

Whyte Ave Alley: Lessons Learned

The Opportunity:

The Old Strathcona Business Association (OSBA), the Old Strathcona Foundation (OSF), CITYlab and other community partners collaborated to temporarily paint and program an alley on the north side of Whyte Avenue between 104 and 105 Street after it was transformed into a permanent pedestrian plaza on July 6, 2015. The alley was immediately closed to traffic. It was open to pedestrians for the remainder of the summer, but will be temporarily closed due to construction activities next door at 10408 82 Ave later this fall. It will reopen for pedestrian use next year.

Transforming the alley into a pedestrian plaza was an opportunity to add to what makes Whyte Avenue great—a place to stop, a place to appreciate, and to explore different things going on. Temporarily activating the alley over the summer was a low cost way to showcase a different use and function, while gathering input from Edmontonians on how the space could be permanently designed in the future.



What We Did:

CITYlab and volunteers from OSF and OSBA painted the alley for better visibility, and added large planters at either end to block vehicular traffic. We also partnered with Media Architecture Design Edmonton (MADE) to include their Street Furniture Competition pieces in the alley, but ultimately the furniture was not suited for the alley.

CITYlab organized public engagement through two different venues. First, a survey was put out through the May Insight Survey Community, asking members if they had ever visited this alley, what their mode of transportation through it was, and how they would like this space to be used in the future.

The second involved two public engagement events at the Whyte Ave Alley site, one on Thursday, August 20th from 1:00pm - 4:00pm and the other on Saturday, August 22nd from 9:00am – 12:00pm. CITYlab set up an information tent and invited one local artist for each session to work with the public on drawings of their vision for the alley's future. Key engagement questions asked were:

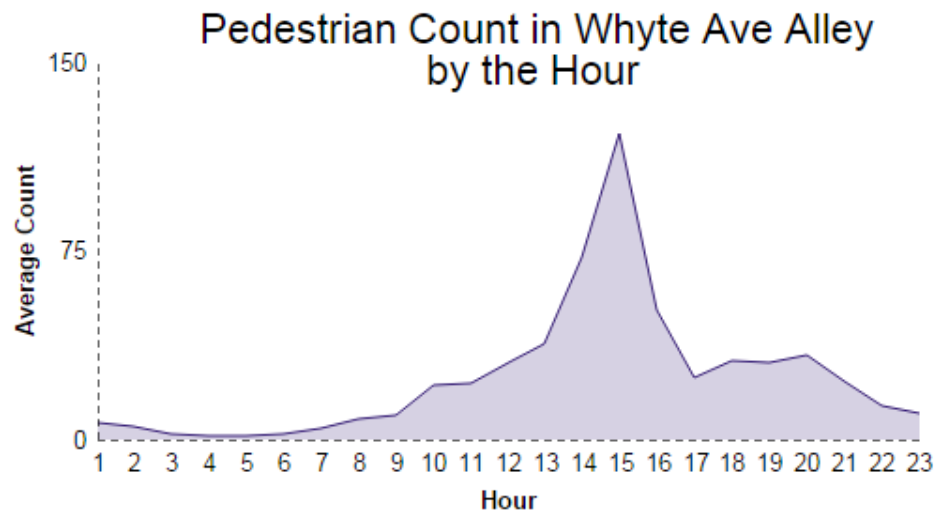
- What would you like to do in the alley?
- What do you think others would like to do in the alley?
- What might we need to build to make the space function the way you would like it to?



Pedestrian Counter Results

CITYlab also partnered with a local civic technology meetup, Open Edmonton, to pilot a DIY pedestrian counter. The counter was inspired by an open-source solution found [here](#). Open source solutions allow anyone to redeploy technology solutions with minimal work. The tool uses a cheap infrared counter and a small, inexpensive computer called a Raspberry Pi. Open Edmonton created the tool using parts purchased from a local tech hobby shop and has released a more detailed open source repository [here](#).

