

Fall 2022 Innovation Incubator

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Confronting the Sexist City



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Our cities were designed and built by (mostly) men.

If the majority of the architects and planners 'in the room' were male, cis-gendered, and able-bodied, then our cities were designed with *their* views of comfort, their perceptions of safety, and their ideas of what makes a vibrant place.

This makes our cities inherently sexist – our buildings, our sidewalks, our parks, and our roads all privilege a certain gender moving through it.



*discriminating
environments
based on sex or
feminine
appearance*



So we're confronting it.

We need to get explicit about what parts of our built environments fail the womxn in our communities. We need to admit how decision-making can be less male-centric, and more community-focused.

A city designed for women is a city designed for all. As a practice or industry, we should take responsibility and **do better** moving forward.

This is just the start. With 80 hours, we are just scratching the surface of gender-inclusive design.

“Across the world, cities have been designed for men, by men – especially young, healthy, cisgender men. This leads to many challenges – for women, for the young and elderly, transgender community and anyone else who does not fit into this fairly homogenous group of young, able-bodied men.”

(Nagendra & Sen, 2022).

We stand on the shoulders of giants.

Over the past few decades, many feminist geographers have identified the problem of gender inequality in the urban environment and documented their findings in forms of books, maps and art.

The books “**Feminist City**” by Canadian geographer **Leslie Kern** and “**Invisible Women**” by writer and activist **Caroline Criado Perez** have laid the foundation for the passage towards building gender inclusive cities. These books identify the ways in which public spaces are not designed for female bodies and how data fails to take into account gender and treats men as the default and woman as atypical.

**PUBLIC SPACE IS
NOT DESIGNED
FOR WOMEN.
MY FEAR IS NOT
IRRATIONAL.
HEADPHONES
ON—DON'T
TALK TO ME.
CITY SPACE IS
MY SPACE. THE
CITY NEEDS TO
HEAR MY VOICE.**

**FEMINIST CITY:
A FIELD GUIDE
LESLIE KERN**

This is not new discourse.

For years, the industry has grappled with sexism – from pay gaps to representation in leadership. We are building on these conversations and **applying it to practice.** We talk all the time about the **power of design** – but this power has not been distributed equally.

How can we **empower** womxn to actually use the built environments we design?

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Diagnose



What we knew:

- From our personal lived experiences – as women/femme-presenting individuals – we knew there were certain spaces in our own neighbourhoods where we felt more unsafe or uncomfortable than our male counterparts, like walking around at night.
- Although there have been lots of conversation about why this is an issue, there are not many **solutions-oriented** discussions. We have not been having these discussions with clients, project teams, within the workplace, or within society broadly.

Diagnose



What others have done:

- While there is extensive research around the issue, there are very few examples of cities trying to fix the issue. Vienna is one of the first cities to identify this in the 1990's and applied a “**Gender mainstreaming**” approach to urban planning and design. After a series of competitions and testing, the city rolled out a public policy with strategies geared towards achieving a gender inclusive city. The strategies range from large scale transportation planning to small scale park design.
- Montreal and Toronto were also pioneers in this action and rolled out a toolkit called “**Becoming a Feminist City**” and “**Safer City Guidelines**” respectively that stemmed from the ideas during late 1990's but none of them were as effective as the approach in Vienna.



Refine



We started to form a question:

- We have, and can shape our public realm. We have projects at this scale with a direct pathway to implementation. We have local clients working in this realm that we can share this research with to start the conversation.
- While more and more North American cities are coming forward to build gender inclusive cities, it is important for us as Urban Designers at Perkins&Will to add this essential lens to our design thinking process to build truly equitable cities.

leading with
inclusivity, not
exclusivity

How do we reimagine our cities
through a **gender inclusive lens** that
creates better opportunities for
women, girls, and other gender
minorities in the public realm?

everything,
everywhere

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Define



Key Terminology:

- **Womxn:** We are broadening the subject to include not just people who were assigned female at birth. Sexism affects people who also express themselves in a way that people perceive as feminine, including transgender and gender-expansive individuals (Medical News Today, 2021).
- **Public Realm:** A network of publicly-accessible open spaces in our built environments. This includes sidewalks, parks, roadways, plazas, and so on. The definition can also include public transit and other privately-owned public spaces like building setbacks, atriums, lobbies, etc.



Key Terminology:

- **Comfort:** The sense of physical or psychological ease, or a lack of hardship. In this study, this could include how a participant feels when they travel along the segments. It can relate to the shelter from adverse weather conditions, or even the amount of room to move freely. For example, the impacts of snow clearing can influence levels of comfort – which has been studied to favour the man over the woman:

A Swedish gender equality initiative team found that the routine of clearing snow typically benefited men over women. In the winter, snow was cleared first on main roads leading into the city, benefiting commuters—who were mostly men. Foot- and cycle-paths were cleared last—not so good for pedestrians and cyclists, who were very often women traveling with children in strollers (Perez, 2019).



Define





Key Terminology:

- **Safety:** The ability to be protected from, or the unlikelihood of danger, risk or injury. In the public realm for this study, this can include factors such as visibility, buffers from oncoming traffic, psychological barriers to space, lighting, or crowding. For example, the way that adverse micro-climate conditions are measured and evaluated for design projects were found to be male-centric as well.

The Former Director of Urban Design for Toronto, Lorna Day, found that the city's guidelines for wind effects assumed a "standard person" whose height, weight, and surface area corresponded to an adult male. This excludes women, children and the elderly and in many similar ways, gender bias influences how our cities are built (Kern, 2019).



Define





Key Terminology:

- **Vibrancy:** Enjoyment of our built environments! The liveliness of our cities, the ability to play freely, animation of the street, and energy to be able to spontaneously move through the public realm. This affects womxn of all ages. For example, the number of girls who play in parks drop drastically beyond the age of 9.

A Dutch urban geographer named Gerban Helleman conducted an extensive research on kids playing outside and found that there is a correlation between gender and age. He found that In the younger age group - from zero to eight years - the ratio between boys and girls is almost equal. However, girls aged nine or older are playing less in public space than their male peers (Helleman, 2021).



Define





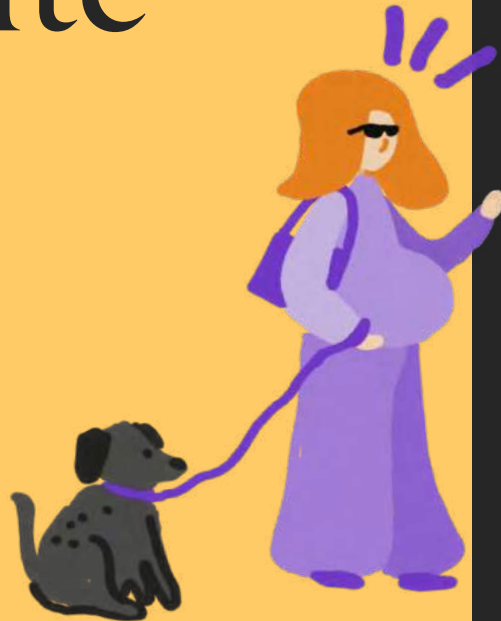
Locate



Setting the Stage:

- **Toronto, Ontario** is where the researchers are based. The City has a population of nearly 3 million, with about 250,000 people living Downtown.
- **Queen Street** is an east-west street in Downtown Toronto, totaling 14.2 kilometers. It was the cartographic baseline for the original east-west avenues of Toronto's grid pattern of major roads.
- **The study segment** chosen for this research is the approx. 2.1 kilometer stretch between Spadina Avenue and George Street. This segment cuts through neighbourhoods such as Trinity Bellwoods, West Queen West, Kensington-Chinatown, Yonge-Bay Corridor, Downtown Yonge East, and Moss Park. The variation between all these areas offer a range of neighbourhood characters to study.

Invite



Reaching Out:

- A public call for participants was made, with over 30 responses of interest. It was important that we allowed participants of any background, age, ability, professional background, and gender identity.
- A 6-part survey was developed, to mirror the 6 segments of the street. It was mobile-friendly and allowed participants to live-respond to prompts and questions about their experiences of travelling along the street. Sub-section questions were organized by theme – **Comfort, Safety, and Vibrancy.**
- We asked for participants to consent to recording their walks using the app **Strava**. With the output .gpx files, we were able to lay the data over our GIS base maps, and view participants' pace, stops, and speed of walk.

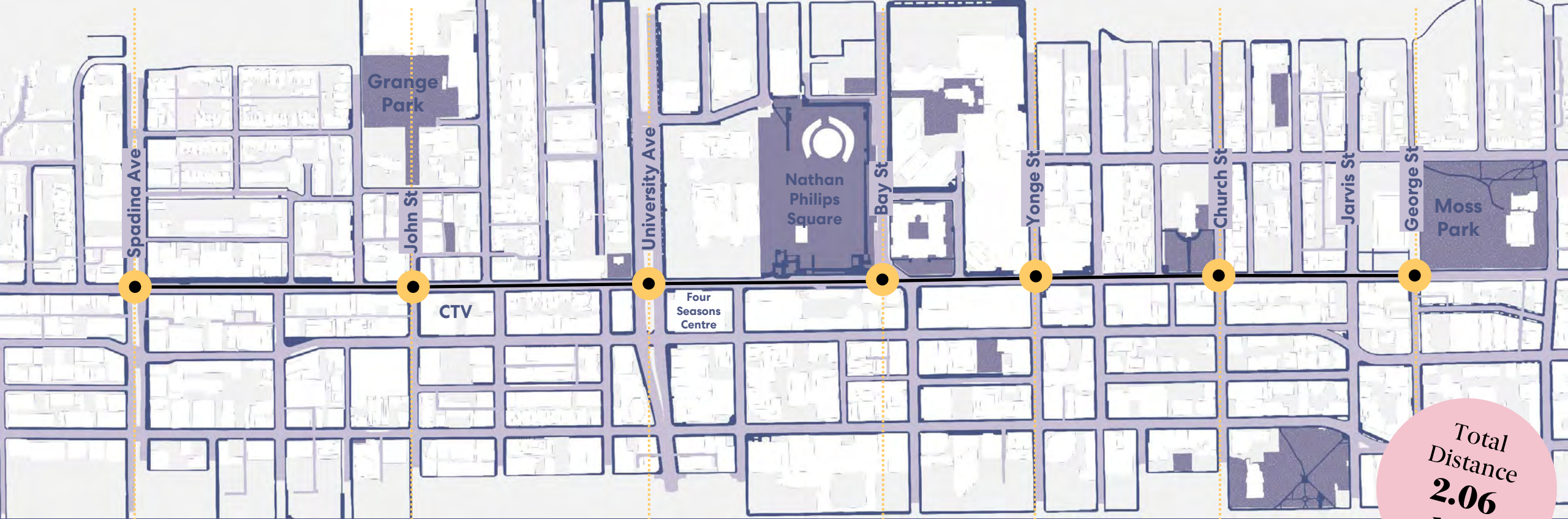
Toronto

2.06km stretch of Queen St



Image © 2023 TerraMetrics

Source: Google Earth Pro



Total Distance
2.06
km

Segment 1

The retail strip

440 m

Segment 2

The restaurant/
cannabis strip

380 m

Segment 3

The civic strip

400 m

Segment 4

The mall
strip

230 m

Segment 5

The hospital
strip

300 m

Segment 6

The garden
strip

310 m

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Participant Overview

20

participants

19-65

age range

walks occurred from

April 2 to April 21, 2023

at a range of times between

8:00 am to 7:00 pm

during weather from

-20 deg C to 18 deg C

We heard the perspectives from a range of demographics:

20

Participants

19 identified as **Female**

1 identified as **Female, Non-binary/Gender Non-Conforming**

1

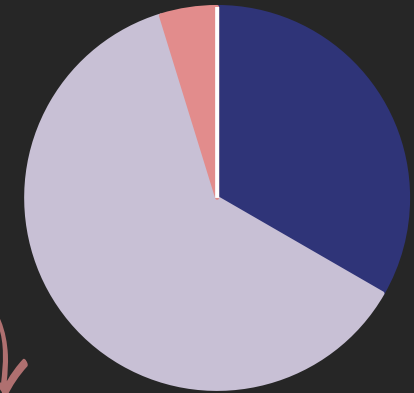


We had one volunteer who walked with a stroller!

40%
of the participants walked alone

60%
of the participants walked with a female friend or with their partner

Age distribution of participants



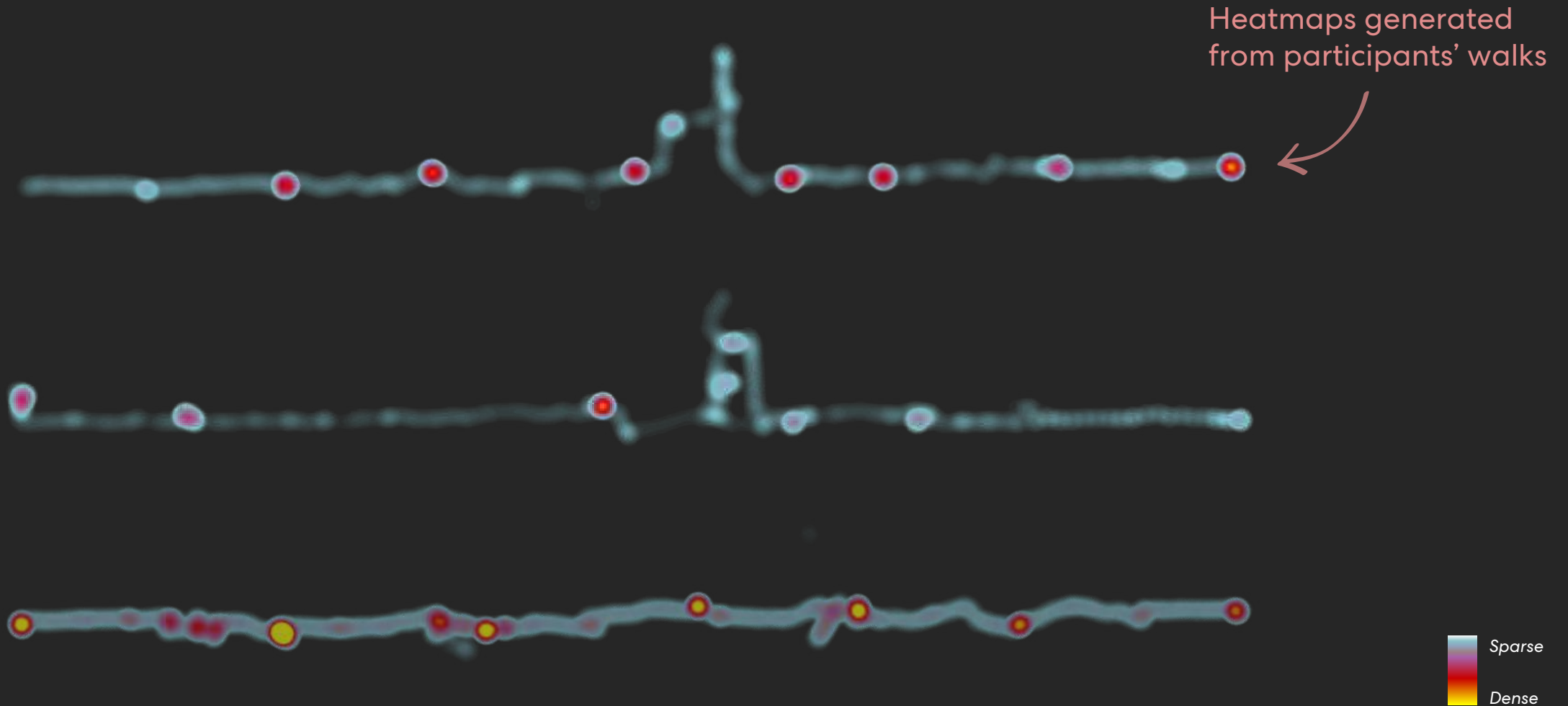
We had a good number of young adults offer their opinions!

■ 15-24 ■ 25-44 ■ 45-65 ■ 65 and over

As someone who identifies as a queer person, I've felt unsafe and uncomfortable on the streets of Toronto repeatedly, especially in the last two years. I'm interested in how the way our streets are designed can be improved to be more fitting to a non-patriarchal norm as well as what exact qualities make minority populations feel unsafe on streets.

Quotes from participants – specific details may be edited to preserve anonymity or enhance clarity.

Participants took anywhere between 30 and 90 mins to complete the walk with multiple stops along the way.



Data was collected in a **shareable GPS data format** (.gpx) via Strava App

Generated via ESRI ArcGIS



Segment 1

The Retail Strip

Segment 1



SPADINA AVE

QUEEN ST W

PETER ST

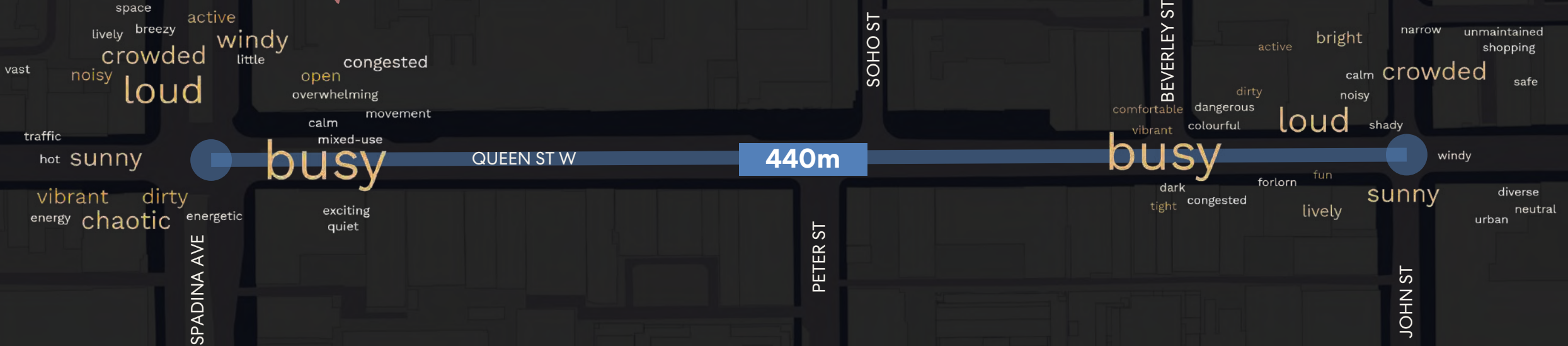
SOHO ST

BEVERLEY ST

JOHN ST

Segment 1

At every intersection, we asked participants to describe their feelings with 3 words.



This segment, between Spadina Avenue and John Street, offers some of the most popular shopping and restaurant destinations downtown. Lots of people are funneled onto Queen Street via Spadina Avenue, which contains a north-south streetcar line.

At Queen and Spadina, this high-energy intersection is bustling at all times of the day, filled with commuters, shoppers, and residents of all ages.



Segment 1

36.8%

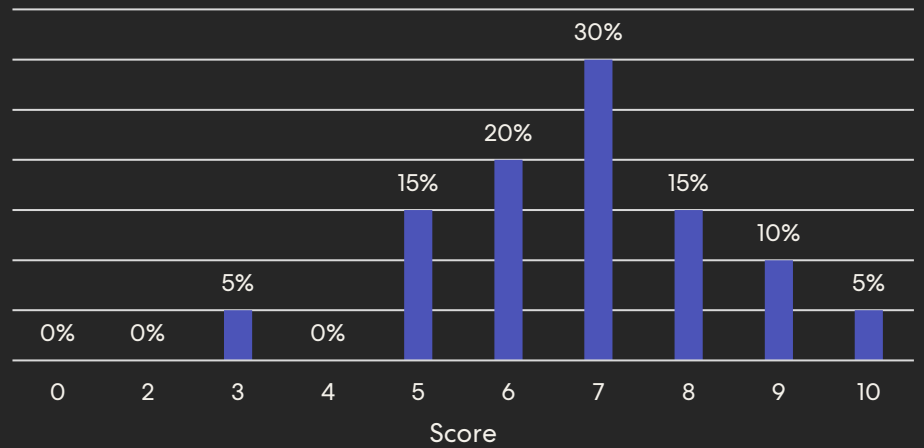
of participants stopped at various points during their walk, but mostly for leisure (not due to discomfort)

40%

of participants did not find the sidewalks to be wide enough to move comfortably

participants were asked to rate their experience from 0 to 10

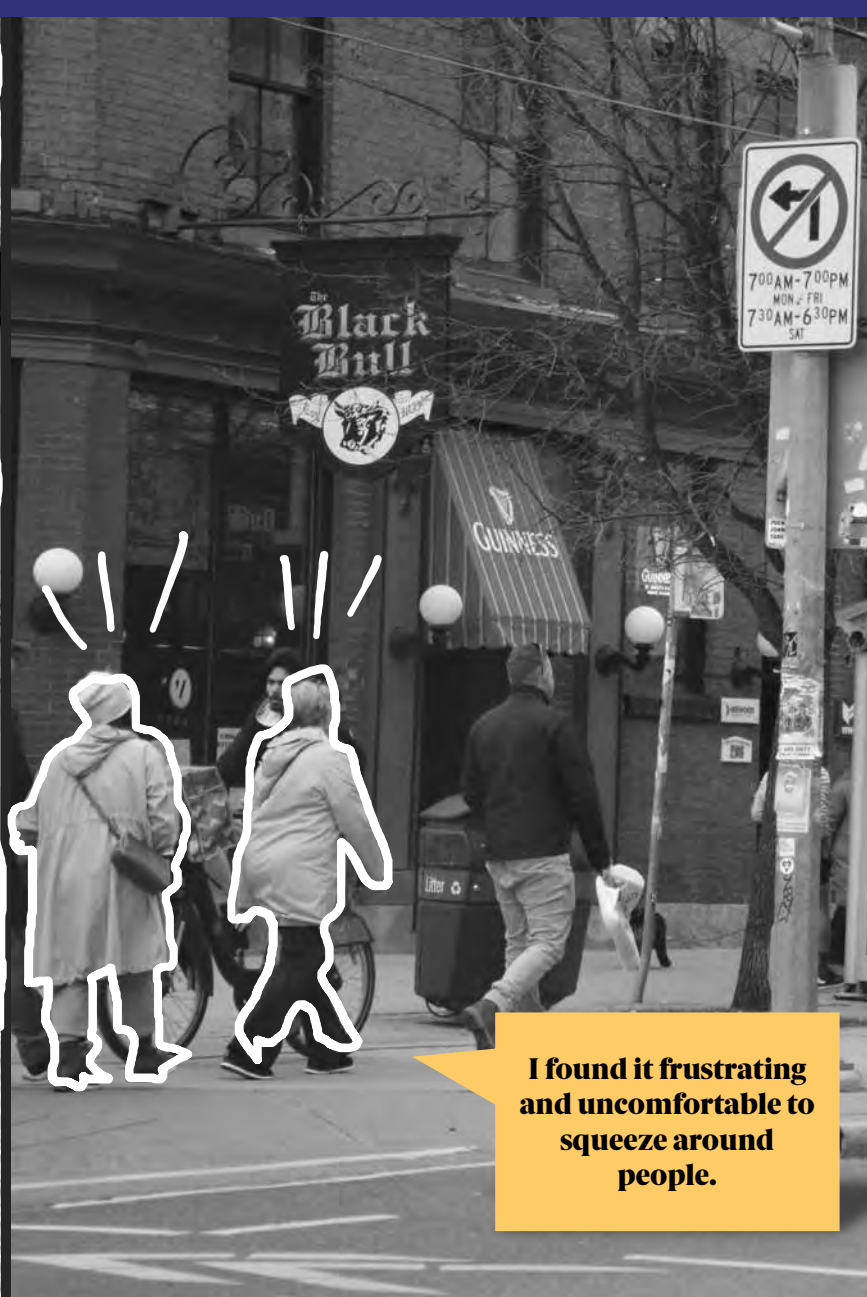
Comfort Score



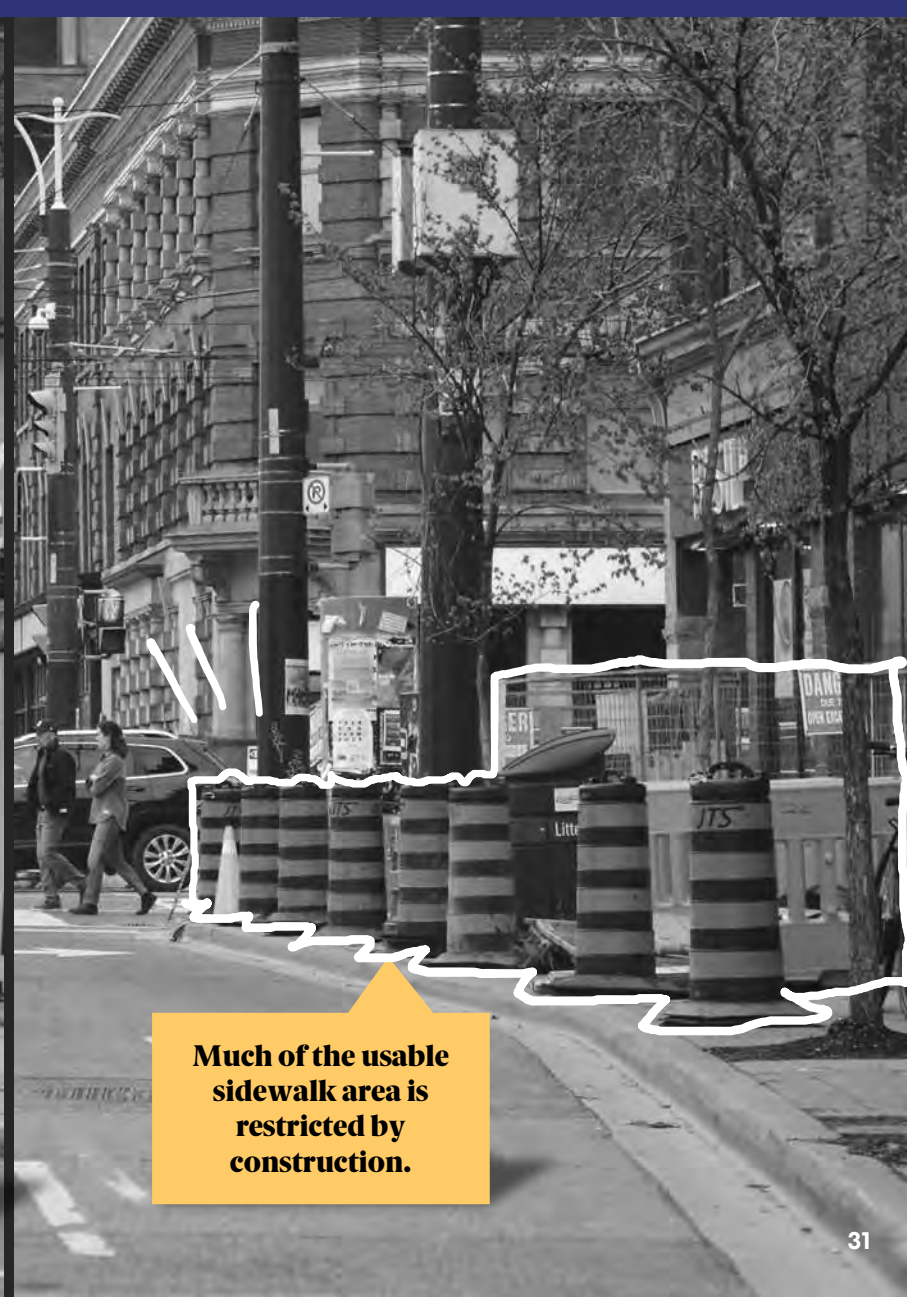
Segment 1



Sidewalk was too sloped to walk with a stroller.



