



# OPEN AIR WHITE PAPER

“Our Streets Belong to the People”  
-Many Urbanists

# BACKGROUND

A downtown is fundamentally a place where people want to be to shop, eat, and socially gather. It should be walkable, pulsating with life, and beautiful. A downtown/city centre of any municipality plays a vital role in its economic and social development. In most cases, the downtown area reflects what the municipality has to offer in terms of its unique collection of businesses, its history, & its culture. Without a doubt Amherstburg's downtown is unique to the region, with its stunning waterfront, landscape views of Navy Yard Park, historical remnants, Fort Malden, and much more. Due to the town's geographical location, Amherstburg is undeniably a 'destination' town, not just a place where one will accidentally land. That being said, preserving the downtown area, adapting to societal transformation, and providing a safe and distinctive place to gather, should promote life and economic growth in Amherstburg.

In 2020, a pandemic struck the entire world. Consequently, businesses suffered, and residents were left with minimal safe activities. Amherstburg's Town Council acted quickly and closed a few blocks of the downtown core each weekend to conduct an 'Open Air' event to help businesses stay afloat and provide residents/visitors a safe event to attend. Following the first year of Open Air, some businesses claimed that this event was harmful to their growth. A survey was conducted by the town, and it indicated that Downtown businesses were split 50/50 on the concept. In spring of 2021, the notion came before council again and the split in the business's opinions remained stagnant. However, after some compromise (opening the streets for cars on Saturday), the Open Air event passed a council vote of 4 to 2. Unfortunately, the decision has not stopped some of the businesses who were against Open Air from criticizing it the entire summer.

T.H.R.I.V.E. has embraced Open Air because it continues to be supported by international best practices, evidence-based data, and is consistent with the science behind Covid-19. A pandemic that continues to look like a new normal for the world. At the same time, we would agree that additional investments should be made in new initiatives. Based on a Tactical Urbanism test, entitled 'Play Amherstburg,' and our online survey, this White Paper will make a case to council that a revised Open Air with more town funding should be done in 2022.

The T.H.R.I.V.E. team that created this White Paper:

Renée D'Amore (director)  
Sara Palmer (director)  
Kory Renaud (director)  
Richard Peddie (director)  
Kurt Reffle  
Linden Crain

## EXISTING BEST PRACTICES

### Global Best Practices:

Visit almost any European city and you can find one to stroll down, shop, have something to eat; and always be safe from cars. In 1970 Bogota Columbia created a concept called “Cicionvia” which in Spanish means “cycleway”. It can be a bike path or a closing of selected streets for cyclists and pedestrians. The city decided that certain streets would be closed all Sundays and holidays for the purpose of Cicionvia. Today 120 kilometers of Bogota are dedicated to a concept that is accessible to anyone. The model has helped shape Bogota into the great city it is today.

Before Covid, Bogotá’s example had become an international best practice and was adopted in cities in 17 countries. With the pandemic, many more cities hastily adopted the concept of Open Streets to help restaurants, and to give their residents a safe, healthy, and social way to enjoy the outdoors.

### Local Best Practices:

Seeing the economic growth and positive social impact of this idea [See Appendix C], cities and towns in our region have adopted Bogota’s invention. They include Guelph, Ann Arbor, and St. John’s Newfoundland. Guelph closes their downtown area from June-September every Friday at 9:00 a.m. through Monday at 5:00 a.m. Ann Arbor closes multiple downtown streets from 4:00 p.m. Thursdays to 6:00 a.m. Mondays running from April – November with additional 2 downtown streets closed for 24hrs/7 days per week. Although St. John’s is a city of 113, 000, it’s vibe is that of a much smaller town. St. John’s closes all of Water Street and a portion of Duckworth as an open street program every weekend with huge support from city Council. In fact, they are abandoning much of their downtown parking and there is a movement to permanently close Water Street. Other North American cities and towns are starting to recognize the benefits of Open Air and are also adapting to these practices.

Over the summers of 2020 & 2021, Downtown Amherstburg’s Open Air event has become an attraction and destination, visited by local and regional residents. The activities provided by the Tourism & Culture Department, Chamber of Commerce, and some local businesses have helped make this event flourish. A few examples of this were: Music in the Park, ping pong, corn hole, Play Amherstburg, Windsor Symphony Orchestra, and Mickey Mouse. There still are many other programming ideas that Amherstburg could adopt to keep their downtown streets alive.

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND 2022 BUDGET COSTS

Our overall message is to continue with Open Air in 2022. After only two years, Open Air is starting to build awareness and is creating a solid reputation as a unique event to visit and enjoy whether one is a visitor or a resident. Faced with many barriers, like a pandemic, this event has not yet reached its full potential. Since it takes time to build a reputation, we strongly believe the best is yet to come; now is not the time to stop it. Instead, the key is for both the town and businesses to continue to invest and adapt to make it better every year.

## Specifically

### 1. Continue with Open Air in 2022

We explored changes in configuration of the footprint with the Fire Department but could not come up with a better plan than the compromises enacted this year. Therefore, we are recommending keeping the footprint and timing essentially the same as 2021. Admittedly, Richmond Street was quiet (excluding the Special Events), but in 2022 there will be at least 3 new unique retail businesses opening, and they should increase visitor and residents' Sunday foot traffic on the street. We do recognize that most businesses are not open on Monday's, therefore, we agree that the streets should remain open for vehicular traffic on holidays if they fall on a Monday.

### 2. Invest at least an additional \$20,500 in new programming in 2022

According to our online survey, over 65% of participants support an increase in investment ranging from \$30,000 to \$50,000 in Open Air, [See Appendix B]. Our recommended amount would only cost \$0.93 per resident in Amherstburg.

