

The Traverse City Downtown Development Authority

Summer 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by Avenue ISR

November 12, 2020

Overview

The Traverse City Downtown Development Authority (DDA), implemented a number of modifications in Summer 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among other steps, the DDA created a pedestrian zone for the 100 and 200 blocks of East Front Street where vehicle traffic was prohibited and where restaurants were permitted to provide seating on the sidewalks and street.



In fall 2020, the DDA conducted a survey of multiple stakeholder groups to assess the effectiveness of the modifications and to determine what steps, if any, to take going forward.

Key Questions

- What were the positives and negatives associated with the DDA's approach in 2020?
- How were specific amenities and services (e.g. traffic flow, cleanliness) rated?
- Looking forward, should the DDA repeat creation of the pedestrian zone or take any other steps?

Sources and Methods

- Information presented in this report is based on an online survey conducted September 24 to October 5, 2020; the survey was promoted through media release, social media posts and other public communications
- 1,472 unique individuals participated; Downtown owners and employees were allowed to also complete questions as City of Traverse City residents, if applicable
- Respondents knew the DDA was the sponsor of the survey

	Characteristics	Sample Size
Traverse City Business Owners/Managers	Own or manage a business within the City of Traverse City	197
Downtown Traverse City Employees	Work for (but not an owner or manager) a business within Downtown Traverse City	187
Traverse City Residents	Own or rent a home within the City of Traverse City	660
2020 Visitors to Downtown	Visited Downtown Traverse City since March 15, 2020 (but not any of the above)	530
Others	Not any of the above	78

Note: respondents were offered the opportunity to enter a drawing for one of three \$50 gift cards as an honorarium for participating in the study

Executive Summary of Results

- The majority of all audiences surveyed are supportive of the modifications the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) made in the summer of 2020 including
 - Closure of two blocks of Front St. to vehicle traffic
 - Change to 2-way traffic on portions of State Street
 - Additional outdoor restaurant/café seating allowed on city streets
 - Use of colorful paint on Front Street
- In verbatim comments, many respondents cite these changes as causing Downtown Traverse City to be even more of a destination; by safely drawing in additional visitors, these modifications had a positive impact on many Downtown businesses in a very challenging time; many are deeply appreciative
- Looking forward to 2021, many would support extending the modifications, though support is a little less than for 2020
- However, there are significant numbers of all groups of respondents who are not supportive of these modifications
 - Some Traverse City business owners/managers and Downtown employees believe the modifications caused direct harm to their businesses and negatively impacted older and disabled customers
 - Some among all groups were disappointed by the loss of parking and traffic flow
- Finding opportunities to provide what was appreciated about the street closure – a Downtown public space, opportunities to spread out away from other visitors, additional café seating and placemaking opportunities – without significantly disrupting business access and parking, would likely be the ideal solution

Key Audiences: Summary of Modification Ratings

- At a high level, the majority of respondents from each group are supportive of key modifications in 2020

Summary Ratings for Modifications in 2020
(Top 2 Box Scores: 2020 “Worked Well” or “Somewhat Well”)

Modifications	TC Business Owners / Manager	Downtown TC Employees	TC Residents	2020 Downton Visitors
Closure of 2 blocks of Front Street to vehicle traffic	73%	84%	88%	88%
Change to 2-way traffic on portions of State Street	68%	72%	79%	77%
Additional outdoor restaurant/café seating allowed on city streets	79%	90%	91%	91%
Colorful paint on Front Street	64%	77%	80%	76%

