

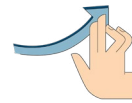


The City Planning PlazaPOV Study team published an online survey between October 2025 and January 2026 to hear from business owners and employees currently operating, or that had previously operated, their business in a strip plaza in Toronto. The survey was available in five languages – English, Spanish, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Tamil and Tagalog, representing the most common languages spoken in areas where plazas are most prevalent.

The questions explored the potential directions set out in the Study's 18 Emerging Directions to identify how the City can:



Support existing plazas



Enhance the physical plaza experience



Mitigate business displacement

We asked business owners and employees to share their thoughts and experiences around policies, tools and resources that can:

- create opportunities to improve plaza sites;
- identify impacts of displacement due to redevelopment; and
- assist in relocation to retail spaces in new or existing mixed-use developments.

## Who We Heard From



We heard from over 270 respondents<sup>1</sup> from businesses across the city, in strip plazas located in former Toronto, Etobicoke, North York and Scarborough.

Survey respondents provided a range of services with the top three being Dining (restaurants, cafes, etc.), Food Shopping (grocery, ethnic goods, convenience store etc.), and Health Services (doctor, dentist, clinics, etc.).



Respondents ranged widely from owners that have operated their business in strip plazas since the 1960s, to more recent businesses established in the last year.

With increasing development pressures on plaza sites, some business owners shared their experiences of moving to new retail spaces located on ground floors of mixed-use developments.

<sup>1</sup>Responses for each question vary and some received limited responses with the survey completion rate under 25 percent

## What We Heard

### Support

The Emerging Directions under this theme look at opportunities for the City to support establishments with programs and initiatives where changes to a strip plaza are not anticipated. These include providing grants for small to medium sized businesses, including grants to support exterior (façade) or interior renovations provided by the City, expanding Business Improvement Areas (BIA) to include plaza-rich areas to support their commercial functions, and providing resources for plazas in a 'one-stop shop' to make them easier to access for business and property owners.

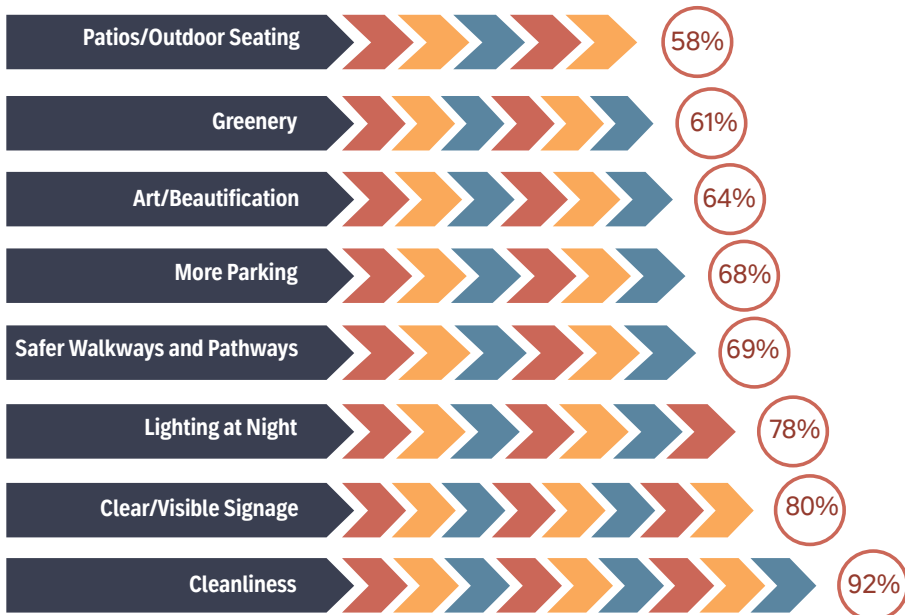
We learned that 75 percent of respondents are interested in guides and resources from the City to help improve the look and feel of their strip plaza and 62 percent believe that it can help their business stay open.



In addition, nearly three-quarters of respondents would consider joining a BIA.

### Enhance

The Emerging Directions under this theme propose opportunities to explore policy and zoning changes, programs and tools to improve the physical space of plazas and their relationship to the public realm through temporary or permanent programming, physical enhancements and funding tools, strip plazas can be improved to create a more inviting environment for establishments and their visitors.



While the majority of respondents believe that changes to their parking areas, such as cleanliness, more parking, lighting, visible signage, art, greenery and seating, can improve business in their strip plaza, adding bicycle parking and reducing vehicular parking is less preferred.

Just over half of respondents do not support removing parking spaces to make room for such improvements.



Figure 1: Rate of respondent agreement on changes to parking to improve business

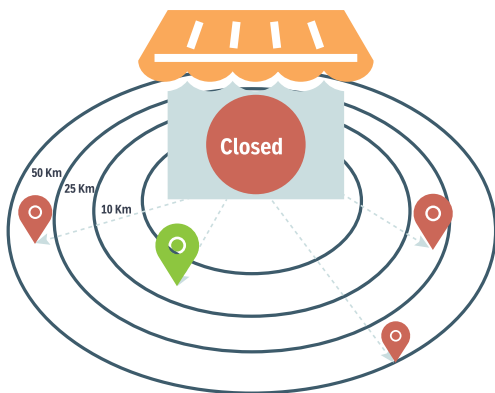
## What We Heard

### Mitigate

The Emerging Directions under this theme consider tools and policies for small businesses located in plaza sites that are facing redevelopment, to mitigate their displacement and avoid permanent closure, with anti-displacement strategies, policies around retail unit size, space acquisition and relocation assistance.