#### **Suggestions as to how to invest the money:**

- a) \$15,000 to program Richmond Street for Play Amherstburg ('Safe Play' Programming for Kids).

While Open Air is popular with adults, it does not have much for kids. T.H.R.I.V.E. conducted two tests called 'Play Amherstburg' that were very successful, [See Appendix A]. Test results support the town investing in programming for kids. Programming will be made up of paid performers, volunteer groups (e.g., Rivertown Dance Academy), and activities paid for by participating businesses on Richmond Street. We suggest 6 Sunday events for kids to occur throughout the course of the 17-week program.

- b) \$5,500 to activate Murray Street.

Murray Street is a perfect candidate for an event. Another gap in Open Air is programming for young adults. We suggest having film nights aimed at young adults. We recommend the town consider a local company called “Marvelous Movie Nights.” This company offers screen sizes between 120” to 20 ft, inflatable chairs with ottomans, side tables, lanterns, string lights, etc. Any movie can be played (perhaps the town could do a survey on what the youth would like to watch) as it is streamed. *Cost:* Approximately \$2,000 for 4 movie nights.

In addition to movie night, another idea would be to present a music concert geared towards young adults on Murray Street. Featuring local musicians or The Windsor Symphony Orchestra, to play a contemporary music selection while the youth socialize, listening and enjoying a potentially new cultural experience. *Cost:* Approximately \$3,500

### **3. Open Richmond and Dalhousie Street to non-food vendors (e.g., arts & crafts, coin collectors, gourmet animal treat/clothing vendors, etc.)**

This was recommended by 24% of survey respondents, [see Appendix B]. These vendors would make the street more interesting and give more reason for visitors to spend time downtown. The number of vendors, their locations, and fees should be determined by The Town of Amherstburg’s Administration.

### **4. We wish Council would better recognize and financially support its very important Tourism & Culture Department**

Our Tourism Department is a well-functioning, high level, operational department for the Town of Amherstburg. The department is creative, executes superbly and is increasingly relevant in attracting today’s savvy demographics to work, play and stay in Amherstburg. Our survey indicates that visitors come from both the county and all across Southern Ontario.

In addition to Open Air, the Tourism and Culture department has done so much for our town. They have a proven track record year after year of securing government grants and sponsorships to offset the cost of doing business. From October 2018 to October 2020, the tourism department sourced, applied for, and facilitated approximately \$738,953 in funding for our town. This money was reinvested back into the community to projects such as the Belle Vue Conservatory, Economic Development Projects, Marketing, Promotion and signature Festival and Events. In 2021, they are trending towards \$400,000+ in revenue. Also, important to mention are the awards Amherstburg has received

due to this hard-working department: (2019) BEST New Festival Award; Amherstburg Uncommon, (2018) Municipality of the Year Award; and River Lights Winter Festival was rated one of the Top 100 Festivals in Ontario, every year for the last thirteen years. Many other awards such as the National “Communities in Bloom” award are also supported by the Tourism Department.

We encourage Council to give the Tourism and Culture Department the necessary resources such as staffing and appropriate funding so that Amherstburg will continue to be top of mind in a highly competitive market for tourism, business, and residential dollars (return on investment) within the region. From the beginning, T.H.R.I.V.E. has said that Amherstburg is a ‘Tourist Town.’ Many Councillors, as well as residents, believe this to be true. A ‘tourist town’ needs a Tourism Department to facilitate the successful projects, support its collective stakeholders, and create new initiatives.

## RATIONALE FOR OPEN AIR

Admittedly, businesses are divided on the concept of Open Air. Unfortunately, some businesses have not adapted, invested, or taken advantage of the open street’s opportunity, while other downtown businesses really stepped up and contributed to the activation of Open-Air streets. These businesses adapted and saw the benefits for the wider community. They have agreed to continue to contribute to Open Air in their unique ways, and so will some (or all) of the new businesses who will be opening soon.

We believe Amherstburg’s streets are also owned by the residents, not just the businesses. Therefore, their voice should be of significant importance and very germane to this debate. Studies conducted by T.H.R.I.V.E. indicates that residents support the continuation of Open Air as 85.9% wanted to see it continue in 2022, [See Appendix B]. Our online survey had tremendous response with 901 submissions. This is well beyond the norm for any survey conducted in this town. The margin of error is only +/- 4%. The number of submissions and the positive feedback also speaks to the active engagement of residents when it comes to Open Air.

### Top Line Findings:

- Open Air is good for the restaurants as 751 survey participants supported them; 377 supported our retail stores.
- Based on our online survey research, the temporary loss of some on-street parking on Richmond, Murray, and Dalhousie Streets did not deter 84% of attendees to accessing their desired businesses.

- When asked on our online survey if they would support additional funding for Open Air, over 84% answered 'yes'.
- Play Amherstburg was a 'Tactical Urbanism' test and was proven successful as 100s of children took part in these events. This concept showed that there is a thirst for additional kid's activities.
- Many businesses in other cities/towns were resistant against 'open streets' in fear they will lose revenue from inconvenienced drivers. New data analysis by Yelp concluded these car-free areas actually saw more consumer interest when their streets were solely limited to pedestrians. These 'open streets' were put in temporarily, however; now a lot are planning on making the Covid-era traffic changes permanent (Bliss, L., 2021). [See Appendix C: Chart 2]
- Currently, some Amherstburg businesses are investing their own money into Open Air, however; they are only doing the bare minimum because this program is not secure and there is little incentive to spend money on something that could disappear the following year. When businesses are confident that Open Air has a future, we believe it will motivate them to invest into the program which in turn will make Open Air and even better event for our town.