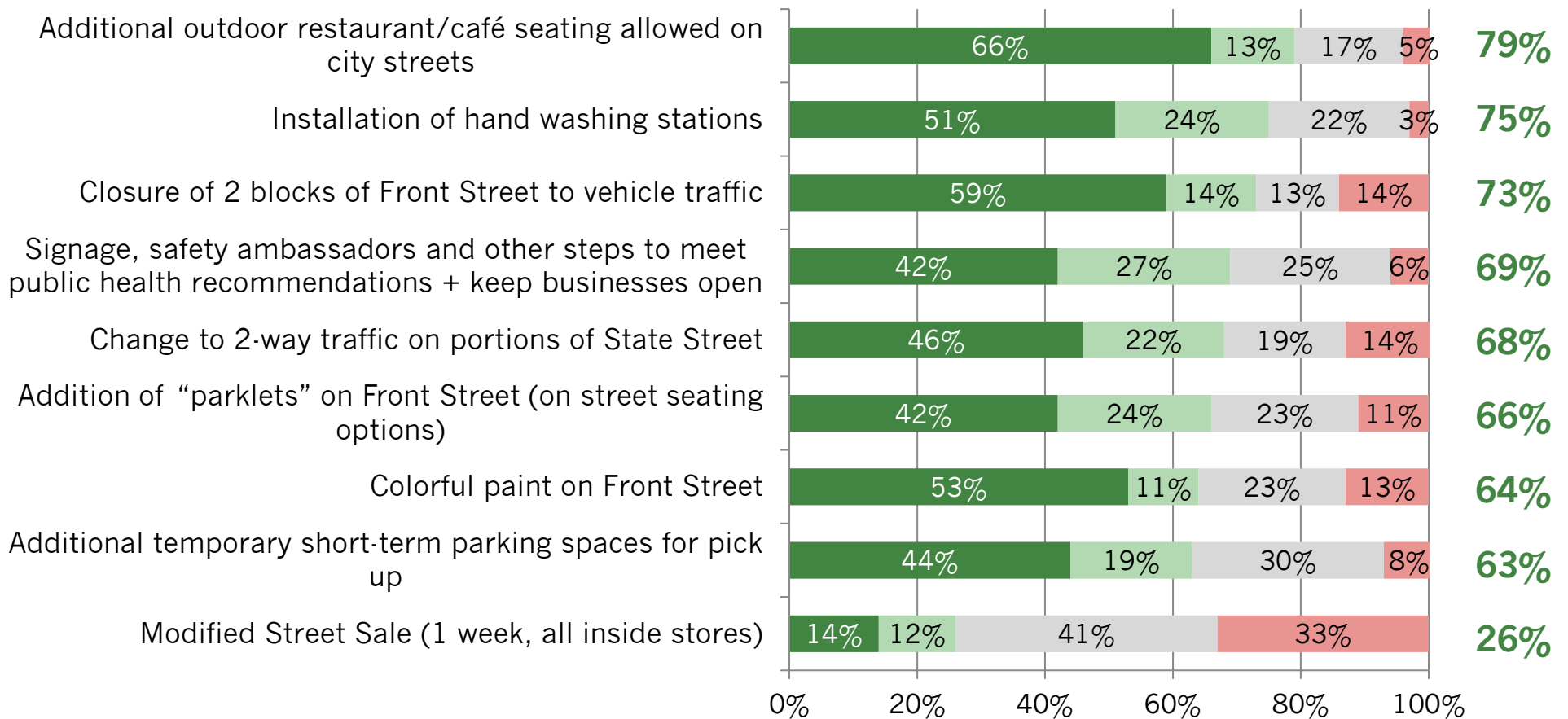
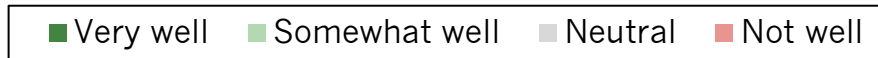
Questions: Which of these modifications would you say worked well for Downtown Traverse City?

Traverse City Business Owners/Managers: Ratings of Modifications Made in 2020

- A significant majority of business owners/managers surveyed believe that almost all modifications made in 2020 worked very well or somewhat well

Ratings of Modifications: Worked Well for Downtown Traverse City? (Traverse City Business Owners/Managers)

Top 2 Box:
Worked Very or
Somewhat Well



Question: Which of these modifications would you say worked well for Downtown Traverse City?