I found it frustrating and uncomfortable to squeeze around people.



Much of the usable sidewalk area is restricted by construction.



Segment 1



Although there were trees all along the northern boulevard, 45% of participants did not notice them. 5% of participants said they saw no trees.

This could be due to the heightened focus on people and movement on streets and the lack of interaction with the greenscape. This response could also be due to seasonality since trees are less noticeable during winter.



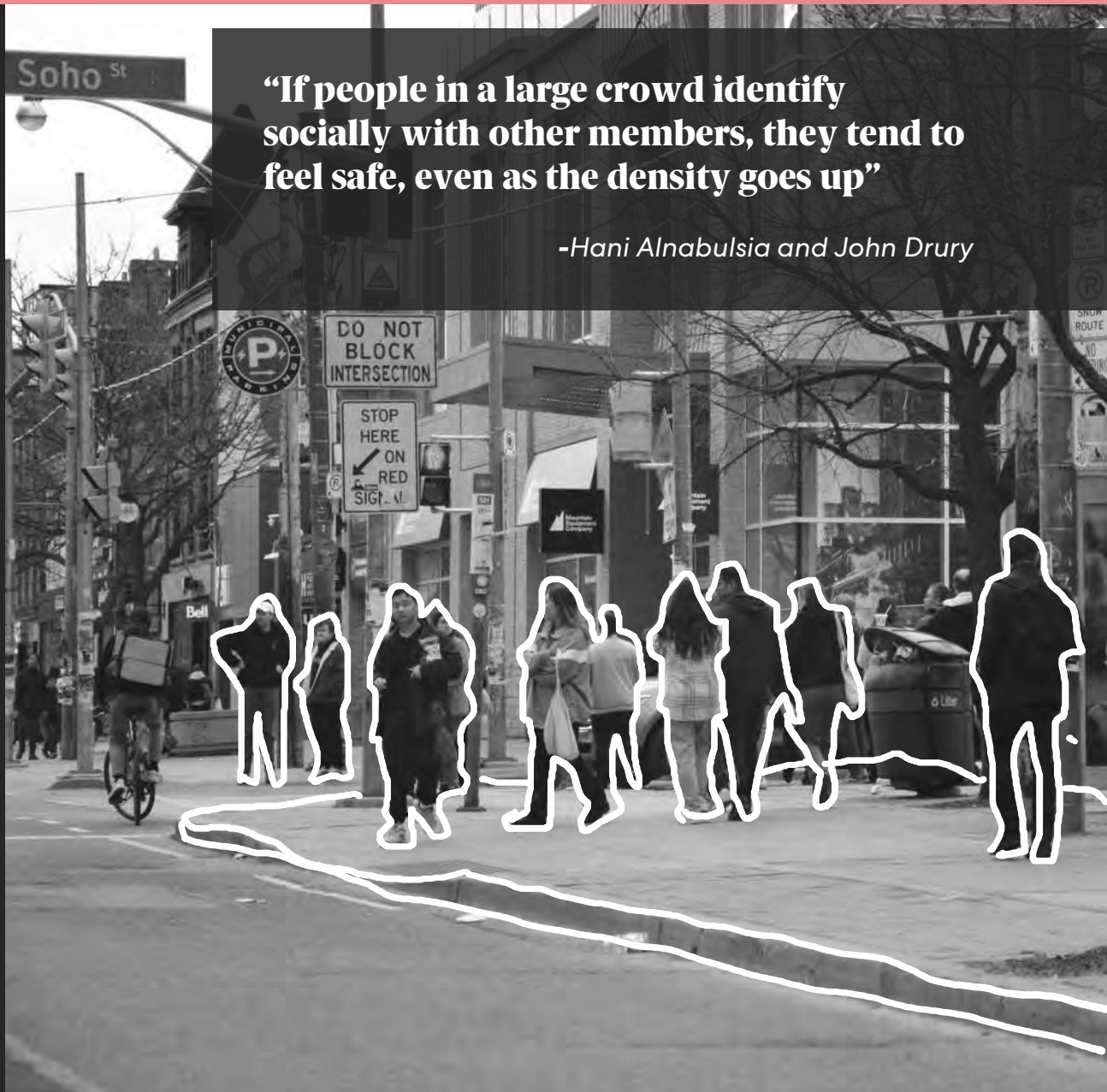
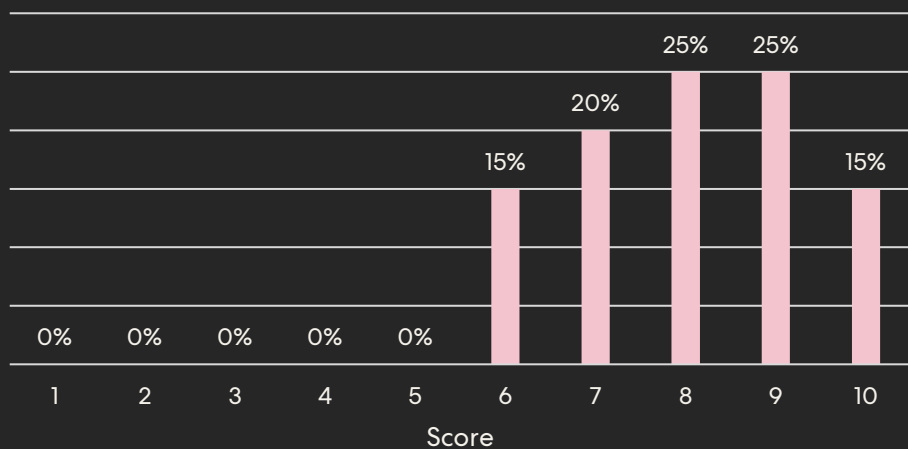
Segment 1

The presence of other women make women feel safe.

94.8%

of participants felt safe or neutral around the presence of pedestrians

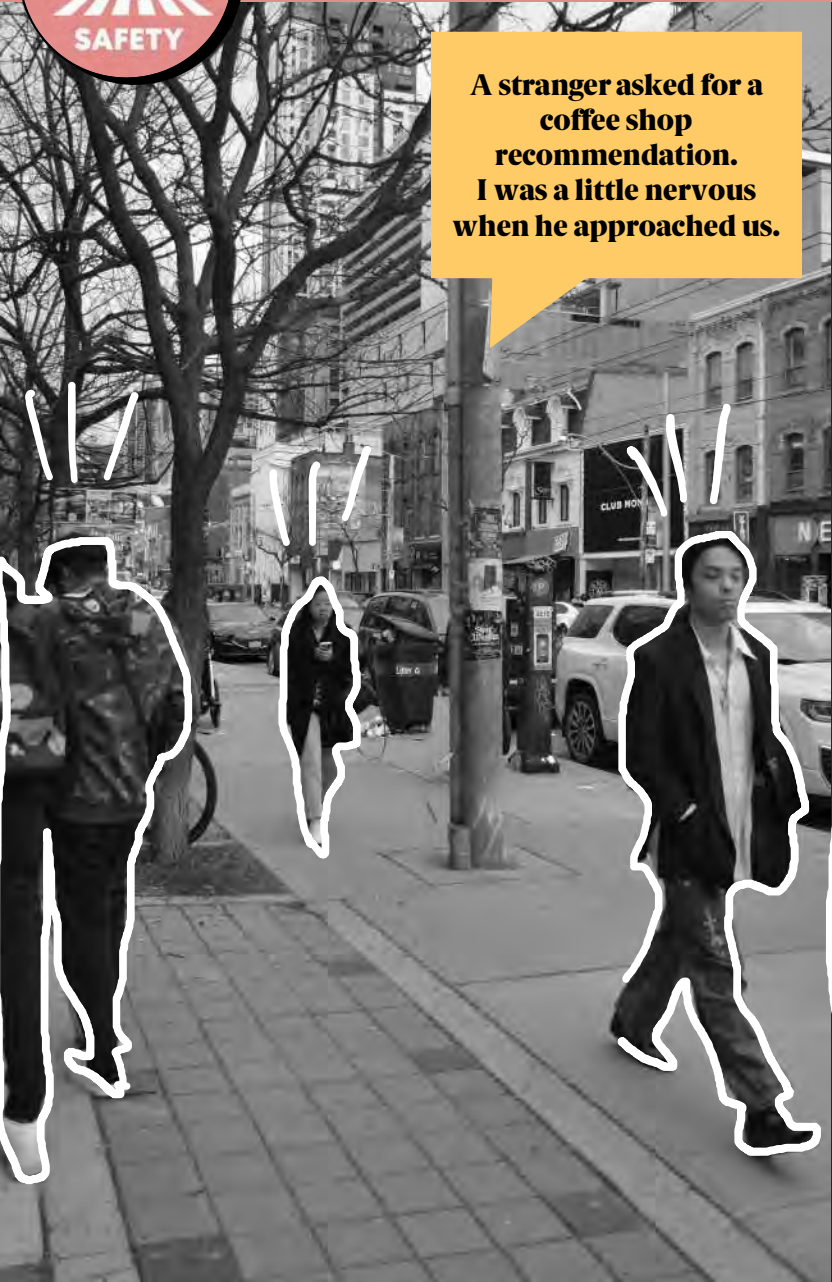
Safety Score



“If people in a large crowd identify socially with other members, they tend to feel safe, even as the density goes up”

-Hani Alnabulsia and John Drury

Segment 1



A stranger asked for a coffee shop recommendation. I was a little nervous when he approached us.



I felt fairly safe while walking. No strangers interacted with me. Cars followed the rules of the road.



It felt unsafe walking under scaffolding.



Segment 1

Much of Safety is driven by the built environment, not people.

However, there were some hesitations around strangers approaching participants. Safety was sometimes linked with interactions.



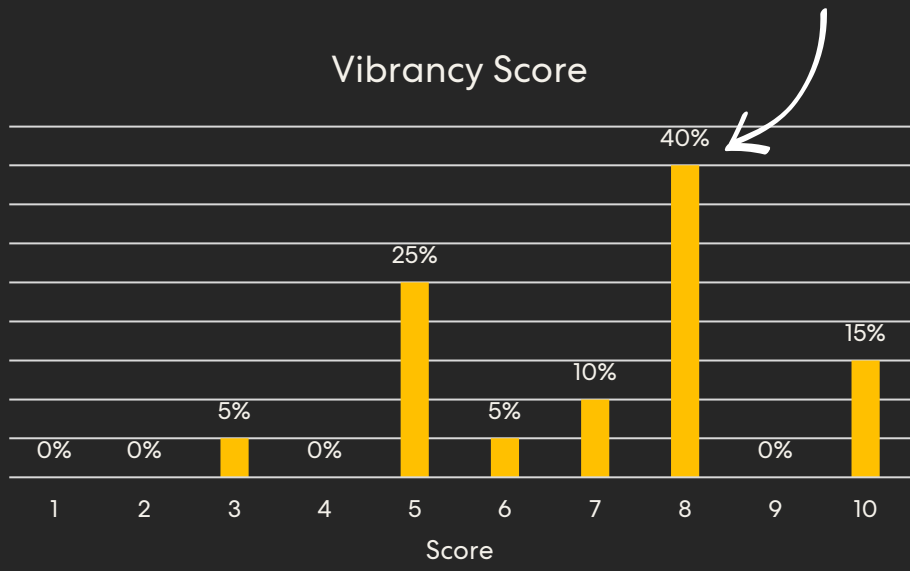


Segment 1

50%

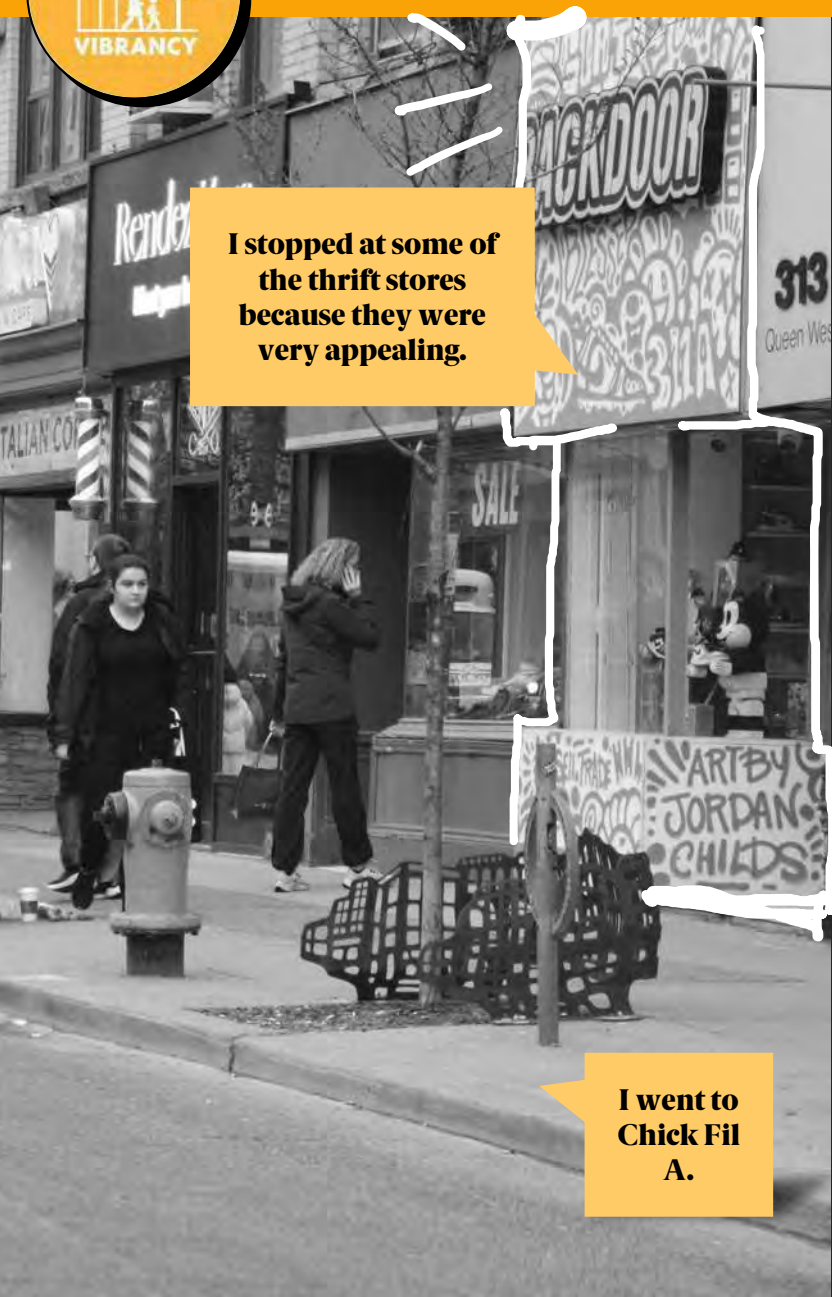
of participants made a stop in a store or establishment. 35% of participants thought about stopping. The other 15% kept walking and made no stops.

High vibrancy score could be linked to thriving retail stores with interesting displays, and presence of people,



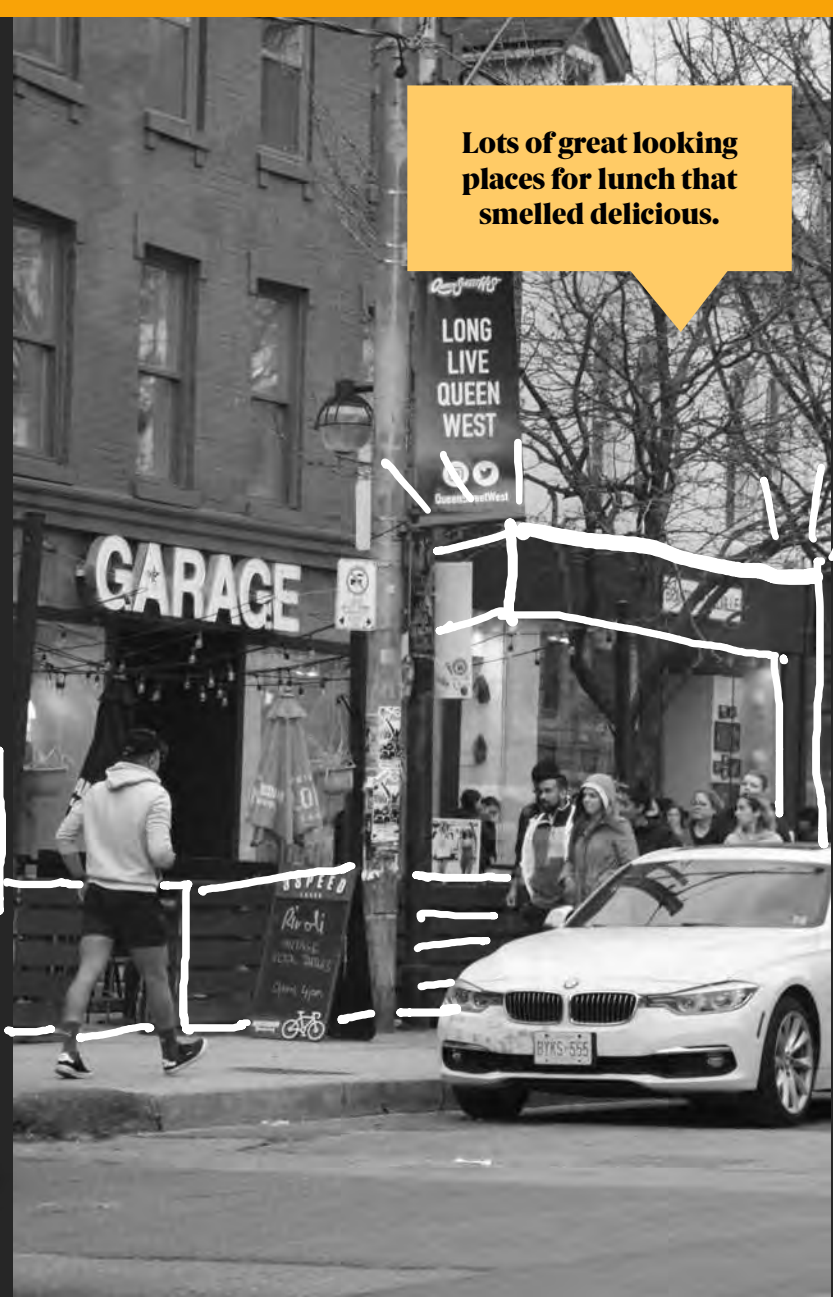


Segment 1

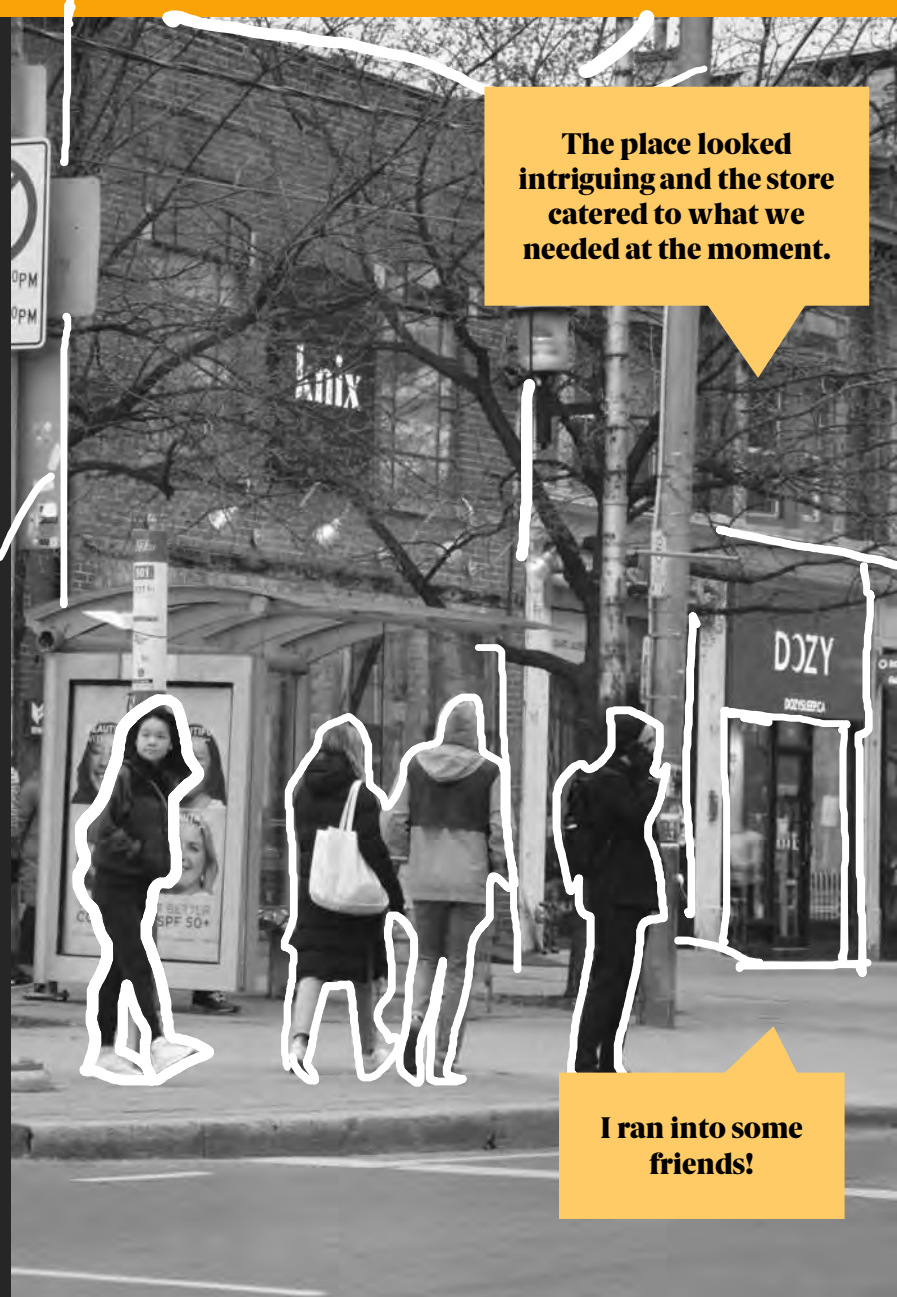


I stopped at some of the thrift stores because they were very appealing.

I went to Chick Fil A.



Lots of great looking places for lunch that smelled delicious.



The place looked intriguing and the store catered to what we needed at the moment.

I ran into some friends!

Segment highlights

Things that negatively impacted the participants' experience

73.7%

Lack of greenery

63.2%

Garbage on the ground

47.4%

Cracks in the sidewalk

Noise

Uneven Surfaces

Traffic

What participants wanted to see more of

Greenery, to add the sense of enclosure from the street and the weather elements

Trees and more even sidewalks

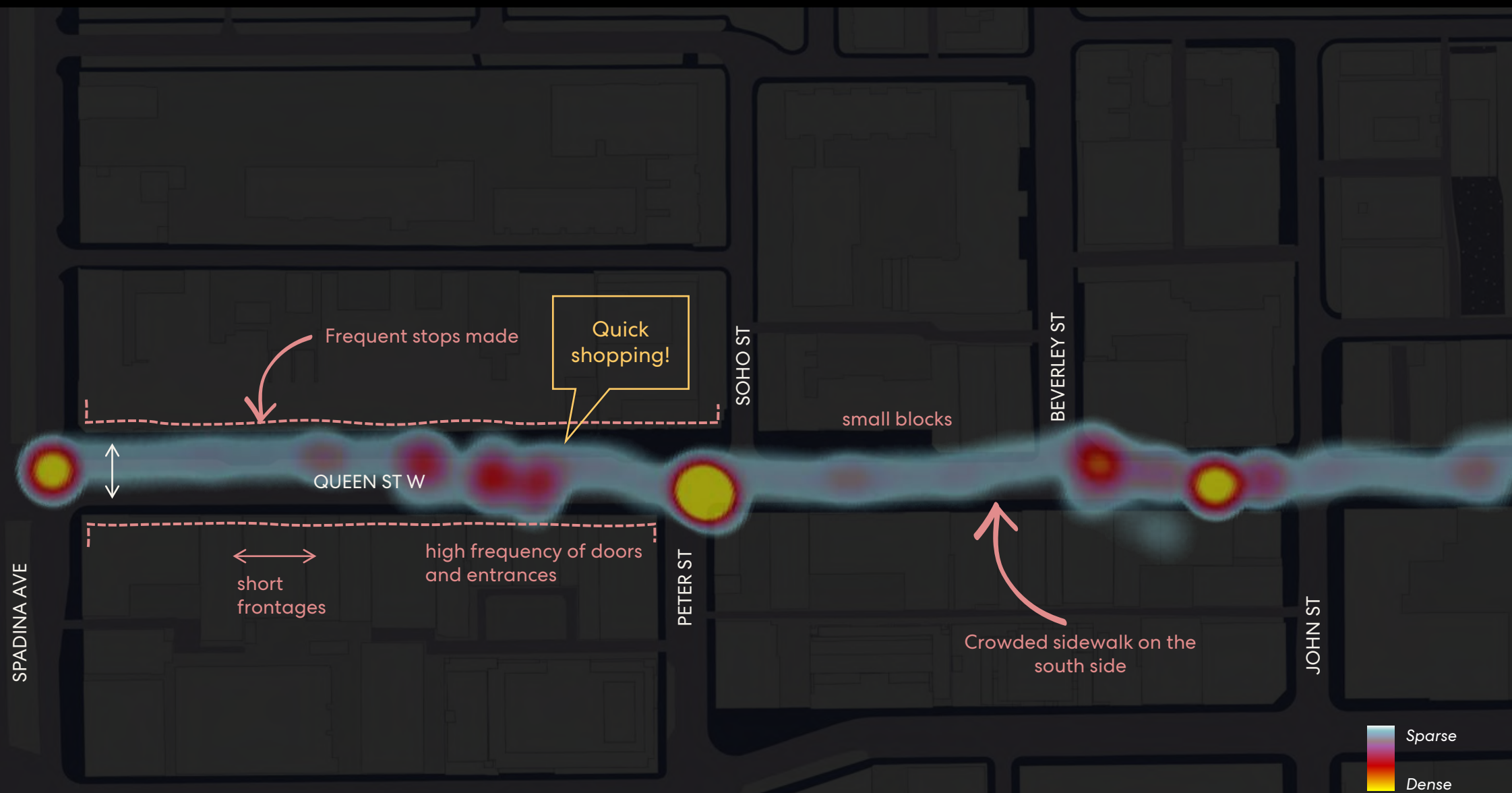
More even sidewalks

Vibrant for the fact many people were on the sidewalk and stores, but the amount of traffic and construction were insane. During this segment lots of doggos with their owners roaming around.