From the survey, we learned that there is generally a positive outlook from owners around moving into new retail spaces. Just over 60 percent of respondents are open to moving to a retail space in a tall building with apartments or offices above (mixed-use buildings).

Some challenges that respondents noted would impact their move to a new location included: rent costs, parking and complexity of lease agreements. Loss of community, unit layout and size were also cited by respondents to a lesser extent.



While 40 percent of respondents stated they would have to either close or sell their business, some respondents felt they would be able to move their business to a new permanent location or would look to temporarily relocate until a space is available in the new development in the existing location.

Respondents also found useful, if the City can assist owners with identifying available retail space for temporary relocation until they can find a new permanent space either within the new development or elsewhere, to avoid permanent closure. On average, respondents would be willing to relocate their business within 10-12 kilometres from their previous location.

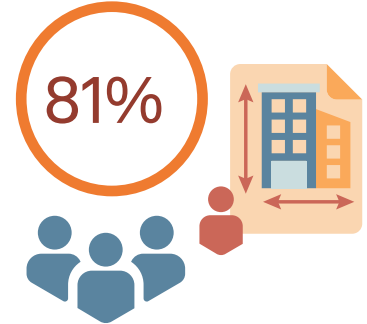


Figure 2: Represent responses to the affect of plaza redevelopment on a business

## What We Heard

To mitigate displacement and loss of businesses, the City should consider tools and strategies that can make relocation easier for business owners.

An overwhelming 81% of respondents felt that early-stage communication with businesses that will be impacted by redevelopment can help make the move easier. This can allow for owners and employees to plan and weigh their options for the future.



Nearly three-quarters of respondents also support having policies to encourage appropriate retail size and layout that works for small and local businesses in new developments.

Respondents also favoured a strategy to help businesses with a resource that can identify potential spaces with lower-than-average rents for short-term commercial use to temporarily move into, until the new development is completed at their current location.



We also heard from business owners that have already experienced displacement, who noted **business stability, affordable rent, quality and size of space** as some of the factors they were looking for when moving their business to a new location.

An overwhelming 80 percent of respondents found losing established community and customer base was a challenge to moving their business elsewhere in the city.

This highlights the importance of proximity to their current location on maintaining the established customer base for the business.

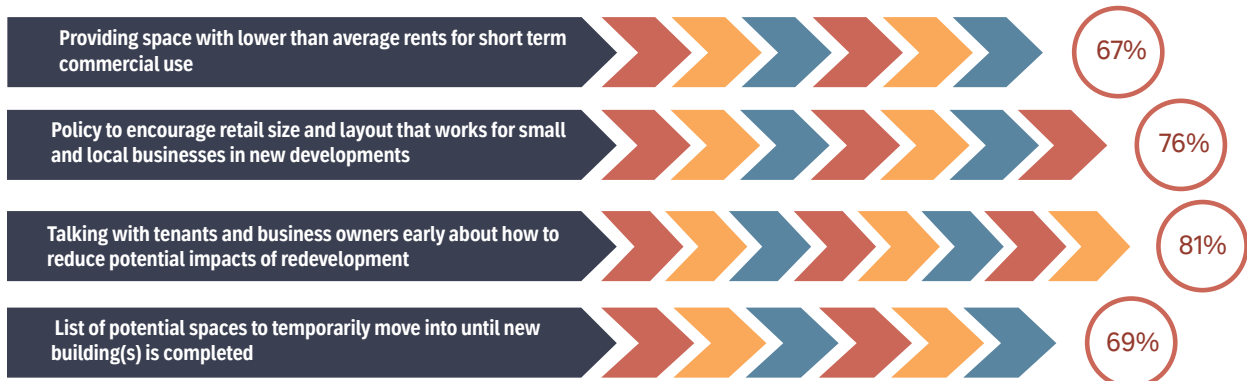


Figure 3: Rate of respondent agreement on tools that can help make moving a business easier

## Summary of Key Takeaways



### Support

- Most people are interested in **guides and resources** from the City to help improve the look and feel of their strip plaza.
- There is interest among the respondents **to join a BIA**.



### Enhance

- An overwhelming majority of respondents believe that *cleanliness, more parking, lighting, visible signage, art, greenery* and *seating* are changes to the parking area that can **improve their business in their strip plaza**.
- Just over half **do not support removing parking** to make room for such improvements.



### Mitigate

- If faced with redevelopment, the majority of respondents felt that they will have to either **close or sell their business**, while a quarter said they would move their business to a new permanent location and others would temporarily relocate until a space is available in the new development.
- On average, respondents would be willing **to relocate** their business within **10-12 kilometres** from their previous location.
- An overwhelming number of respondents find **early-stage communication with businesses** that will be impacted by redevelopment can help make the move easier by allowing owners to plan and consider their options.
- Businesses would support a resource that can **identify available spaces for temporary relocation**, especially spaces with lower-than-average rents for the short-term commercial use.
- Respondents found **losing established community and customer base** a challenge to moving their business elsewhere in the City.
- Respondents noted factors that would help businesses currently located in a strip plaza move into a new building include **lower rent costs, temporary relocation assistance** and **unit size adaptability**.

To learn more about the PlazaPOV Project and past reports, visit the [PlazaPOV project webpage](https://toronto.ca/plazapov) (toronto.ca/plazapov)