2020 Traverse City DDA Survey
197 Traverse City Business Owners/Managers

Traverse City Business Owners/Managers: Verbatim Responses to Summer of 2020

- Select verbatim comments give a sense of the intensity of feeling – mostly positive (negative comments follow on a subsequent slide)

Many Affirmed Their Appreciation for Modifications Made in the Summer of 2020

- *“Under the circumstances of dealing with the pandemic, I think Downtown TC dealt effectively and efficiently with the parameters of the Covid mandates. I commend the DTCA for their thoughtful response to a quagmire of issues once the pandemic hit and grateful for their guidance. Great job, DTCA Board 🙌” (Front Street Retail Store: Retail Store: Clothing, Gifts and Accessories)*
- *“I absolutely loved the way this was handled. I loved the Front Street closure because it provided so much space for people to move around. Even without Covid, Front Street can get so crowded and unpleasant. This was a dream! It was so much easier to access businesses and enjoy downtown TC. It was much easier for my clients to reach me and have things to do while they wait.” (Front Street Personal Services)*
- *“Summer was good for us. Please close Front St again and put out igloos, tents, and fire pits!!!” (Front Street Restaurant)*
- *“Street closure was brilliant and should be done every year. Hand wash stations were great for public health.” (Downtown Personal Services Company (salon, barber, fitness, mental/physical health, etc.))*
- *“Keep the street open to pedestrians! It's helping creating a Downtown we can really be proud of!!” (Downtown Nonprofit/NGO)*
- *“Great start...lets keep improving!” (Downtown Professional Services Firm)*

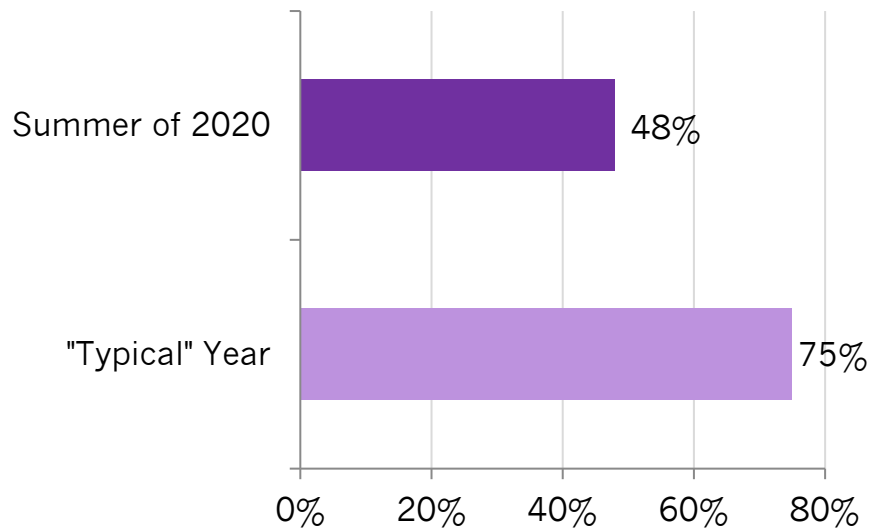
Question: (optional) Use this space if you would like to explain any of your answers to the previous 2 questions about the summer of 2020 in Traverse City.

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Visitation to Downtown Traverse City

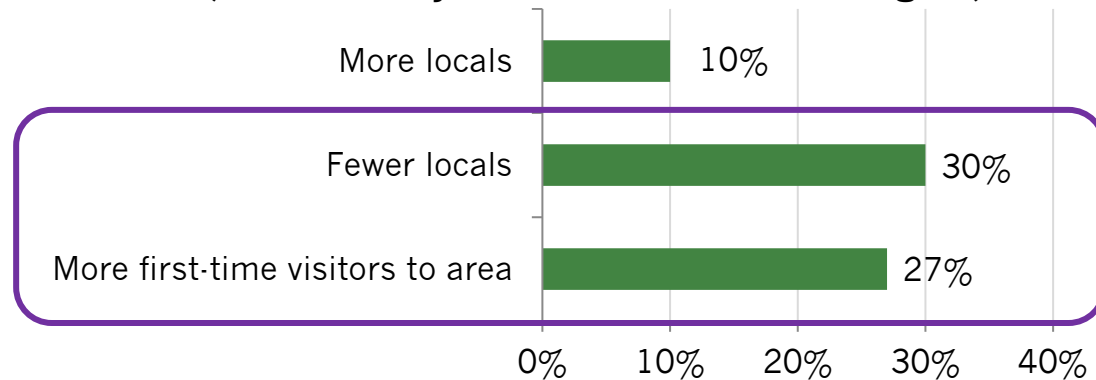
- Although city residents report visiting Downtown Traverse City less frequently in Summer 2020, nearly half visited weekly or more; in addition, many Downtown business owners, managers and employees report an up-tick in first time visitors to the area

