation**, and/or UVC lighting can accompany masking for safer spaces.
- **Toronto Arts Council’s accessibility support fund** is one model that might be extended to cover costs of event accessibility measures.

#### *Indigenous access to land and space:*

- In one participant’s eyes, **Indigenous communities should have greater agency to hold cultural events on their traditional land**. With regards to securing one-time community event permits, “I don’t think a lot of community groups for Indigenous events know where to start, even.” They questioned the significant effort required by Indigenous communities to secure City permits for sacred fires, in order to hold events on unceded land.
- **Indigenous communities’ challenges in securing permits for sacred fires** in public spaces, and being harassed and disrupted by law enforcement during these events, in spaces such as Dufferin Grove, has fueled a particular mistrust of City permitting processes and regulations.

#### *Promoting equity in the music industry:*

- One participant suggested a “wraparound approach” (borrowing language from social services) to consider **equity and access to industry opportunities**—booking, ticketing, and promotion can present obstacles to emerging and independent artists.

## Getting around and performing at night

- While the downtown core can be prohibitively expensive and communities outside of the downtown core are underserved, participants emphasized that **developing nightlife in areas beyond the core must be accompanied by expanded transit**.
- **Nightlife is being pushed farther and farther out** as the city densifies...and these areas suitable for nighttime sound and noise are less accessible by transit (e.g. night buses are infrequent, with limited routes).
- Participants indicated a desire to see **extended TTC service in terms of distance, accessibility, and time**—and hoped to see **retail and hospitality** activity also go later, to provide vibrancy and safety at night.
- Similarly, **bike and pedestrian infrastructure also seem to be more limited** beyond the downtown core (e.g. north-west): this matters to DIY organizers and their audiences, who may be financially limited to transit, bike, and walking. The idea of siting bike shares near venues was raised.

## The logistics of non-alcohol centred nightlife:

- Participants pointed to **all-ages shows as a “social good,”** but noted that the financial incentives dissuade venues (who make less money on the bar) and organizers (who have to pay an additional security related surcharge); financial offsets to incentivize these would be ideal.
  - NYC’s **Nowadays** was cited as an example with its community programming, restaurant, and garden.

## “Bike Parking” - to further explore in other conversations

- The idea was raised of a **rent control-type system** as a means to improve financial access to leased space (with the recognition that rent control is administered at province rather than City level—alternative approaches may be necessary).
- One participant called for **fewer restrictions on busking**; this topic should also be examined in broader night strategies.
- The need to **review the noise bylaws** was raised in this and other sessions: “I believe there are [limits to hours associated with current] noise bylaws... There have been folks at committees advocating for reassessment. This is important.”

# Focus Group #5: Music Industry, Performance and Live Music Spaces

**Session Date and Time:** 2023.03.29 , 10:00–11:30 a.m. EDT

**Format:** Online via Cisco WebEx

**Facilitators:** Chris Wilson, Sheena Jardine-Olade

**Notetakers:** Maarten van Brederode, Amir Salem, Bengi Güven, Jess Dymond Barber

**City Presenters:** Mitchell Thibault, Jamie Atkinson, Mike Tanner

**Session Report Prepared by:** Diana Raiselis, Maarten van Brederode

## Session summary

This session was primarily attended by live music venue owners and operators representing a mix of small, midsize and large music and entertainment venues, ranging from a few years' operation to a 75-year history. These were accompanied by music association representatives and other industry advocates. Topics covered included:

1. Where beyond downtown nightclubs should be permitted;
2. How operators are currently licenced, most relevant activities in licensing definitions, and what is working/not working in practise;
3. Biggest barriers (regulatory or otherwise) to operating music and nightlife establishments; types of licensing and zoning flexibility most needed;
4. Best practices and current steps to ensuring safe, respectful, and sustainable environments for employees, customers, and neighbours/local community;
5. Hopes and visions for the NTE, including 24-hour space.

### **Participants spoke frankly about their current challenges and future concerns regarding licensing.**

While operators struggle with the “confusing, antiquated” licence system, they also **fear that a new licensing structure will bring more onerous requirements but no discernible benefits**; there are particular concerns about obtaining insurance, being “lumped in” with nightclubs (and their regulations), and increased cost. **Flexibility is a top priority**, and for some businesses, expanded entertainment and dance-floors have been a necessary lifeline given the financial impacts of Covid-19. The general sentiment was for **more venue autonomy** rather than strict floor area or revenue percentages, with the sense that businesses know what is necessary for financial sustainability and should be able to plan for entertainment accordingly. Participants also pointed to a **perceived contradiction** between the Music Office's priority to expand live music in Toronto, and the potential for increased regulation that might stifle it.

**It is notable that all participants in this session opted to be anonymized or unlisted**, in contrast to other sessions, where most organizations were listed by name with a handful of participants opting to be unlisted or anonymized. This itself speaks to the challenges that venues face in operating within the current regulatory landscape, and their concerns about the challenges that future changes could bring.

**A further, major theme was handling noise complaints amidst a sharp rise in new residential condo construction.** Participants articulated the value that their venues bring to neighbourhoods and communities, and described their approaches to minimizing local noise disturbance and building good relationships with neighbours. Operators note that they remain in a precarious position when it comes to complaints (one person’s repeated complaints can shut down a space), so they hoped to see more oversight of subjective-seeming ML&S enforcement, as well as Agent of Change applied more widely to better protect venues.

**Attendees: 16**

Organizations Represented: <i>(some attendees reported more than one affiliation)</i>	Wards Represented <i>(alphabetically)</i> :
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large North American entertainment company*</li> <li>• Downtown-area BIA*</li> <li>• Small West End music venue*</li> <li>• Downtown pub and live music venue*</li> <li>• West End live music venue*</li> <li>• Large music and entertainment venue*</li> <li>• National music association*</li> <li>• Provincial music association*</li> <li>• Jazz venue and lounge*</li> <li>• Music venue and restaurant*</li> <li>• Multi-purpose live music, performance, restaurant/bar venue*</li> <li>• Downtown concert hall*</li> <li>• 4 attendees opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beaches-East York</li> <li>• Davenport (2)</li> <li>• Etobicoke-Lakeshore</li> <li>• Parkdale-High Park</li> <li>• Spadina-Fort York (4)</li> <li>• Toronto Centre (2)</li> <li>• Toronto Danforth</li> <li>• 4 attendees opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.*</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p>	

**Value of Nighttime Venues**

*“All of our businesses are anchors for communities. There’s restaurants, bars, etc. all adjacent to our music venues that make money when we’re open, so there’s spinoff economies.”*

*“As living space decreases (ie. condos), bars, venues, and restaurants, businesses become the living rooms of residents.”*

*“Venues are safe and secure environments for nighttime activity. Without venues operating late at night people will congregate more often elsewhere, in private residences or illegitimate spaces.”*

**Flexible licensing for music venues—and fears of change**

- Several participants noted operating with a restaurant or entertainment facility licence. Restaurant licence holders reported varying (generally low) percentages of revenue from food service; one does not serve food at all. The entertainment facility licence is seen as flexible by one participant; others noted that the restaurant licence supported multiple aspects of their business best.
- **“The pandemic showed us that we need to stay flexible”**: participants see it as impossible to pre-define percentage of sales from food, drink, entertainment, and a need for flexibility/ability to change models. For some, the “expanded dancefloor” is a means of survival; businesses need the autonomy to set their own percentage of floor area (or revenue percentage) for entertainment.



- Participants described the **“confusing, antiquated” licensing process** that leaves some businesses in a grey zone, and requires legal advice to clearly interpret.
- There is a general **fear that this new licensing structure** will create more cumbersome compliance regulations, increased operations costs, new issues obtaining insurance, and **new challenges rather than supports**.
  - Two business owners shared serious concerns about being identified as a nightclub or music venue from an **insurance** standpoint. Separating the restaurant/bar and entertainment categories would likely exacerbate an already difficult process, with businesses **more likely to be classified as high risk**.
  - Businesses stressed the **desire not to be seen as a nightclub** (“not lumping in comedy, theatre, live music with nightclub regulation”); there is fear that ML&S will apply nightclub licence terms to live music venues, creating more onerous conditions for operation.
- **Ideally, new licence categories for venues should offer advantages instead of restrictions:** requirements like music on a certain number of nights per week would be a hardship.
  - One participant recognized the late 2000s origins of the nightclub licence as intended to curtail the club and dance scene in the Richmond-Adelaide area. They saw this new approach of licensing live music venues as intended to regulate (or even prevent) growth, which stands at odds with the music office’s desire to enable more live music in Toronto.
- One operator suggested a **general assembly licence, with a specific type indicated** (“a little box you check on the side that’s restaurant or music venue or nightclub”).
- **In one US example, Austin’s licensing scheme includes both “T&C” (table & chairs) and an “SRO” (standing room only) capacity limits**, allowing flexibility.
- Ideally, operators wish for a different relationship with the City: they would like to seek advice from city departments to best operate within bounds, rather than fearing punitive consequences.

## Music and sound near residential buildings

- “Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods, everywhere we have residents in close proximity to venues.”
- **A major theme: the sheer volume of new residential condo construction leading to loss of cultural space**, particularly when construction has insufficient sound insulation (“waffle condos”). One bar owner noted that **Agent of Change should apply more broadly**: “If our goal is to have music and entertainment part of the fabric of the whole city, it shouldn’t be developments where there’s an existing live music venue (being required to) do good soundproofing, it should be *all* [development].”
  - This has become more urgent given **residents who may have moved next to (shuttered) music venues during the pandemic**, yielding new, unexpected complaints upon reopening.
  - Participants wanted to **see the Agent of Change legislation have “teeth”** (i.e. consequences for developers who do not follow it), as well as application to renovation and construction permits.
- There is a **mistrust of ML&S and particularly the enforcement division**; desires for an ombudsman or oversight entity was expressed as they are perceived as sometimes acting “rogue,” particularly after the new noise bylaw’s implementation.
  - Venues expressed the need for a **step between ML&S receiving a noise complaint and a space being closed**—they do not feel that venues have sufficient protection or recourse in these cases.

## New Areas for Nightlife: main streets, industrial areas, City space

- Participants would like to see the City **re-examine the possibility of industrial areas**, given their distance from residential use and lower-cost land (recognizing that this may require the City to advocate with the province).
- Keeping in line with the idea of “**complete neighbourhoods,**” **mixed-use/retail main streets, where public life is already active** (especially in Scarborough and Etobicoke/outside the downtown core) were raised as suitable areas for nightlife. An ideal situation is near transit but far from residential neighbours.
- **Near rail routes**, and the **Port Lands** area were also both suggested.
- Participants would like to **see the City proactively inventory its available property for arts and culture**, particularly given empty space since the pandemic.
  - One participant voiced a desire for more “pop-up” flexibility at venues, rooftops, and outdoor spaces like parks, with minimal red tape for promoters.

## Biggest Barriers/Concerns

- Some emphasized the **2 a.m. alcohol service restriction as out of step** with nighttime workers’ schedules, the realities of how different communities go out at night (only arriving shortly before 2), and the ability to be creative with nighttime event concepts.
- The **requirement that councillors must sign off with the AGCO on new nightclub licences in their wards creates a power imbalance** that makes opening new venues extremely difficult. Another participant noted the years-long timeline for rezoning as a prohibitive obstacle for opening new space.
- Accessing **outdoor and harbourfront venues** seem to be quite limited.
- **Participants struggle to get correct information;** they’ve identified instances of contradictory information (e.g. around patio closing times).
- One operator contrasted the change from a more community-feeling Queen Street West music scene to a different nighttime scene on King Street that seems to draw more violence, particularly as bars simultaneously let out at 2 a.m.
- In addition to **rising costs for businesses and cost-of-living inflation for their customers, Covid impacts are still being felt:** “business is back to only 60% of what it was in 2019: restrictions of all kinds have to be lifted.”

## Being a Good Neighbour

*What venues already do:*

- One venue deliberately loads music equipment in and out through front doors only, so as to **minimize residential disturbance late at night;** another ensures acts do not load out until music ends, to minimize sound bleed, and clearly instructs acts with tour buses where to park, to avoid vehicle idling noise on residential streets.
- “**If someone makes a complaint, we try to deal with it head on** with the neighbour, we don’t let it go out...we’re always in communication with them.”
- One participant shared another venue’s practice of **getting involved with the local residents’ association** as a means to stay open to community feedback.
- Another participant, opening in 2019, “**went door to door**” to **introduce themselves** and share their phone number, encouraging them to reach out with concerns or issues. “I deal with it the day of, and

people seem to respond to that.”

- One operator “surrounded by apartments” **voluntarily shortened her own hours** (music until 11 p.m. on weekdays, and 12:30 a.m. on weekends) and has found it to work smoothly.
- Two operators affirmed that the **biggest share of complaints for them have come from music running past 2 a.m.** (offered for special events), although another recognized that it can be **especially profitable to offer music between 2–4 a.m.**, and others do choose to run programming late.
- One participant noted a good practice of **recording decibel ratings hourly and even giving dB readers to neighbours** alongside direct contacts of organizers, to keep communication open.

## Opportunities and Possibilities

- Two operators **commended the Music Office’s work** to solve issues and support operators.
- The **last-call rush can be reduced** with staggered and flexible opening hours.
- Could **more basement/subterranean spaces** reduce noise and support residential coexistence?
- **More outdoor activity can create more “eyes on the street”** and thus feelings of safety.
- **Participants brainstormed ways to maximize transit opportunities:** offering temporary/micro public transportation routes to support popup and DIY events; subsidizing late-night taxi/rideshare; legalizing low-speed scooters; etc.
- **In considering 24-hour space, participants looked to Asia’s many overnight spas** which also serve tea, food, and alcohol as an example. They considered whether **round-the-clock businesses might be able to hold secondary licences/endorsements** to support more diverse, creative use of space.