## Summary

T.H.R.I.V.E. believes that Open Air can be the forerunner to redesigning our downtown streets, using the proven best practices of more walkable and successful streets across the world. Redesigns that reduce parking, planting trees, adding comfortable street furniture, cycling lanes, and on some streets, eliminating vehicular traffic altogether. T.H.R.I.V.E. is not recommending that in this White Paper, but that is what we believe Amherstburg needs to do to become even better. A major redesign that would be as impactful as creating the Navy Yard years ago, and a move that will set up the town for success throughout the 21st century.

# ALL T.H.R.I.V.E. WHITE PAPERS WILL ADDRESS THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND HEALTH & WELLNESS:

## Health and Wellness

### **Obesity in Windsor-Essex County is extremely high:**

2016; data conducted by the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU) stated that 64.5% of people living in Windsor and Essex County are overweight or obese. This is a significant increase of 6.2% higher than the rate in Ontario.

### **Mental-illness is globally one of the largest ongoing social problems at date:**

WECHU also says 'the rate of mental health-related emergency department visits for Windsor and Essex County residents (2,499.6 visits per 100,000 residents in 2017) was significantly higher than Ontario (2,181.9 visits per 100,000 residents in 2017)'.

### **Being outdoors is scientifically proven to have benefits on your physical health especially in children:**

- Have a positive effect on the body (heart, lungs, and immune system).
- Have psychological benefits (such as stress management and higher self-esteem).
- Limits screen time in children which currently is at a record high level

Continuing with Open-Air can assist in the areas above by potentially decreasing the chances of having mental & physical health issues. Having this event encourages patrons to walk more which in turn aids in a healthier physical lifestyle and promotes positive mental health.

## Climate Crisis

Open Air encourages walking and cycling; both can help tackle the Climate Crisis. Swapping the car for walking even for one day makes a significant impact on a person's carbon emissions. Meeting greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets requires a significant move away from motorized transport. Perhaps that walk or bike to Open Air will encourage residents to make active transportation a part of their personal Climate Crisis action plan.

## In Closure

T.H.R.I.V.E. believes that all their initiatives (parks, affordable housing, arts, streets for people, climate crisis, active transportation, speed limits, and heritage) can all weave together to create an even better Amherstburg.



## REFERENCES

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<http://www.880cities.org/images/openstreets-template/pdf/open-streets-local-economies.pdf>.

Afana, D. (2021, March 16). *Ann Arbor OKS street closures for restaurants, retail until August*. Ann Arbor OKs Street Closures . Retrieved September 11, 2021, from <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2021/03/ann-arbor-oks-street-closures-for-restaurants-retail-until-august.html>.

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Kim. (2021, June 30). *It's patio season!* City of Guelph. Retrieved September 11, 2021, from <https://guelph.ca/2021/06/its-patio-season/>.

Kristi York March 12, 2021. N. C. » August 5, 2021, August 13, 2021, December 11, 2012, April 14, 2021, & June 23, 2020. (2021, March 29). *Why some doctors are now prescribing outdoor time in nature*. Active For Life. <https://activeforlife.com/doctors-prescribing-time-in-nature/>

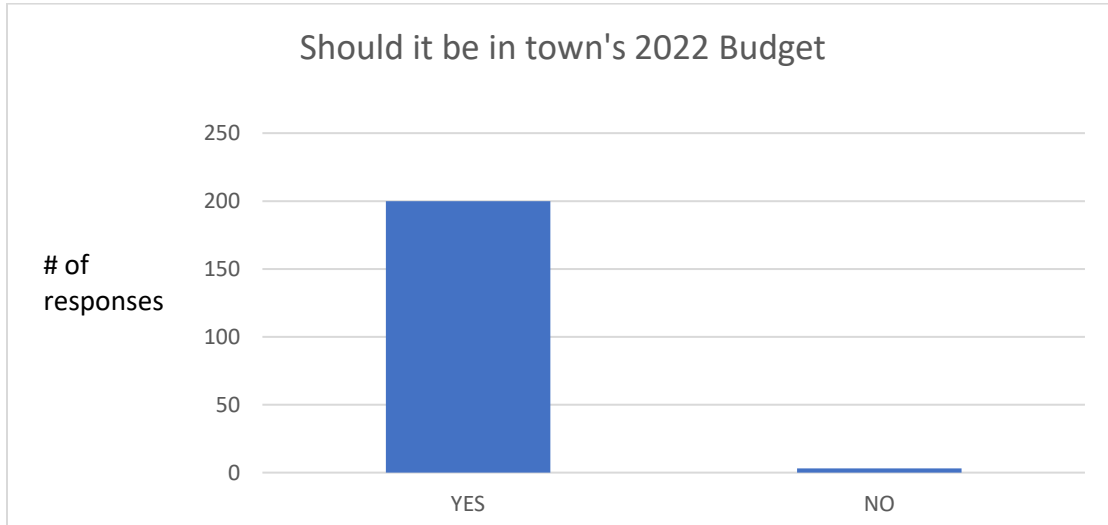
# APPENDIX A:

## PLAY AMHERSTBURG: July 25 & Aug 29, 2021

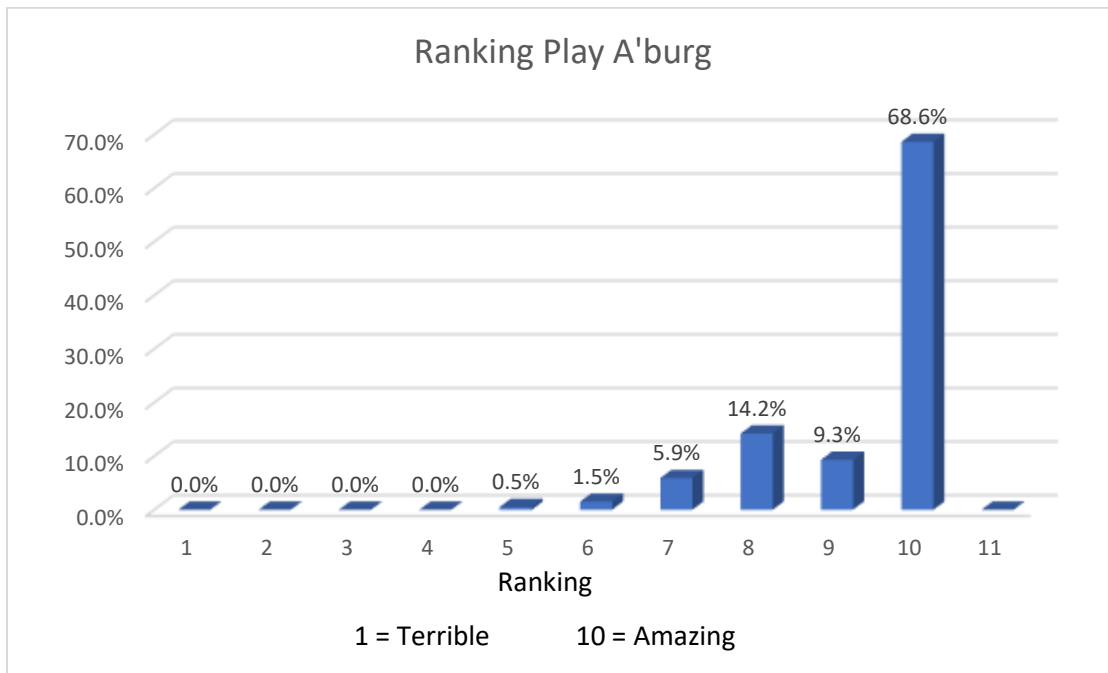
Sample Size = 214; Operated 11am – 5pm

Funded entirely by local businesses + volunteer groups

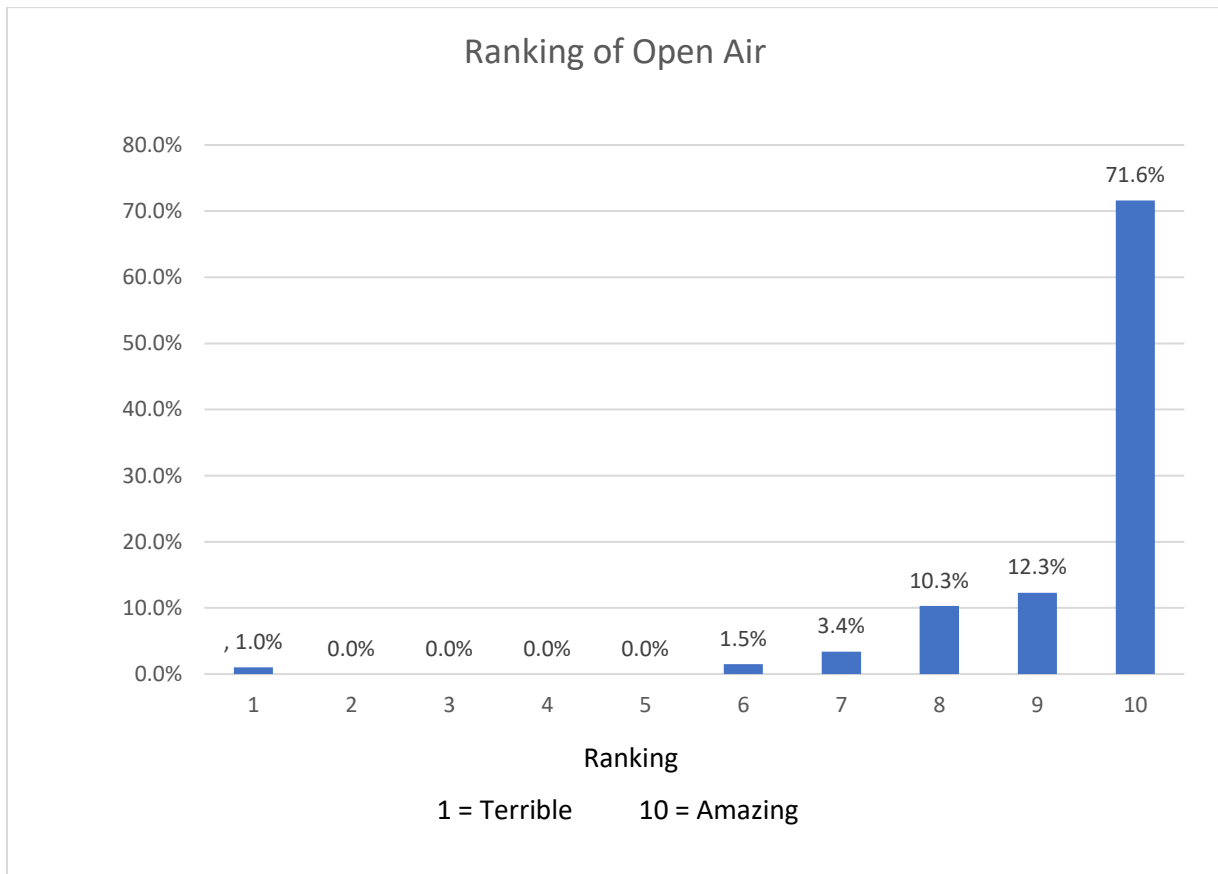
Graph 1



Graph 2



**Graph 3**



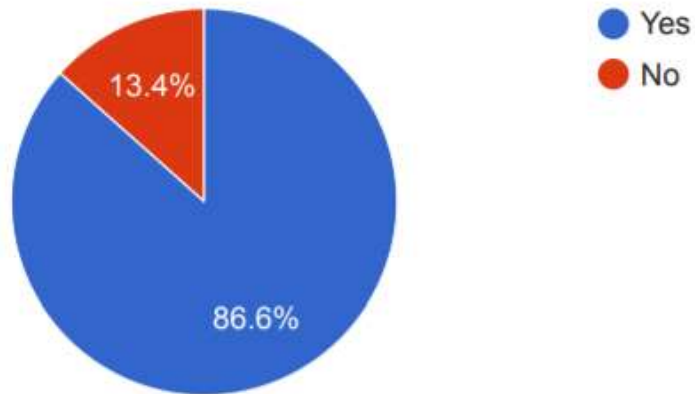
# APPENDIX B

## Online Survey Results (based on 901 submissions)