More pedestrian seating to take a break after going to the stores

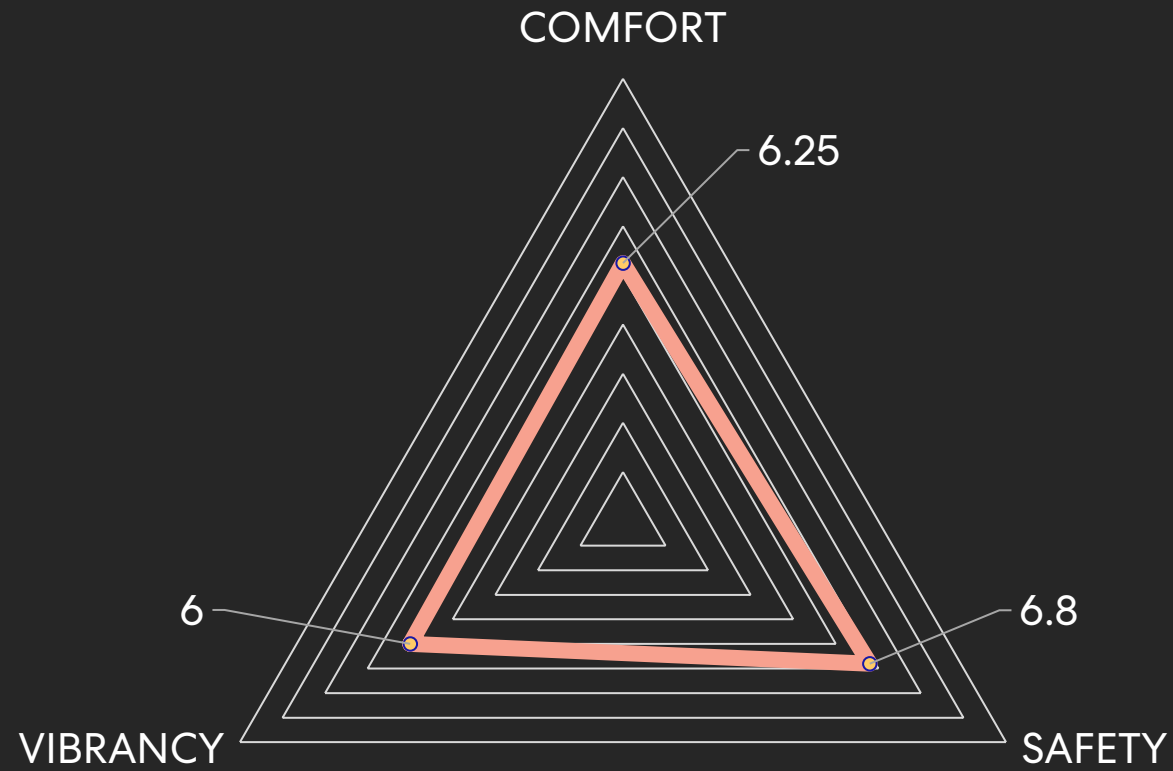
Less construction, more trees and even surfaced side walks

Segment Highlights



Segment Highlights

Overall Average Scores





Segment 2

The restaurant/cannabis strip



Segment 2



JOHN ST

MCCAUL ST

ST PATRICK ST

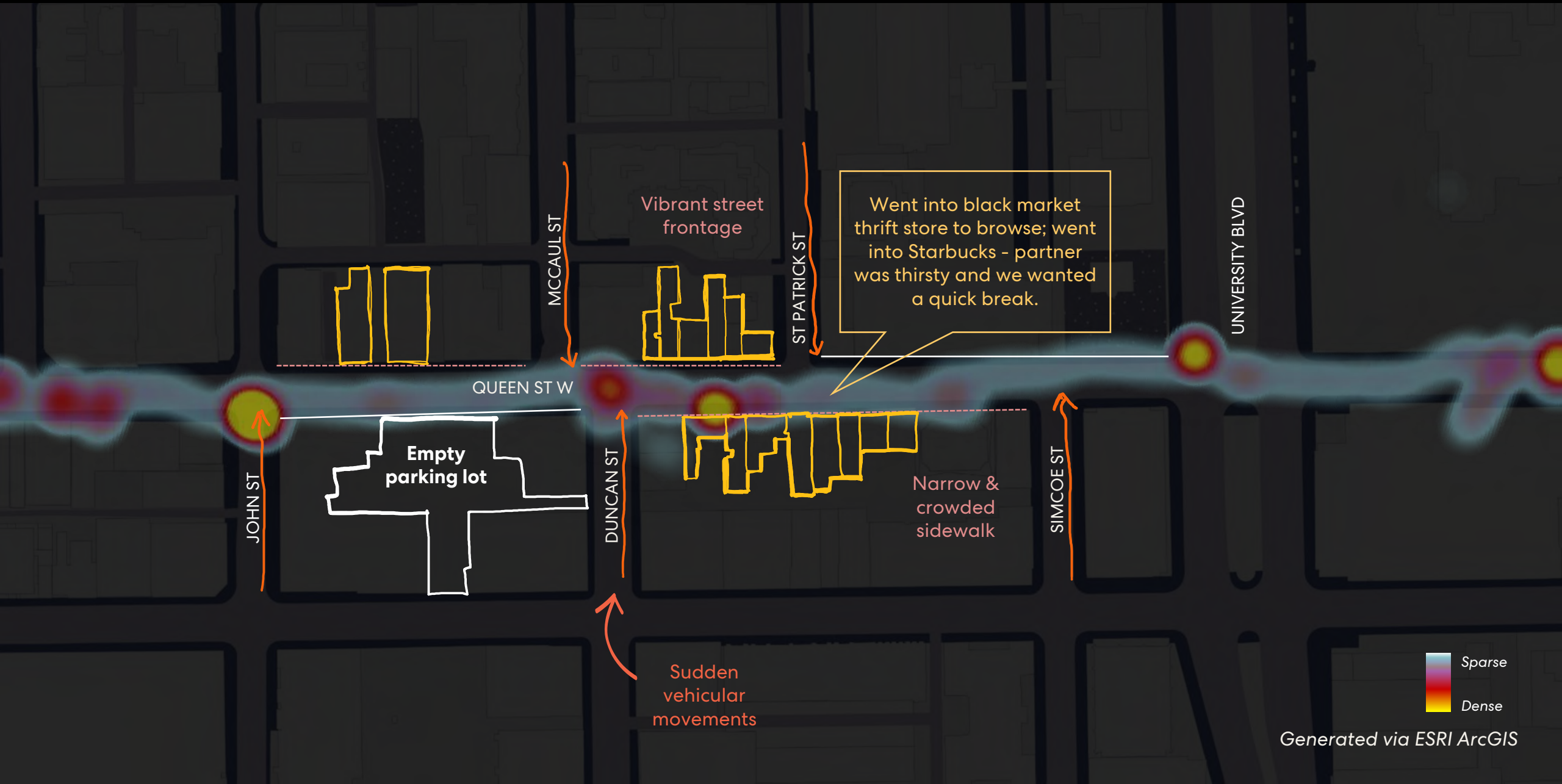
UNIVERSITY BLVD

QUEEN ST W

DUNCAN ST

SIMCOE ST

Segment 2





Segment 2

25%

of participants stopped at various points during their walk, but mostly for leisure (not due to discomfort)

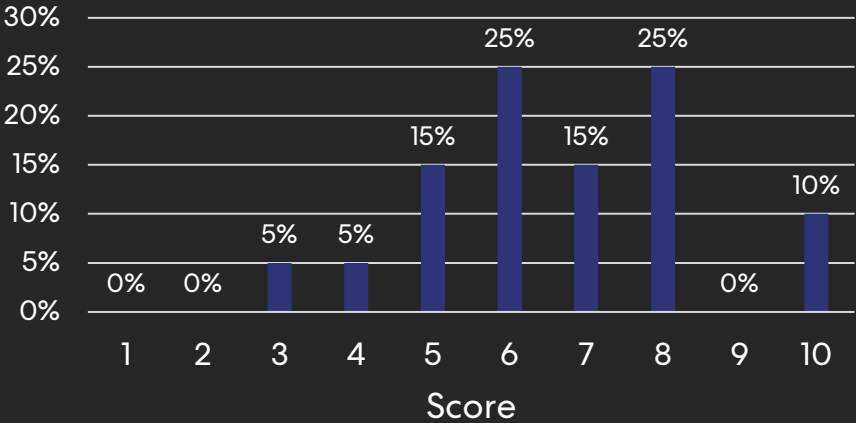
50%



This is 10% more than Segment 1

of participants did not find the sidewalks to be wide enough to move comfortably

Comfort Score



Segment 2



Visible signs above ground

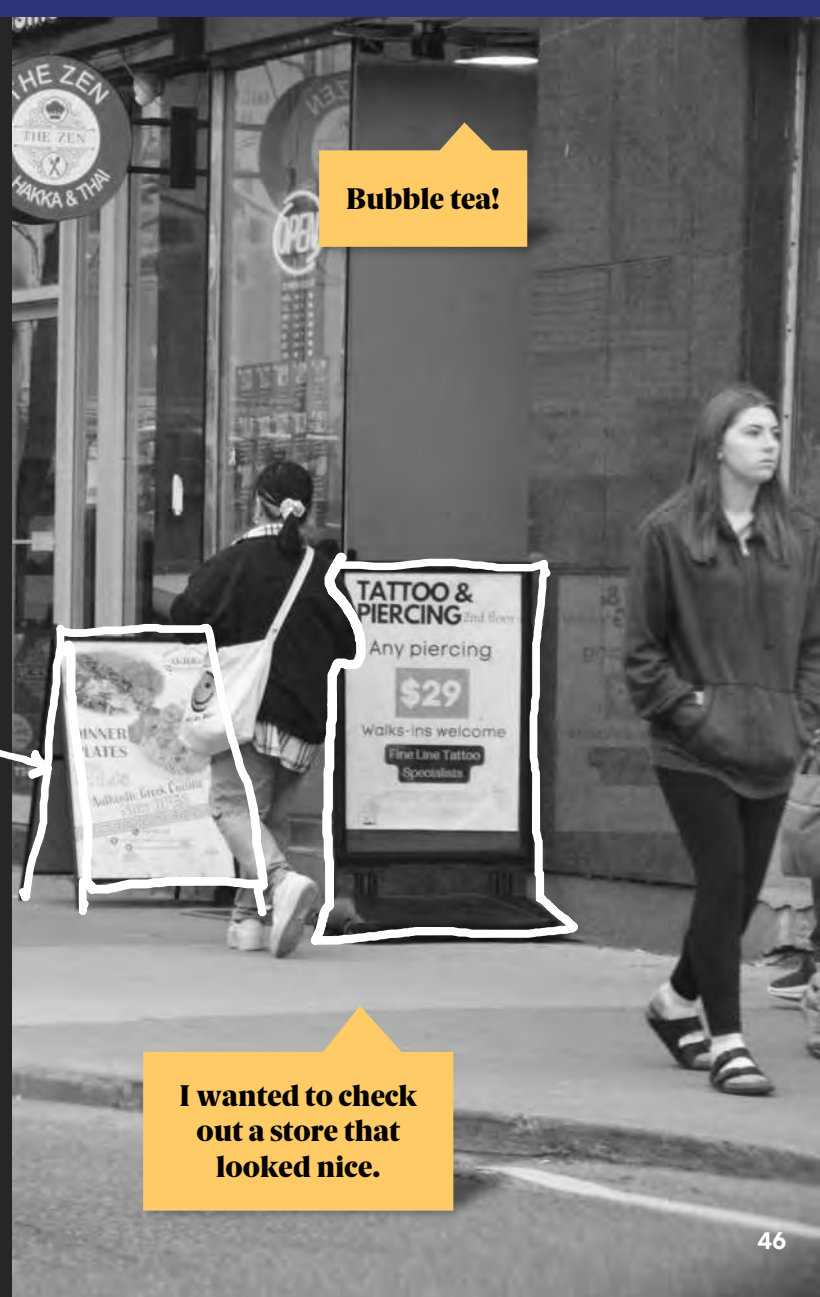
Went to go check out a bakery! There were yummy treats in the window.



Mostly comfortable until Simcoe - then it was crowded and tight. New bicycle racks pushed people inwards.

Constrained usable sidewalk space

1m 2.5m



Bubble tea!

I wanted to check out a store that looked nice.



Segment 2

The sidewalk width in this segment is narrower than the previous segment. This section has many small businesses with **short frontages**.

Store displays and sign boards of these businesses on the sidewalk reduce the amount of usable pedestrian space.

Lifting these signs off the ground and using vertical displays could free up pedestrian space.





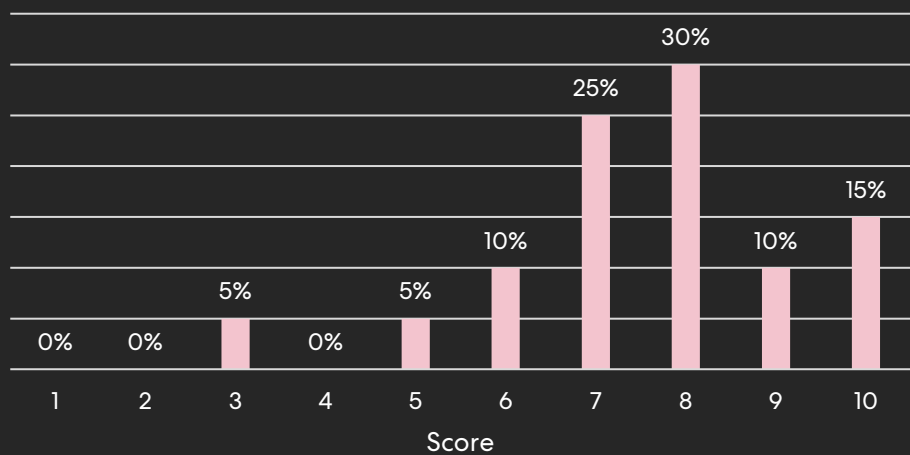
70%

of participants had to navigate around other pedestrians

90%

of participants felt safe or neutral in the presence of other pedestrians

Safety Score



Segment 2



Cars were eager to turn and did not give pedestrians the right of way.



Crossing University Ave. felt unsafe.



Where there were people to close to each other as some people were walking too slow while others wanted to get somewhere faster.



Segment 2

Participants did not feel safe around **fast-moving cars** and cars that too unpredicted turns on to Queen Street.

Long crossing distance at University Avenue also increased fear amongst many participants.

Sidewalks were very narrow, and people were **competing for space** amongst spillover from restaurants and streetscape amenities such as light poles, info poles and bike racks.





Segment 2

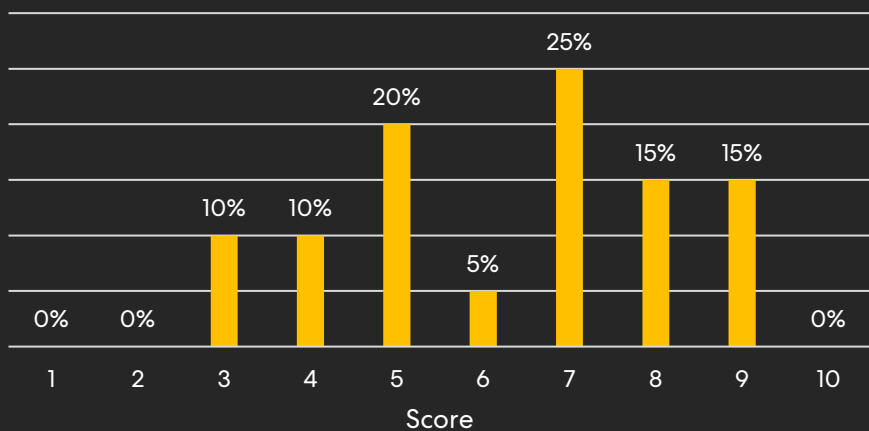
Smaller frontages, more enticing displays and weather influence these high number of stops.

65%

This is 15% more than Segment 1

of participants made a stop in a store or establishment. 35% of participants thought about stopping. The other 15% kept walking and made no stops.

Vibrancy Score



Segment 2



I considered getting a hot beverage because there was a cafe I have thought about checking out but is usually out of my way.

Wanted to look at things I saw through the glass.

There were some nice restaurants.

The window display made some cafes look really interesting and the cold and rainy weather made me want to warm up for a second inside a store.

Some restaurants smelled good as I walked by.