# Focus Group #6: Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke Resident and Community Associations

**Session Date and Time:** 2023.04.29 , 6:00–7:30 p.m. EDT

**Format:** Online via Cisco WebEx

**Facilitators:** Amy Gottung, Tennesha Joseph

**Notetakers:** Travis van Wyck, Lauren Goshinski, Tom Piekarski

**City Presenters:** Mitchell Thibault, Jamie Atkinson, Marguerite Pigott

**Session Report Prepared by:** Diana Raiselis, Maarten van Brederode

## Session summary

This session was attended by arts, community, and resident associations from 8 wards across Etobicoke, North York, and Scarborough. Topics covered included:

1. Whether participants feel that they have easy access to a variety of cultural and social activities in their area, and where they would find nightclubs appropriate beyond the downtown area;
2. Public safety or community nuisance concerns experienced in their neighbourhoods, and promoting vibrant nighttime while minimizing negative local impacts;
3. Discussion of licensing categories for restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, as well as reflections on the 6% floor area limit for entertainment in restaurants;
4. What a more inclusive nighttime would look like in Toronto and what barriers marginalized or racialized groups face;
5. Hopes for non-alcohol-centred nightlife.

**Across geographies, there is a strong sense from participants in all three areas that there is *not* easy access to cultural and social activities near home, or space to hold them—day or night.** While “people want to stay in their neighbourhood to experience culture,” nighttime social activities (or socializing at other hours of the day) require travelling out of their areas, which in turn raises concerns about access to transit—seen as scarce during daytime hours and even more so at night.

**Participants voiced desire for more locally-owned, small, mixed cultural business (pubs or coffeeshops that can have sit-down shows) and more mixed-use common community space that can hold theatre performances or local artist events.** There is a perception that developers prioritize commercial chains/franchises over local, independent businesses, which are growing scarcer—implying a need for government interventions: protections, incentives, or supports. In terms of licensing, **flexibility and hybridity** are key: licensing should enable community gathering rather than impose restrictions, and restrictions can be an especial burden on small businesses; **streamlined processes and a “centralized” support point** is desired. Some participants tended to associate nightclubs with **negative outcomes**—overconsumption, nuisance, violence—while others found it ludicrous that a world-class city like Toronto does not have clubs throughout the city.

# Attendees: 9

Organizations Represented (alphabetically):	Wards Represented (alphabetically):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts Etobicoke</li> <li>• Bayview Village Association</li> <li>• Don Mills Residents Inc.</li> <li>• Guildwood Village Community Association</li> <li>• Scarborough Rosewood Community Association</li> <li>• The Group Project</li> <li>• <i>Regional arts service organization*</i></li> <li>• <i>Etobicoke-area residents association*</i></li> <li>• 1 attendee opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don Valley East</li> <li>• Don Valley North</li> <li>• Etobicoke Centre</li> <li>• Etobicoke-Lakeshore</li> <li>• Scarborough North</li> <li>• Scarborough Southwest</li> <li>• Scarborough-Guildwood</li> <li>• Willowdale</li> <li>• 1 attendee opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.*</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p>	

## Lack of affordable social and community space—and late-night food

- Across geographies, participants noted the **lack of weather-appropriate “low cost places for people to gather.”** Participants stressed the need for affordable nighttime spaces that deemphasize alcohol, substances, and loud music, perhaps even more urgently than nightclubs.
  - This need is particularly strong for **youth** (dedicated spaces for under-19s like arcades and youth venues), but also important for **residents over 50** (noted by Etobicoke respondents), better enabling populations to “age in place.”
  - **Food options**—both for day and nighttime—recurred as an important component of health and access: “A&W surely shouldn’t be the only 24-hour food option.”
  - **Public and outdoor space** is very important to older people not drawn to crowded night spaces, particularly given Covid-19. These can be made more accessible by better **lighting** parks at night and providing **public washrooms**.
- **Affordability** is a key component of this conversation, but goes beyond nighttime and nightlife. Embracing temporary events, activations, and pop-ups is not only a question of vibrance but also access to entrepreneurship opportunities and space.
  - One participant noted this challenge for Scarborough arts, youth, and BIPOC communities: “We just want a space to come together. That could be for sharing art, planning stuff together - every time we do that together, it’s difficult to find indoor spaces that are affordable. There are specific things we’d like to do in the evening, [but] it’s an all day long problem.”

## Flexible licensing and streamlined regulation

- **Flexibility and hybridity** are key. For one North York participant, “a dream” would be to “open an establishment that can serve coffee in the morning and drinks until 3AM.” Ideally, **licence categories enable space for community**, rather than imposing strict designations.
  - Restaurants need flexibility to provide live music—including formats such jazz, folk, solo or small acts, or other opportunities for emerging artists. “If a restaurant has the ability to expand non-food space, or a club to expand food space, that is critically important.”

- The hope of **lower barriers for smaller venues** was voiced—drawn-out application processes are particularly hard on small businesses. One participant proposed expedited processing for smaller operators or target areas: “we’ll review in [X] amount of days if you are under [a certain amount of] seats.”
- The **6% floor area regulation** was only briefly discussed, but seen as “ridiculous and very limiting.”
- Respondents emphasized the **disappearance of independent and neighbourhood operators**, which are giving way to franchises, chains, and “big-format” spaces in new development.
- In discussing **conditions on licences**, participants urged the City not to overemphasize numbers alone (i.e. # of infractions or complaints), and to recognize the difference between safety and nuisance concerns. One participant suggested a focus on hours of operation as a means to distinguish between bars/restaurants and nightclubs, as the “key feature” of clubs is that they operate late.
  - **Sound at night near residential areas** is a concern. One participant cited how in areas near the waterfront, music must end at 11 p.m. due to residential proximity, and saw this model as desirable. The idea of “licensing per neighbourhood zone” was raised.
- An event organizer emphasized the **challenges of producing events**—not just knowledge of detailed logistical and processes, but also addressing noise, potential police interactions, and minimizing impacts on neighbours. They called for **streamlined temporary event permitting processes** and ideally a “**centralized place to get access to support.**”

## Limited transit as a barrier

- **Limited transit infrastructure** presents a barrier, both travelling within a suburb (i.e. between parts of Scarborough) or to denser entertainment and social areas. Given existing TTC cost and safety challenges, the feasibility of extending service is an open question.
- Due to current constraints around concentration of entertainment in specific areas, two participants emphasized that **accessing social and cultural activities generally means travelling downtown**, requiring either prohibitively long transit trips or a car (and arranging for a designated driver, if drinking). For one Don Mills respondent, “that isolation, and the requirement that you have to go miles away, is an issue of City planning.”
- One participant observed that **Scarborough experiences more barriers to transit and different needs** than, say, Yonge-Eglinton. A daytime transit journey from Scarborough can require three buses, and this becomes only **more challenging at night**. This profoundly limits opportunities for community meetings and meetups.
  - Both Scarborough and North York participants pointed out that **transit after nighttime events is severely limited**, presenting issues for audiences and workers to travel safely home.

## New areas for nightlife

- In general, **siting nightclubs near existing transit and retail infrastructure** seemed most appropriate to participants. One North York participant hoped to see nightclubs close to public transit and restaurants (both operating into the night), allowing for nighttime mobility as well as options for nighttime workers.
- More generally, **the City can protect vibrant public life by upholding more public-oriented uses of main street ground floor space**—coffee shops and retail fuels more public life and movement than condos or offices (furthermore, basic services like doctor’s offices are also being pushed out).

- **Specific areas raised for nightlife** (to be seen as a starting point only):
  - Scarborough Town Centre, given transit accessibility.
  - Etobicoke: the Dundas strip (marked in red as a centre on Toronto’s Official Plan) given transit, parking, and existing uses that animate the area and make nighttime mobility safer.
  - Long Branch and Lakeshore has “room for animation” and diversification.
  - Light industrial areas were raised as potentially separating more sound-intensive use (clubs) from residential, *but* other participants voiced safety concerns particularly for women and 2SLGBTQ+ people.

## “Nightclubs” in the neighbourhood? Stigma and open questions

- **There seems to be stigma attached to “nightclubs” and “nightlife”** (one participant described that it “conjures up blue lights, disco, young people over imbibing”). While facilitators clarified the broader definition/usage, participants tended to associate “nightlife” with the club district downtown, and by way of that, nuisance and violence.
  - **Participants, however, brought up other forms of music at night**—dining and dancing to piano music, attending jazz concerts (“we’ve lost so many jazz clubs”), “coffeehouse” singer-songwriter formats, etc.—which for many participants seemed distinct from the vision of “nightlife” characterized by clubs, rather than part of general life at night.
- **For others, clubs should be a fixture throughout the city:** “It’s ridiculous that a city the size of Toronto doesn’t have clubs across the city that people can access in their area.”
- **“We want to have spaces so we create vibrancy in the neighbourhood, but the idea is not for that to create problems.”** Recognizing potential unintended issues from expanded nightlife, one Scarborough resident questioned how to avoid “overpolicing” as a negative consequence, and voiced a desire for clubs to share and implement good practices (harm reduction, etc.). (Similarly, in other sessions, business participants emphasized the need for supports and requirements to ensure that businesses can and will invest in it.)

### *Area-specific concerns:*

- One **Etobicoke**-area participant contrasted the many proposals for high density housing (particularly in Islington) with the lack of nighttime and community spaces: “we are swamped with more proposals for more towers, but nothing for cultural life, art, music.”
- **“Scarborough** needs a good variety for different ages and types of activities - including venues that offer alcoholic/non-alcoholic options, food places open late, dancing places open late, and just spaces for active living that are open late.”
- Participants asked whether **North York** unused or underused buildings could be made available to nighttime entrepreneurs on a pop-up basis.
  - “One of the issues is if you look around this area, there are very few cultural points...more importantly, there is no common space. There are [commercial] spaces and private spaces. That’s it. ...That common area for people to gather and have a cup of tea is lacking.”

## Questions for the City:

- One participant expressed uncertainty about **why this topic is being raised now** - the general concern around community safety post-pandemic seemed like a higher priority, rather than night economies. It will be important for the City to explicate the connections between the two, and the dual prioritization of these two subjects in nighttime action plans going forward.

# Focus Group #7: Downtown and Toronto East York Resident and Community Associations

**Session Date and Time:** 2023.03.30 , 6:00–7:30 p.m. EDT

**Format:** Online via Cisco WebEx

**Facilitators:** Amy Gottung, Sheena Jardine-Olade

**Notetakers:** Travis van Wyck, Lauren Goshinski, Tom Piekarski

**City Presenters:** Mitchell Thibault, Jamie Atkinson, Marguerite Pigott

**Session Report Prepared by:** Diana Raiselis, Maarten van Brederode

## Session summary

This session was attended by a majority of residents association representatives as well as a few participants from the arts, music, and hospitality industries. Topics covered included:

1. Whether participants feel that they have easy access to a variety of cultural and social activities in their area, and where they would find nightclubs appropriate beyond the downtown area;
2. Public safety or community nuisance concerns experienced in their neighbourhoods, and promoting vibrant nighttime while minimizing negative local impacts;
3. Discussion of licensing categories for restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, as well as reflections on the 6% floor area limit for entertainment in restaurants;
4. What a more inclusive nighttime would look like in Toronto and what barriers marginalized or racialized groups face;
5. Hopes for non-alcohol-centred nightlife;
6. (Briefly) Considerations for 24-hour spaces in the city.

**While some neighbourhood associations expressed appreciation for the nightlife in their areas, they also highlighted select regions' challenges of overconcentration of nightlife, associated safety concerns, and a desire to better distribute nightlife activities throughout the city.** General sentiments were positive towards more small, independent businesses providing more intimate, low-key mixed culture and dining experiences and outdoor activities for all-ages and families in their neighbourhoods. Conversely, **many participants hold stigmas around “nightlife” and “nightclubs”** being associated with negative outcomes such as drug use, crime, violence, and drunkenness. Participants held **varying views about enforcement**—some wanting to see stronger ML&S enforcement and policing of noise bylaws, or more control over liquor licences and decisions made in their area, while others emphasized rewarding responsible actors and promoting positive examples.

**This session was one of the few to raise concerns around those experiencing mental health concerns or homelessness.** While some participants did not see a clear connection, others advocated for the necessity of supports for precariously and under-housed residents, in order to ensure the safety of all Toronto residents, day and night.



## Attendees: 15

Organizations Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ): <i>(some attendees reported more than one affiliation)</i>	Wards Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beaconsfield Village Residents Association</li> <li>• Confederation of Resident And Ratepayer Associations in Toronto (CORRA)</li> <li>• Federation of North Toronto Residents Associations</li> <li>• Greater Yorkville Residents' Association</li> <li>• McGill Granby Village Residents' Association (MGVRA)</li> <li>• Night Life Guard project</li> <li>• Pocket Community Association</li> <li>• Swansea Area Residents Association</li> <li>• Toronto Noise Coalition</li> <li>• Trinity Bellwoods Community Association</li> <li>• <i>2 downtown-area resident associations*</i></li> <li>• <i>Hospitality association*</i></li> <li>• <i>North Midtown-area resident association*</i></li> <li>• <i>West End-area resident association*</i></li> <li>• 1 attendee opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davenport</li> <li>• Parkdale-High Park (3)</li> <li>• Spadina-Fort York (2)</li> <li>• Toronto Centre (2)</li> <li>• Toronto Danforth</li> <li>• Toronto-St. Paul's (2)</li> <li>• University-Rosedale (2)</li> <li>• 2 attendees opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary.*</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p>	

## Mixed feelings about increasing nightlife

- Two participants voiced **appreciation for the nightlife in and around their areas**, but cautioned around disproportionate overconcentration of nightlife, as well as potential conflicts with side streets/adjacent residential areas.
  - Challenges include safety, noise, and wellness for underhoused folks.
  - Development is putting increased pressure on nightlife spaces around Church/Wellesley.
- Another representative commended the **diversity and vibrancy that nightlife establishments have brought** to the Trinity-Bellwoods area, but also noted a tension between neighbourhood vibrancy and residential uses. They hoped that the City might consider expanding nightlife spaces to new neighbourhoods (i.e. in North York) to reduce some of this pressure.
  - One participant indicated that Yorkville-area residents have not indicated a desire for more bars and “quasi-nightclubs” (i.e restaurants operating like a nightclub after dining hours). There have been some issues around noise, and this participant perceived that police response time and bylaw enforcement/fining have been insufficient.
- Still another felt that there was “**not enough**” activity near Lakeshore/Bathurst, requiring residents to visit Liberty Village or King St.
- One expressed a **desire for community members to have a say in AGCO liquor-licensing** processes.

## Stigmas around “nightlife” and “nightclubs”

- Many **associated nighttime activity with negative outcomes**: drugs (sale and use), crime, violence, nuisance behavior, and connected clubs/bars to drunkenness and nuisance.
- “Does participating in this session assume I am pro-nightlife?” asked one participant.
- “Focusing on nightclubs gets people anxious.” - one participant suggested **framing it differently**: trivia nights, festivals, etc.