“Many respondents added in qualitative data; available upon request”

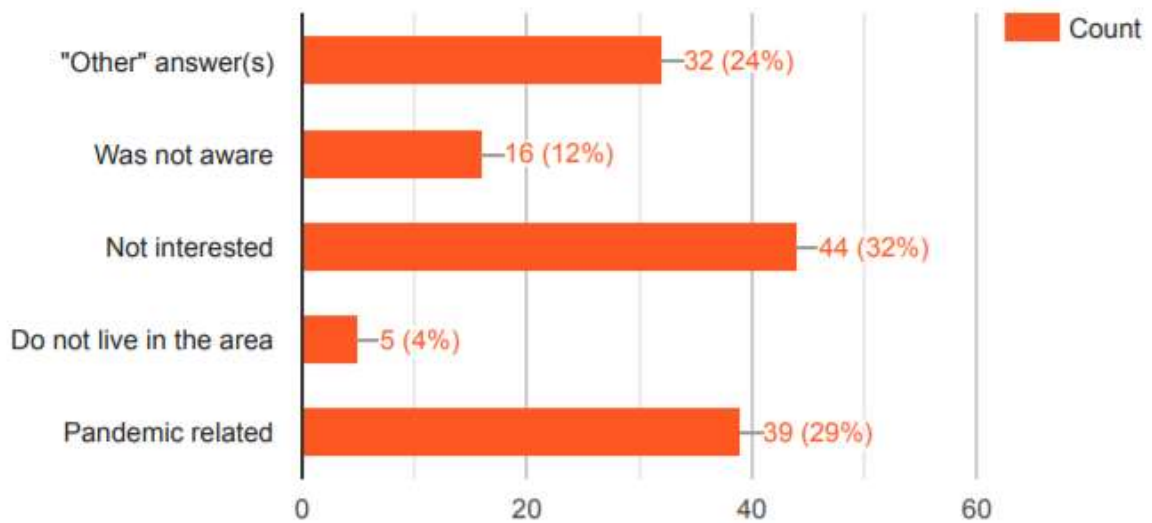
Did you attend Open Air Amherstburg in either 2020 or 2021?

901 submissions



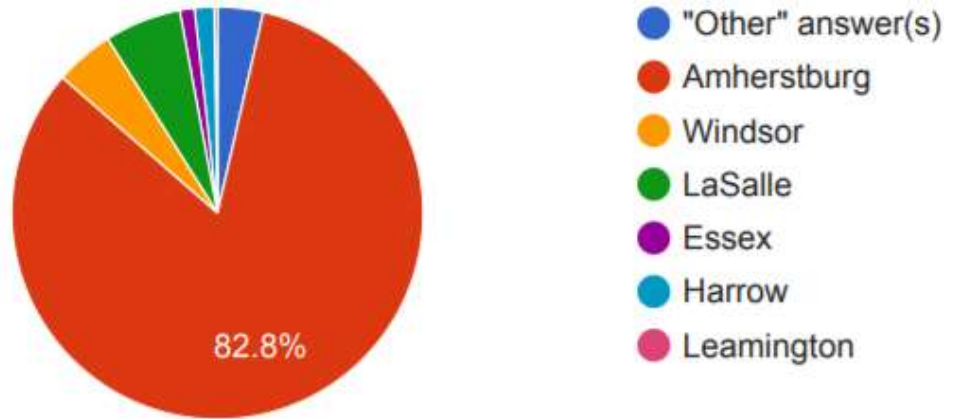
Why did you not visit Open Air? (Check all that apply)

121 submissions



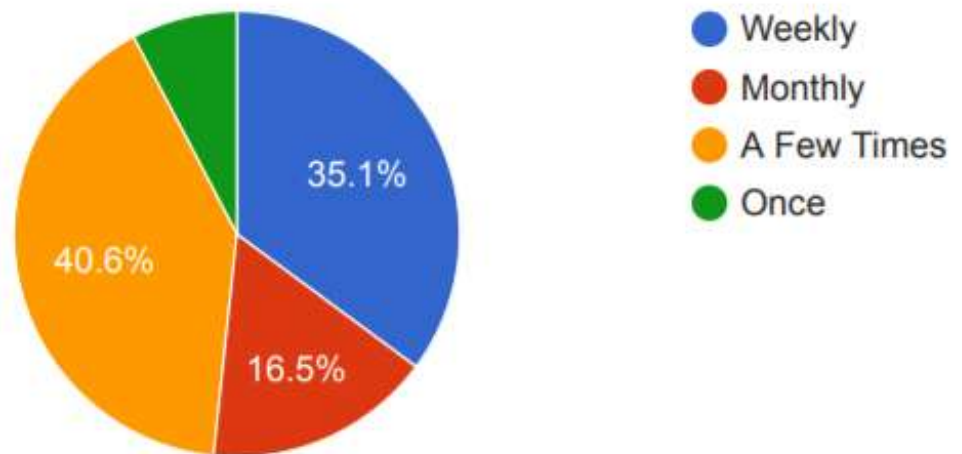
Where are you from?