Aside from some setbacks related to Wi-Fi access and a stolen extension cord, pedestrian counts stay steadily within the 300-600 most days, weekdays or weekends. The exception was Saturday, August 22nd and Sunday, August 23rd, when the Fringe Festival brought more people to the area than normal.



What Was Said:

May Insight Community Survey Results

- 1210 people responded to this section of the survey
1. *Do you ever visit Whyte Avenue (82 Avenue) between 103 Street and 105 Street?*
 - 86% of respondents have visited this location in the past.
 2. *Do you ever visit or go through the alley, either on foot or in a vehicle?*
 - Over half of respondents have not gone into the alley before;
 - 30% of those who have gone through the alley did so on foot.
 3. *If the alley is closed to vehicular traffic, in your opinion what are the top 3 types of amenities and/or programming you think would best contribute to Whyte Avenue?*
 - Overall, the top three amenities chosen were 1. Space for festivals (68%), 2. Seating (42%), and 3. Flowers or decorations (32%);
 - Respondents had the ability to choose more than one amenity;
 - 34 Respondents think that there should either be no programming or nothing listed in the survey. Their suggestions included food trucks, washrooms, parking, and vendor space.
 4. *How do you think closing the alley and turning it into a pedestrian friendly space might improve your Whyte Avenue experience?*
 - Over 50% of the respondents gave an open ended response;
 - Themes included having a quiet and safe space to relax, prioritizing pedestrians, encouraging social interaction, and not having an overall effect at all.



Questionnaire Summary Demographics

- Between the two sessions, 100 questionnaires were completed and submitted on location in the Whyte Avenue Alley;
- Those who responded represent 40 different Edmonton neighbourhoods and 5 out-of-province municipalities;
- The age of respondents skewed young; over a quarter of respondents were between the ages 0-20, and another quarter were between 21-30.
- 11% of respondents were considered seniors (over the age of 60).

Questionnaire Summary Results

1. What would you like to do in the alley?

Of the 100 questionnaires submitted, 97 people told us what they would like to use the alley for. Common themes included:

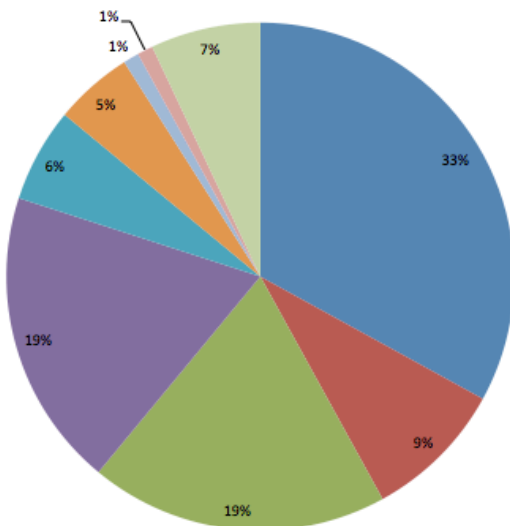
- A space to sit, rest and drink coffee
- Play
- Admire art
- Participate in programming
- Have a market space
- Traverse through
- Parking
- Servicing

Overall, over a third of respondents said they would like to use the alley as an area to sit, drink coffee, and relax.