- Another participant queried (directly to the City) **why the topic of the night economy** is being “pushed”; the City answered that the primary focus of this process is to update outdated bylaws and zoning to reflect how businesses are running.
- One participant made the **distinction** between desirable “smaller and independently owned late night businesses (independently owned small bars, restaurants, concert venues)” and less desirable “larger capacity night club type venues with lineups that invite congestion, increased drunk driving...ignorance of [one-way] street signs.”

**Location of nightlife:** New nightlife was suggested to be sited on **main streets**, well-connected to **transit**, and if in residential or mixed-use areas, potentially a specific **distance from residential**.

## Licensing and enforcement that enables hybridity

- “We need to give teeth to enforcement without limiting creativity.”
- For distinguishing between types of business licensing criteria, participants made several suggestions: **hours of operation** (i.e. a business opening at 22:00 or 23:00 is unlikely to be a restaurant); **ratio of food to liquor sales/offerings**; **capacity**; **requirements for food services** (i.e. real meals for venues that are not nightclubs); and **seating**. **Liquor licences**, **music volume**, and **physical size** were raised; **decibel caps** were raised as a possible mitigation measure.
- One West End-area participant expressed **caution around a distinct club licence**, given that many businesses do operate in a **hybrid** fashion (i.e. do operate primarily as restaurants during dining hours). From a business perspective, this hybrid approach is a necessity, but they should not necessarily be viewed as clubs. To them, the City needs to look at potential uses of space alongside better bylaw enforcement.
- One participant noted that there is very little **ML&S enforcement** outside of business hours: “restaurants become nightclubs regardless of regulation.”
- A participant noted the issue of **unlicensed bars** that police or ML&S enforcement staff cannot address (“this is where crime happens”)—and the contradiction that even so, residents cannot bring “a glass of wine to a park.”

## Noise, enforcement, and good neighbours

- One concern raised: **crowds/queues outside event venues** creating noise and blocking sidewalks, “spilling out after close and generating noise.”
  - **Clear, accessible sidewalks** are a need - participants asked how pop-up events can better manage crowd control.
- Businesses’ **waste management** and items like sandwich boards left out on sidewalks were also raised as examples of businesses being inconsiderate neighbours. Concerns were flagged around what the city can provide to ensure clean, safe access to sidewalks (or to incentivize businesses to do so). Early morning sanitary sweeps were seen as essential for a safe and healthy urban nightlife.
- One participant shared the perception that the **noise complaint pathway is ineffective** (“It used to be cops coming to your door. Now...maybe after several [311] calls you might get city staff showing up.”) Another posited that if noise was handled by police, violence might also decrease.
- One participant felt “let down” by the lack of enforcement of noise bylaws: e.g. restaurants that are not allowed to have patios do so anyway, and other clear violations of bylaws.

## Safety, accessibility and inclusivity

- Some participants noted that **vibrant night spaces can also draw individuals in crisis, who may not have other places to go**. They raised the issue of foundational supports (e.g. housing) for these individuals, and the presence of safe and accessible gathering spaces at night. **“We can’t make nighttime activity safer without addressing the systemic issues (e.g. through supportive housing).”**
  - However, this connection wasn’t clear-cut to all: one participant saw nightlife as a zero-sum game, where **City funds could either go towards homeless shelters, or later nights** (to “the person who wants to drink until six o’clock in the morning”). In their words: “Your inclusivity goal is admirable, but the city needs to prioritize where it is spending its money.”
- Concerns were raised about **TTC safety and walking** between hotels and other Toronto locations.
- **Safety is a concern**: “4 a.m. is when we get gunfire and gun play.”
- Trained security and venue staff who know the neighbourhood well are seen as very desirable.
- One participant asked the City to **better consider physical accessibility of parks; more benches and seating space** is also an accessibility need.
- **Above-board, regulated drug sale** was seen (and affirmed by other participants) as being safer than illegal activity; however, others wanted to see **more control over drugs and alcohol permits** and sales.
- One participant perceived a relationship between the **increase of nightlife establishments in a given area and the rise of chain retail** (fast food, vape shops), which puts independent businesses at a disadvantage—while the City should instead be supporting independent operators and businesses. They suggested **limiting the number of operating licences for multinational corporations** in any given area.

## Non-alcohol-centred nightlife

- **“Spaces not centred around alcohol consumption is an important access opportunity**, especially for folks living with addiction.”
  - Suggestions: late night ice cream shops, board games cafés, experiential businesses (escape rooms, VR), all-ages family events like pizza in the park.
- One participant noted that **younger residents have a “strong and growing preference” for venues offering high-quality non-alcoholic options**, and suggested that licensing require a certain proportion of a beverage menu to be “thoughtfully curated non-alcoholic beverages” as a means to promote healthier, more responsible consumption and potentially better neighbourhood coexistence.

## Rewarding responsible actors

- One participant noted **the burden small club owners and venue owners experience, such as rising costs, hiring security, enforcing Covid regulations**. “We need to find a way to show love to the responsible bar owners and reward the ones who are making an effort.”
- Another echoed this, encouraging the **promotion of safe activities, recognizing/awarding model businesses, and “giving PR to what’s good.”** Seeking ways to “prioritize and incentivize local ownership, and create responsible relationship with the neighbourhood” can be beneficial.

**24-Hour Space:** While discussed only briefly in one of the two breakouts, participants reiterated potential noise concerns, and suggested that area BIDs (and/or other neighbourhood/council entities) might get involved in promoting safe activities and rewarding good actors.

## “Bike Rack” - to further explore in other conversations

- One participant asked for more clarification on the legislation that allows dancing at a restaurant or small venue.
- Another expressed a concern about tensions that arose when neighbourhoods lost their “dry” status
- A question echoed throughout the session of what is “downtown”—i.e. Queen Street West is a key entertainment district—it will be important for the City to clearly communicate areas in question throughout the coming licensing and zoning changes.

## Focus Group Session Feedback

VibeLab provided an optional, anonymous post-session feedback form to allow participants to add any further reflections on the content or format of the focus group sessions. 12 participants responded to this form.

71 per cent of those respondents found the session *somewhat* or *very valuable*. Some respondents found the consultations comprehensive and well-focused, and appreciated the session as a platform to voice opinions to the city, learn from peers, and find validation in shared concerns. Others wished for more context and detail from the city and more focused, to-the-point questions to foster more action- and solutions-oriented discussion. Some individuals voiced critiques of breakouts, noting perceptions of facilitators’ bias towards the industry, a perception that discussions could lean toward venting instead of solutions-oriented discussion, or a feeling of “two clear sides” of the issues limiting potential future compromise. Access-related feedback was minimal: two respondents encountered challenges with the Mural software, while respondent noted feedback that the survey should be sent by mail to all residential buildings to enable handwritten participation.

Generally, participants want these consultations and engagements from the City to continue, given these topics’ detail and complexity (“Feels like we barely scratched the surface.”). Suggestions for future sessions included involving more City divisions as well as provincial government, providing more extensive background information (such as legal frameworks and the relevant zoning and licensing bylaw texts) beforehand, and explicitly looking to citizens’ own expertise in designing new structures: “Don’t simply collect complaints. Crowd-source solutions.”

# Session #8: Public Consultation #1, Virtual

**Session Date and Time:** 2023.04.12 , 6:00–8:00 p.m. EDT

**Format:** Online via Zoom

**Facilitators:** Amy Gottung, Mirik Milan, Chris Wilson, Tennesha Joseph, Sheena Jardine-Olade

**Notetakers:** Bengi Güven, Jess Dymond Barber, Amir Salem, Lea Rose Sebastianis, Maarten van Brederode, Travis van Wyck

**City Presenters:** Mitchell Thibault, Jamie Atkinson, Mike Tanner

**Session Report Prepared by:** Maarten van Brederode, Diana Raiselis

## Session summary

This session was attended by a mix of restaurant and bar operators, arts, music and cultural initiatives, music industry professionals, DJs and event promoters, and Toronto residents. Topics covered included:

1. Where in the city entertainment, cultural and social activities are happening, and where they are lacking; whether there is desire for more alcohol-free or other alternative nighttime events;
2. Where else in the city is suitable for nightlife expansion outside of downtown, and whether current zoning regulations (such as the 6% rule) make sense for the current nightlife landscape;
3. High impact vs. low impact nightlife, and the utility of current licensing categories of restaurant, bar and nightclub;
4. What the City of Toronto can do to decrease access barriers for a more inclusive, safe and community-based nightlife;
5. What the experience of getting around at night is like;
6. What 24-hour spaces can look like.

By bringing together operators and residents at the same table, this consultation was especially fruitful for gathering differing perspectives as well as facilitating **debate, dialogue, consensus and points of disagreement**. Facilitators observed informative interactions between residents and operators. Middle ground, compromise and agreement were found on potentially contentious topics such as noise, nuisance and safety. Some participants were able to find common ground, and most engaged in productive conversations that reached across the table.

Invitations for Consultation #1 included a focus on **participants from Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke**. In addition to the City's outreach through BIAs, licenced restaurants/bars/clubs, and hospitality and resident associations, the consultation team engaged compensated "connector" organizations to conduct targeted outreach in each region. Arts Etobicoke, North York Arts, and Scarborough Arts promoted the three public sessions and survey through their newsletters, e-blasts, and boosted social media posts (as a reference, social media reach for each organization ranges between 3.1–5.4k Instagram followers and 3.3–6.2k Twitter followers). Each organization created curated lists through their community (20+ personal contacts per contact) that included local business, bars, restaurants, theatres, safety/non-violence/harm reduction contacts, residents and arts/entertainment-going members. "Connectors" were encouraged to emphasize outreach around marginalized communities: stakeholders less typically represented in consultation processes. Further, direct invites were sent to personal contacts and communities from the team's internal database (e.g. from Scarborough: RISE Edutainment, CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals, and The Group Project).

**Participants joined from Etobicoke Centre, York South-Weston, Scarborough-Agincourt, Scarborough Centre, and one further Scarborough ward, but turnout from Toronto/East York wards remained higher.**

This session made clear that operators and residents are committed to reaching a **peaceful coexistence in the city**, but that zoning and licensing regulations may be getting in the way. Mixed-use neighbourhoods are a boon rather than a burden, but noise and nuisance from both inside and outside of venues needs to be addressed. At the same time, operators and cultural workers felt that residents need to recognize when they have moved into a nightlife area and respect the existing character of a neighbourhood without trying to change it.

One pervasive topic discussed throughout breakout groups are **restaurants that also function as clubs**. Broadly, participants were frustrated with the current licensing setup. Because restaurants can be licensed close to residential areas, participants living close to these multi use establishments expressed concerns with the noise that reaches their homes. They do recognise that this is a zoning issue, however that does not stop them from making noise complaints. Operators want to continue operating this way, and are frustrated there is no licensing option that allows for the flexibility to remain profitable and respond to customer preferences.

Participants broadly shared concerns about the **“monopoly culture” of commercialized, investment-based development**. They observe that property developers do not consider the needs of businesses or residents and tend to be purely profit-driven with no consideration for the neighbourhood. Generally speaking, participants fear Toronto becoming a prohibitively unaffordable place to live and play, and want to see this kind of “runaway” development addressed by the city. Most participants see the **TTC as too expensive** and not reliable at providing access to all parts of the city for all of its residents. Participants share concerns about **affordability** - some residents about the ability to afford a night out and many operators about remaining profitable.

Participants discussed **the image of the city and the image of its nightlife**. Torontonians feel that there is a disconnect between the city claiming it is “world class” when it does not offer the same kinds and volumes of entertainment as other comparable cities. Another metric by which Torontonians believe they are behind other cities is public transit - finding that the TTC is too expensive and does not run late enough. Said one participant, “We can all agree Toronto is a world class city, but I don’t feel like our nightlife reflects that.” Another participant noted that while Toronto has many talented “world class” musicians, there is nowhere for them to play. Some participants believe it is important to counter negative perceptions of nightlife such as its associations with noise, crime, and substance use with a **city campaign for nightlife** to accompany these potential licensing and zoning reforms. This campaign could highlight and promote the **economic, cultural, social and tourism benefits of nightlife** to combat stigmas and communicate a holistic understanding of the night economy.

A number of break-out groups did not have time to discuss the topics of mobility at night and 24-hour spaces because discussions around other topics were so rich. Nevertheless, observations from groups that did discuss these topics are included here.

## Attendees: 37

Organizations Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ): <i>(some attendees reported more than one affiliation; some none at all)</i>	Wards Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Creek Arts &amp; Culture</li> <li>• Cafe on the Hill</li> <li>• Collective Concerts Inc.</li> <li>• Iconic Arts &amp; Entertainment &amp; Breaking Down Racial Barriers Initiative</li> <li>• iSLAS Filipino BBQ &amp; Bar</li> <li>• Story Arts Centre Campus at Centennial College</li> <li>• Toronto Hardcore</li> <li>• Z Bar &amp; Grille</li> <li>• <i>DJ and radio host</i></li> <li>• <i>DJ and event producer</i></li> <li>• 11 attendees opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary; 24 participants did not list an affiliation.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davenport</li> <li>• Etobicoke Centre</li> <li>• Parkdale-High Park (2)</li> <li>• Scarborough Centre (2)</li> <li>• Scarborough-Agincourt</li> <li>• Spadina-Fort York (7)</li> <li>• Toronto Centre (2)</li> <li>• Toronto Danforth</li> <li>• Toronto-St. Paul's</li> <li>• University-Rosedale (3)</li> <li>• York South-Weston (2)</li> <li>• 11 attendees opted for their wards not to be listed in this summary.*</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p>	

## Licensing categories and new applications

### *Multi-use establishments:*

- Operators attributed the prevalence of multi-use establishments (most often restaurants that are also functioning as live music/dancing spaces) in downtown and suburbs to a number of factors:
  - Establishments are responding to changing audience tastes and expectations for different types of nightlife and gastronomy in one venue: “spaces won’t stay open for long if they aren’t offering people what they want”.
  - Functioning as a multi-use space provides more financial profitability for establishments facing pressures including rising rent, operating costs and noise-related fines and continuing pandemic recovery.
- Operators want **less prescriptive licensing adaptable to venue use rather than fixed venue categories** (bar, restaurant, nightclub).
  - “A real nightlife city has venues that can provide a variety of things. The labels of club, bar, restaurant are limiting.”
- Participants highlighted a number of existing successful multi-use concepts: a small hair salon-by-day/club-by-night in a nightlife-rich neighbourhood that was seen as a creative concept; and flexible multi-floor performance/club/restaurant venues in the downtown core that were seen as important nodes of nightlife.