Segment highlights

Things that negatively impacted the participants' experience

80%

Lack of greenery

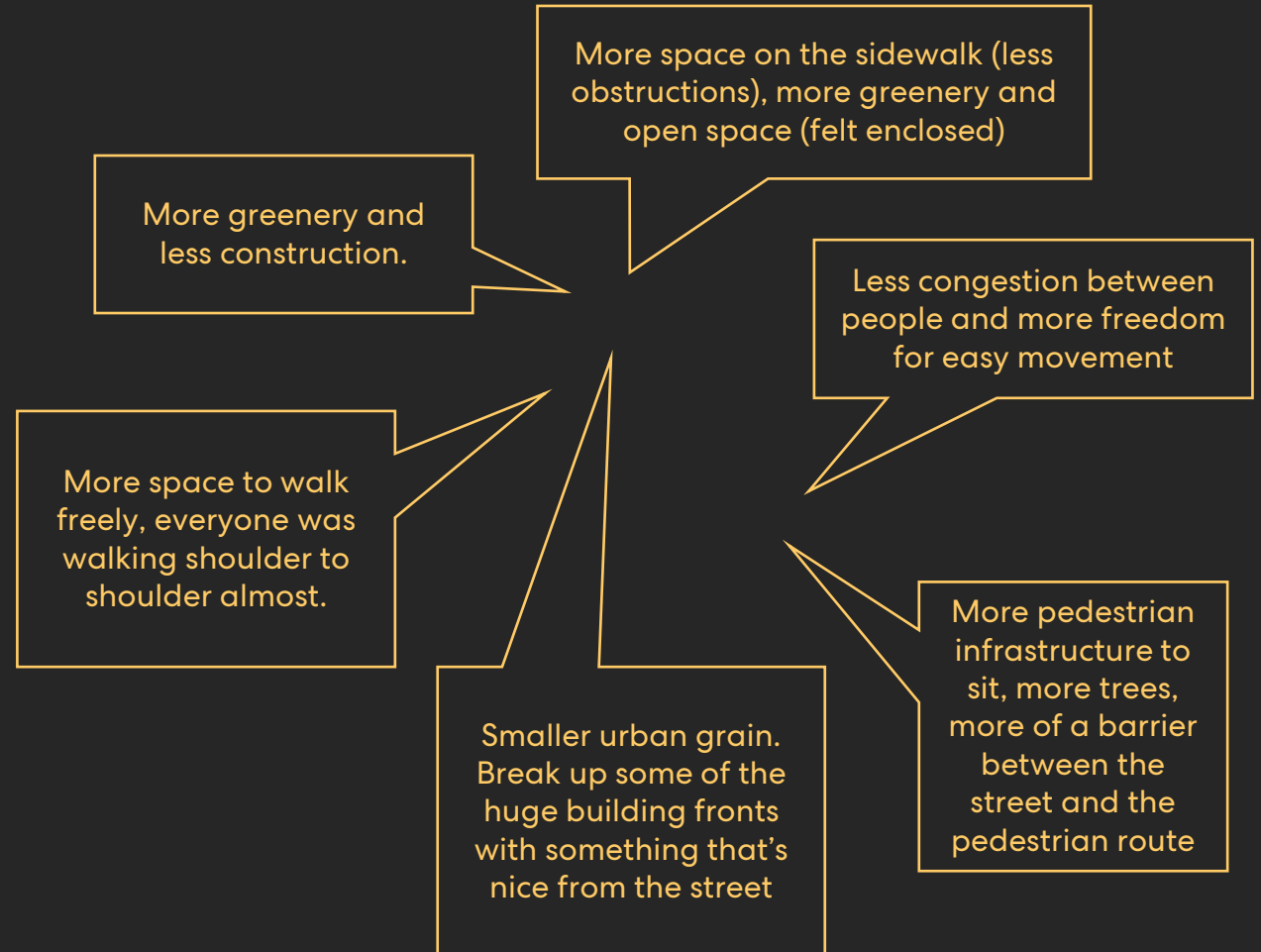
60%

Noise

55%

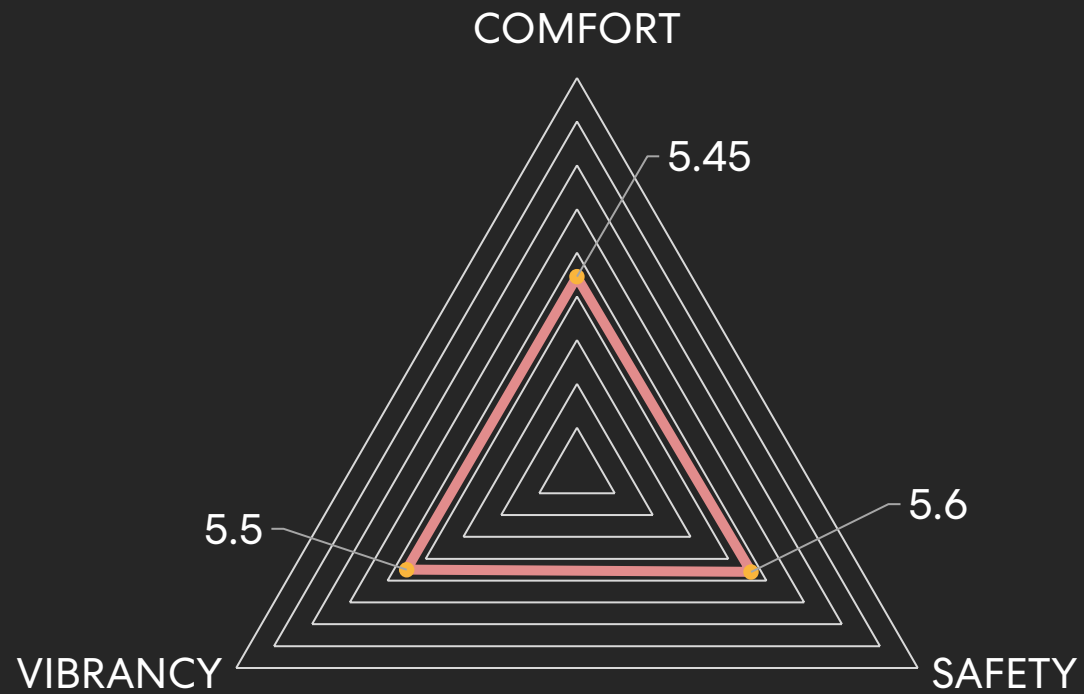
Garbage on ground

What participants wanted to see more of



Segment highlights

Overall Average Scores





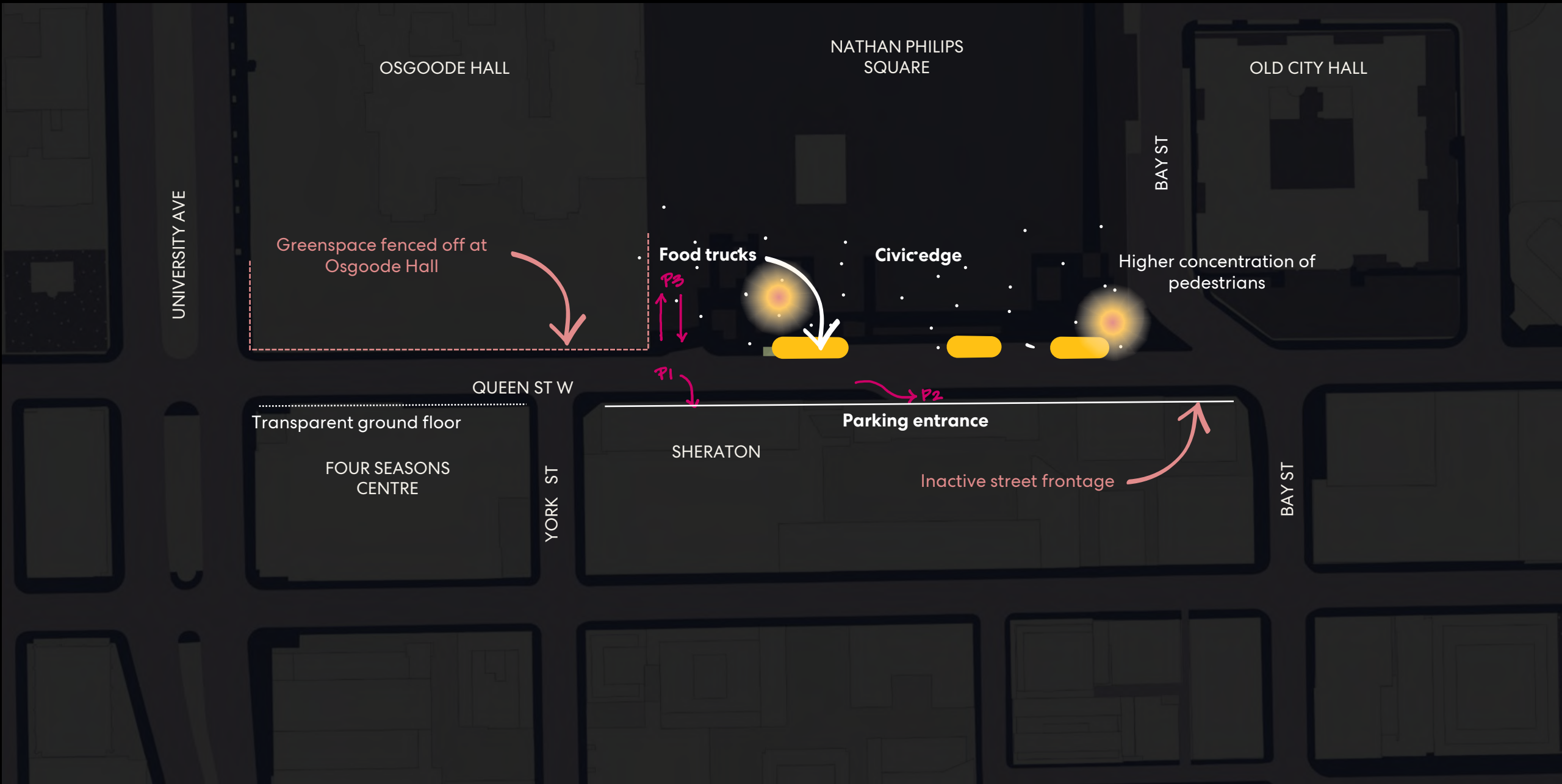
Segment 3

The civic strip

Segment 3



Segment 3





Segment 3

30%

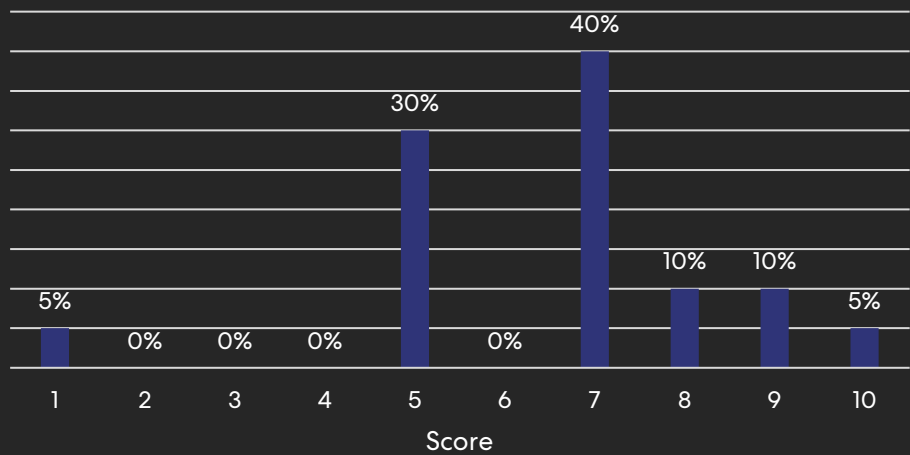
of participants stopped at various points during their walk, but mostly to stop and relax at Nathan Philips Square

45%

of participants did not find the sidewalks to be wide enough especially in the first half

Even though Nathan Philips Square has a wide pedestrian boulevard, the narrow and neglected sidewalks on the other parts of this segment offset the benefit.

Comfort Score

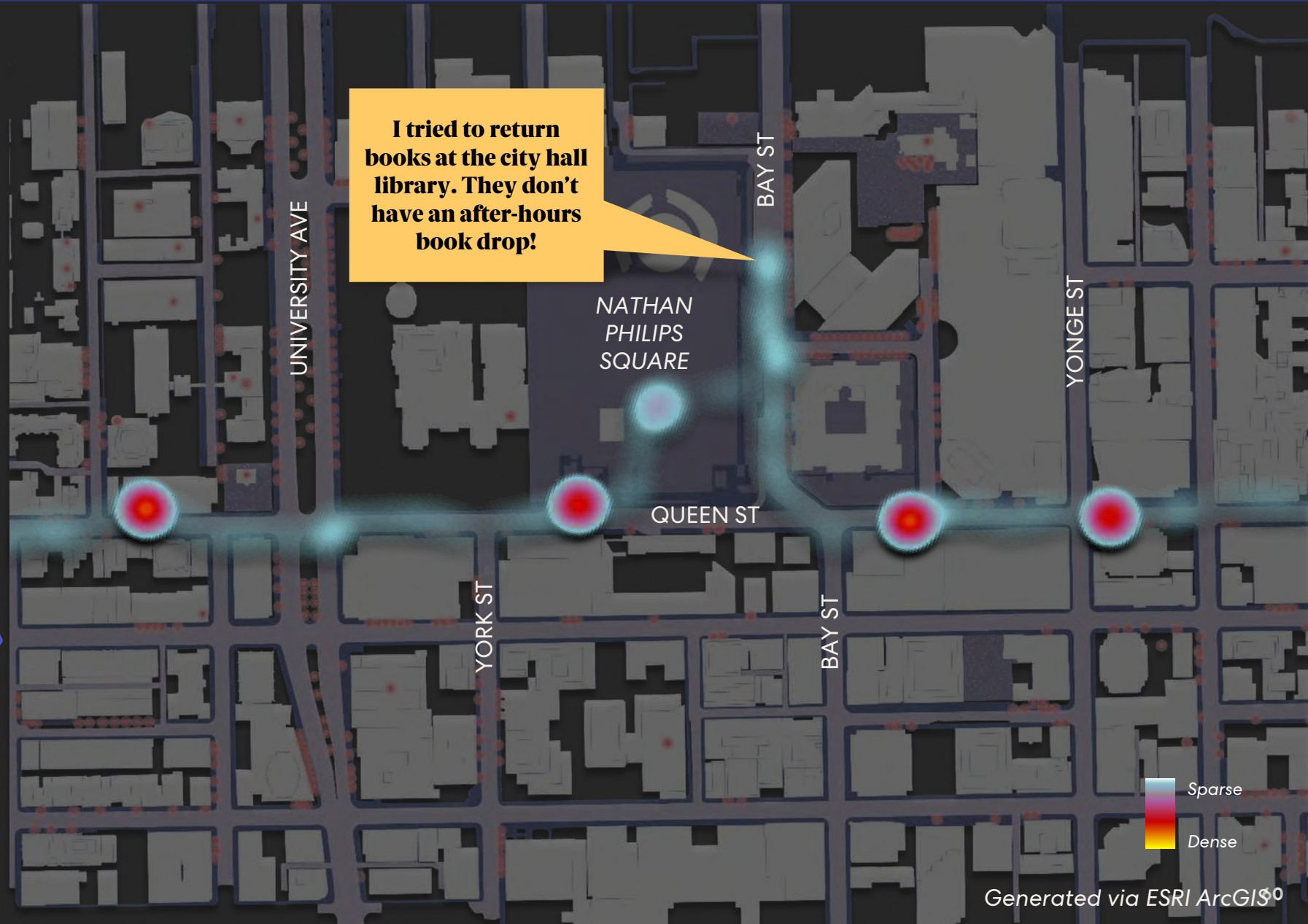




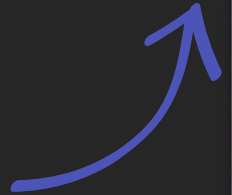
Segment 3

Most of the participants stopped at Nathan Philips square to grab a bite at the food truck. Some of them stopped to run errands as well.

I tried to return books at the city hall library. They don't have an after-hours book drop!



Heatmap generated from a participant's walk





Segment 3

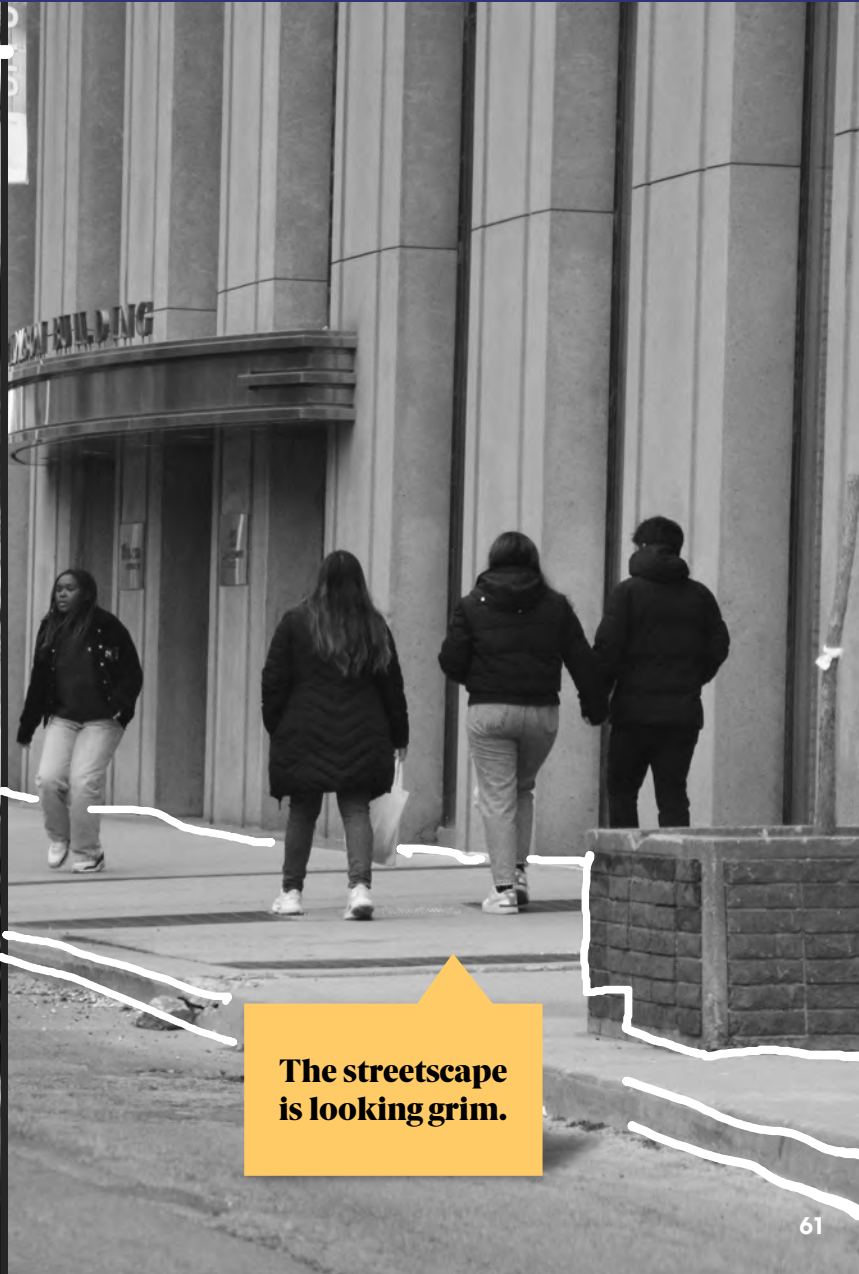
The fence around Osgoode hall is confusing for people who haven't been before because the gate is hard to maneuver around. I saw a lady in a stroller and she wouldn't have been able to get through the gate I went through. Very few people in there even though it's the biggest green stretch I've seen.



I wanted to buy a poutine and eat it.



The streetscape is looking grim.



Segment 3



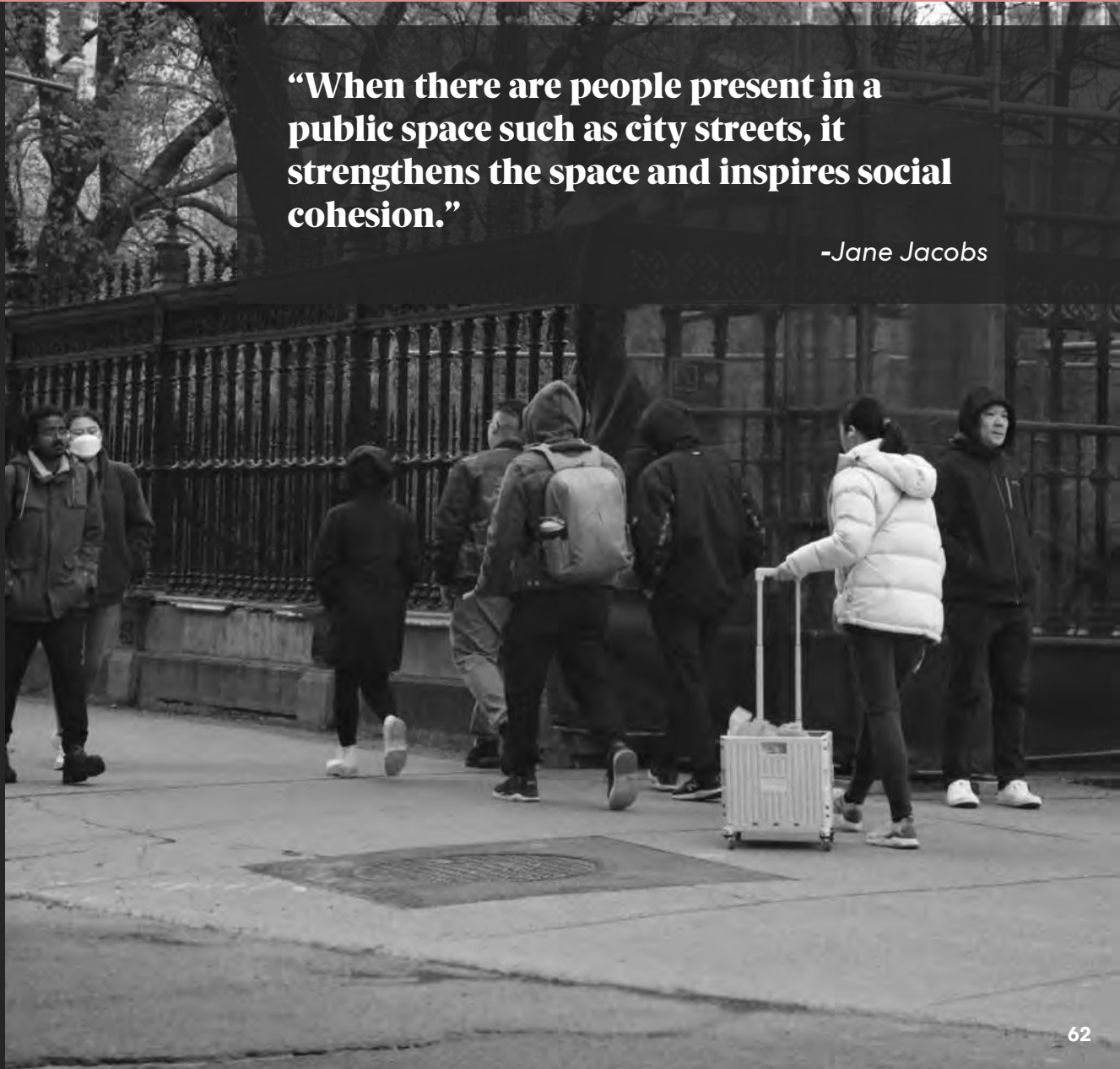
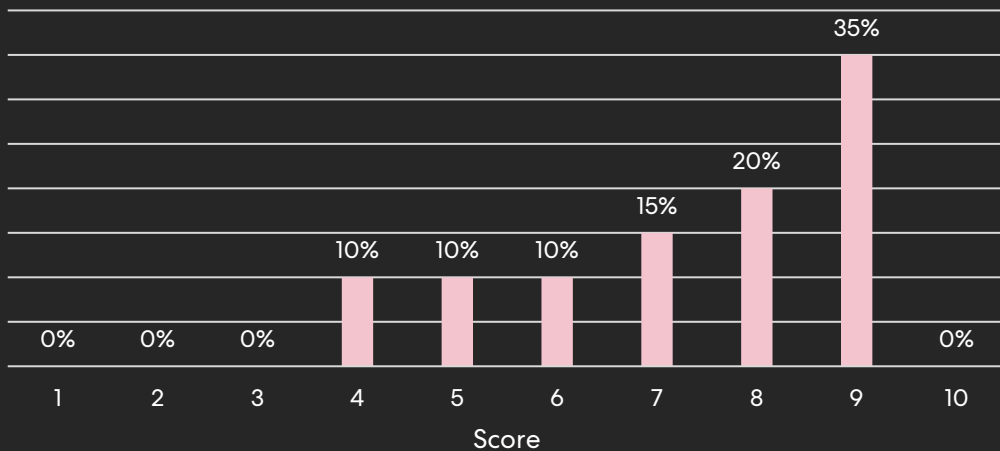
80%

of participants had to navigate around other pedestrians

80%

of participants felt safe or neutral in the presence of other pedestrians

Safety Score



“When there are people present in a public space such as city streets, it strengthens the space and inspires social cohesion.”

-Jane Jacobs

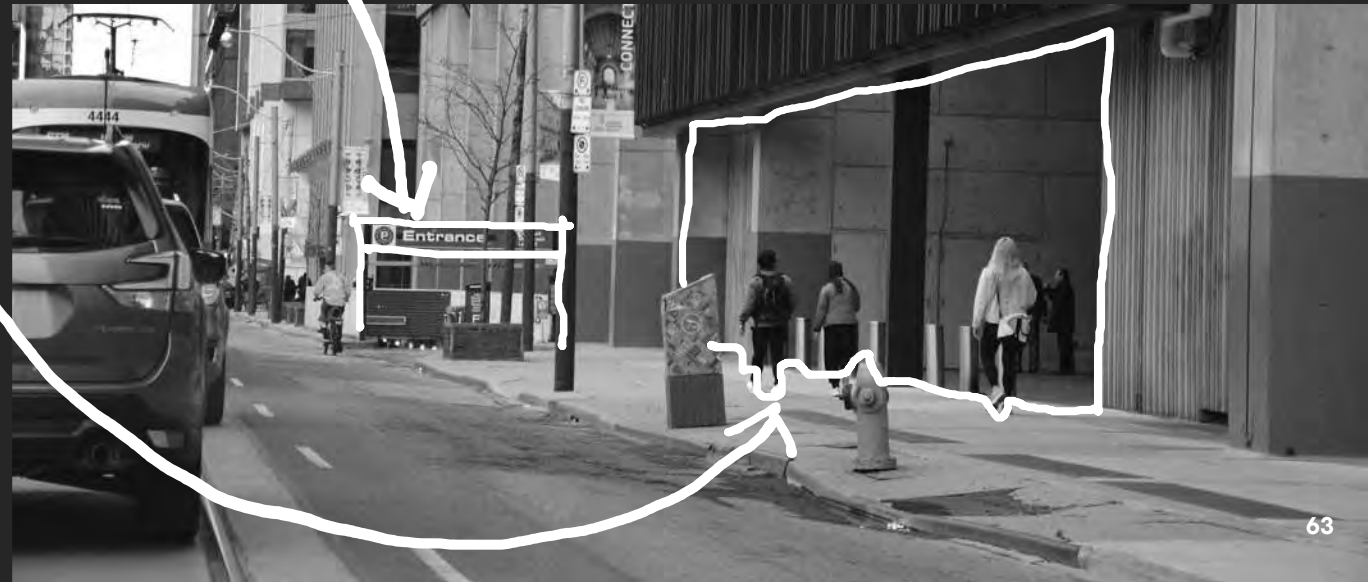


Segment 3

Participants did **not feel safe** around **fast-moving cars**.

The entrances and exits of 3 parking garages in the area, forces pedestrians to be **highly vigilant** while navigating this civic strip, barring them from enjoying the large open space.

Additionally, the inactive south boulevard of the street with **hidden and dark niches**, make it further unsafe for women to navigate through this space.



Segment 3



On the south sidewalk, there is a covered area in front of the Sheraton and it is not pleasant to walk there (bad smells, stagnant water, blinds on the building, etc.)

Narrow sidewalks being used by cyclists, unhoused people and skateboarders. Just a lot to navigate!

Along the gates of Osgoode, and at City Hall and Sheraton, there are big blocks of architecture but there's no access to them.

I felt unsafe in front of city hall. [The person] may have [under the influence], they were dancing and screaming.

Passing a lot of people close to the road and moving cars. as sidewalk narrowed.





Segment 3

80%

of participants did not make a stop in a store or establishment. 10% of participants for a snack at the food cart and the other 10% kept walking and made no stops.

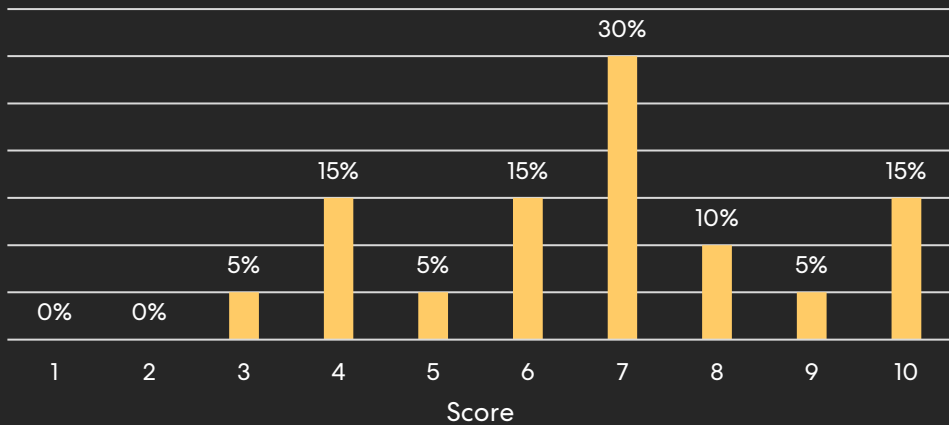


The food trucks lined up along Queen St activate the street and Nathan Philips Square!

45%

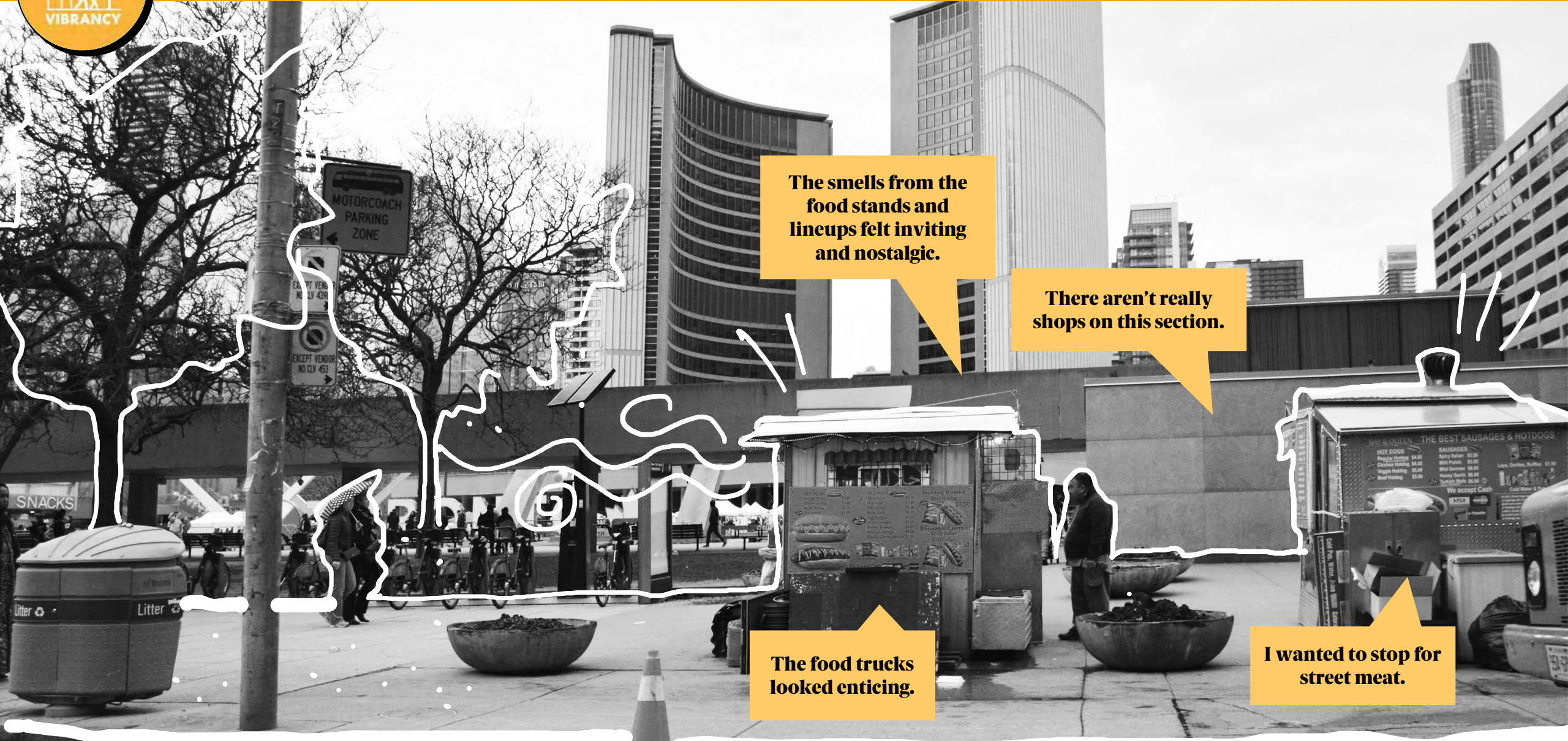
of participants noticed parks or open spaces in the segment that was welcoming.