780 submissions



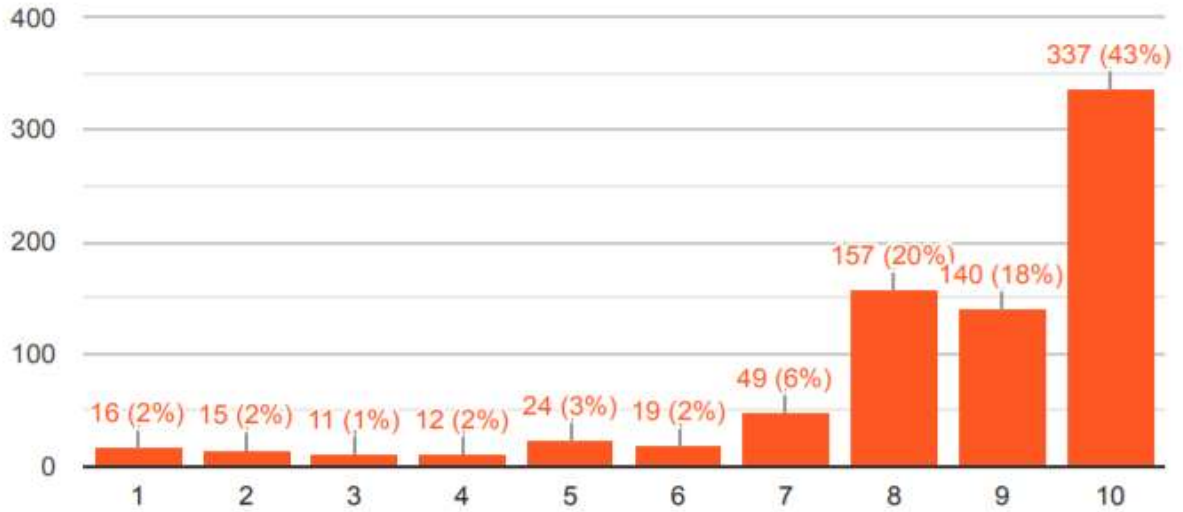
How often did you or do you attend Open Air in Amherstburg?

780 submissions



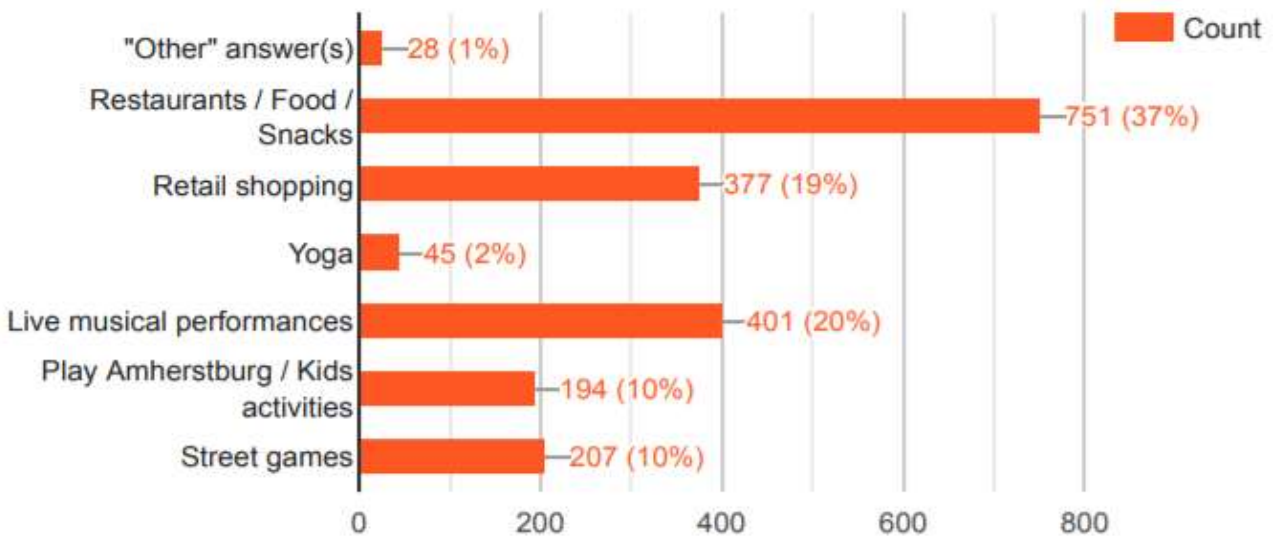
On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being Exceptional, how do you rate Open Air weekends in Amherstburg?