### *New licence applications:*

- Operators described the application process for new licences as incredibly challenging, too complex, too rigid and lacking clarity and ease. They perceive a lack of information, education and support from the city.
- As a result, many venues are being pushed into licensing “grey zones.” “The more complicated you make the rules, the easier it is for people to ignore them”. Restaurants operating as nightclubs “forces businesses to look for ‘work-arounds’, and it’s the work-arounds that cause the problem”.

- One proposal is an **impact-based approach** where operators work with the city to discuss positive and negative impacts on the surrounding area, rather than prescriptive rules (such as the 6% floor area zoning regulation) for licensing based on characteristics instead of definitions.
- Participants would like city divisions to work better and more closely together, to be more open and transparent about licensing, especially to incentivize existing businesses to update their licences.
- Adding a new 24-hour license category was discussed, however operators wonder how to remain profitable. One participant proposed 24-hour recording studios.

## Expanding nightlife beyond downtown: safe, profitable, creative and inclusive nightlife in North York, Etobicoke and Scarborough

### *Barriers to expansion beyond the downtown core:*

- Participants explained that nightlife expansion outward from downtown is not only being inhibited by zoning restrictions and other framework conditions, but also by a lack of incentives for both operators and patrons. Patrons have to want to go to these suburbs, and operators need to be confident they can sustainably run a business.
- Barriers which were repeatedly mentioned include a lack of venues and other cultural spaces (theatres, galleries, etc.), high taxes for small businesses and access (in terms of public transportation, affordability, accessibility standards, etc.).
  - A lack of access to safe and legal venues is a particular barrier for the DIY scene, who are forced further into the outer limits as the City develops.
- Participants recognize that bylaws must be standardized across downtown and the suburbs.

### *Public transportation:*

- Participants communicated that the relationship between public transportation and nightlife expansion is a high priority. They believe that new nightlife districts need to be appropriately served by safe, all night or late night public transportation options. Participants believe public transportation is too expensive everywhere in the city, and that there are few to no public transportation options to get residents from the suburbs to downtown to enjoy nightlife. Diverse transportation options, besides driving, would make reaching new nightlife districts safer and more accessible.
- For example, one participant from Oakwood Village highlighted that limitations of transport affordability and hours perpetuate access barriers and make it harder for patrons and nighttime economy workers to get home.
- However, if new businesses are too concentrated around transit stations, this may lead to unwelcome competition. Additionally, participants do not want to wait for fixed-rail public transportation to be extended, as this construction will take a long time.

### *Potential for nightlife expansion:*

- Participants from a number of neighbourhoods, including Oakwood Village, Avenue & St. Claire, King-Bathurst, Bloor-Sherbourne would like to see walkable nightlife options to complement the diverse existing mix of cultural, entertainment and gastronomy options in these areas of the city.
- One participant described the goal as nightlife “sprawl,” to provide people more places for art, dancing, and dining that aren’t restricted to one particular neighbourhood or area of the city.
- Participants observed that expansion beyond downtown has the potential to provide benefits for a new nightlife demographic looking for spaces: youth.



## Inclusivity, diversity and equity in nightlife

- Marginalized participants highlighted the racialized and classed geographies of nightlife. When concentrated downtown, nightlife access may not feel safe or reachable for marginalized people, due to issues that include public transportation.
- Participants stated that zoning bylaws have a material impact on inclusivity, and a direct impact on how nightlife operates and who is able to take part in it. A “lack of inclusivity is engraved in the application process” for licences. Participants feel that the current system is unsustainable and prohibitive of marginalized groups being able to run nightlife businesses.
- Participants expressed concern about financial barriers preventing low-income Torontonians from accessing nightlife, such as increasingly expensive and unaffordable cover charges, drinks and meals. Participants want to see more initiatives to preserve access to nightlife regardless of financial situation.
  - One participant gave an example that can be replicated in other neighbourhoods of Toronto - The Friends of Kensington Market **My Friends’ Tab** community resource bank. Patrons donate money to the fund, and participating businesses allow customers who may not be able to pay themselves to use this service to pay.
- The following steps can be made by the city to create more inclusivity, diversity and equity:
  - Access to affordable spaces and specialized grants and funding. “There’s a disconnect between grants and public funding, and getting it to the people who need it.”
  - ‘Eyes on the street’: more public art and better street lighting leading to feelings of safety in numbers.
  - More resources for drug users: testing locations, support and resource centres, overlap with existing support for unhoused communities.
  - Racial justice and cultural competency in planning: race-based data and community consultations, training for city staff, public space activations.

## Hands-on neighbourhood relations

### *On-the-ground mediation, security and safety control:*

- Operators observe policing they see as excessive, and are concerned about the links some make between nightlife and crime (including media), while at the same time recognizing the issue of patrons creating noise and nuisance in areas concentrated with nightlife.
  - As a solution, participants proposed the use of mobile units, community development and harm reduction teams to “keep the peace” in nightlife areas rather than police.
  - Multiple break out groups mentioned **Good Night Out Vancouver** as a good example of community volunteers addressing conflicts between venues and residents, and providing harm reduction training to nightlife employees.

### *Mutual support and self governance:*

- Operators want to see each other succeed and are willing to work together to strengthen night life, for example by forming local business coalitions. Participants in one group proposed the creation of a nightlife self-governance structure, such as Berlin’s Clubcommission, to represent the interests of nightlife operators (and suggested that operators’ participation be required, though this differs from Clubcommission’s voluntary model).

## **Alcohol-reliance: problems and alternatives**

- Many participants (both citizens and operators) want more types of community-based nightlife not focused on nor financially reliant on alcohol sales - theatre, art spaces, daytime festivals, family-friendly options, etc. Participants also highlighted a lack of spaces for cannabis consumption.
- Participants wondered whether 24 hour-licences that allow the serving of alcohol at all times would create spaces less reliant on alcohol sales by spreading alcohol purchasing over more hours, thus creating a less alcohol-heavy environment.
- The city can support emerging promoters who have ideas of alcohol-free events ('entrepreneur grants').

## **“Bike Parking” - what needs to be further explored in other conversations?**

- One participant would like to see EDC explore in more detail why it is that many small businesses like cafes and restaurants are closing early (before legally mandated closing time) - particularly how evening/nighttime operation intersects with operating costs.

# Session #9: Public Consultation #2, Virtual

**Session Date and Time:** 2023.04.13 , 6:00–8:00 p.m. EDT

**Format:** Online via Zoom

**Facilitators:** Amy Gottung, Mirik Milan, Chris Wilson, Tennesha Joseph, Sheena Jardine-Olade

**Notetakers:** Bengi Güven, Lea Rose Sebastianis, Travis Van Wyck, Jess Dymond Barber, Amir Salem, Maarten van Brederode

**City Presenters:** Mitchell Thibault, Mike Tanner, Jamie Atkinson

**Session Report Prepared by:** Maarten van Brederode, Diana Raiselis

## Session summary

This session was attended by a mix of Toronto residents, bar operators, event producers and promoters, DJs and musicians, and representatives of hotels, arts and music spaces, and music conferences. Topics covered included:

1. Where in the city entertainment, cultural and social activities are happening, and where they are lacking; whether there is desire for more alcohol-free or other alternative nighttime events;
2. Where else in the city is suitable for nightlife expansion outside of downtown, and whether current zoning regulations (such as the 6% rule) make sense for the current nightlife landscape;
3. High impact vs. low impact nightlife, and the utility of current licensing categories of restaurant, bar and nightclub;
4. What the city of Toronto can do to decrease access barriers for a more inclusive, safe and community-based nightlife;
5. What the experience of getting around at night is like;
6. What 24 hour spaces can look like.

As with the first public consultation, this second virtual consultation brought together a **diverse group of participants from different target groups** including operators, promoters, artists and residents. Participants were inspired to discuss and debate the topics presented to them, and once again points of consensus and disagreement emerged. Some **innovative zoning and licensing proposals** were presented to facilitators. Participants were able to **educate each other** and facilitators on the pressing issues facing nightlife, urban development and residential peace in the city.

Invites to this series of consultations focused on **participants from Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke**. Please see the session summary #8 for further details on geographically-specific outreach. Participants joined from **Etobicoke Centre, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Scarborough Southwest, and Scarborough-Guildwood, but turnout from Toronto/East York wards remained higher**.

As was the case in previous consultations, Torontonians observe a **disconnect between the city claiming to be “world class” while not offering the services and amenities of a global city**. Repeated observations included a lack of adequate and accessible public transportation and lack of support for small businesses: “being a world class city means supporting all operators, small to large.” However, participants highlighted Toronto’s **cultural diversity** as one of its “world class” qualities. The city is home to many ethnic communities, cultures, and subcultures with unique habits and activities. The availability of more culturally-appropriate venues and frameworks (such as supportive policies and regulations) serve and protect these

cultural assets. Without a diversity of businesses, as one participant put it, **Toronto is at risk of becoming a “bedtime city”** rather than a vibrant, thriving 24-hour city.

Participants believe that **the onus is on the City to be present and involved in the nighttime industry**, and that the interests of residents and operators must inform policy decisions. Participants identified a number of needs from the city, including better **enforcement (“more teeth”) for Agent of Change violations** (more resources towards investigating, fines, and adequately measuring sound), **financial support programs to small businesses (in particular for, but not limited to, sound insulation)**, **ease of public access to information and reducing the administrative and financial burden of licensing**.

Participants identified a number of shared top concerns for the City. They urge the City to do something about **commercial and residential real estate speculation**, especially in downtown. Discussions occurred around the issues of maintaining **profitability and affordability** at the same time. How can the City best support nightlife as a sustainable industry and keep it accessible to all? Operators are concerned about the ways public transportation expansion and construction may negatively impact business. For example, if parts of public transportation are shut down for repair or construction, people are less able to reach venues. Additionally, if construction is happening directly in front of a business, people may be less likely to visit it. Participants observe issues with night buses such as overcrowding and **overall frustration with public transportation**: “It’s not fair that we have a vibrant city and no access for people to get home”. One participant proposed the idea of a 24-hour east-west streetcar to allow people to move better around the city at night.

Facilitators observed a number of topics that were discussed in both virtual public consultations. Participants in both virtual consultations pointed out to facilitators that the area where nightclubs are allowed is actually much smaller than the map provided to them on Mural, citing **additional licensing requirements that prohibit nightclubs** from full use of space within the current zone. Operators in both consultations communicated the **value of multi-use spaces**, both in terms of business and customer satisfaction. Many participants are interested in **alcohol-free nightlife and other cultural events**, however they expressed concerns about economic feasibility, and stressed the importance of public intervention or innovation to subsidize, incentivize, or otherwise support viable alcohol-free nighttime business models. A **walkable city** is an attractive city and this also leads to increased feelings of safety and community. Gastronomy, nightlife and entertainment should be within walking distance for Torontonians. There is a desire from participants for the **city and tourism industry to do more to promote restaurants and nightlife**—for example, supporting outdoor and waterfront dining were topics commonly raised in this consultation.

A number of break-out groups did not have time to discuss the topics of mobility at night and 24-hour spaces because discussions around other topics were so rich. Nevertheless, the learnings from groups that did discuss these topics are included here.

# Attendees: 39

Organizations Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ): <i>(some attendees reported more than one affiliation; some none at all)</i>	Wards Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bar'kada</li> <li>• Box of Kittens</li> <li>• The Drake Hotel</li> <li>• Indie Week</li> <li>• Music Gallery</li> <li>• Scarborough Arts</li> <li>• Tranzac</li> <li>• DJ and promoter</li> <li>• Promoter and musician</li> <li>• Multidisciplinary arts and music event production company</li> <li>• 1 attendee opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary; 29 participants did not list an affiliation.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beaches-East York</li> <li>• Davenport</li> <li>• Etobicoke Centre</li> <li>• Etobicoke-Lakeshore</li> <li>• Parkdale-High Park (2)</li> <li>• Scarborough Southwest</li> <li>• Scarborough-Guildwood</li> <li>• Spadina-Fort York (10)</li> <li>• Toronto Centre (3)</li> <li>• Toronto Danforth (2)</li> <li>• University-Rosedale (2)</li> <li>• 14 attendees opted for their wards not to be listed in this summary.*</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p>	

## Geographically-specific nightlife insights

- **Etobicoke:** One Etobicoke participant identified that there are very few late-night options for nightlife and entertainment open past 10 PM. This participant needs to travel 15 minutes by car to reach nightlife options. **Etobicoke is missing walkable access to lounges, cafés, cultural spaces and other establishments:** “You have to either drive or take the train somewhere to access nightlife or diverse music options. There are no options for dancing nearby”.
- **Scarborough:** Barriers to nightlife expansion into Scarborough include the difficulty of coaxing people to come from downtown to Scarborough (due to a lack of easy public transportation options connecting the two). **More funding and investment** will be needed to incentivize and expand nightlife to these new areas of the city.
- **East York-Beaches:** According to another participant, although there is good access to nightlife in East York, these options could be increased and diversified (potentially including nightclubs), in conjunction with **balanced input from all stakeholders**.

## Approaches to licensing and zoning for nightlife

*Balance:*

- Participants repeatedly urged the City to pursue a more balanced approach to licensing and zoning. In the end, most participants believe the city can have a healthy night economy while also preserving peace for residents.
- Part of a balanced approach is ensuring **balanced input from all stakeholders** when it comes to city decision-making at all levels.
- The City should **balance the needs and interests of both operators and residents equally**, so that neither feels underrepresented.
- Balance can lead to peaceful coexistence and respect between operators and residents. One participant mentioned the Horseshoe Tavern as a venue that operates “**as a community member**” by being mindful of sound and communicative to surrounding residents.