Vibrancy Score





Segment 3



The smells from the food stands and lineups felt inviting and nostalgic.

There aren't really shops on this section.

The food trucks looked enticing.

I wanted to stop for street meat.

Segment highlights

Things that negatively impacted the participants' experience

57.9%

Noise

52.6%

Building construction

47.4%

Lack of places of interest

What participants wanted to see more of

More of a barrier between cars and pedestrians, more safe spaces to wait on the side of the path.

If there was no construction on the street. Had to cross the street, due to the building shadows.

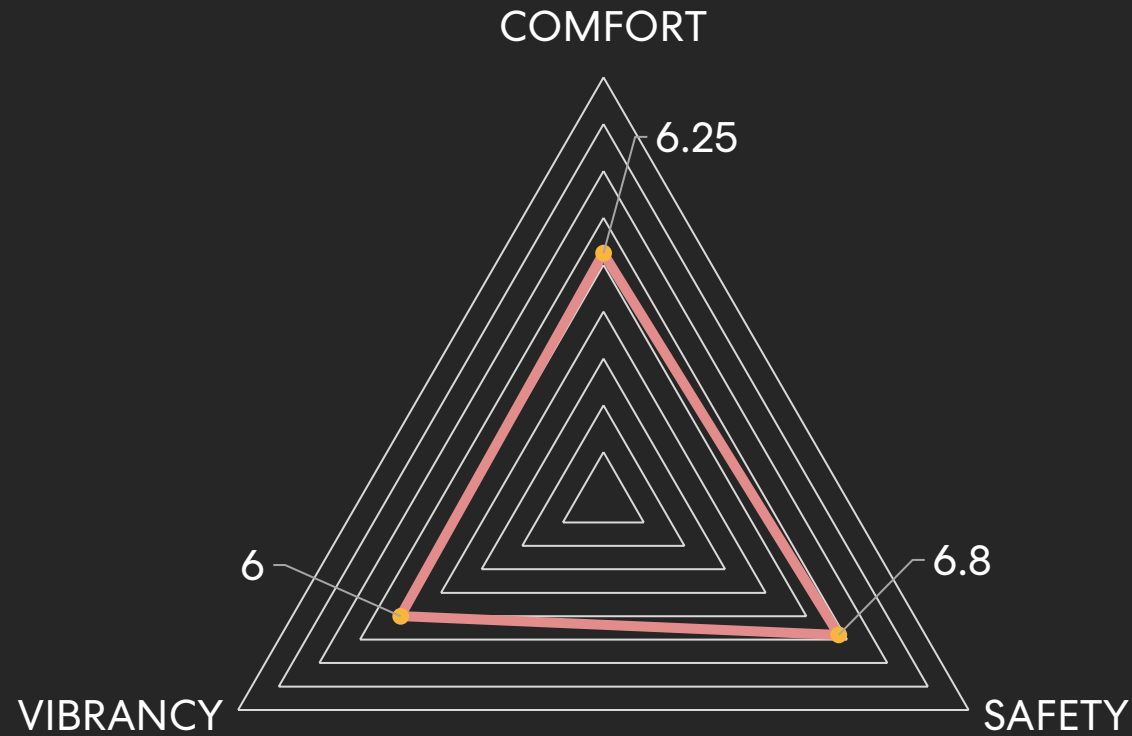
Activate the south sidewalk with retail space or restaurants.

A better seamless connection from one intersection to another while coinciding along traffic.

If there was no construction on the street. Had to cross the street, due to the building shadows.

Segment Highlights

Overall Average Scores

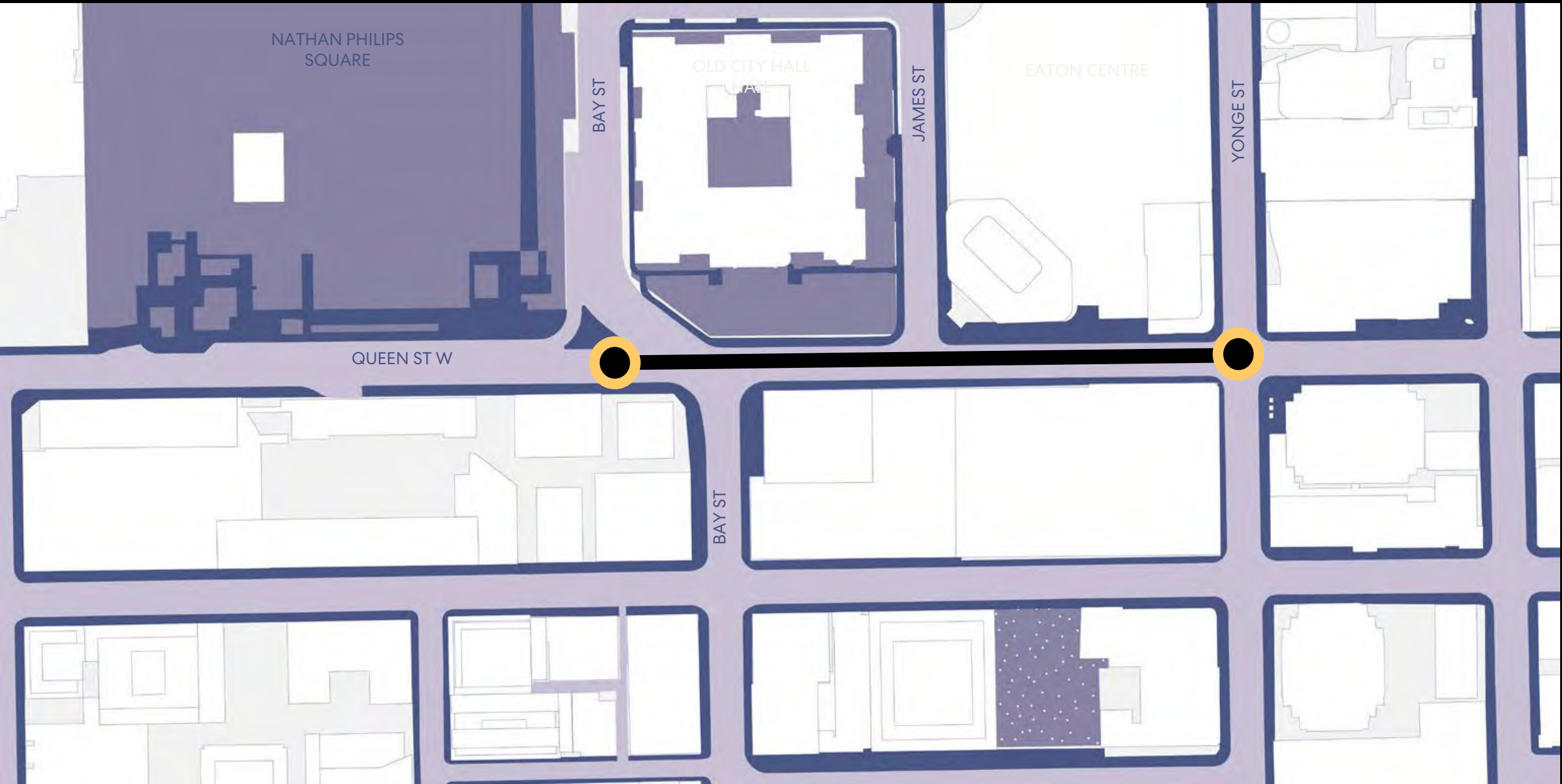




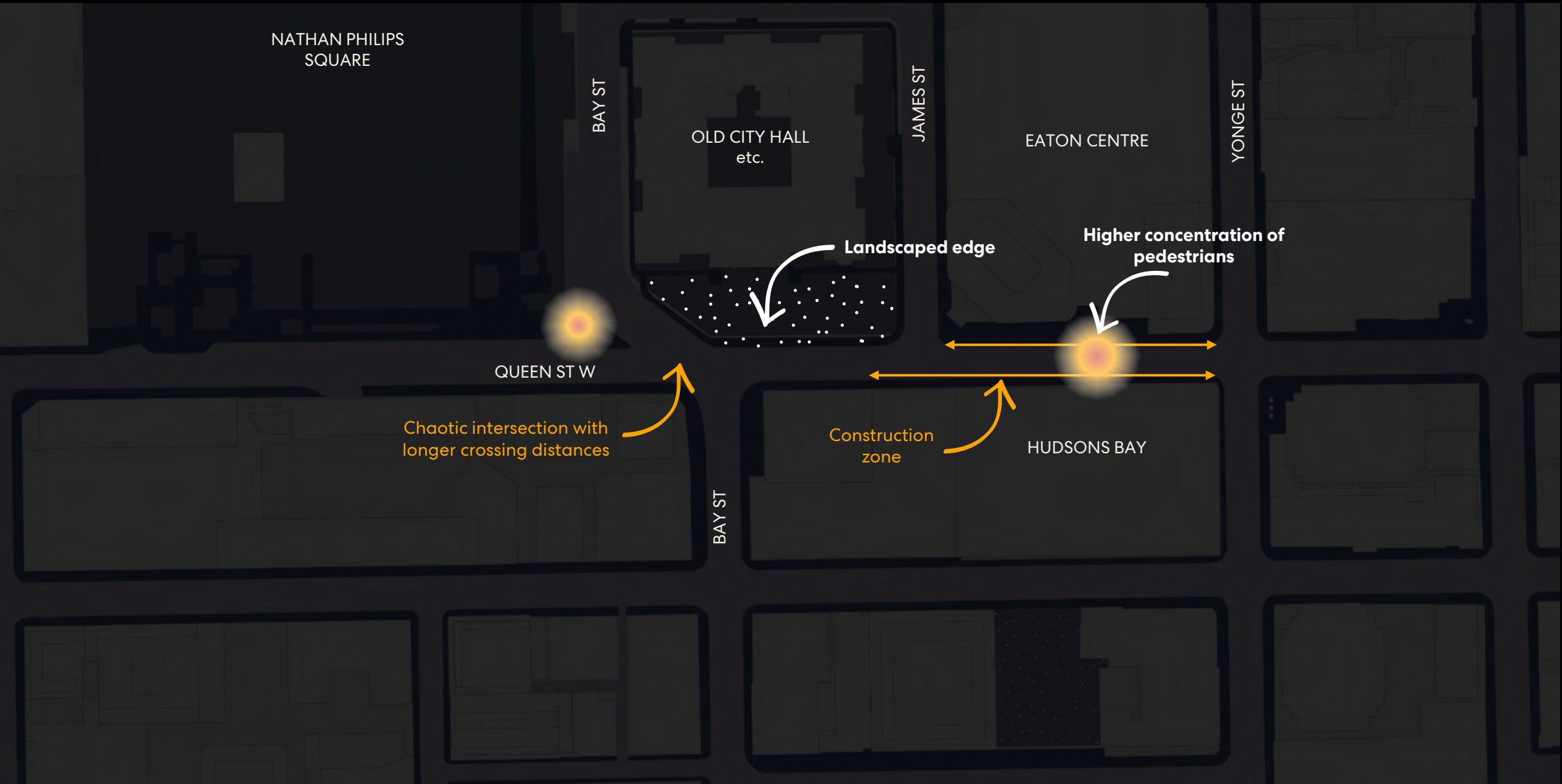
Segment 4

The mall strip

Segment 4



Segment 4





Segment 4

85%

of participants did not cross the street at any point of their journey and did not make any stops along their way. The other 15% stopped by the mall.

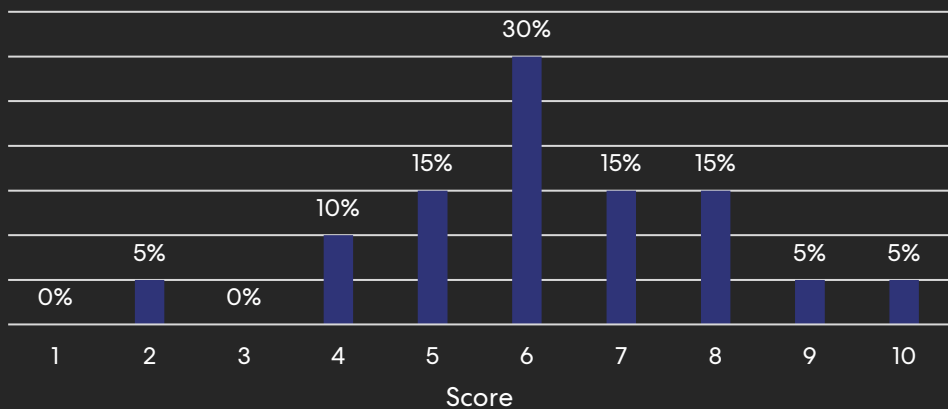
65%

of participants did not find the sidewalks to be wide enough.

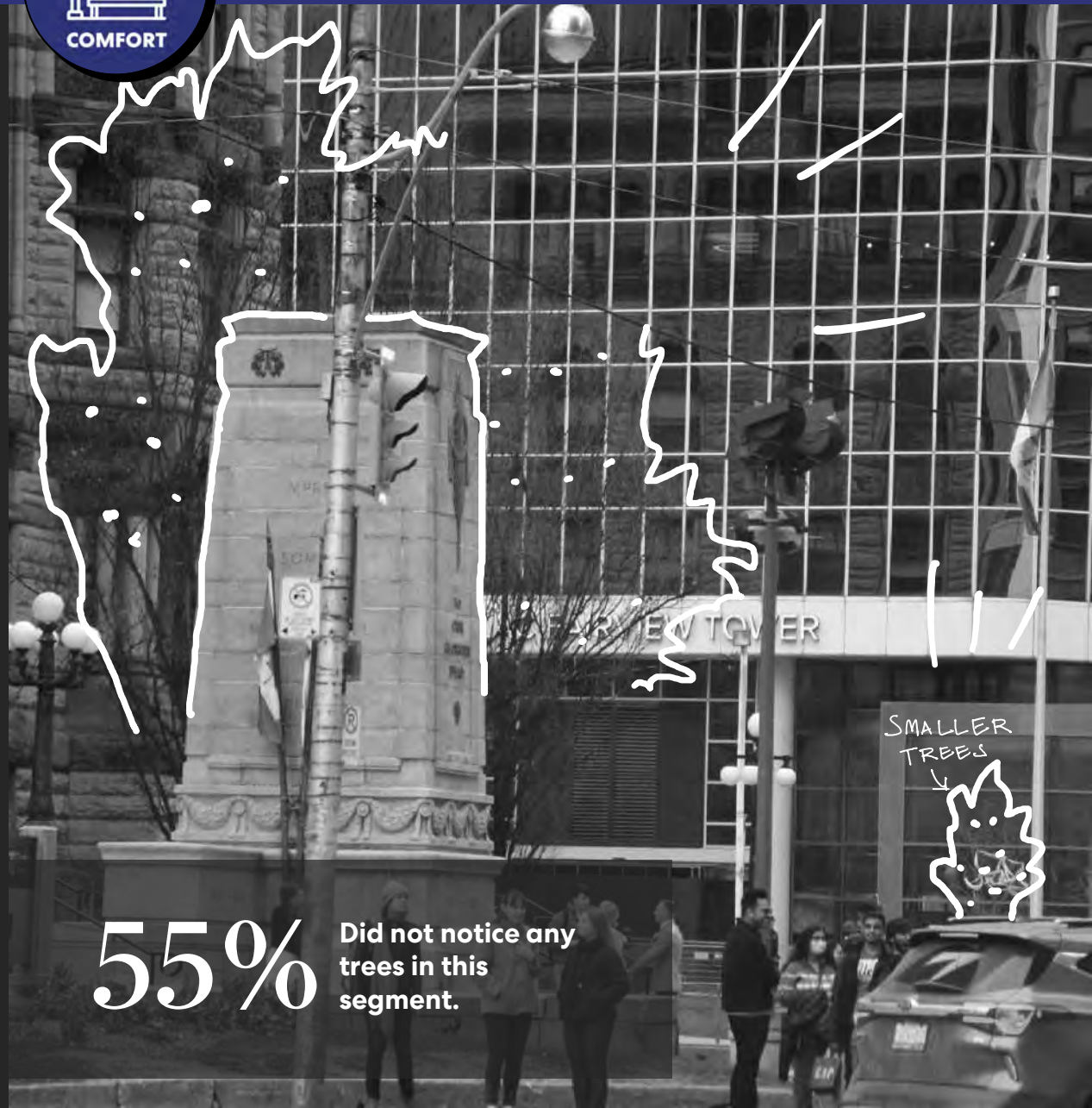
Even though the sidewalks on either side are wider in comparison to the other segments, both north and south side street had ongoing road maintenance work that made it difficult for pedestrians to navigate this section.



Comfort Score



Segment 4

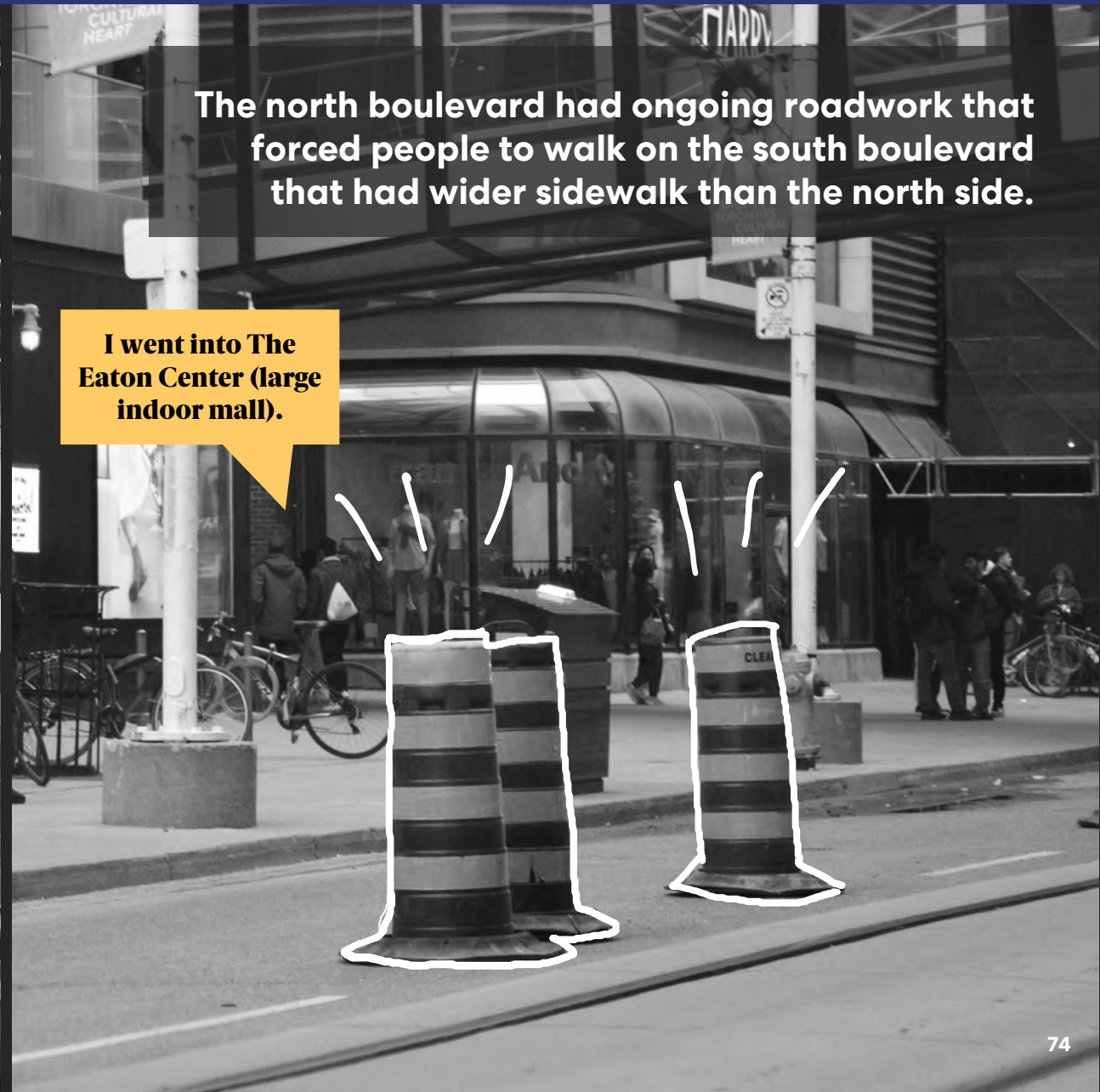


55%

Did not notice any trees in this segment.

The north boulevard had ongoing roadwork that forced people to walk on the south boulevard that had wider sidewalk than the north side.

I went into The Eaton Center (large indoor mall).



Segment 4



85%

of participants had to navigate around other pedestrians

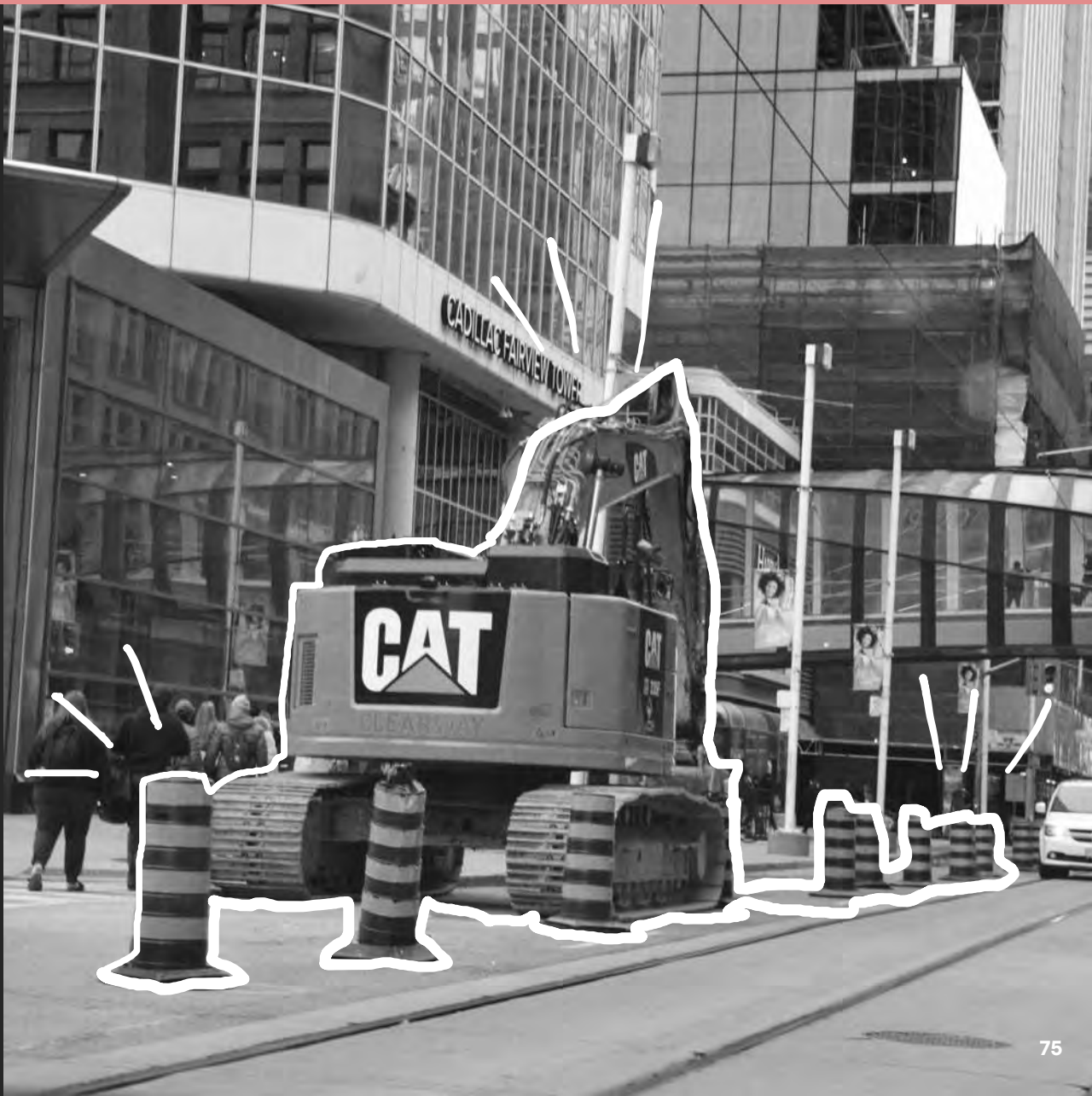
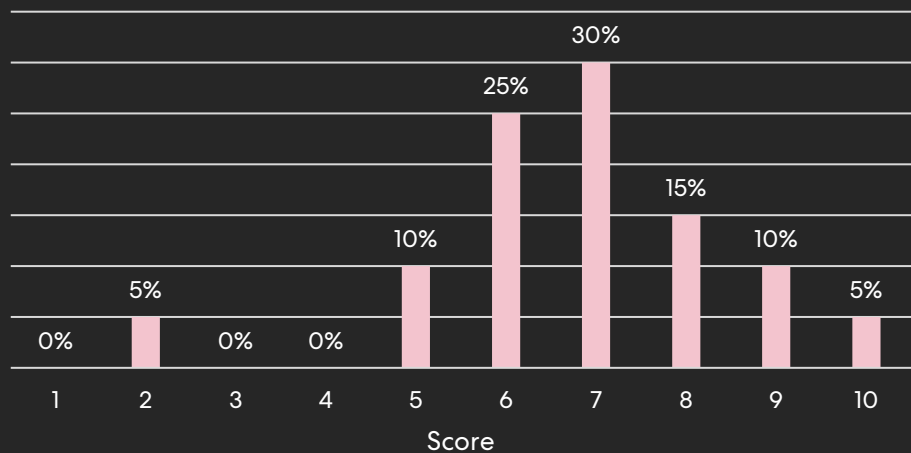


80%

of participants felt safe or neutral in the presence of other pedestrians

High pedestrian traffic with financial district crowd getting to the subway and people going in and out of the mall.