780 submissions



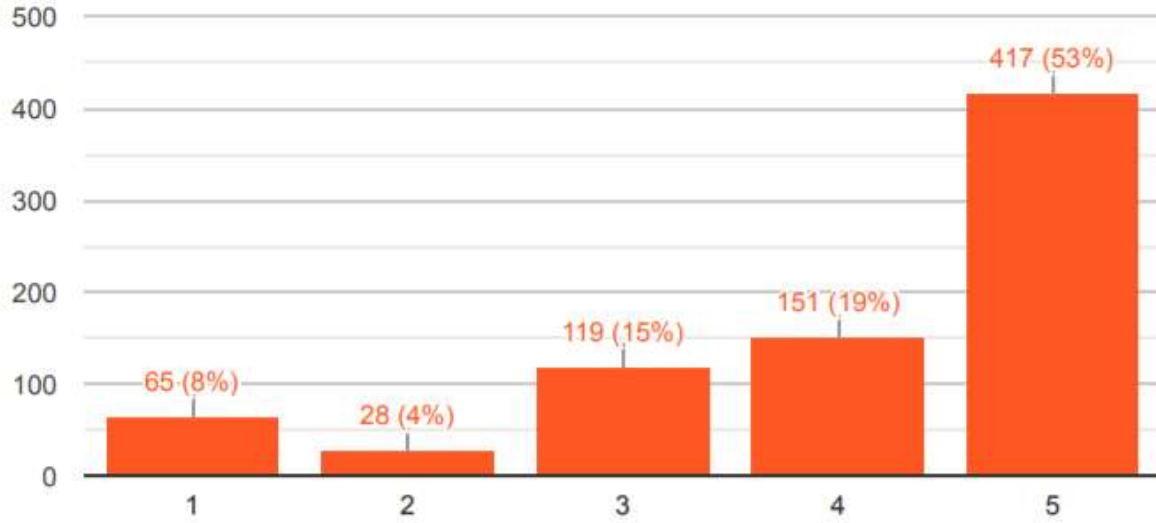
What Open Air activities or events have you taken part in? (Check all that apply)

780 submissions



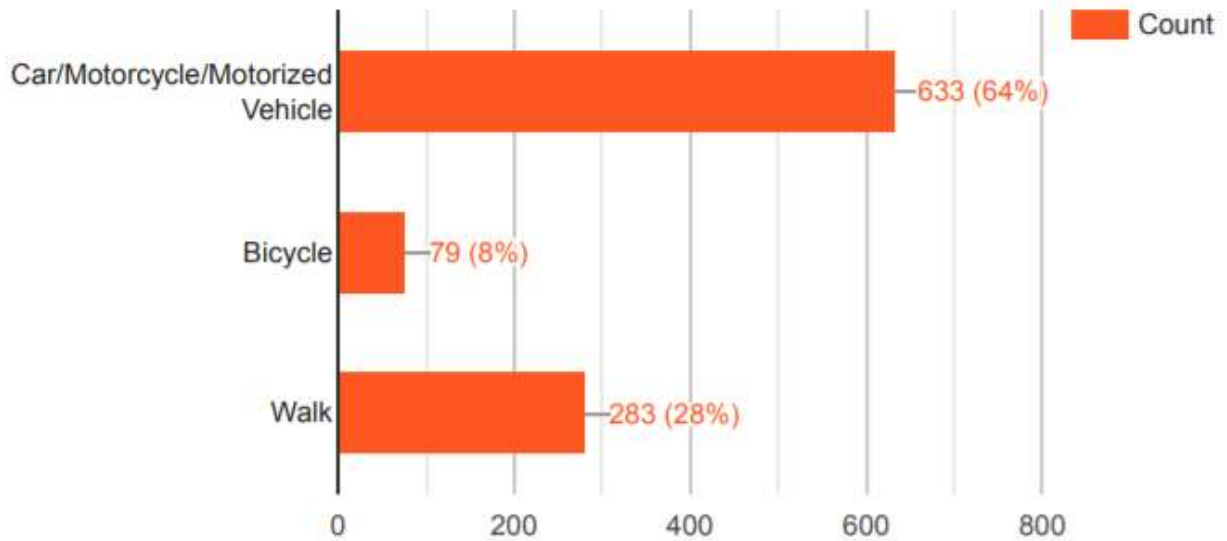
Does Open Air influence the amount of time you spend in the downtown area?

780 submissions



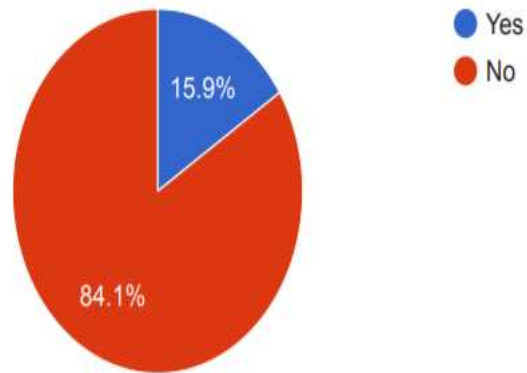
What method of transportation do you use to attend Open Air? (Check all that apply)

780 submissions



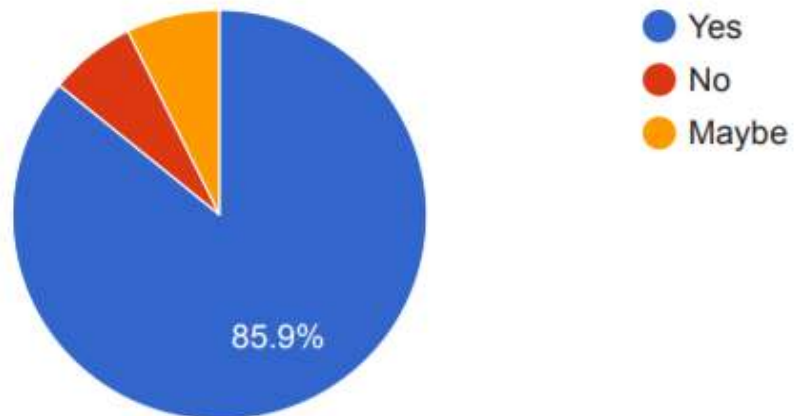
Does the temporary loss of some on-street parking on Richmond, Murray and Dalhousie Streets deter you from attending Open Air or from visiting some of the businesses?

780 submissions



Would you like to see Open Air continue in 2022?