#### *Common sense:*

- Participants **do not believe that the current licensing and zoning bylaws operate from a “common sense” perspective** and that this approach needs to change.
  - Operators again stressed the importance of **protecting multi-use venues** during these reforms processes. These popular spaces, which are currently forced to operate between uses illegally, provide diverse programming and an easy **nightlife flow from dining to entertainment** that patrons enjoy. Participants cited the positive example of a highly active, community-connected live music/dance/restaurant venue in Toronto’s west end.
- One resident questioned the sense of the risk-based and economy-first approach they perceive the City is taking towards licensing and enforcement. This approach leaves responsibility to venues and does not account for residents’ needs and concerns.
- **Common sense argument for expanding nightlife beyond downtown:** concentrating clubs and nightlife in one area homogenizes the cultural character of these spaces; expanding access beyond the downtown core would allow for better cultural representation.

## Location challenges for small businesses

- Small venue and business operators feel they are being squeezed out of both downtown and other areas, and have no viable options in which to locate and run a nightlife business.
- The first layer of difficulty in the downtown is a **lack of affordable and small spaces**. The majority of venue spaces in the downtown area are too large and too expensive for small businesses to operate.
- On top of that, zoning restrictions and other framework conditions prevent small businesses from operating legally outside of downtown.
- At the same time, the **current zoning bylaws feel prohibitive for the needs of small businesses to creatively and flexibly operate**. This leads venues to operate illegally with restaurant licences, which is the source of many conflicts with surrounding residents.

## Licensing revision proposals (to replace the 6% rule)

- Participants proposed a number of innovative ideas for how the city can create better, more sensible and applicable licensing bylaws and procedures.
  - **Industry mentors** to help support new and small businesses with the licensing process.
  - **Separation of live music and concert venues from club category** since they operate differently (in terms of sound insulation, opening hours, etc.)
  - Consider **increasing the floor space allowance to at least 10-20%** to respond to evolving tech requirements taking up more space in restaurants.
- Multiple participants raised sound insulation as a high-priority factor for business viability and good neighbour relations of any venue offering entertainment, suggesting that standards be set, and this condition factor into licensing requirements.

#### *Tiered licensing system for closing hours:*

- **Based on capacity:** one participant offered an example from Manchester, UK. There, closing hours are determined by venue size. Bigger venues can stay open later than smaller venues, motivating patrons to migrate to places that are still open and stay off streets.
- **Based on location:** one participant proposed a tiered system where opening hours are categorized based on designated zones for nightlife. Venues in zones with less or no residential land use can

stay open later, and venues in more residential and mixed use zones close earlier. This approach considers proximity, for the city to ask: what is happening around establishments, are they directly next to residences, are they in areas more conducive to nightlife, what does such an area look like?

#### *Needs-based licensing:*

- Rather than a percentage of floor space, one operator proposed a system for **allowances of music and other entertainment based on each licensing category's distinct needs** (restaurant, bar, nightclub).
  - The participant did not propose methods of implementation, which could potentially include updates based on sector needs assessments, or the flexibility for individual establishments to set their own entertainment areas, following existing precedent.

#### *General purpose nighttime event licence:*

- This would be separate from existing daytime event licences, and could include **subsections with specific conditions** (e.g. playing music would require an agreement to meet certain conditions around soundproofing and noise mitigation).

## **Zoning revision considerations for expansion beyond downtown**

- Participants alerted facilitators to a number of concerns and opportunities that the city should take into account in its decision to potentially rezone nightclubs outside of the downtown area.
- When considering nightclub operation in industrial areas ('employment zones'), particular attention needs to be paid to safety. Participants mentioned **fire safety and physical access safety** as especially important if nightclubs are to operate out of industrial facilities.
  - Participants generally support allowing nightclubs in industrial areas: "If these areas are already loud, why aren't nightclubs permitted?"
- Participants urge an **equitable and pluralistic approach** to designating new nightlife areas.
  - For example, expanding nightlife to other areas of the city presents an opportunity to showcase Toronto's cultural and musical diversity.
  - Additionally, investing in areas outside of downtown has the potential to increase opportunities to diversify venue types and programming.
- This potential expansion presents opportunities to examine regions outside of downtown where **access to nightlife is linked to increased tourism and investment**. If nightclubs are allowed in new areas of the city, participants believe that money and interest will follow.

## **Noise and nuisance as a City-level planning issue**

- Participants feel there is more the City can do to **address noise and nuisance issues from the top down**, as some feel that mediation and other strategization is unfairly left to operators and residents themselves: "Noise is a planning issue; the City needs to plan for entertainment".
  - The City needs to consider not only music and other sound emanating from establishments, but also noise made by patrons outside of and nearby venues.
- Participants would like to see the City **revise building codes**, in addition to licensing and venues. Current building codes do not require noise mitigation measures, and as a result developers are not building for future neighbourhood coexistence but rather to maximize profit, which has negative consequences for both residents and operators. Revising building codes to require sound mitigation is an example of the Agent of Change principle being put into action.

- Operators are fed up with so-called “**bad actors**” **giving the industry a bad name** and worsening neighbourhood relations. In their eyes, “bad actors” are those establishments clearly violating licensing rules and making little effort to engage and work with surrounding residents. These select few make it difficult for the majority to operate without incident: “Those who play by the rules are the ones that are going to be overshadowed by those who don’t.”
- Participants agree that more soundproofing of venues is needed in order to more easily coexist. To decrease financial barriers for small businesses, a number of them asked for a City **grant system** specifically for soundproofing.
- At least one participant found issue with the current noise bylaw, specifically its stress on **point of reception over point of emission**. This operator requested that decibel measurements be taken from the origin (venues) and not the reception (residences). They believe this would be a fairer and more effective framework.
- Residents repeatedly told facilitators that there is a **lack of enforcement** of noise bylaws. However, they observe that police are stretched too thin and their increased presence is not the right solution. Instead, they propose **bylaw officers and higher fines**. (In other sessions, equity concerns around fines were raised – a set-rate fine not representing the same “cost” to all businesses. E.g. participants referenced existing larger/chain establishments willing to pay repeated fines to continue operating, while such options are not available to smaller or newer establishments.)

## Towards a new nightlife culture of alcohol-free/less alcohol-reliant entertainment

- As was the case in other closed and public consultations, participants would be happy to see more alcohol-free nightlife and cultural events in the city. Operators are noticing a **shift to a “new nightlife culture” less reliant on alcohol** and want to offer these options.
- The biggest barrier is that dry events face significant challenges generating revenue. Operators are concerned about how to revise their **business models to be less reliant on alcohol** while remaining profitable.
- One solution that was proposed is **funding to lower cost barriers or other financial incentives**.
- One Scarborough participant gave the example of **culinary tours** in their ward. These are not focused on alcohol, but are good for business as attendees will return to the area. Additionally, these tours highlight the cultural make-up of a region.

### *Cultural activities in outdoor and public spaces:*

- Participants feel that there is **untapped potential for public and outdoor spaces in Toronto** to host more nighttime events not focused on alcohol consumption.
- Barriers include a current general **lack of infrastructure**. Participants note that more public stages, lighting and more space in general would allow for more such events.
- Participants want music and entertainment, block parties, film screenings, etc. and view these outdoor events as a way to also highlight **Toronto’s green space**.
- Here and in other consultations, participants have mentioned that these types of events are a great way for families to participate in nightlife. **Inclusivity involves intergenerationality** and inclusion of children as well.
- Two examples of successful initiatives:
  - PlazaPOPs: funding by the provincial and city governments, this project activated **parking lots as entertainment spaces** in the Albion-Islington area of Etobicoke.



- Outdoor ice skating rinks in the nearby city of Sault Saint Marie. Residents would like to see **more outdoor cultural programming in the winter** besides Nuit Blanche.

*Walkable and public cities:*

- Many participants would like for Toronto to become a more walkable city, not only in the context of nightlife. This could also legitimize Toronto as a “world class” city.
- Participants view **European cities as the model**: Paris outdoor music festivals and the Spanish steps in Rome were provided as examples.
- The **interplay between drinking and eating in public spaces** creates a special nightlife atmosphere that participants feel the city is lacking.
- This kind of nightlife increases foot traffic at night, but residents are also concerned about this model causing noise nuisances and feeling unsafe.
- Operators see **King Street West** as an area where this model could be implemented.

## Opportunities and barriers to inclusive nightlife

- Participants feel that expanding nightlife beyond downtown, especially when nearer to **equity-deserving communities**, will diversify nightlife and presents an opportunity for the city to invest directly in culture.
- Participants believe that safeguarding affordable spaces for nightlife and cultural gatherings outside of downtown is a priority for protecting marginalized communities. This is especially important for **2SLGBTQ+ and youth spaces**.
  - One participant provided a cautionary tale from a suburb-based space for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, which they believe lost access to its home within a church due to homophobia and transphobia.<sup>22</sup> This protection of inclusivity goes beyond zoning reforms.
- Participants mentioned the need for more support and incentivization from the city for equity, anti-violence, and harm reduction training, as “essential” conditions for nighttime businesses that require substantial, ongoing costs. (This notion was raised by multiple participants across sessions.) Ideas included grants and tax breaks for venues hosting training events, funding or support for professionals or peer-led groups who specialize in this work, as well as the city offering free trainings.
  - **DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion)** training: increases access and safety of marginalized groups, and can be undertaken by staff, security and management of venues.
  - **Harm reduction** training: addressing not only substance use issues, but also safety and concerns about violence. Onsite trained staff can serve as an alternative to policing.

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<sup>22</sup> In fact-checking this reference, we could not find definitive confirmation of the event described, but are including with appreciation for the reality and prevalence of targeted threats to queer spaces, in Toronto and elsewhere.

# Session #10: Public Consultation #3, In-Person

**Session Date and Time:** 17.04.2023 , 6:00–8:00 p.m. EDT

**Format:** In-Person at City Hall, Committee Room 2

**Facilitators:** Amy Gottung, Chris Wilson, Macy Siu, Tennesha Joseph, Sheena Jardine-Olade

**Notetakers:** Lea Rose Sebastianis, Travis Van Wyck, Anna Kanduth, Tatiana Velickovic, Dusty Lee Norsworthy, Paul Simoneau

**City Presenters:** Mitchell Thibault, Mike Tanner, Jamie Atkinson, Night Economy Champion Councillor Paul Ainslie

**Session Report Prepared by:** Maarten van Brederode, Diana Raiselis

## Session summary

This session was attended by a mix of Toronto residents, musicians and DJs, event promoters and organizers, music industry professionals, business owners, and union representatives. Topics covered included:

1. Where in the city entertainment, cultural and social activities are happening, and where they are lacking; whether there is desire for more alcohol-free or other alternative nighttime events;
2. Where else in the city is suitable for nightlife expansion outside of downtown, and whether current zoning regulations (such as the 6% rule) make sense for the current nightlife landscape;
3. High impact vs. low impact nightlife, and the utility of current licensing categories of restaurant, bar and nightclub;
4. What the City of Toronto can do to decrease access barriers for a more inclusive, safe and community-based nightlife;
5. What the experience of getting around at night is like;
6. What 24 hour spaces can look like.

This session was the sole in-person event following the seven closed consultations and two public consultations conducted via WebEx/Zoom. Topics and questions remained the same, though facilitation was adapted as needed to support the live structure. In general, facilitators found the in-person format to be a more effective context for rich and efficient data generation, conversation “flow” (allowing participants to further develop, or challenge, individual perspectives), and morale/collaboration-building. Many participants lingered post-session in lively, ongoing discussion around ideas. The opportunity for stakeholders to informally interact with city officials before and after the official consultation process was also seen as a benefit.

Invites to this series of consultations included a focus on **participants from Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke**. Please see the session summary #8 for further details on geographically-specific outreach. Attendees included residents from **Etobicoke Centre, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Scarborough-Guildwood, York South-Weston, one further Scarborough ward, two further Etobicoke wards, and one further North York ward, but turnout from Toronto/East York wards remained higher**.

Session notes for Consultation #3 cover the most varied set of topics of the three public sessions (reflected in the approximately 15 topic headers in the detailed notes below). As in other sessions, flexibility and adaptability were key concepts for new approaches to licensing, with participants in this session voicing proposals for licensing conditions more focused on types of events offered. Participants wondered how to

better integrate nightlife throughout the city in the spirit of “15-minute city” planning, with better access to cultural and social events particularly in the suburbs; alcohol-free events are also seen as essential for inclusive city planning, but can pose challenges in terms of generating revenue. A perception was voiced that the City’s resident engagement can be improved, with attention to the many different communities and groups that intersect with Toronto’s nightlife. Specific suggestions were offered to improve communication between the City and cultural actors, to activate new spaces for culture, to support more inclusive night culture, and to plan for better coexistence between residential use and nighttime sound-producing uses.

Facilitation and support staff observed the interdependence of individual consultation topics. Participants noted the importance of considering “domino effects” of solutions: addressing any one problem impacts conditions for another; nothing can be considered in isolation. General endorsement for a holistic, integrated approach to nightlife topics emerged throughout.

A number of break-out groups did not have time to discuss the topics of mobility at night and 24-hour spaces because discussions around other topics were so rich. Nevertheless, the learnings from groups that did discuss these topics are included here.