Safety Score



Segment 4



Right in front of old city hall, there were some [groups of people] who were yelling into the void, kicking air, etc. it is daytime and lots of people were around. I didn't want to get too close to them, but I didn't feel like they would hurt me. I just know it is obviously a sign of distress.

The reduced sidewalks outside Eaton Centre make me feel unsafe.

Unpleasant construction activities on the street.





Segment 4

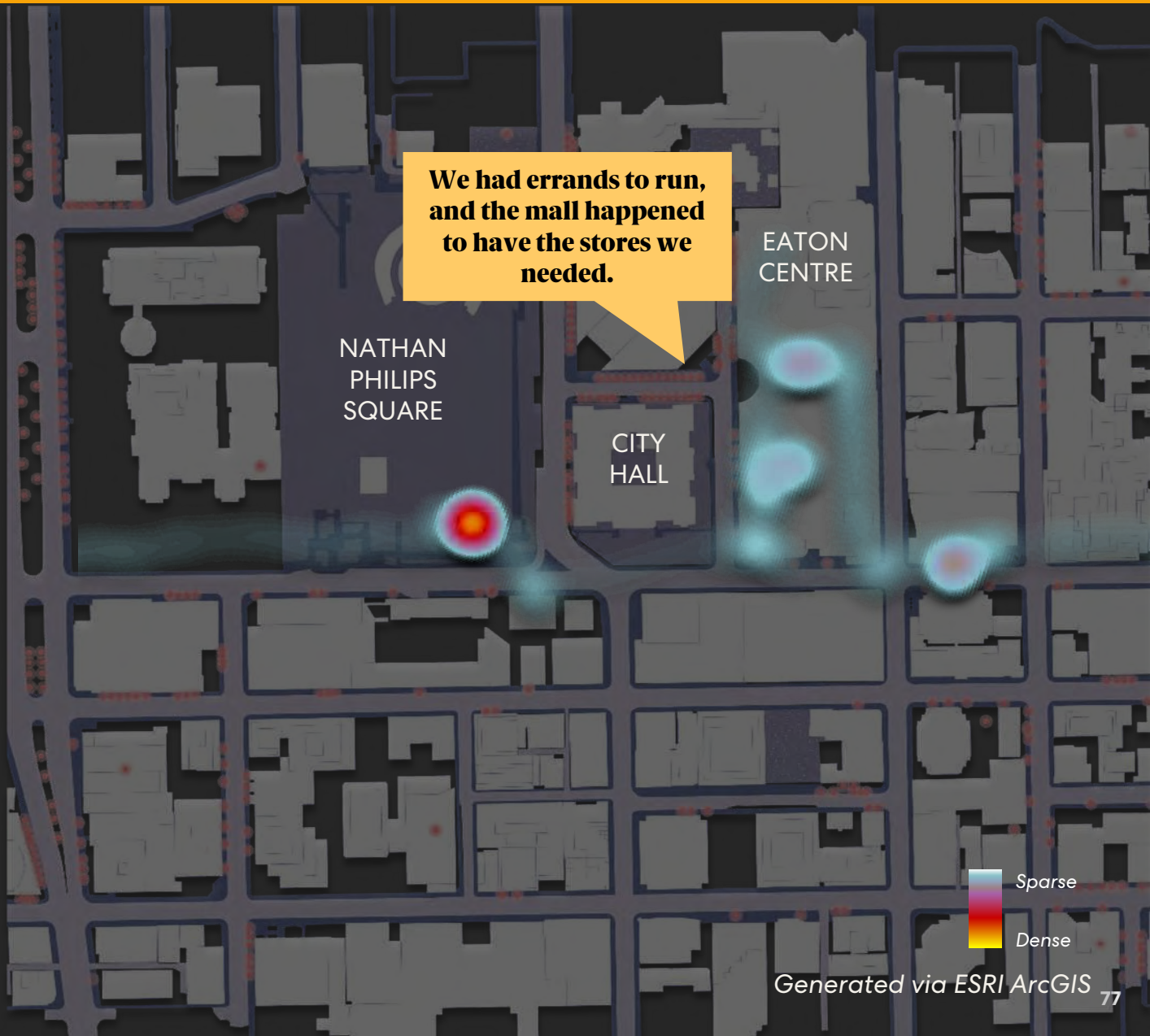
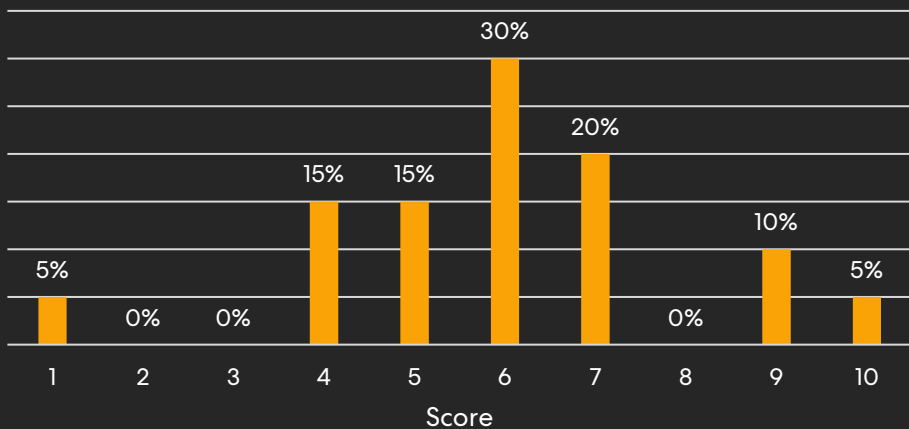
75%

of participants did not make a stop in a store or establishment. 15% of participants for a snack at the food cart and the other 10% stopped at Eaton Centre to run errands.

70%

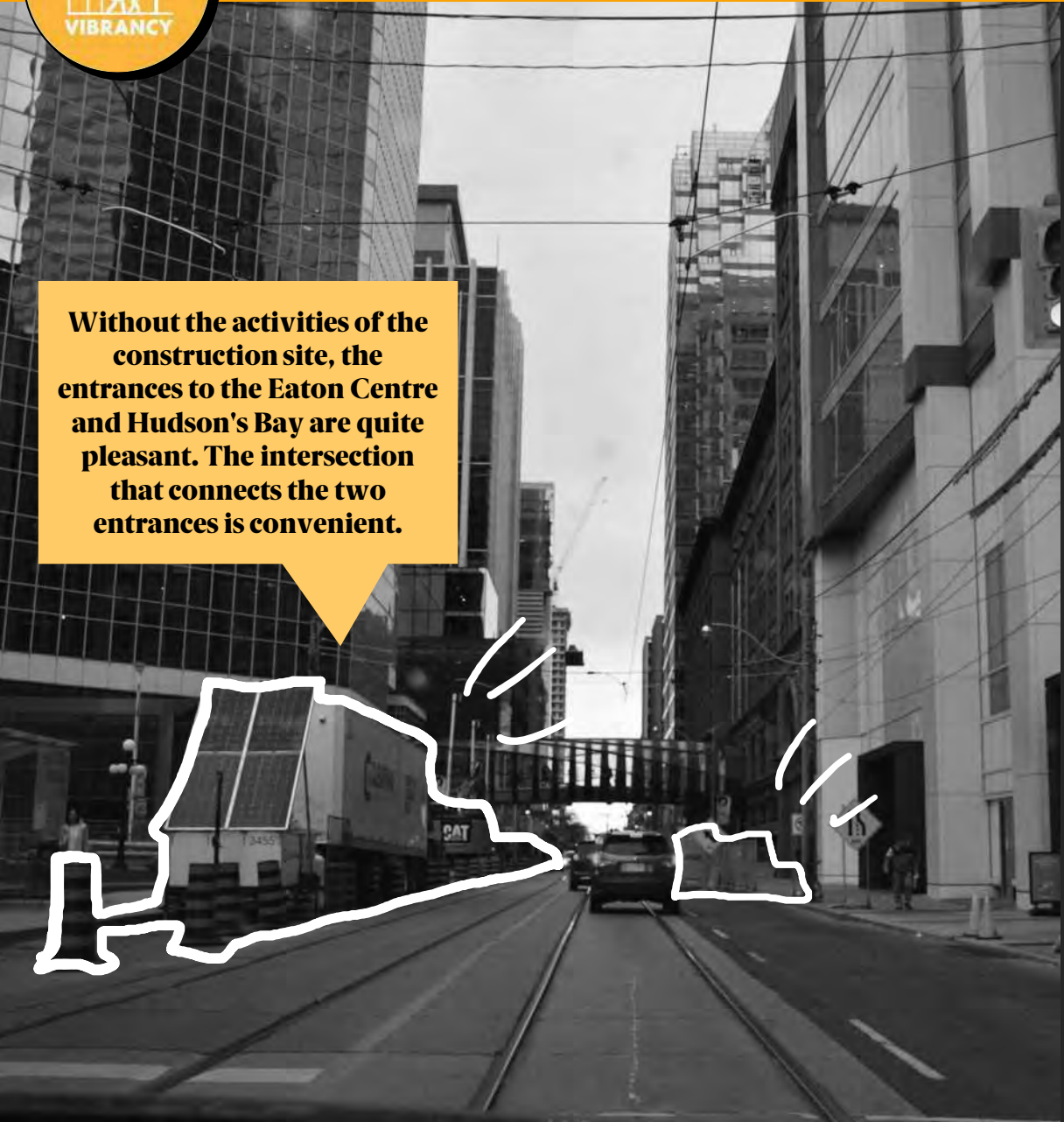
of the participants did not notice any parks or open spaces in the segment.

Vibrancy Score

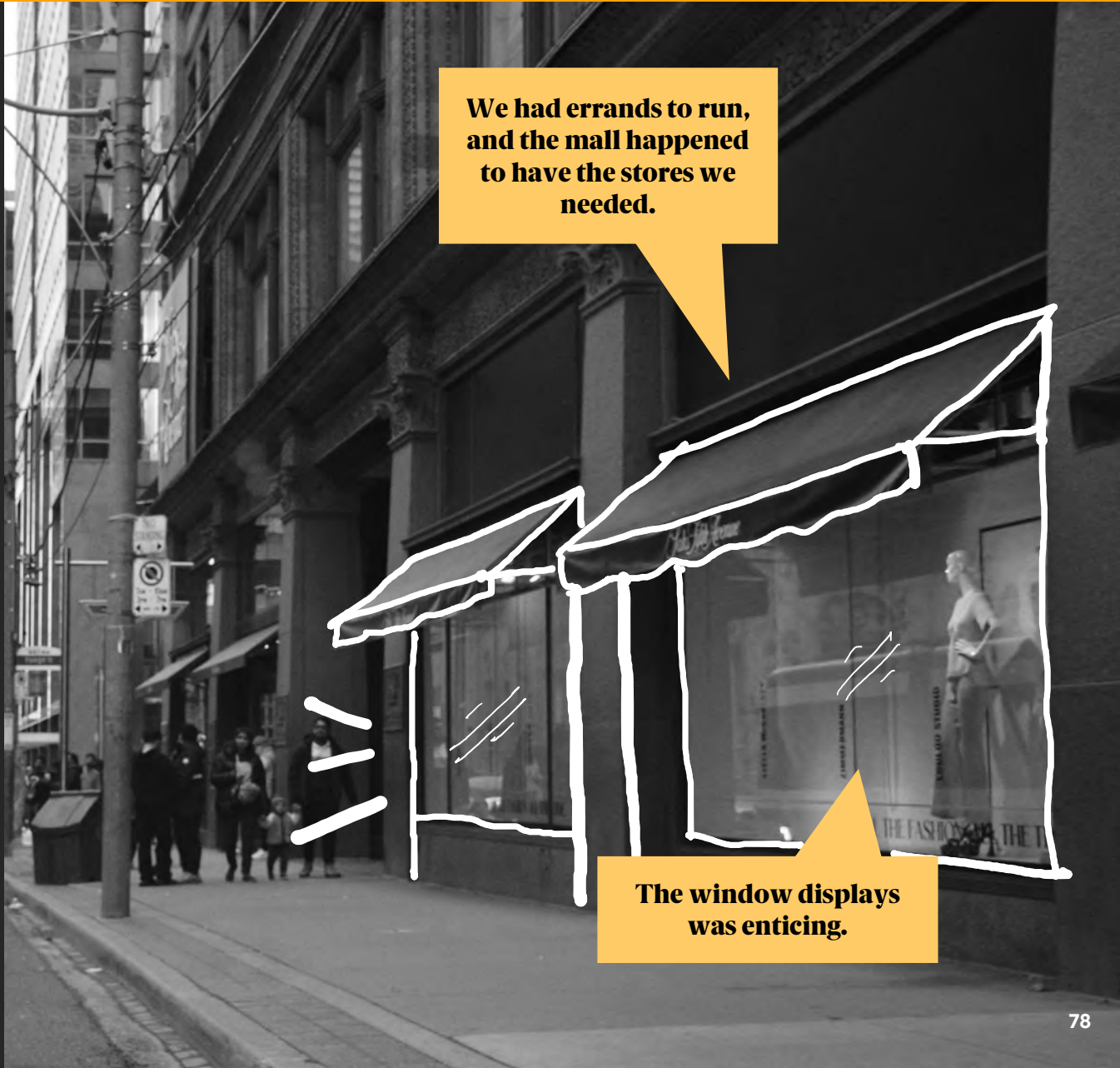




Segment 4



Without the activities of the construction site, the entrances to the Eaton Centre and Hudson's Bay are quite pleasant. The intersection that connects the two entrances is convenient.



We had errands to run, and the mall happened to have the stores we needed.

The window displays was enticing.

Segment highlights

Things that negatively impacted the participants' experience

85%

Building construction

55%

Traffic

55%

Lack of greenery

What participants wanted to see more of

Better barriers between cyclists and pedestrians, more greenery, maybe more outdoor vendors as the area didn't have much interesting characteristics.

There's so much potential around old city hall but it is very empty most of the time. Lots of construction near the Eaton Centre too. It's ok. I wish I could access a public washroom without having to go to the mall.

Less construction.

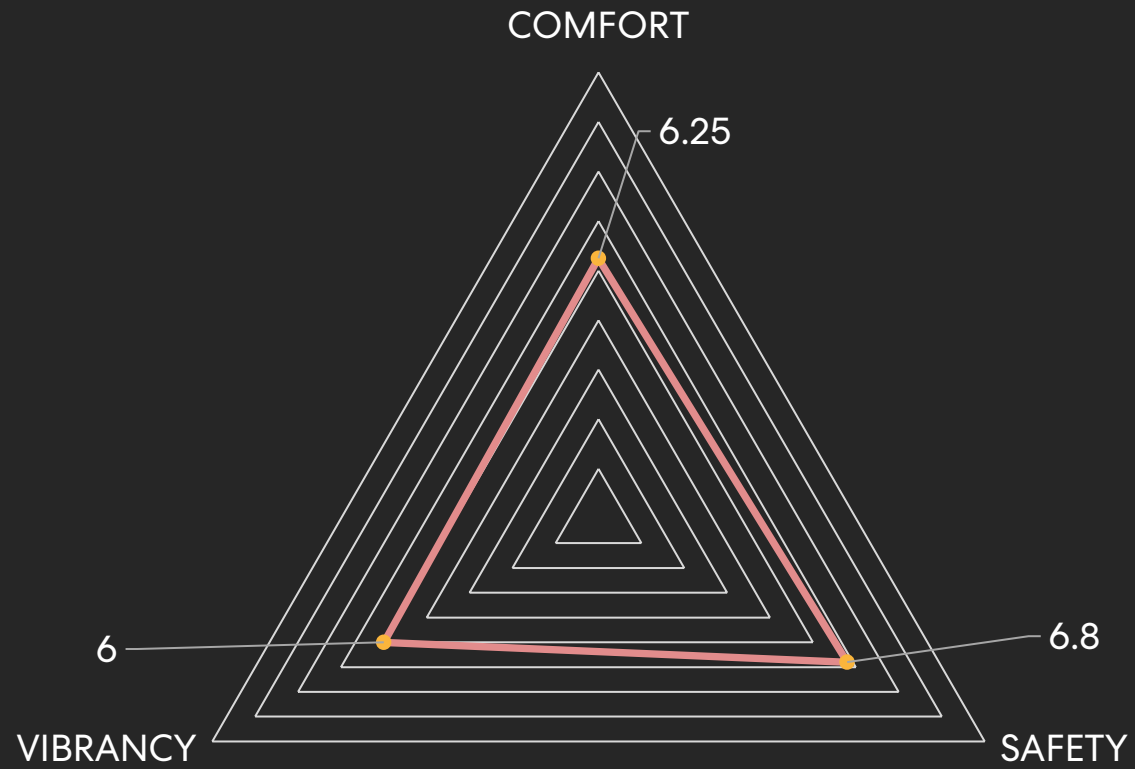
More lighting to brighten up the area which may have made me feel more safe.

More greenery.

More variety of shops or other businesses.

Segment Highlights

Overall Average Scores





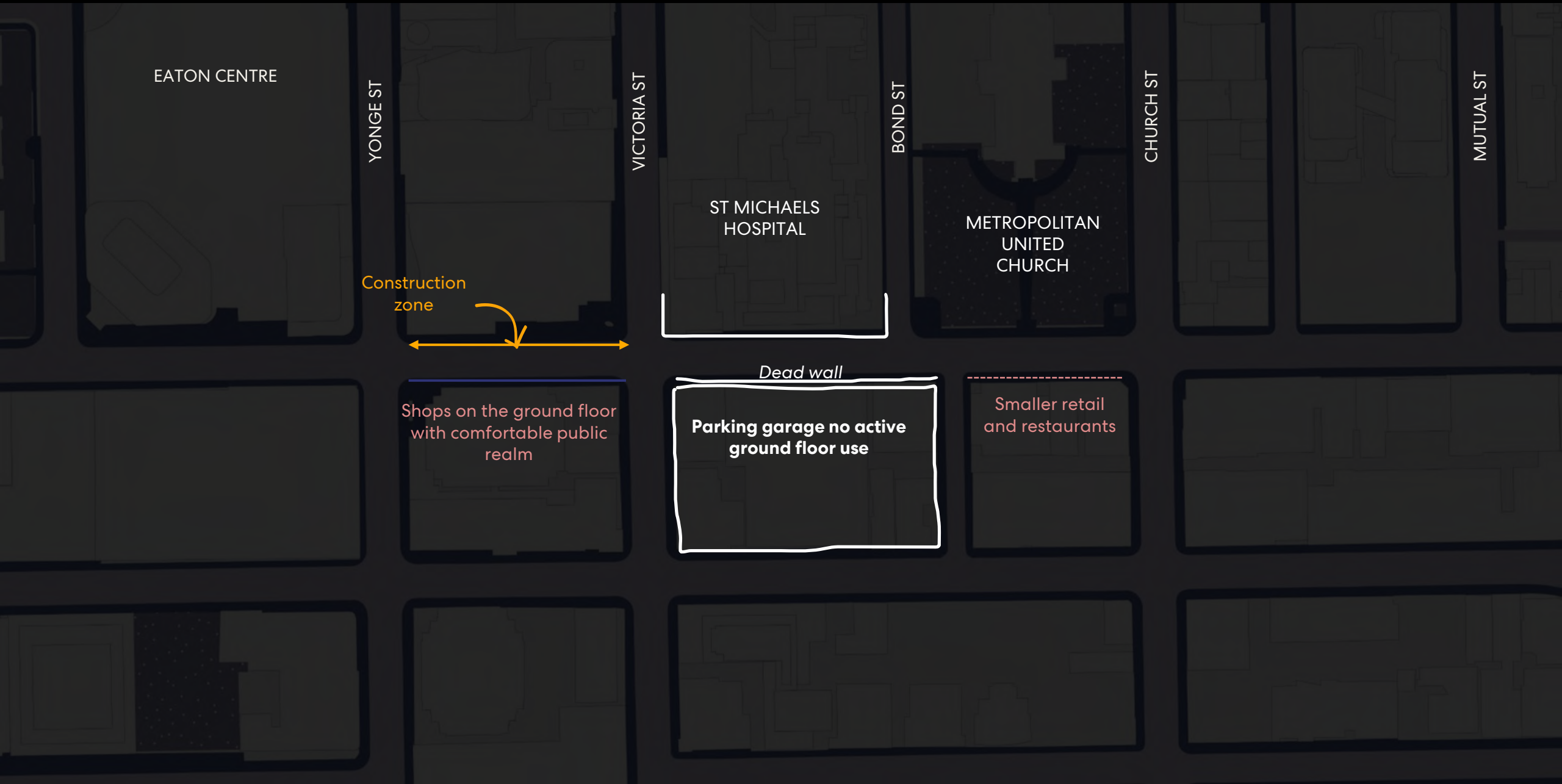
Segment 5

The hospital strip

Segment 5



Segment 5





Segment 5

95%

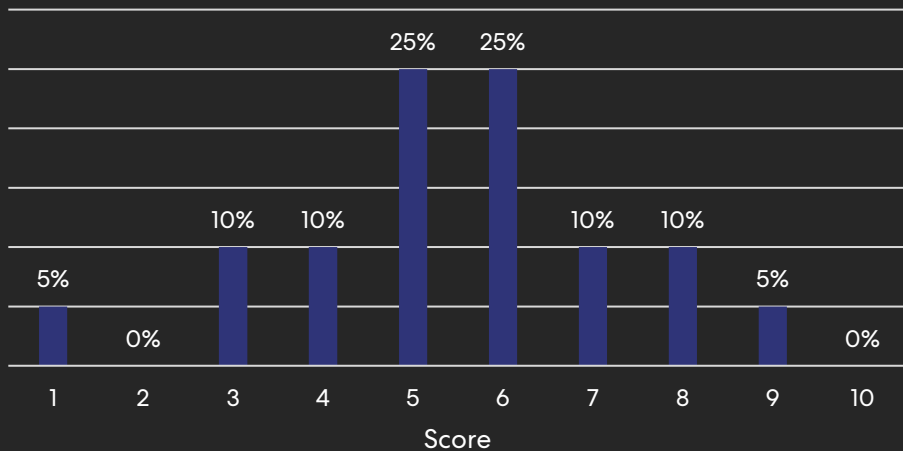
of participants did not stop at any point of their journey

30%

of participants did not find the sidewalks to be wide enough

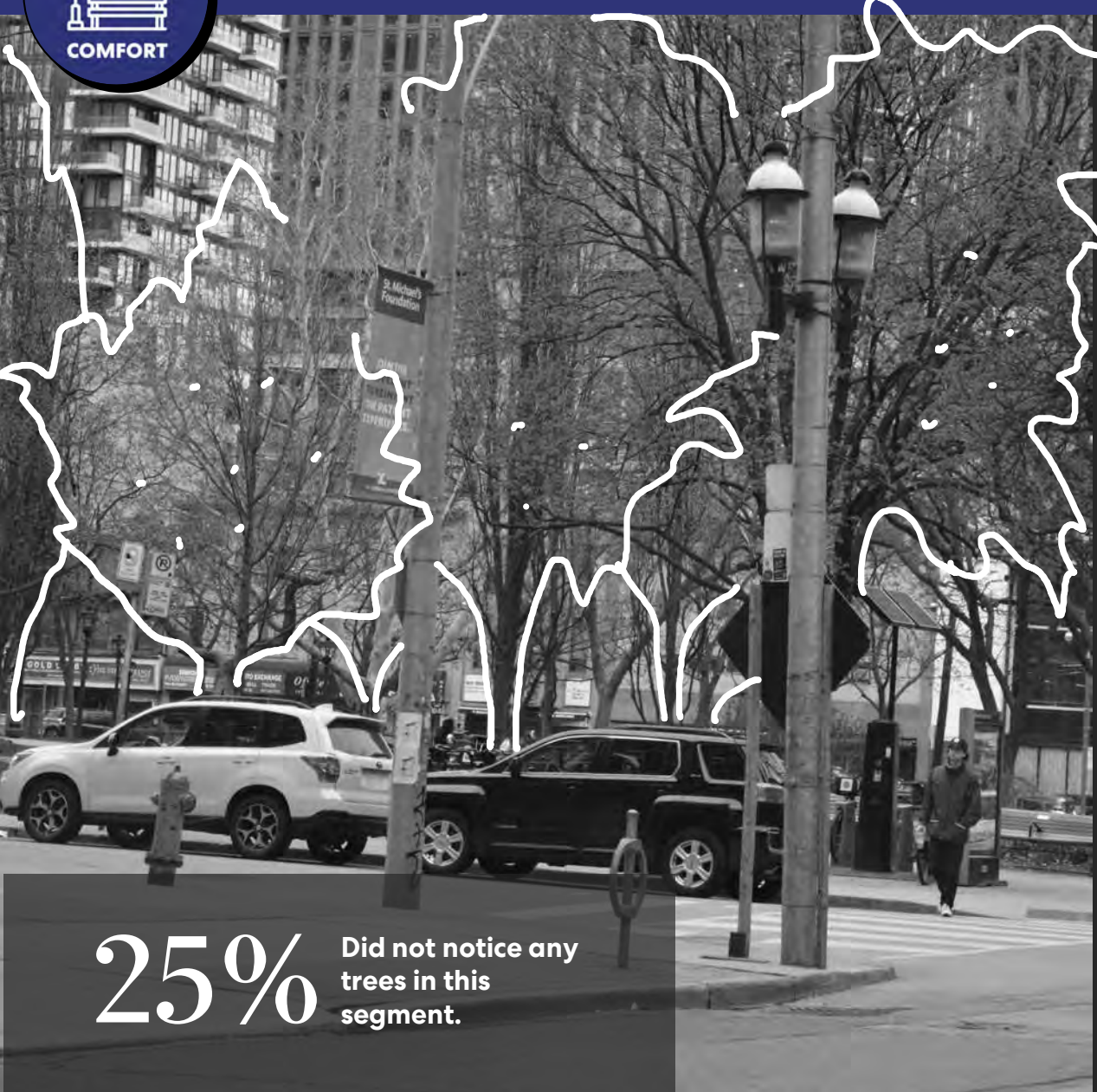
Drop in scores starting from this segment

Comfort Score





Segment 5



25%

Did not notice any trees in this segment.