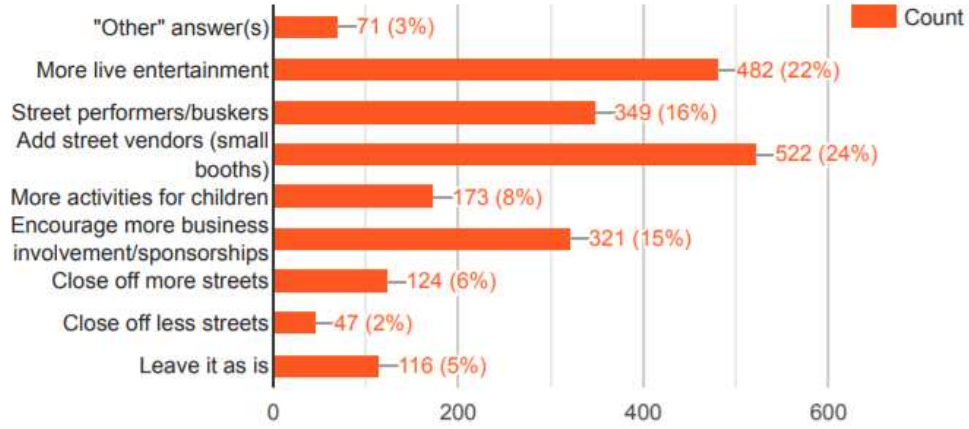
780 submissions





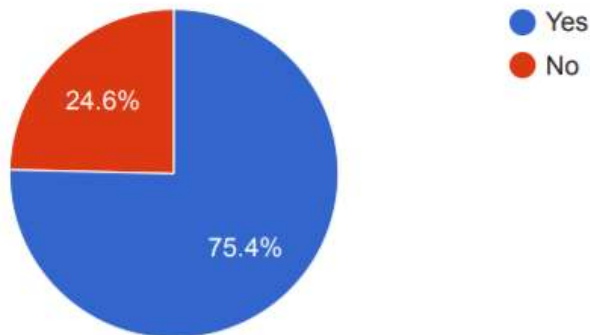
If Open Air was to continue in 2022, how could it be improved? (Check all that apply)

727 submissions



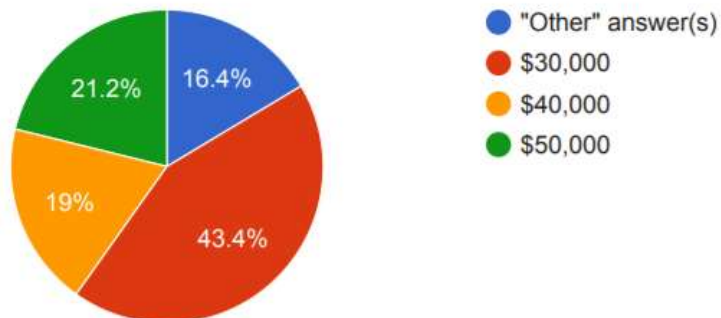
Would you support additional funding in the 2022 Town of Amherstburg budget to improve entertainment programming during Open Air?

727 submissions



What additional funding amount would you support for Open Air in the Town of Amherstburg 2022 budget?

548 submissions



# APPENDIX C

Chart 1

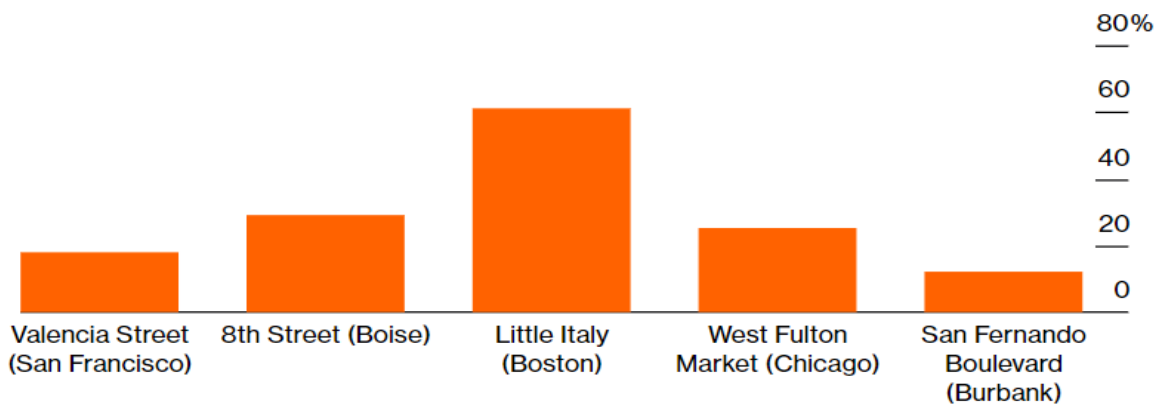
<b>Economic Impacts: By the Numbers</b>	
70.6% of businesses felt participation in Open Streets was worthwhile. <sup>4</sup>	Fort Collins, CO
84% of respondents shopped or purchased food and said they would return to the neighborhood <sup>3</sup>	San Diego, CA
73% of participants spent money at a store or restaurant; 68% of participants became aware of a new store/restaurant <sup>5</sup>	St. Louis, MO
82% of respondents spent money, with over half spending more than \$10.00 <sup>6</sup>	St. Louis, MO
Nearly 82% of the Open Streets participants anticipated spending \$10.00 USD or more at Atlanta Streets Alive. <sup>7</sup>	Atlanta, GA
The net increase in average revenue on an Open Streets Sunday compared to a non-open streets Sunday was \$466 <sup>2</sup>	San Francisco, CA

880 Cities. (n.d.).

Chart 2

## Fewer Cars, More Business?

Car-free zones saw boost in share of consumer activity compared to the rest of the city during Covid-19



Data: Yelp

Note: All of these programs spanned different time periods and street sections. Chart reflects the change in the share of activity from start of the pandemic to each program's respective implementation period.

Bliss, L., (2021)