**Attendees: 48**

Organizations Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ): <i>(some attendees reported more than one affiliation; some none at all)</i>	Wards Represented ( <i>alphabetically</i> ):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bodyshopstudios</li> <li>• CCS Rights Management</li> <li>• Carpenters Regional Council Local 27</li> <li>• Combo Breaker</li> <li>• Daytripper Songs</li> <li>• International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 58</li> <li>• K-tel Records</li> <li>• New Ho Queen</li> <li>• New Nails</li> <li>• PM Strategies Inc.</li> <li>• TRIP! Project</li> <li>• <i>DJ/producer and event promoter</i></li> <li>• <i>Music advocacy organization</i></li> <li>• <i>QTBIPOC-focused music event collective</i></li> <li>• <i>Queen West restaurant and cocktail bar</i></li> <li>• 5 attendees opted for their affiliation not to appear in this summary; 31 participants did not list an affiliation.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beaches-East York (2)</li> <li>• Davenport (6)</li> <li>• Etobicoke Centre</li> <li>• Etobicoke-Lakeshore</li> <li>• Parkdale-High Park (8)</li> <li>• Scarborough-Guildwood</li> <li>• Spadina-Fort York (3)</li> <li>• Toronto Centre (5)</li> <li>• Toronto Danforth (2)</li> <li>• University-Rosedale</li> <li>• York South-Weston</li> <li>• 17 attendees opted for their wards not to be listed in this summary.*</li> </ul>
<p><i>*Attendees were offered the option to have their affiliation and ward noted in session summaries, to have their affiliation anonymized, or not to have their affiliation/ward appear in the summary at all.</i></p>	

## From “out of touch” and “archaic” zoning and licensing, to promoting flexibility

- “This one-size-fits-all system creates no room for culture”: there’s a feeling that zoning and licensing are out of touch with the industry and what is happening on the ground.
  - Participants broadly felt that the 6% floor area regulation is outdated, some noting that it hurts live performance. When restaurants host live music, they do not always charge a cover. Artists earn money from cover charges, so this condition creates an additional barrier to performing in such spaces. Many negative opinions were expressed in response to the 6% limit - being perceived as the city telling operators how to run their business; making patrons feel uncomfortable. Getting rid of this limit would better support spaces outside the downtown core. At least two facilitators found their groups were “near consensus” on endorsing maximum flexibility around percentage for entertainment in restaurants.
  - The music industry has changed over the last 30-40 years, particularly with regard to how music is made, performed, and consumed - many participants felt that space needs to adapt. The 6% regulation stifles that possibility.
  - Many expressed the need for business owners to be given maximal options for their space and to be able to determine their own goals (responding to demographics). Some stressed that it is no longer possible for businesses to survive in the long term, if they can’t be multi-use.
- Participants felt that the City needs to make itself aware of where vibrant nightclub/entertainment areas are realistically and organically present, not just by looking on a map.
- A majority of participants from one breakout saw the three licence types (restaurant, club, bar) as very blended, and felt they shouldn’t have separate designations, especially when it comes to adding entertainment.
  - In recognition of the increased need for flexibility and adaptation of all business types, one multi-venue downtown business owner endorsed bypassing hard and fast distinctions between “restaurant” “bar” and “venue”, in pursuit of a broadly applicable tiered/condition-based licensing process with individual, à la carte conditions tied to respective requirements.
  - Participants recognized the rising popularity of supper clubs - and the need for flexibility of this licence type.
  - To one event organizer, restaurants, nightclubs, and bars could be roughly understood by the presence of food, live music, and a dance floor. Food + live music = Restaurant. Live music + dance floor = nightclub. Food + live music + dance floor = Bar.
  - Some observed that entertainment in Toronto is already moving north and west from downtown (towards North York and Etobicoke) - noting that restaurants featuring live music and entertainment are *already* bringing nightlife to these areas. Supporting these possibilities would have a positive impact on nightlife development across the city.
  - Lack of clarity: Participants in one breakout group were unclear on how Toronto’s licensing process allows for various uses (one participant questioned if “middle ground” licences between restaurant and club were available, while another brought up an example of a multi-use commercial kitchen, restaurant, and nightclub).
- Restrictive downtown zoning prevents the development of other regions where nightlife already exists and could be enriched and diversified with the addition of nightclubs. One participant gave an example of Dundas West, an already busy area where nightclubs are not currently zoned.

## Flexible proposals for licensing and zoning

- One breakout group inquired about the difference between a “music venue” and “nightclub”.
- One participant drew a distinction between “nightclubs” and the more general “night economy,” (the latter inclusive of DIY and community spaces), while another saw nightclubs more broadly, as potentially hosting anything people can do at night. The first opinion may speak to the “nightclub” stigma identified in prior sessions.
- Participants raised various possibilities for more flexible licensing and zoning for hospitality and nightlife businesses. These included:
  - A “restaurant by day, club by night” (as raised in the example of Miami, FL). In this case, a single “restaurant” licence could be modified or scaled based on desired use, with various conditions or provisions tied to “add on” activities or options such as club nights (e.g. a safety and security plan and/or security staff for a restaurant that also offers club events).
  - A “hospitality licence” (one type for all entertainment spaces). One participant hoped to see venues have more power to define the conditions attached to operating past a certain time (e.g. a security plan, liquor licence, particular capacity thresholds), based on their concept and events.
  - Supporting tiered licensing based on the use of the space, with regulations attached to each tier (discussed in two breakout groups).
    - This model could allow more leeway for operators to determine what kind of business they’d like to run, what kind of patrons they expect, and how patrons could use the space.
    - Ideally, this licence is *flexible*, allowing a venue to move through and between uses, with access to all tiers. This suggestion echoed other comments made throughout many sessions and is an important takeaway of these sessions.
    - A similar tiered licensing system was proposed in the first public session, in which capacity and location of venues would determine relative limits on closing hours (more detail in the report for Public Consultation #1).
- Participants emphasized that licensing and zoning needs to be responsive to industry: the city needs to adapt to venues and operators rather than the other way around. Ideally, regulations are tailored to what a venue is interested in offering, and not mandated by venue type. Participants often returned to the concept of zoning/licensing based on, and adaptable to, individual events, rather than type of space.
- Licensing must be simplified for outdoor events and special events - participants saw this as a missed opportunity.
- Neighbourhood businesses have the capacity to support one another, driving the surrounding economy by bringing people to the area. This happens across an entire evening: night events draw people to restaurants in the area pre-event, and then to bars post-event. Participants felt licensing and zoning should support this type of scenario.
- Participants would like to see more possibility for 24-hour licences, and raised Miami and NYC as examples.

## “15-minute cities” and new locations for nightlife

- Two breakout groups raised the concept of “15-minute cities” where everything needed to live, work, and entertainment is within a 15-minute walk. This can happen if nightlife is enabled city wide (particularly in Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke).
  - This is especially important as many Torontonians cannot drive or afford a car (esp. elders, youth).

- Reduces risks for drunk driving.
- Spreading nightlife is seen to reduce chaos and the favouring of certain areas.
- One urban researcher pointed out that despite Toronto's large size, there is only one "downtown"; facilitating multiple urban cores (around transit) can allow better access to nightlife and other urban amenities.
- One participant noted that industrial, warehouse, and other abandoned spaces offer relative stability in one sense (events in industrial areas are less likely to be displaced due to residential growth, than those in mixed-use areas), but noted that safety, accessibility, lighting, and public washrooms do pose issues in industrial zones.
- Opposing a "designated" nightlife area, this group praised the examples of New York City and Berlin, where clubs are well-integrated throughout various areas of the city.
- Participants highlighted that Covid-19 temporarily paused growth/development of nightlife, and they would like to see this begin again (partly involving expansion into suburbs).

## **Threat of homogenized nightlife mono-culture**

- Participants expressed concern about the homogenization of Toronto's nightlife and culture, especially in terms of development in the downtown and its concentration of nightclubs.
- Participants observe condo construction and the loss of small businesses to larger chains as detracting from regional/neighbourhood character. One downtown resident described the disappearance of "mom and pop" businesses in their neighbourhood.
- Participants believe that the downtown entertainment district does not adequately represent the diversity of Torontonians and full potential for nightlife in the city. One participant felt that downtown can no longer be considered an entertainment district: although there is a lot of nightlife available, it is all the same.
- One participant identified the negative consequences of a concentration of power within the Toronto nightclub scene among a limited number of venue owners: when such a small group defines what clubs are and what kinds of programming they have, diversity is stifled.
- Participants observe a geographic split between what is happening downtown and elsewhere in the city: mainstream events and large venues downtown, and smaller and more varied nightclubs in other areas.
- A number of strategies were suggested to combat this move towards mono-culture:
  - Support for lesser-known talent and smaller venues, to preserve a range of venues in the city.
  - Disperse nightlife throughout the city, moving away from a downtown-only focus.
  - Increase variety of social and cultural activities, and increase number of small venues, as opposed to just a few large venues.

## **Geographically-specific nightlife concerns**

- Participants noted that Davenport is newly under pressure as the "condo crawl" moves outward from downtown, which puts additional pressure on nightlife spaces: West End gay bars, DIY spaces, and record shops have closed.
- One participant noted that Beaches' nightlife feels lacking, with streets feeling empty when "everything" closes early.
- Participants praised Parkdale's variety of spaces (i.e. restaurants, an after-hours, pop-ups and street festivals) but wished for more DIY spaces, art opportunities, and variety of late-night events.

## Scarborough

- “Scarborough has a lot of artistic talent but little event space”: Participants voiced the lack of spaces for artists (rehearsal, performance, and event space), identifying the lack of physical space as a key barrier to artistic production and expression. In some cases, this is only available at specific times of day.
  - Participants raised examples of events they’d like to bring to life: one example was performance nights with singing, karaoke, and poetry. Rather than just be limited to a karaoke bar (raising safety issues of overconsumption and driving under the influence), they’d like to see other possibilities for showcasing local talent.
- One participant noted that much of Scarborough (especially North/East) is residentially zoned, making it difficult to find suitable spaces for events or businesses where people gather.
- Some participants wanted to see nightclubs, food, and dancing comparable to downtown; one raised Woodbine Racetrack as a potentially suitable site. Others wanted to see a wider variety of drink and food options (not just bars), as well as entertainment at earlier hours of the night, to support what they saw as healthier lifestyles.
- Participants in this and other sessions asserted that food-centred events are already taking place. Allowing those events to flourish, and allowing restaurants more space for live music and entertainment brings more vibrancy to Scarborough, even beyond the nightclub conversation - this is seen as a good step.

## North York

- One participant described not being “proud” of Toronto right now, and that North York “feels depressing” with “nothing to do”; they see Don Mills (“downtown north”) as the only available option in North York.
- The Hangar sports complex was raised as a potentially suitable nightlife space.
- In particular, one participant brought up the lack of queer spaces in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood next to York University.

## Low/no-alcohol events

- Alcohol-free events can centre around education and non-commercial activities: opportunities for attendees to share ideas, learn new things, focus less on buying things, and showcase talents (performance, crafting).
  - Examples: teen discos, bingo halls, 24-hr diners, 24-hr movie theatres or film screenings, cafes, libraries, art galleries, science centres...
  - “Where are these spaces for teenagers to be entertained? They’re part of our culture too.”
  - This is also an equity issue to provide options for communities who do not drink, or who want to gather in ways not focused on consumption (one group raised the example of spaces for Muslims fasting during Ramadan).
- Even if an event doesn’t have alcohol (theatre, etc.), it can still drive the surrounding economy by bringing people to the area and nearby businesses. Food can also be decoupled from alcohol (e.g. one participant mentioned that a number of Scarborough food establishments don’t serve alcohol).
- Multiple breakout groups noted that Toronto is not utilizing its park and outdoor spaces (in comparison to Montreal for example).

- However, alcohol is a major source of revenue. Financial barriers and pressure lead to monotony in spaces centred exclusively around alcohol - venues might be open to the idea but won't or can't take the financial risk. One participant wondered how to relieve the financial pressure on businesses to sell alcohol, as this would allow more freedom.

## Relationships between the city, industry actors and artists

- City licensing and zoning departments, industry actors (labels, operators, etc.) and artists all have a stake in the same city and scene. They can work together to make policies beneficial for all.
- Participants believe that the engagement of residents by the City needs to be improved. One participant in particular, from North York, told facilitators that they have felt excluded and ignored in previous community consultations in their neighbourhood. They also pointed to a lack of representation/ diversity among the participants in this consultation. Describing the disconnect between the city and some marginalized communities in Toronto, they said "there is a gap between communities that are forgotten and the city".
- A number of participants do not believe that the city represents their communities, and would like to see the city create new spaces for different groups. Marginalization and systematic racism make it harder for people to come together, socialize and create an inclusive culture.
- Participants want the city to recognize that there are different cultural communities in nightlife and that they overlap. Even so, helping one does not necessarily mean helping all, so particular attention needs to be given to every community.

### *Proposals for better and standardized communication between the city and cultural actors:*

- More comprehensive and inclusive City database of musicians, so the City can more easily and directly inform artists about funding and grant opportunities (one participant mentioned that the City already has one of public mural artists).
- Cultural officers appointed for each City ward to work with City councillors to ensure the protection and development of regionally-specific culture throughout the city.
- Networking events to bring together musicians, artists and other cultural sector actors and foster entrepreneurial ideas.
- A nightlife advocate who knows the nightlife community in the city and can act as a bridge to the City administration.

### *Proposals to improve government support of artist:*

- Venue trust to support artist associations that can put money towards opportunities to become developers of event venues.
- Land trusts that can support venues investing in proper soundproofing.
- Open data trusts (including commercial tenancies) to track venue displacement with evidence rather than hearsay.
- Better outreach and instruction to small venues and DIY spaces about existing provincial cultural grants.

## Innovative venue/space concepts

- *Flexible use:* Participants in multiple breakout groups voiced a desire for spaces that move from day uses (visual arts, poetry, exhibitions) to night uses (club).



- “Successful nightlife exists in cities because venues are allowed to [do] a million different things. Venues should be **expansive** and flexible.”
- *Reuse at night*: One participant observed that the city is privatizing spaces that could be used for nightlife/entertainment. Instead, participants hoped to see unexpected city spaces used for public activities at night, citing:
  - museums, libraries, High Park (though accessibility may be an issue),
  - shopping malls, plazas (participants noted the current move to redevelop shopping malls, and hope to see nightlife considered).
  - PATH (downtown underground pedestrian path network).
  - Empty office buildings, convention centres.
- *Public space*: Halifax’s example of spontaneous live music on the street was raised; participants observed a lack of such opportunities in public spaces in Toronto.
- *DIY and unofficial events*: One participant explained that public spaces like underpasses and more remote parks have been used for parties. As “artists can’t afford to host parties, underpasses were an opportunity.” As in other consultations, cost of event space rentals was seen as a barrier.
- Rave culture is seen as more inclusive, more safe and more attractive for youth and for communities feeling unwelcome in the downtown “mainstream” nightlife, particularly for younger Indigenous, Black, and racialized participants.
- Queer people using digital communication to coordinate and share locations for DIY parties highlights the “mobility of culture” in DIY scenes; this information-sharing also feels safer to marginalized ravers.