Segment 5

85%

of participants navigated around pedestrians

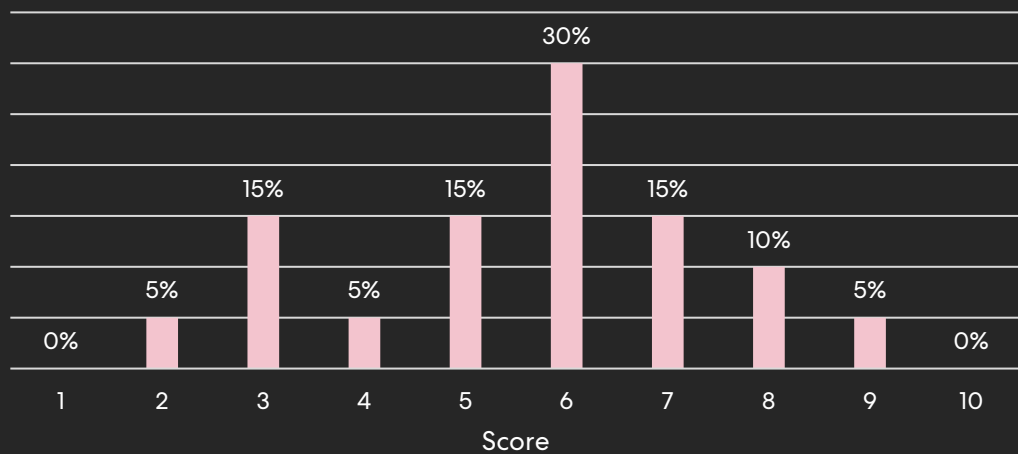
45%



This is 25% more than the previous segment. The presence of fewer people of streets may have influenced this response.

of participants felt unsafe in the presence of other pedestrians. 35% felt neutral and the rest felt safe.

Safety Score



Segment 5



I felt unsafe throughout this segment. The stores are really unappealing. Once you pass Yonge, you see a change in population with more unhoused people, especially in front of the church.

Felt unsafe at the McDonald's at Church and Queen.

There were small nooks where people could have hidden. It was feeling a tad uncomfortable. There was not a lot of people pass Yonge.

Had to navigate away from cars pulling out of parking garage and onto the sidewalk. This felt unsafe as they were not looking.

Along the south side of the street in narrow segments where it was difficult to navigate around others.

Along the south side of the street in narrow segments where it was difficult to navigate around others.



Segment 5

90%

of participants did not make a stop in a store or establishment. 5% of participants stopped to use the washroom.

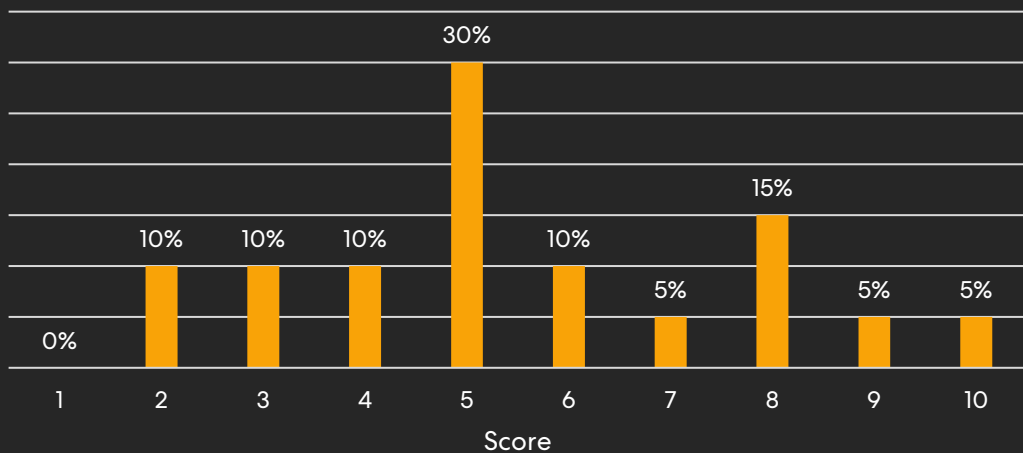


Most of the stores in this segment are vacant and the opens that are occupied, have fewer open hours.

60%

of the participants did notice parks and open spaces in the segment but they did not look inviting.

Vibrancy Score

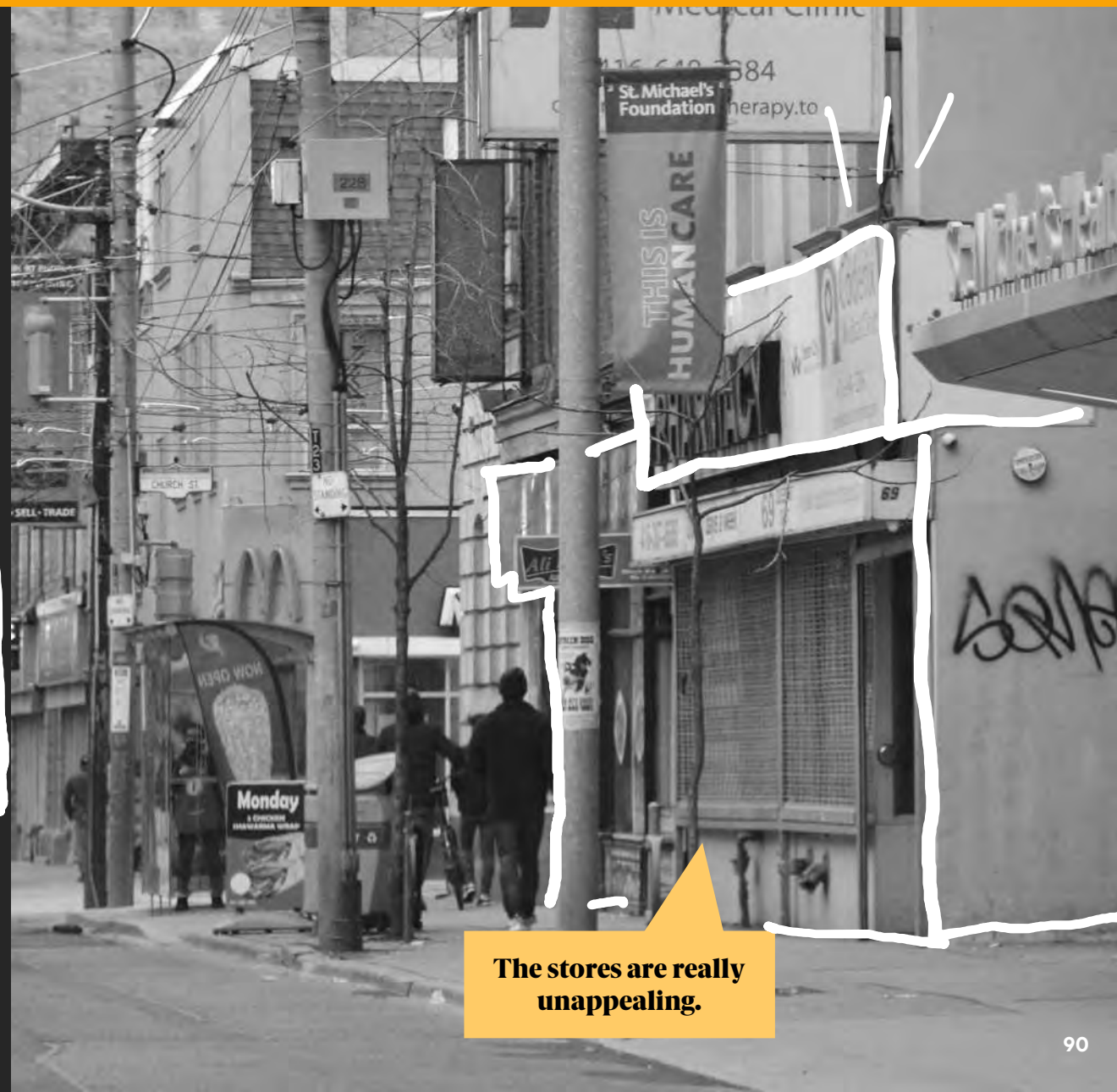




Segment 5



On the north side there aren't really any shops.



The stores are really unappealing.

Segment highlights

Things that negatively impacted the participants' experience

63.2%

Lack of interesting places

57.9%

Lack of music, Noise, Building construction

52.6%

Lack of nice views, garbage on ground

What participants wanted to see more of

More greenery, something to separate the traffic and sidewalk, more pedestrian crosswalks.

Less noise, more street furniture, more greenery.

Better lighting, shops that you could see into (many had film on them) wider sidewalks.

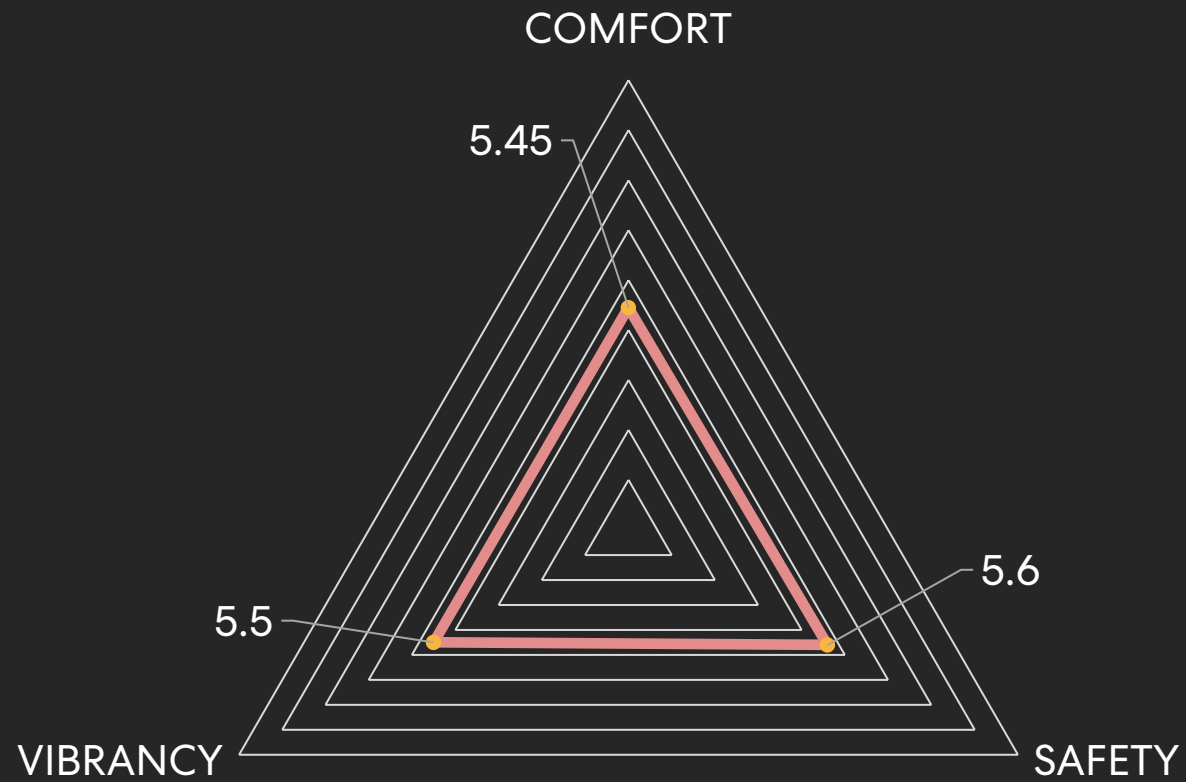
Cleaner streets, wider sidewalks, more trees.

Increased lighting and more open places to make the spaced feel more welcoming.

Unsure. There are a bunch of hospitals you walk by, so it doesn't necessarily have to be more interesting. There is lots of garbage though.

Segment Highlights

Overall Average Scores





Segment 6

The garden strip

Segment 6



METROPOLITAN
UNITED CHURCH

CHURCH ST

BOND ST

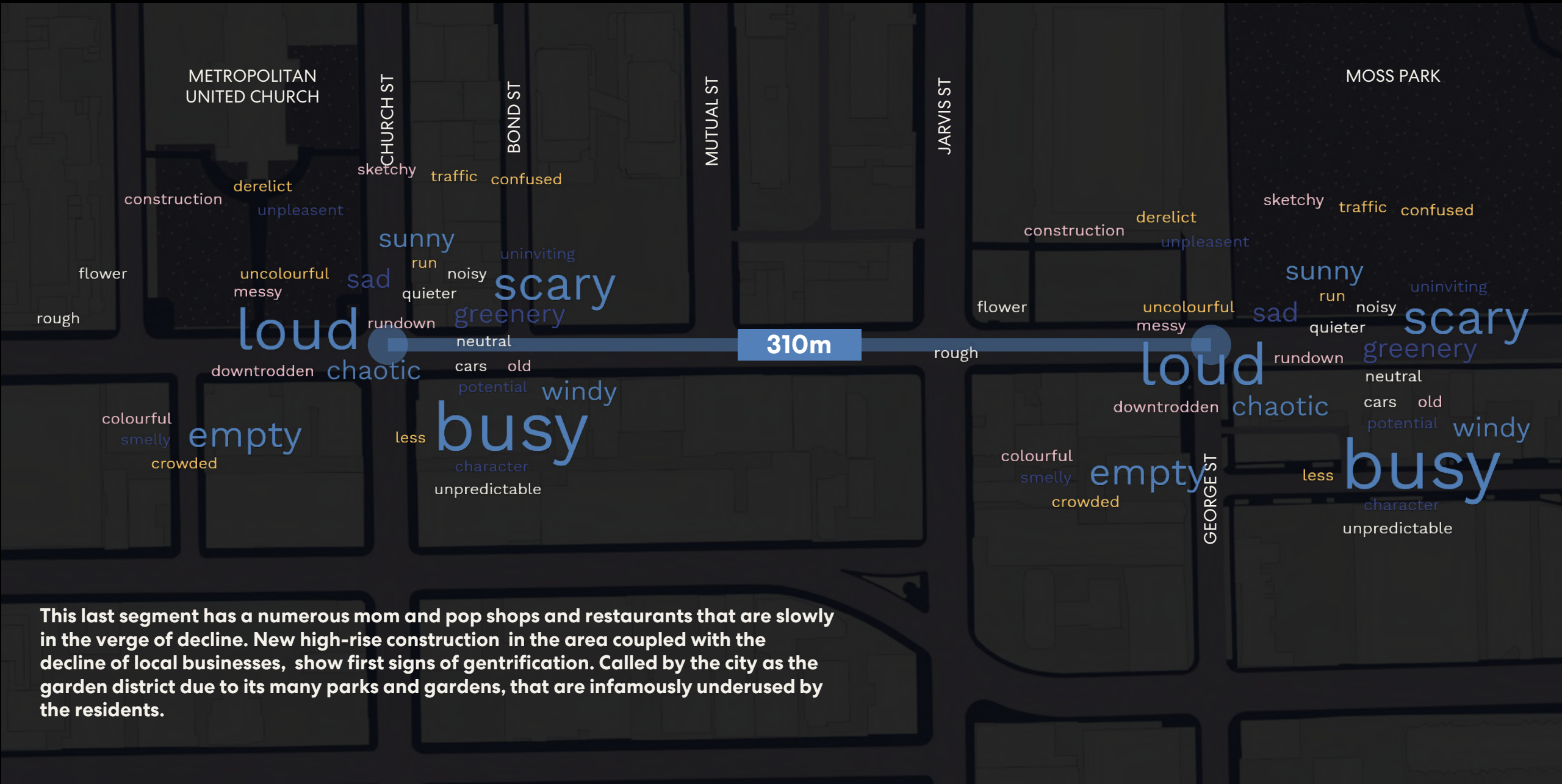
MUTUAL ST

JARVIS ST

MOSS PARK

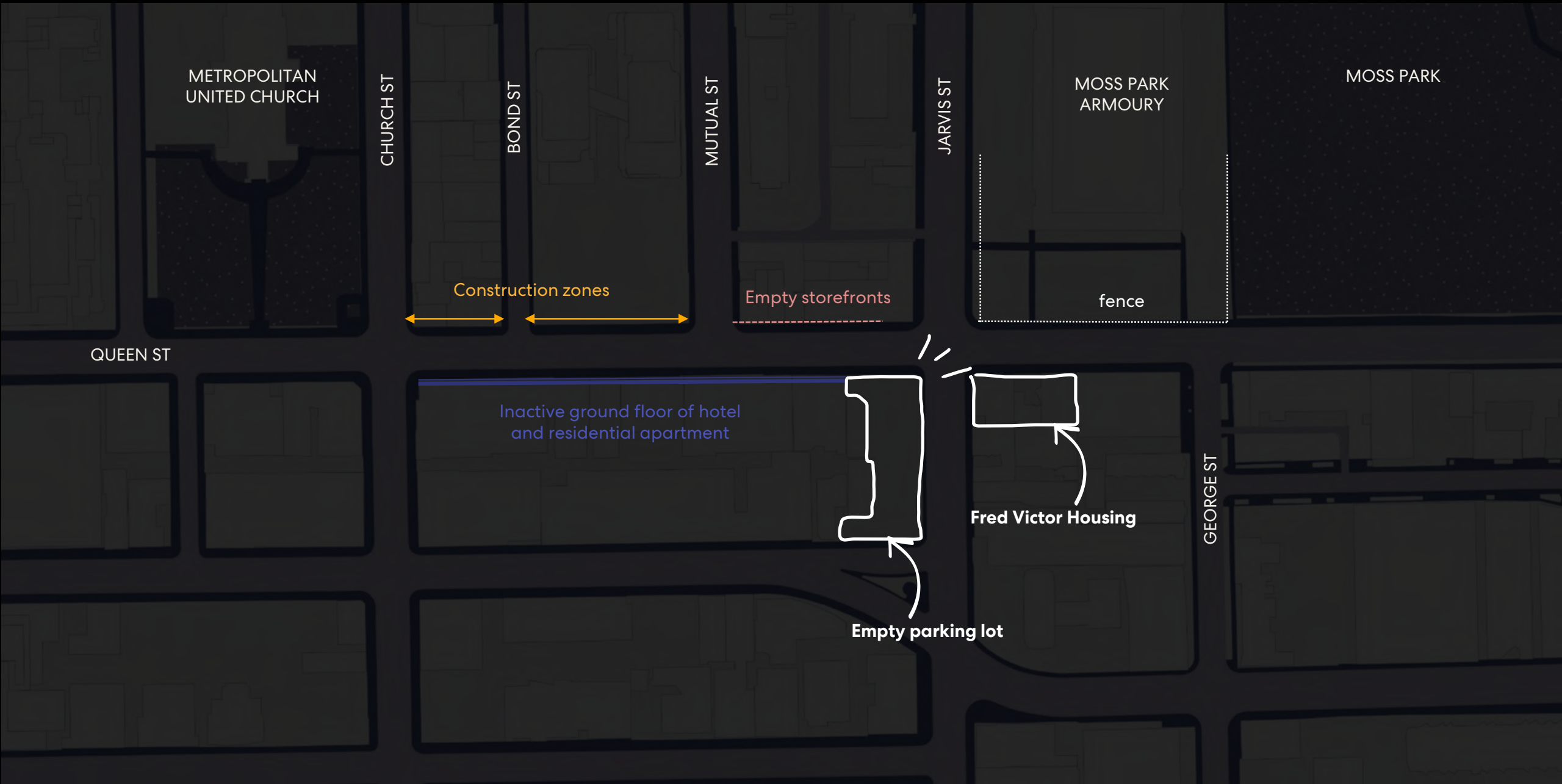
GEORGE ST

Segment 6



This last segment has a numerous mom and pop shops and restaurants that are slowly in the verge of decline. New high-rise construction in the area coupled with the decline of local businesses, show first signs of gentrification. Called by the city as the garden district due to its many parks and gardens, that are infamously underused by the residents.

Segment Highlight





Segment 6

75%

of participants did not stop at any point of their journey, those that did stopped at the Downtown Camera Store

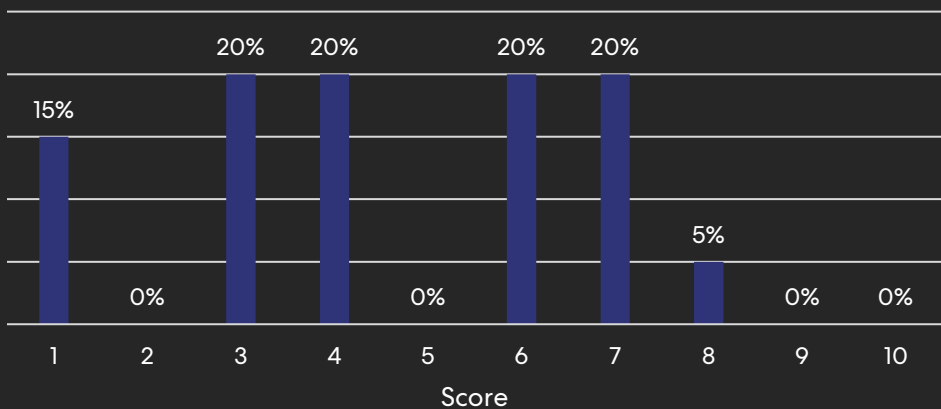
50%

of participants did not find the sidewalks to be wide enough

20% more than the previous segment due to construction on most of the north boulevard



Comfort Score



Segment 6

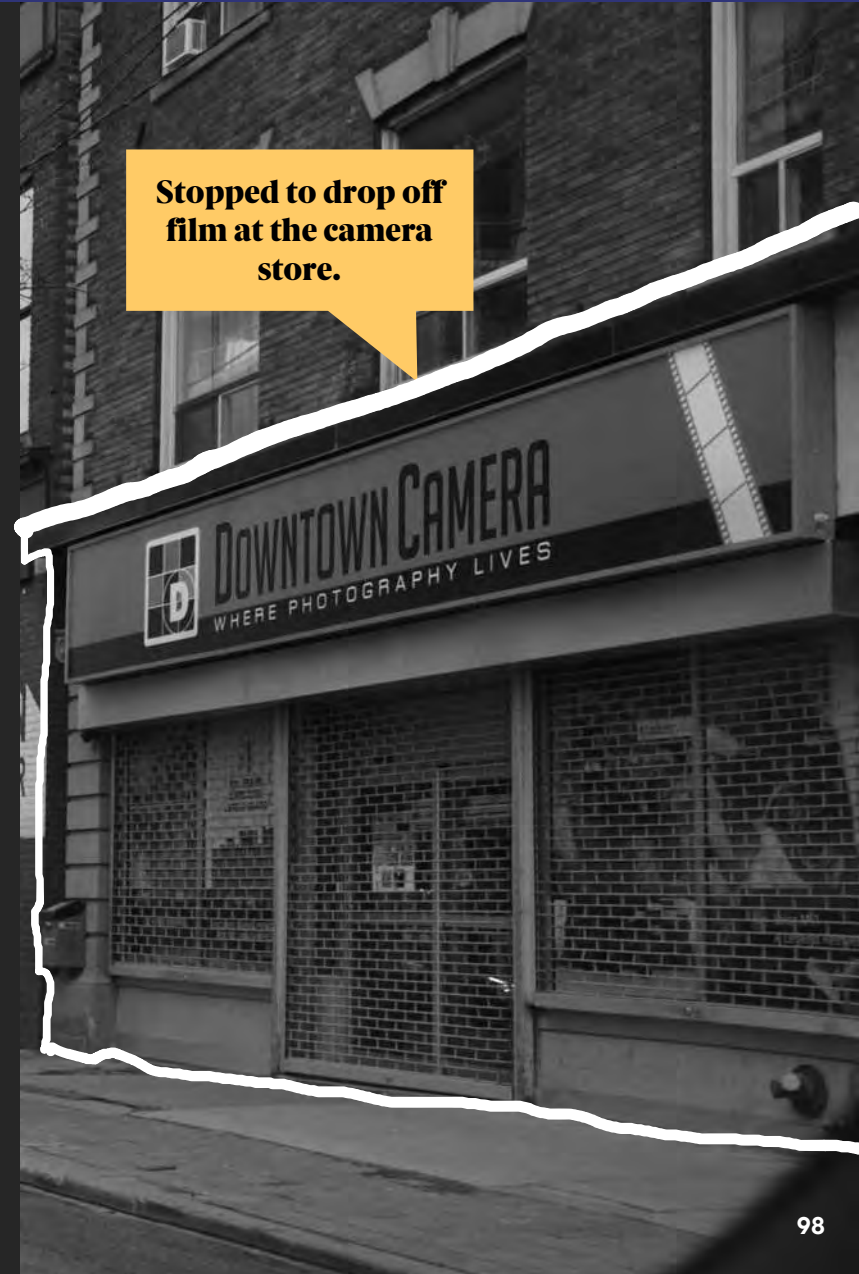


Certain parts of this stretch of Queen has groups people that made us feel unsafe.



Construction felt uncomfortable.

Stopped to drop off film at the camera store.



Segment 6



45%

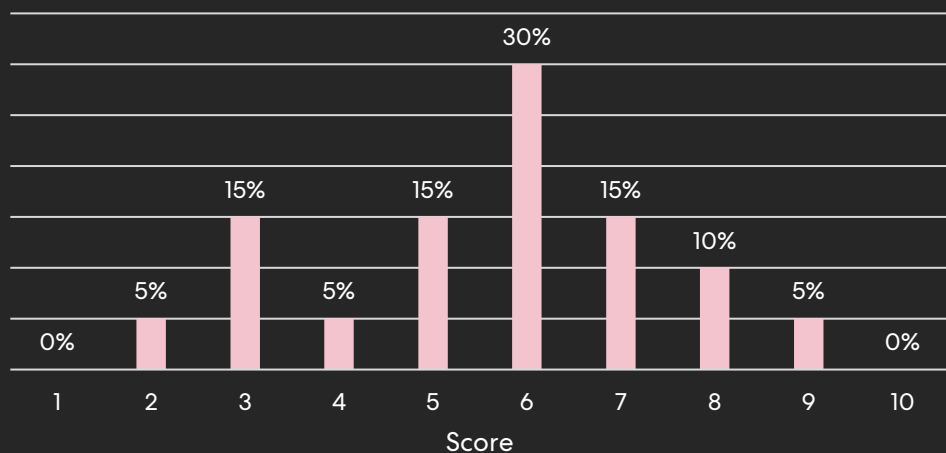
of participants navigated around pedestrians.