Visiting Downtown Weekly or More (Traverse City Residents)



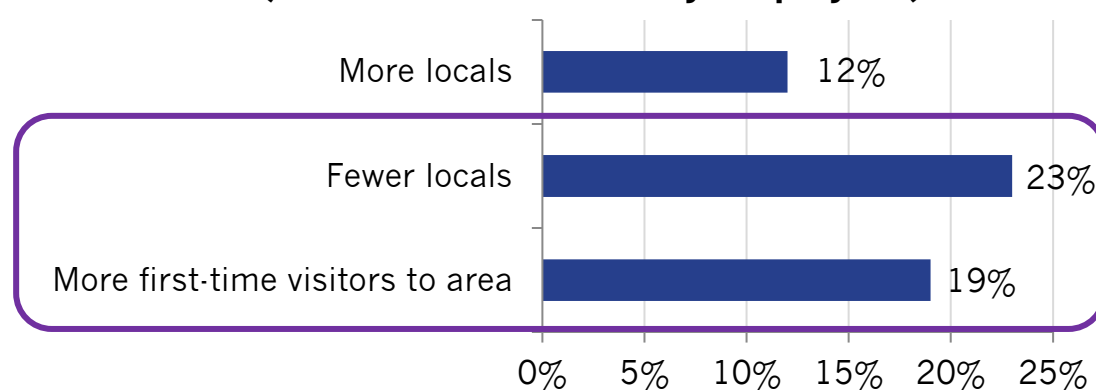
Question: How often did you visit Downtown Traverse City in the summer of 2020? How often would you say you visit in a 'typical' year?

Change In the Mix of Visitors: Summer, 2020 (Traverse City Business Owners/Managers)



Question: Did you see a change in the mix of people coming to your business in the summer of 2020 compared to a "typical" summer? Please select all that apply.

Change In the Mix of Visitors: Summer, 2020 (Downtown Traverse City Employees)



Traverse City Business Owners/Managers: Impact on Business of Modifications Made in 2020

- The majority of business owners/managers reported no impact from DDA modifications on their businesses; positives mostly outweigh negatives

Ratings of Modifications: Worked Well for Downtown Traverse City? And Impact on Your Business (Traverse City Business Owners/Managers)

2020 Modification	Worked Well For Traverse City (Top 2 Box)	Impact On Your Business		
		Positive	Neutral	Negative
Additional outdoor restaurant/café seating allowed on city streets	78%	30%	64%	6%
Installation of hand washing stations	75%	29%	70%	1%
Closure of 2 blocks of Front Street to vehicle traffic	73%	33%	53%	14%
Signage, safety ambassadors and other steps intended to meet public health recommendations & keep businesses open	68%	29%	68%	3%
Change to 2-way traffic on portions of State Street	68%	20%	71%	9%
Addition of “parklets” on Front Street (on street seating options)	66%	21%	74%	5%
Colorful paint on Front Street	64%	25%	70%	5%
Additional temporary short-term parking spaces for pick up	63%	14%	79%	7%
Modified Street Sale (1 week, all inside stores)	26%	6%	75%	20%

Question: Which of these modifications would you say worked well for Downtown Traverse City? Overall, was the impact on your business positive, negative or neutral compared to what summer 2020 might have been like if the change hadn't been made but COVID-19 conditions along with state and federal mandates were still happening?