## Policing and harm reduction

- Some participants articulated concerns about “over-policing,” especially as it pertains to marginalized and racialized groups, while others felt there is not enough police presence in major nightlife entertainment areas (specifically King West) to ensure public safety.
- Some cited police presence as a condition that can counter feelings of safety, making many feel anxious and scared.
  - One suggested alternative to current approaches was to emphasize other types of harm reduction or supports that don’t stigmatize drug use and safety measures.
- Participants suggested mandatory training for venue owners on harm reduction and bystander intervention.
  - Existing Toronto organizations can support this: Pieces to Pathways (substance use support for 2SLGBTQ+ young people) and Trip! (harm reduction initiative for rave community) were referenced as examples.
  - This could potentially be funded by cuts to police budget.
- Comments from some break-outs indicate a belief that nightclubs need to do more about harm reduction and addressing situations *inside* the venue before patrons go outside, taking a harm-reduction rather than demonizing or stigmatizing approach.
  - This goes hand in hand with a culture of “being a good patron” (drug testing, safety, harm reduction, etc.) Venue owners expressed frustration at the “targeting” of businesses over patrons, suggesting it is overwhelmingly the venue owners who tend to be penalized for bad behaviour of patrons, long after they leave.
- One downtown resident suggested an additional nightlife police unit for the downtown core entertainment area.

## Access and equity: barriers for marginalized and lower-income operators and audiences

### *Supporting business owners:*

- Participants recognize that racialized communities face historical barriers to ownership. This means they often rent rather than own, making it harder to operate sustainably: “People who are making the culture need to be backed up financially so they can be supported”.
  - Grants and funding can support marginalized people getting more involved in venue creation and programming.
  - “People want to do this work! They want to open new spaces! The city needs to do things to make it less prohibitive. There needs to be less barriers, low cost, and spaces that attract people. People need to support venues that already exist, and give resources to the people who want to do the work.”
- In particular, venue insurance costs are prohibitive: “People with the deep enough pockets outlast everyone else - and that shouldn’t be the case.” Operators hoped for a more equitable approach to this, “not just rich people dictating what a space can be.”
- While this consultation series asks explicitly if and where nightclubs should be allowed in new parts of the city, participants also recognized the need to protect existing spaces (with mechanisms like rent control, property appraisals and regulations).
- The art sector is able to secure spaces in development projects, but not nightlife—which could be better suited to local communities than high-end art.

### *Supporting events:*

- There is a sense that there are enough spaces outside the downtown core, they just need to be activated.
- Nonprofit participants reported it difficult to book cheaper event spaces - spaces charge a lot, especially ones with a licence for a club. This creates a layer of exclusivity, where only those with money can afford to rent spaces.

### *Supporting audiences:*

- Low-income participants struggle to find both affordable and enjoyable events, creating the sense that “events aren’t for me.”
- Participants noted that in the past, it was easier to access cultural/social activities as it used to be more affordable. Now, higher production costs, less funding for cultural activities, and higher rent and property taxes have made accessing culture more expensive.
- Participants wanted to see the city fund and support nightlife for marginalized people rather than “VIP services” (there were two different mentions of the city “VIP services,” such as convention centre parties).
- Physical inaccessibility was also cited as an issue, preventing people with accessibility issues from equally enjoying space. The concept of universal design in nightlife was raised.

## Transportation

- Proposals raised by participants included: a 24-hour subway, “party bus” service to get people to and from venues safely, express nighttime services, and not closing transit for construction on weekends when possible.

- There have been a number of incidents of violence on transit that make some feel uncomfortable to use.
- LRT expansion can expand what kind of nightlife is available in different parts of Toronto.

## Noise and sound

- Soundproofing needs to be required in building codes (multiple breakout groups). One participant told facilitators that venues are being forced to shut down because of “NIMBY” complaints, when they could have coexisted with proper soundproofing.
  - Participants noted that while it’s a strength that residents have voices in Toronto, it’s a problem if residents use that power to have clubs shut down.
  - One breakout group praised Berlin’s state-funded soundproofing fund for clubs (given that many venue owners cannot afford to soundproof), and generally agreed that Toronto should support this type of mitigation.
  - Enforcement is perceived to favour residents over businesses in a disproportionate way: one participant brought up the example of noise complaints being lodged against a music studio from an illegal apartment next door (while the next legal residential dwelling was 600m away): ML&S enforcement shut down the studio, rather than investigating the unsanctioned dwelling.
- Participants recognized that overcrowding of downtown nightlife areas (using King West as an example) happens when clubs are packed densely into one area and people have nowhere to go in their own areas (so they travel to these) - producing negative outcomes like nighttime noise and decreased safety.
- Consultation staff observed a distinction between participants discussing “noise” or “sound” at night. Generally *noise* = bad and *sound* = good according to residents and City—but what’s the difference? Both may disturb others, but noise is perceived to come from nightlife, perpetuating a negative view of nightlife in the city.
  - Noise is subjective: participants felt that the City needs better definitions in bylaws. Why is (noisy) condo construction accepted and not nightlife?
  - Planning around noise is looking through the lens of a false binary between people accessing nightlife and residents, but a person can be both.
  - One participant suggested listing clubs on rent registries to create clearer awareness of spaces that produce sound at night.
- Participants saw that businesses and local communities have a mutual responsibility to work with one another.

## Questions for the City

- Why are measurements related to building codes made with decibels only?
- Why isn’t the provincial government taking part in these consultations (liquor licence decisions)?

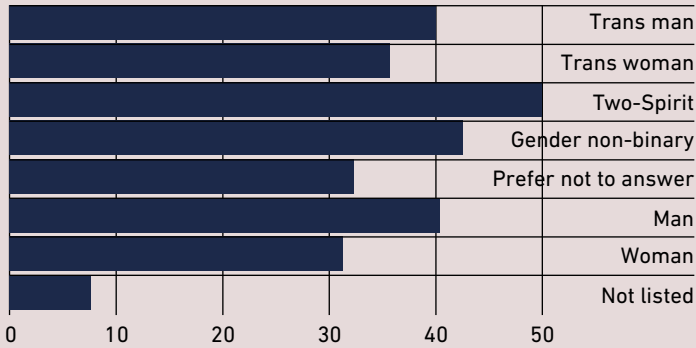
### D. Survey Cross-Tabulations

The following are selected cross-tabulations referenced in the report (*Section III: Survey Findings*). These include data related to barriers to access, and safety or nuisance concerns experienced while visiting bars, restaurants, nightclubs, and other entertainment venues. These data are then cross-tabulated by gender, age and/or race. Please note, these cross-tabulations are based only on the respondents who offered optional demographic information, so some of these subgroups are small samples.

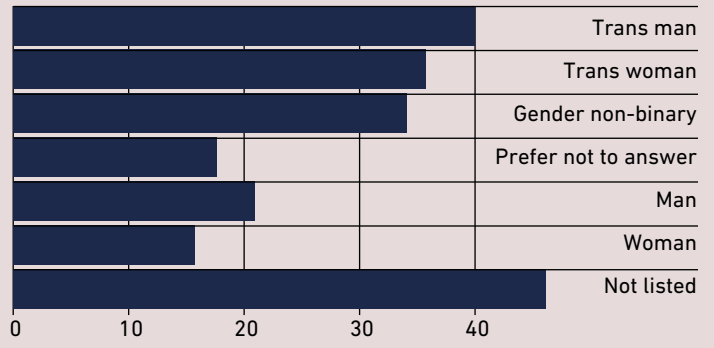
# Barriers to access when participating in nighttime activities

cross-tabulated by gender

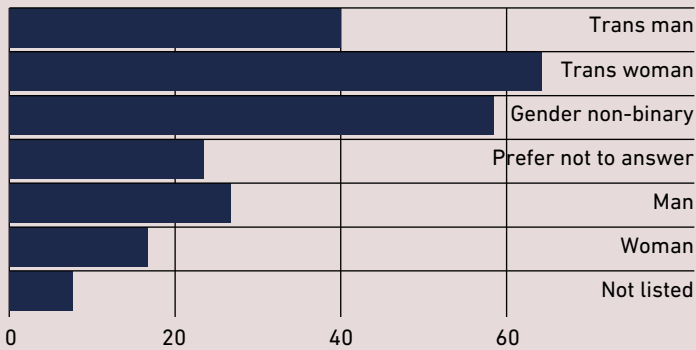
**Access to activities near me**



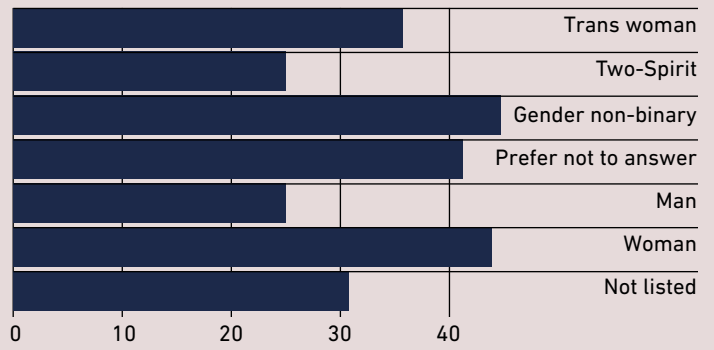
**Other**



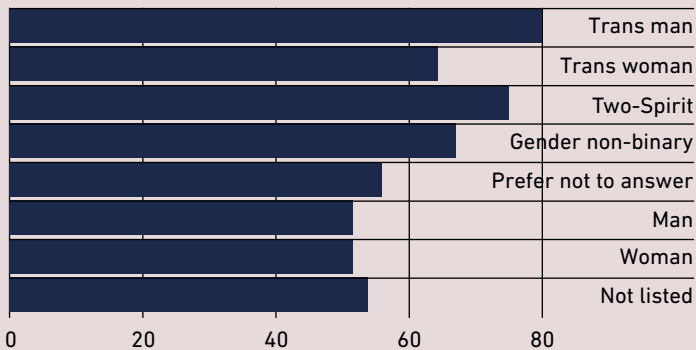
**Access to inclusive activities and/or spaces**



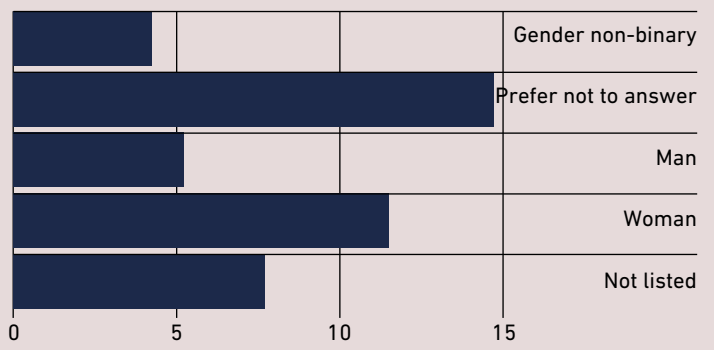
**Safety**



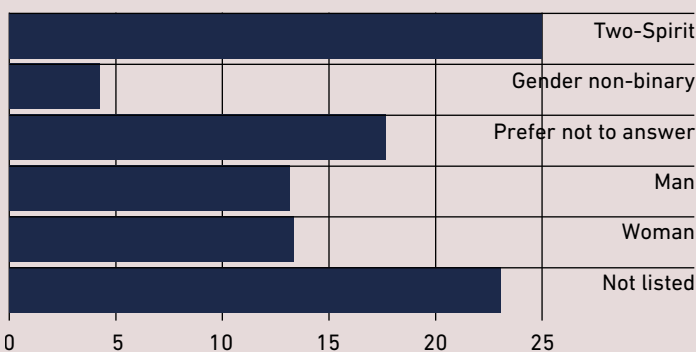
**Cost**



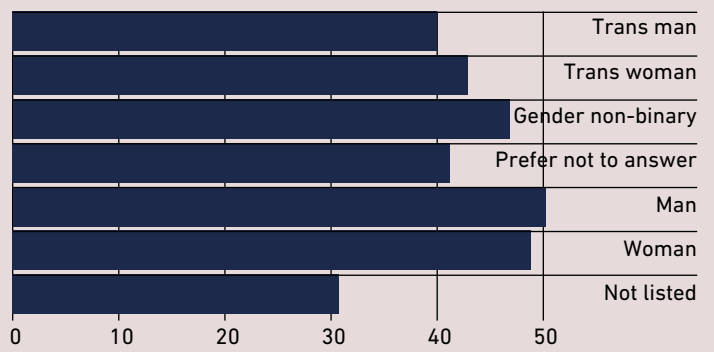
**Suitability for families**



**I do not face any barriers**



**Transportation**

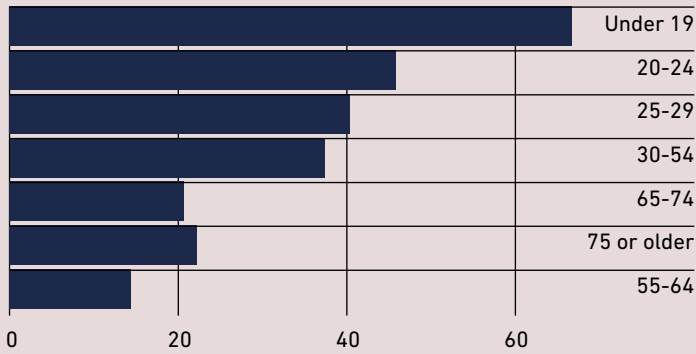


Percentage %

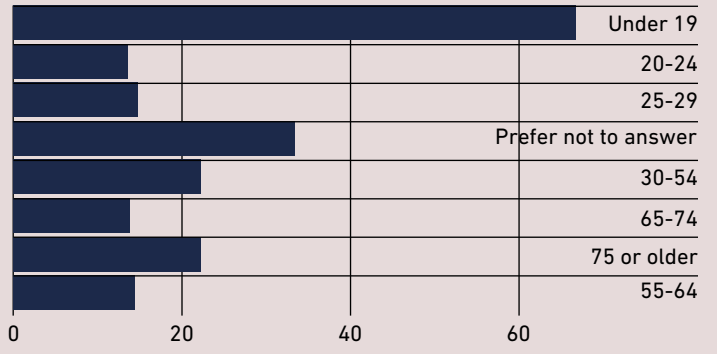
# Barriers to access when participating in nighttime activities

cross-tabulated by age

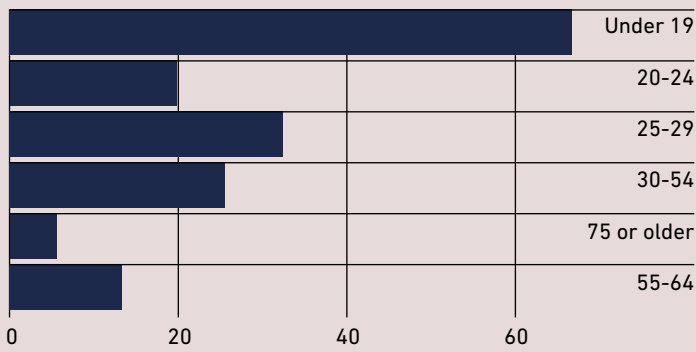
**Access to activities near me**



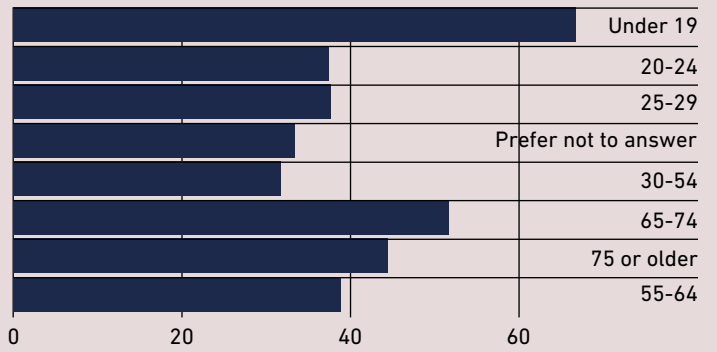
**Other**



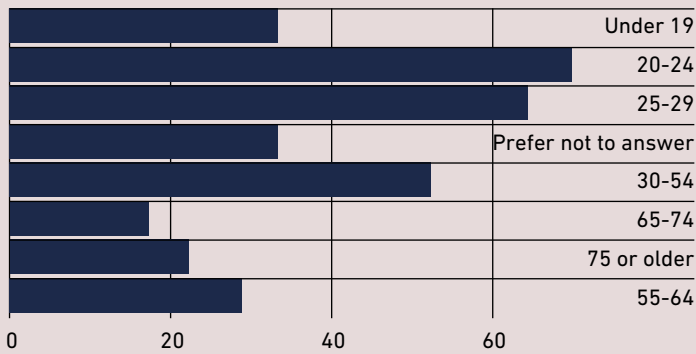
**Access to inclusive activities and/or spaces**