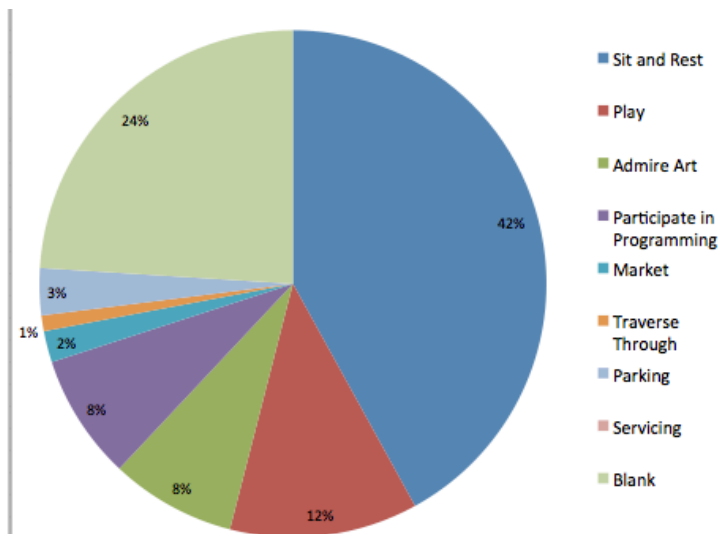
2. What do you think others would like to do in the alley?

Almost half said that they feel other groups of people would use the space in the same way. The results of this question are fairly similar to the first, except almost a quarter of respondents left this question blank or asked us to refer to question 1.

1. What would you like to do in the alley

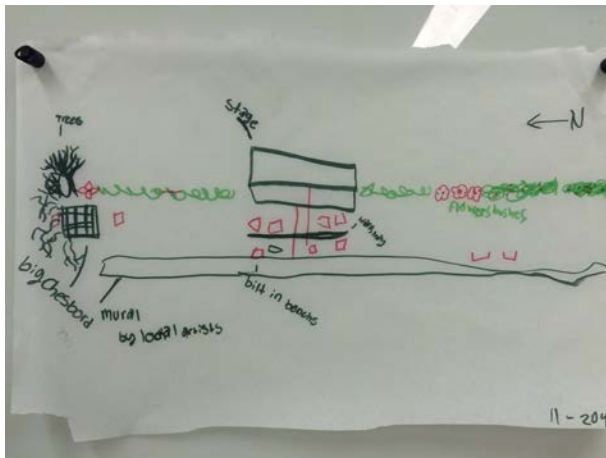


2. What do you think others would like to do in the alley?



Drawn Visions Summary

Altogether, sixteen visions were illustrated by either passersby themselves or the artists invited to participate in the engagement. As you can see from the six examples below, ideas ranged from practical seating spaces with lighting and greenery, to a giant slip and slide!



Some Lessons Learned:

- Painting the alley was exciting for pedestrians passing by at the time and many people wanted to join in. This could have been organized as more of an engagement event;
- Street furniture was not left out in the alley for fear of theft, but locking them would not create the creative space CITYlab hopes to foster;
- Thursday afternoon was a much more effective time to consult as opposed to Saturday morning;
- The total number of questionnaires was not counted until both engagement events were over. A count could be taken after each session to determine how many people were engaged on each day;
- Some people were reluctant to stop and talk to the team, until they knew we were affiliated with the City. More explicit City of Edmonton signage or name tags would mitigate this;
- Many people we approached were reluctant to draw their ideas themselves, but were comfortable working with the artist to illustrate their ideas;
- Questions on the questionnaire potentially worded too similarly. Many respondents filled out the first one and wrote 'see above' for the other two;
- Legalities of renting the alley were not resolved in time to rent and program it over the summer;
- The pedestrian counter's ability to count motion was tested, but not in situations where it would detect group motion, shadows, animals, bicycles, etc. The data therefore provides activity trends for the area, but not accurate counts.

Whyte Ave Alley in the Media

['Pedestrian plaza' planned for Whyte Avenue alleyway](#), CBC, July 7th, 2015

[Whyte Avenue alley made into a creative space](#), Edmonton Examiner, July 22nd, 2015

[Old Strathcona roadway transformed into walkway by alley closure](#), Edmonton Journal, July 9th, 2015

[The Edmonton Insight Community in action!](#), Transforming Edmonton, August 19th, 2015

[Laneway on Whyte Avenue becoming more than a pedestrian path](#), Metro News, July 8th, 2015

...thanks, Edmonton, for sharing your long-term alley visions!!