45%

of participants felt unsafe safe in the presence of other pedestrians. 25% felt neutral and the rest felt safe.

Similar response to previous segment and low safety scores

Safety Score



Segment 6



Construction areas walking under hoarding.

I felt really unsafe throughout this segment. We walked very fast, so I didn't notice much. The only place I remember is what looks like a homeless shelter between Jarvis and George, we really didn't feel safe walking by.

A car was speeding very close to the sidewalk.

Past Jarvis, it feels a little unsafe because there are no people out and disinvestment from the city is present.

Streets were deserted.





Segment 6

75%

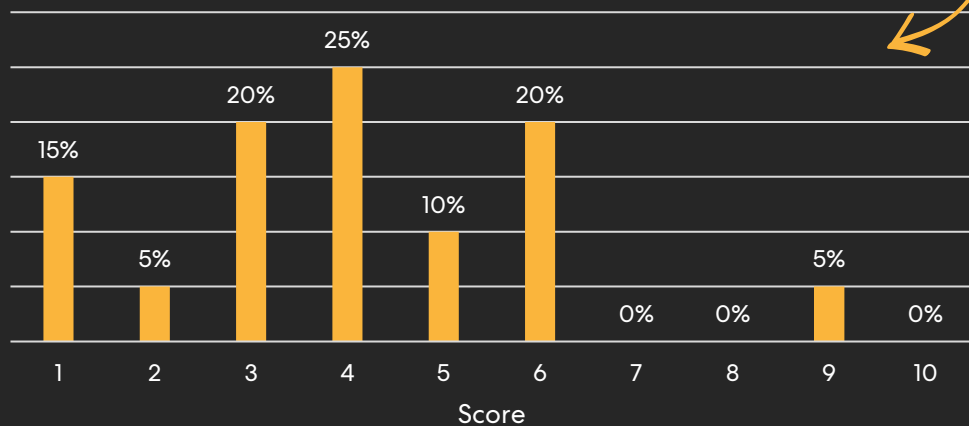
of participants did not make a stop in a store or establishment. 10% of participants thought about it and the rest stopped to checkout the camera store and go to the ice cream store.

50%

of the participants noticed Moss Park in the segment but it did not look welcoming to them.

Lowest vibrancy score of the study

Vibrancy Score





Segment 6



Really nice busy ice cream shop at northwest corner of Jarvis and Queen.

There's some really interesting stores here! I need to come back!

I did not want to stop.

There wasn't anything that interested me,



Check out the camera store because the display looked interesting, and I wanted to see the prices.

I dropped off film at the camera shop which is my usual place to bring film!

Segment highlights

Things that negatively impacted the participants' experience

85%

Building construction

65%

Noise, Garbage on ground

60%

Lack of music or enjoyable sounds

What participants wanted to see more of

As a woman, walking past a group of homeless men when there is hardly anyone else on the street was an unpleasant experience. I initially thought about doing the walk alone, but when I realized that it involved walking past Yonge, I didn't want to do it alone, and doing it with [a friend] didn't really feel safe either.

A higher effort of make this place safe for kids and families. Also better landscaping, This area is very barren and vast feeling with a lot of empty lots, units and fields. Also better rehabilitation systems as there are homeless, and [substance users] very present in this area.

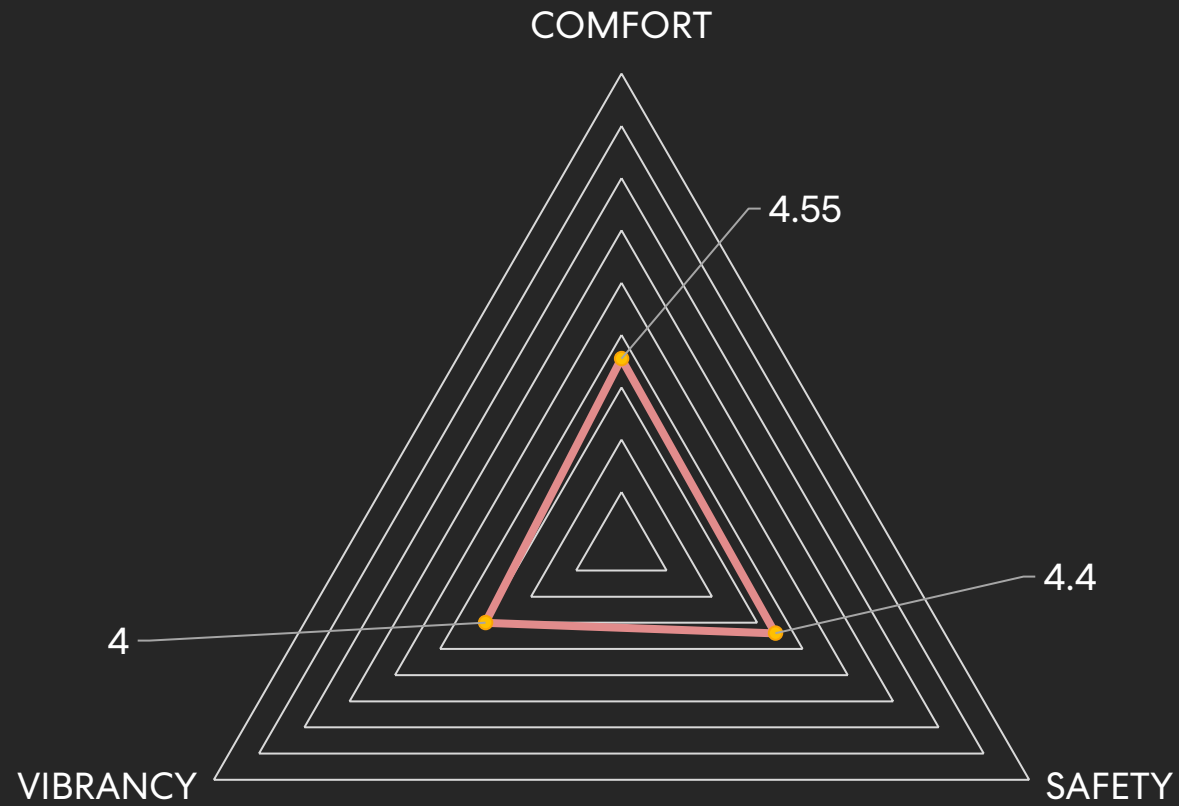
More business fronts. More buildings on both sides of the street. More lighting.

I noticed a large construction site across the street. Hopefully when it is completed it will activate the street.

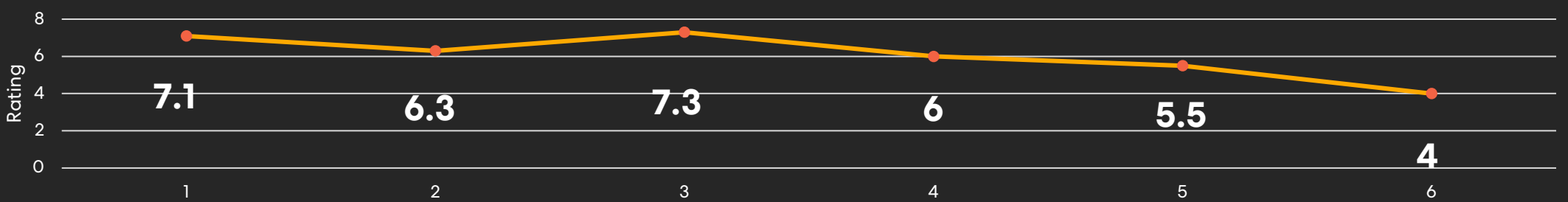
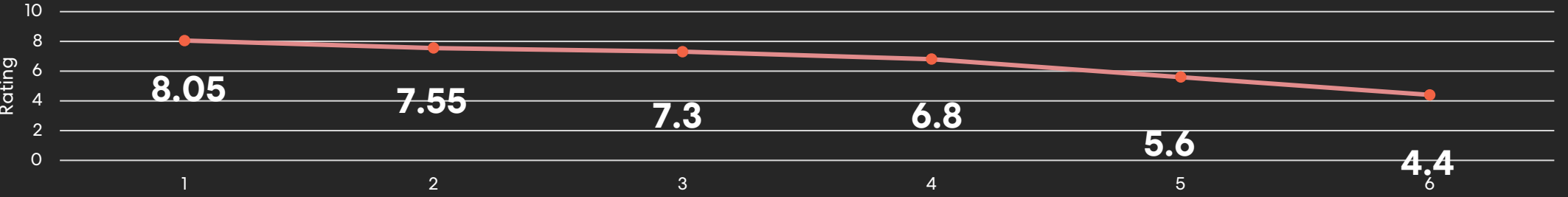
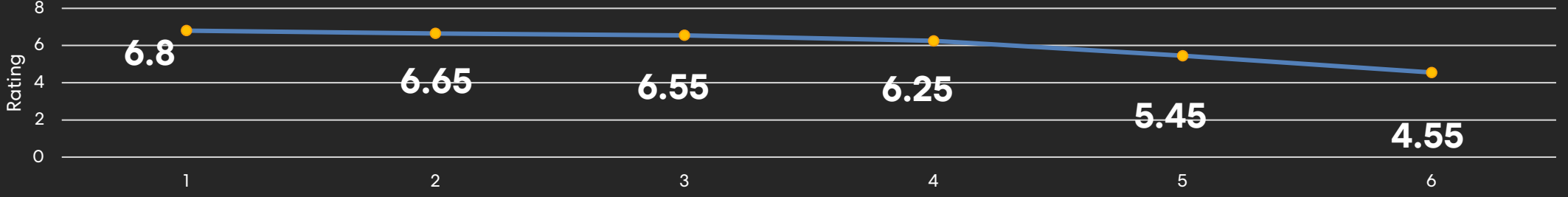
Idk moss park is under construction right now. That is sad. Hate the parking lot on the corner of Queen and Jarvis.

Segment Highlights

Overall Average Scores

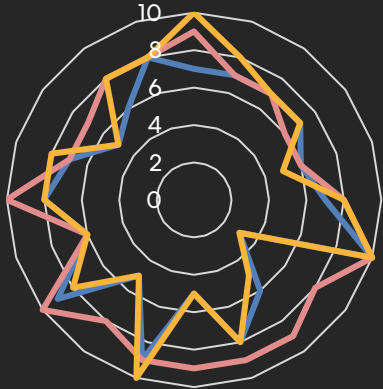


Overall Assessment



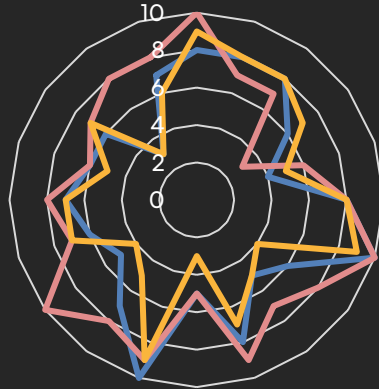
Segment 1

COMFORT SAFETY VIBRANCY



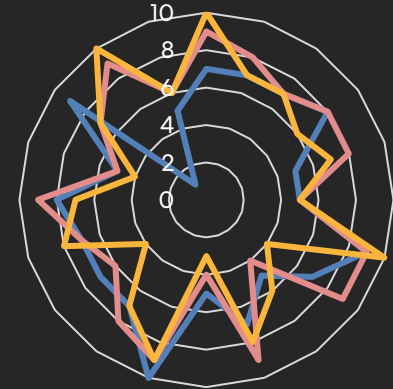
Segment 2

COMFORT SAFETY VIBRANCY



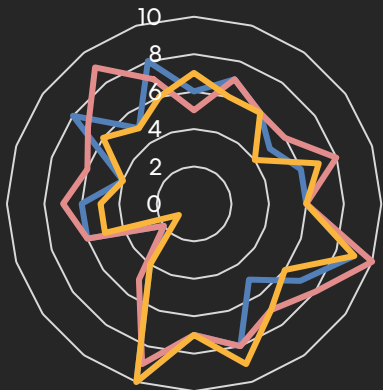
Segment 3

COMFORT SAFETY VIBRANCY



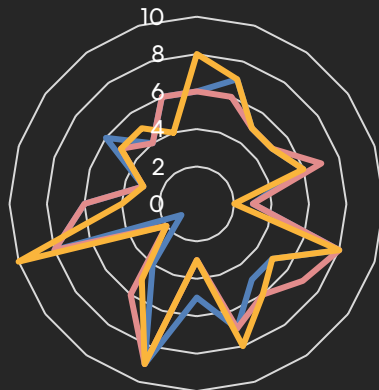
Segment 4

COMFORT SAFETY VIBRANCY



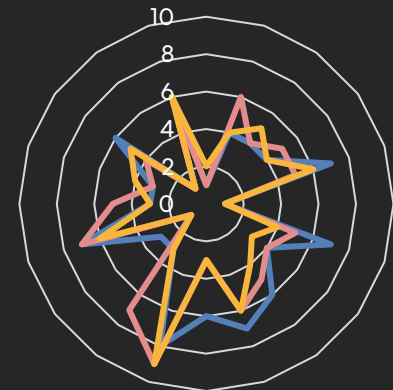
Segment 5

COMFORT SAFETY VIBRANCY



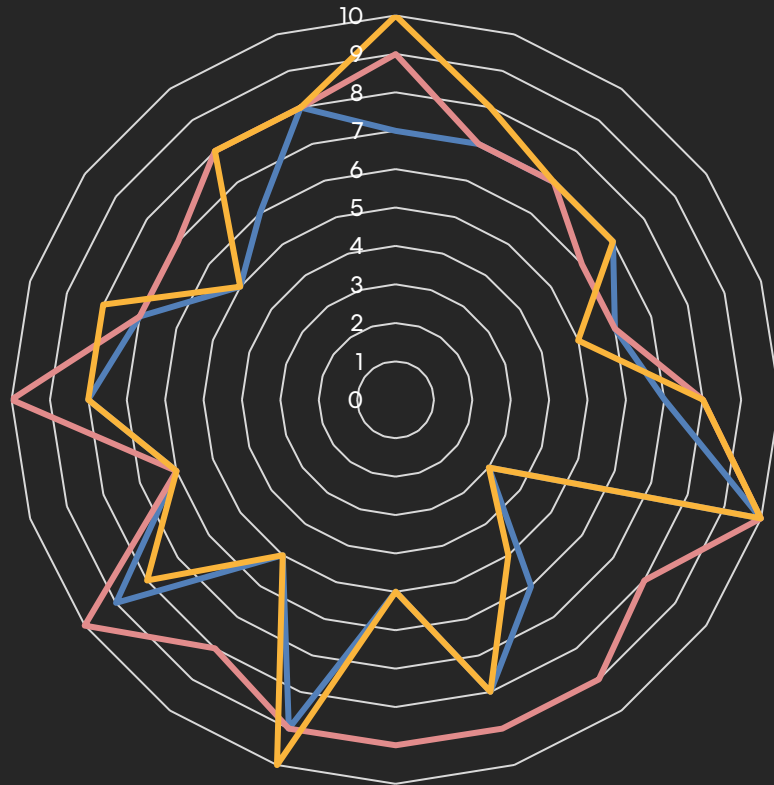
Segment 6

COMFORT SAFETY VIBRANCY



Overall (Average) Rating

COMFORT SAFETY VIBRANCY



1

Introduction

2

Objective

3

Methodology

4

Results

5

Takeaways

What did we learn?

[Click to jump back to TOC](#)



Takeaways

[Click to jump back to TOC](#)

Takeaways

There are two main categories of takeaways we have from this study, that we can apply back to our practice:

- **Process:** How we change the way we work with clients, with our communities, and within our internal teams. What parts of the planning and design process, or within the construction industry, can we influence and change?
- **Design:** Specific built form, public realm, or policy design interventions that we can apply back to our projects. When working on projects at various scales, what can we be more considerate about? Where can we start to make our built environments more gender-inclusive?

Process

1. Inclusive engagement processes

Simply put, there should be more womxn at the table for urban design and planning decision making. Further than internal teams, public engagement or stakeholder processes should consider how to include more womxn in discussions, and what barriers exist today for them that need to be reconsidered. It was clear that participants had many suggestions on what could be done better, from additional trees to larger sidewalks. These should be critical voices in our decision making.

For example, the [Policy4Women](#) research project developed and tested inclusive models of public engagement that seek to mobilize the academic, community, and first-hand knowledge necessary for the renewal of a Canadian gender justice policy agenda.

2. Break down jargon

It was proven useful to use language in our survey that was inclusive and simple, especially for participants that were outside of the design industry. For example, instead of asking about a “building setback”, asking if folks had enough room to move, could access a building entry, or if they enjoyed the presence/sight of stores or shops. Prompts have been helpful for getting to specifics.

Process

3. Construction management

Multiple participants noted how the presence of, and the navigation around construction, made it unsafe and uncomfortable. In rapidly growing and changing environments like Downtown Toronto where construction activity is inevitable, proper construction management is required. For example: coordination of construction (there were multiple instances where both sides of the street had construction and pedestrians had to use the roadway); adequate signage and barriers to buffer from construction; replacement of lost public realm space with high quality alternative pathways; and additional lighting, especially in narrow environments.

For example, STEPS initiative in Toronto has a program called PATCH (Public Art Through Construction Hoarding) that help developments come up with art installations & murals on the public interface of construction sites

Process

4. Public Decency for Unhoused Members of our Community

In some instances, a handful of participants reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable in areas where the housing crisis was the most evident – notably in the eastern segments. This could include anything from people in distress or people sleeping in public spaces like parks and sidewalks that make people feel uncertain in their public realm. This raises both larger societal and policy issues. This study does not aim to further stigmatize these folks as social outcasts, but rather to stress the deep systemic inequities that need to be addressed by our municipalities, policy makers, and even public spaces designers.

“In a public realm that does not cater to the needs of the unhoused, homeless folks effectively become perceived as intruders into “our” space.” (Haughton, 2020)

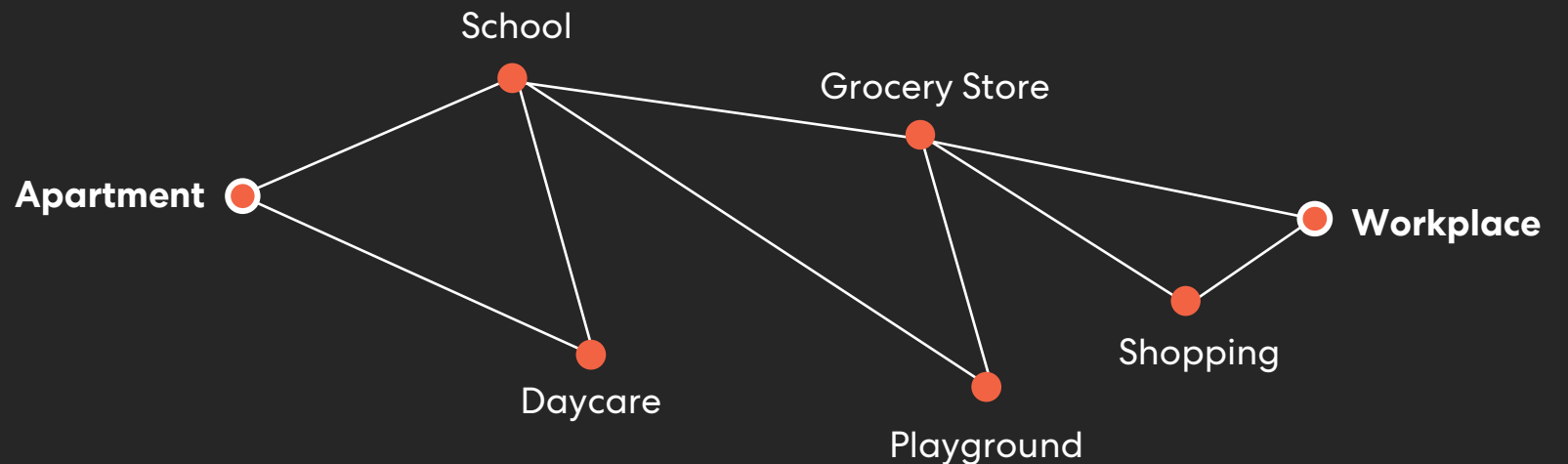
We can't treat these members of our community as obstacles or intruders the same way we may talk about traffic or where a bench is placed, in this study. Our public realm has been hostile to folks that are seeking shelter, refuge from extreme weather, or just find the ability and space for decency.

Process

5. Furthering an Understanding of Trip Chaining

Studies have shown that womxn are more likely to trip chain (making the most of a journey by adding on stops). The survey was designed survey to empower/allow participants to veer off, linger, and move as naturally as possible (as long as they travelled along all of the segments).

What resulted was that many folks added on errands and caretaking responsibilities on top of the objectives of the survey. Participants went into stores to do a refund, to pick up something they ordered, or to care for any home/family duties. As designers, we need to better understand how trip chaining may not be evident in typical transportation or pedestrian movement data, which often relies on just an origin and destination. This demonstrates a need to probe further in our engagement and design processes, to understand how populations – especially womxn – actually move through space.



Design

1. De-cluttering Amenities

Many participants noted that some segments were difficult to navigate through because they had to maneuver around amenities (garbage receptacles, bus stops, hydrants, poles, benches, construction, signage boards, etc) in order to safely and comfortably move forward. Often times when there are obstacles in our path, pedestrians are forced to make a decision – either get closer to the building facade (often into private property) or to make a quick detour, such as stepping into the roadway. Both are not ideal scenarios and can impact their feelings of safety

2. A Need for Green!

One of the most frequent comments received, for improving the conditions of all three themes of Comfort, Safety, and Vibrancy, was the need for more greenery along the streetscape. Although there were some trees and acknowledging that the study was done when most trees were bare, participants really felt that more trees would have increased their ratings across all categories. For designers, this means prioritizing more space for trees within the boulevard, and for healthier, mature, and lush tree canopy that is consistent along the entire length of the street. By studying pace and speed data, areas with ample shade and landscaping allowed pedestrians to linger longer.

Design

3. Slow Down!

One of the biggest factors that affected participants' feelings of comfort and safety was the proximity of, and the speed of, vehicular traffic. Some thought the car traffic was too close to the sidewalk, others thought that fast cars affected their ability to enjoy their walk throughout. Queen street is a major arterial with traffic speed of **40km/hour** which is considered fast for a street with high pedestrian traffic. The high traffic speed coupled with lack of buffer between vehicular traffic lanes and pedestrian pavement for majority of the stretch between University Avenue and Church St makes it even more dangerous for pedestrians.

4. Make Room for Buffers

People appreciate the presence of a permeable buffer, especially a landscape buffer between different kinds of activities on the street. Participants mentioned that within the narrow sidewalk, some people moved fast (commuters) and some people moved slow (leisure) and everyone was struggling to find their space in the public realm.

Design

5. People as a Social Resource

The availability of other people and activities that one can socially identify with can foster community spirit and provide support to people. This can be in the form of having access to community services, being able to see through a window while passing by a vocational school, hearing other people, etc.

6. Eyes on the Street – it's a real thing

Jane Jacobs knew what she was talking about. The presence of people on the streets (either from surrounding residential density, office uses, or retail activity) also had a connection with Comfort, Safety, and Vibrancy. A mix of uses is effective in creating an environment that people enjoyed. In segments where businesses were vacant, parks were empty, or inactive frontages, feelings of comfort and safety drastically declined.

“When there are people present in a public space such as city streets, it strengthens the space and inspires social cohesion.”

- Jane Jacobs

Design

7. The Gift of Choice

By not restricting the 'ability to choose' creates inclusivity and autonomy in public space. This means providing multiple ways to travel, not just by mode, but by route. A pedestrian should be able to cross the street or enter a building whenever they want – whether to seek refuge, to feel safer (avoid a conflict or seek help), or just for curiosity. This can be done by small walkable block lengths, frequent entries, and multiple crosswalks.

8. Make Good (Material) Decisions

Design and construction process (especially Urban scale projects) are long and tiring and during this long and tiring process, as designers we fall off the path of creating spaces for humans and get sucked into standards and norms. We often find ourselves in positions where decisions around choosing elements/materials such as street furniture, lighting, street trees, planters, surface materials such as pavings and underground utilities such as soil cells are highly motivated by short term cost benefit and not by human experience. A shift in the thought process to make “human centric decisions” is essential in achieving inclusive design.

Design

10. Building Design: Setbacks and Frontages

A fine grained retail space can be very helpful in improving the vibrancy of the street but the frequency of openings, restaurant signages, frequent movement of people can be uncomfortable for some pedestrians to navigate. Coordination between business owners to avoid clutter will be helpful. Coordinated setbacks / matching setbacks provide a consistency and rhythm to the street that encourages pedestrian activity.

11. Visibility and Signage

Familiarity in the urban space improves feelings of safety and clear wayfinding and signage play a huge role in this. Treatment of streets, laneways, inset recesses, vehicular entry and exit ramps to make them very visible to pedestrians is crucial for pedestrian safety. Application of sight triangles even in smaller streets can improve visibility and help avoid pedestrian crashes. Signages intimating pedestrians about oncoming vehicular routes is also helpful

Final Thoughts

We can do better with the design of our public realm – for our friends, parents, children, and our communities. A city designed for our most vulnerable is a city designed for all. Our spaces are never neutral, and if we do not apply these intersectional and empathetic lenses to our work, there will be no progress towards a Just and Equitable City.

A big thank-you to our study participants! We have many next steps in mind of where to take this study – further gender-inclusive research, sharing the findings with our studio and our clients, and of course, applying it into the work we do day-to-day.

Questions or Comments? Want to work with us to continue this research? Contact us:



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Thank You!