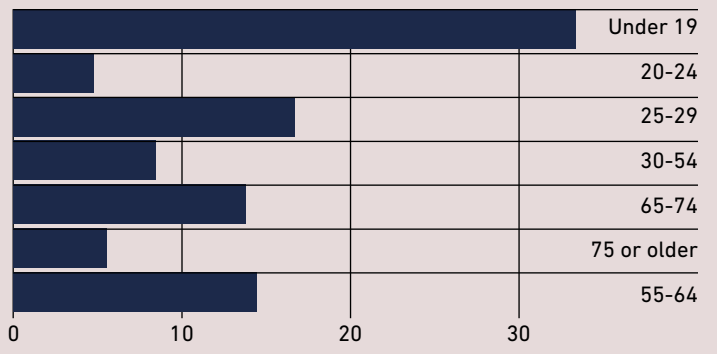
**Safety**



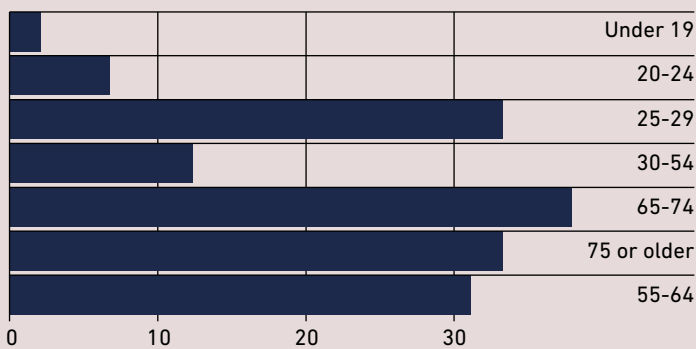
**Cost**



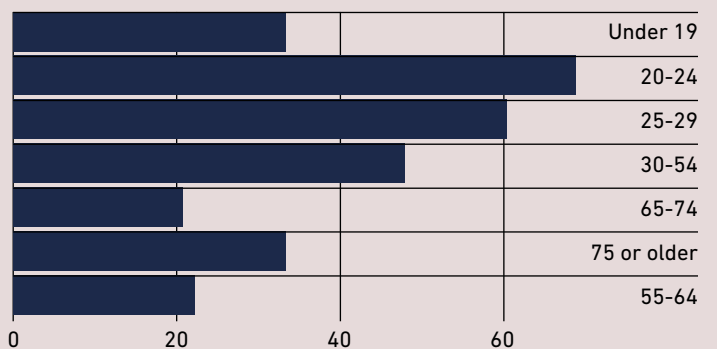
**Suitability for families**



**I do not face any barriers**



**Transportation**



Percentage %

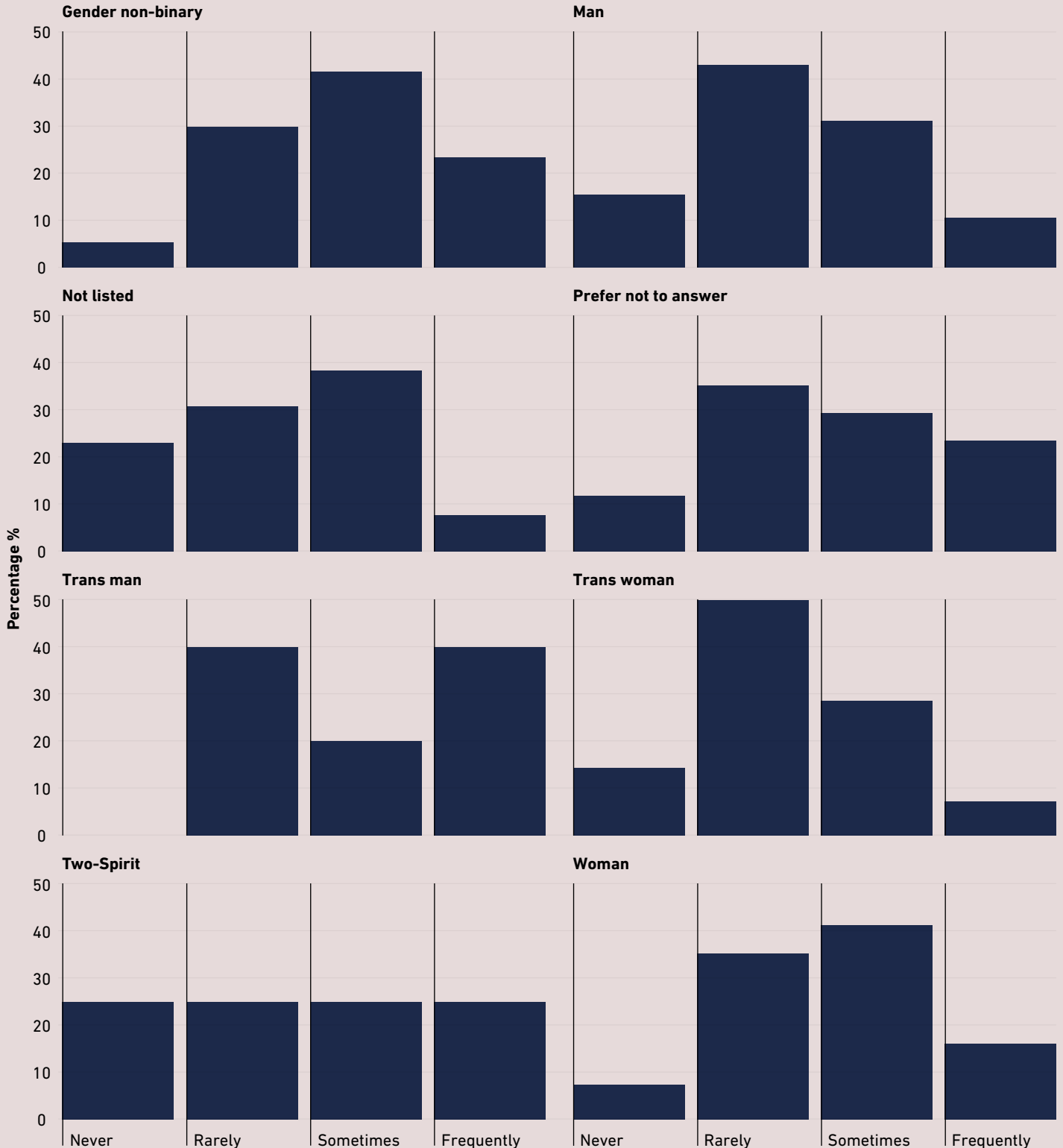
# How often customers/patrons have experienced safety/nuisance issues while visiting a restaurant, bar, nightclub, or other entertainment venue

cross-tabulated by race



# How often customers/patrons have experienced safety/nuisance issues while visiting a restaurant, bar, nightclub, or other entertainment venue

cross-tabulated by gender

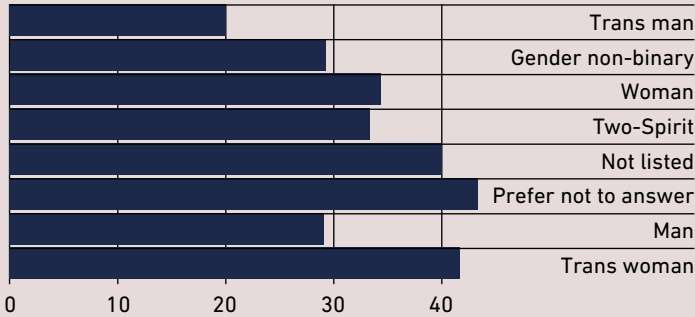




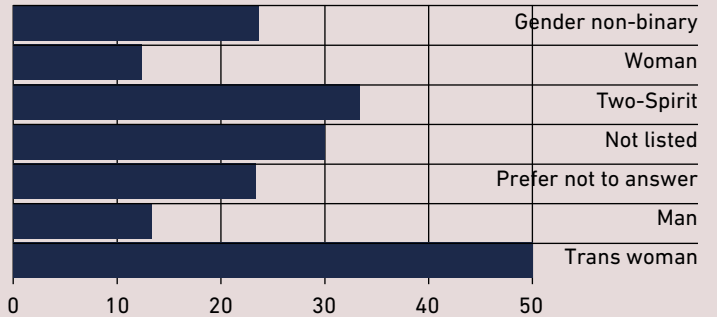
# Nature of safety or nuisance issues experienced while visiting a restaurant, bar, nightclub, or other entertainment venue

cross-tabulated by gender

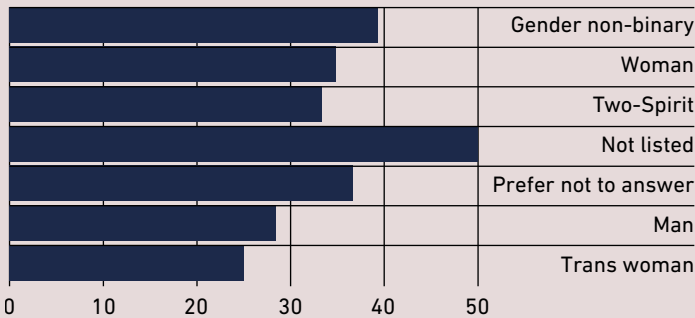
## Unlawful or anti-social activity



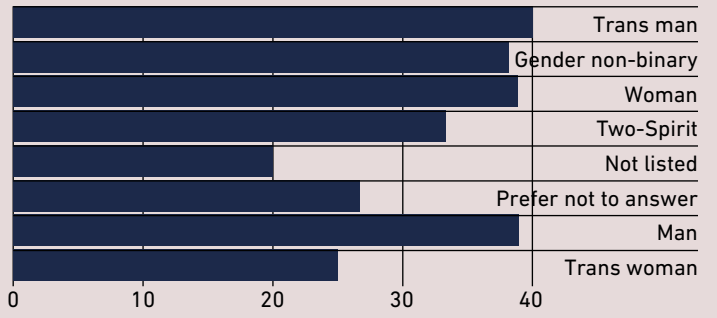
## Other



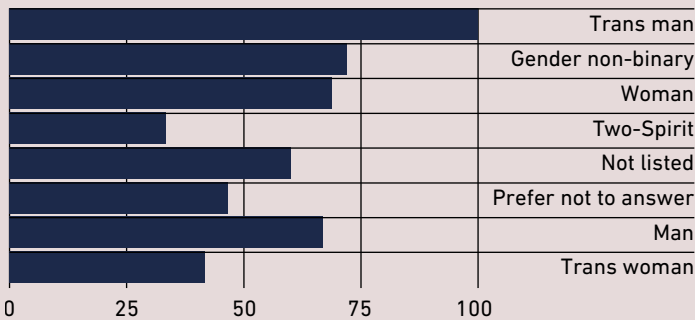
## Concerns about security



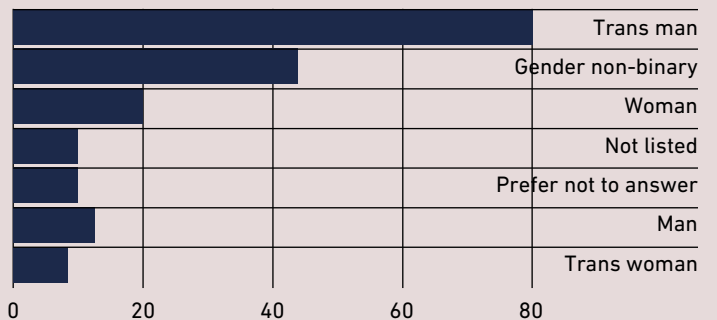
## Overcrowding



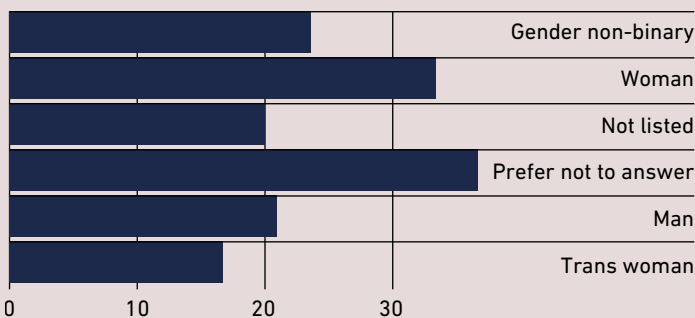
## Difficulty getting home afterward



## Physical accessibility of the venue



## Excessive sound levels



Percentage %

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This report was produced by VibeLab on  
behalf of the City of Toronto.

# Toronto Night Economy Review

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