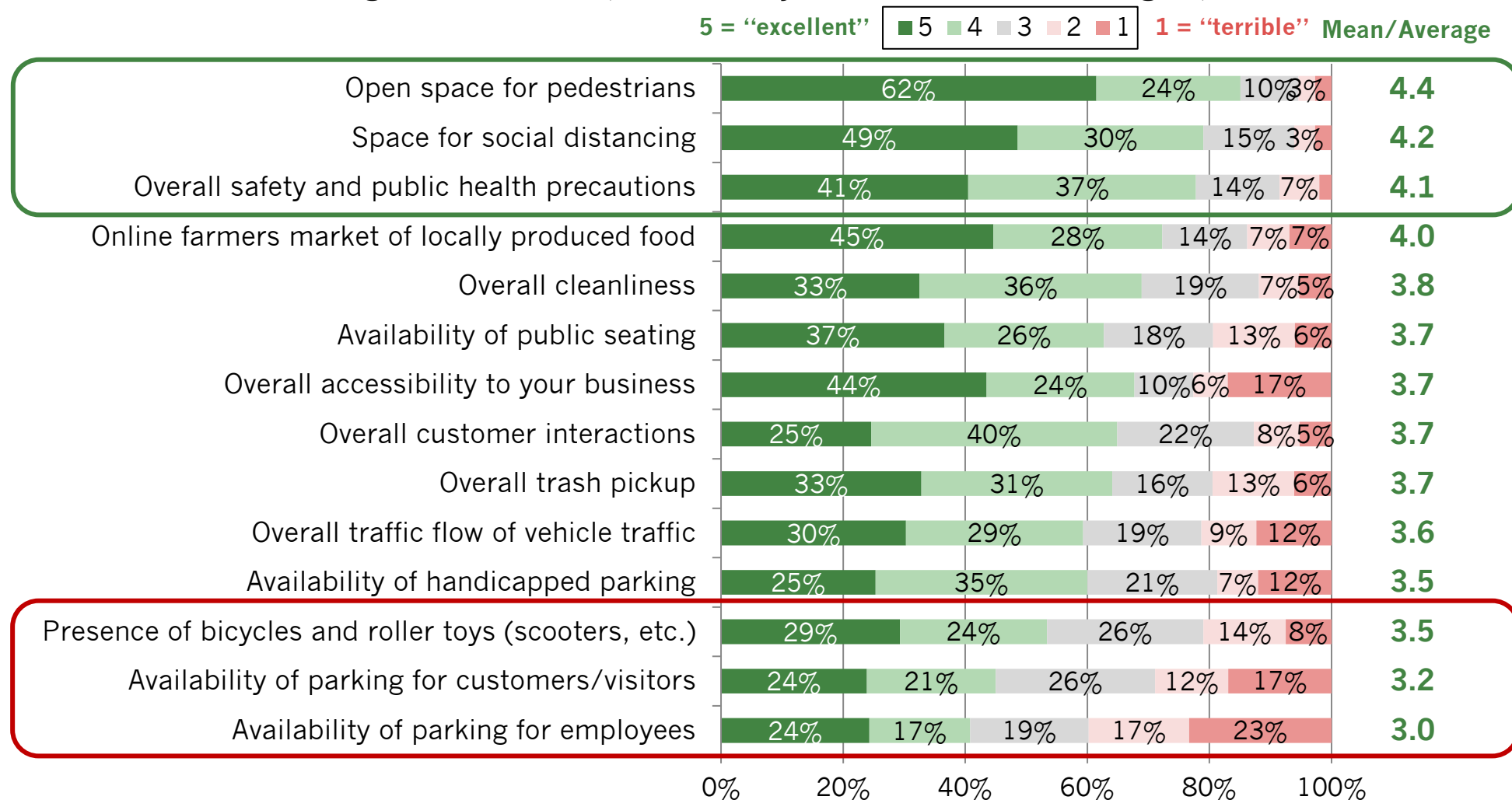
Impacts with 30% of respondents indicating positive or negative are highlighted in green or red

2020 Traverse City DDA Survey
197 Traverse City Business Owners/Managers

Traverse City Business Owners/Managers: Ratings of Conditions During the Summer of 2020 in Traverse City

- Summer 2020 modifications are associated with high ratings in terms of open space for pedestrians, ability to distance and overall safety and public health

Ratings of Conditions (Traverse City Business Owners/Managers)



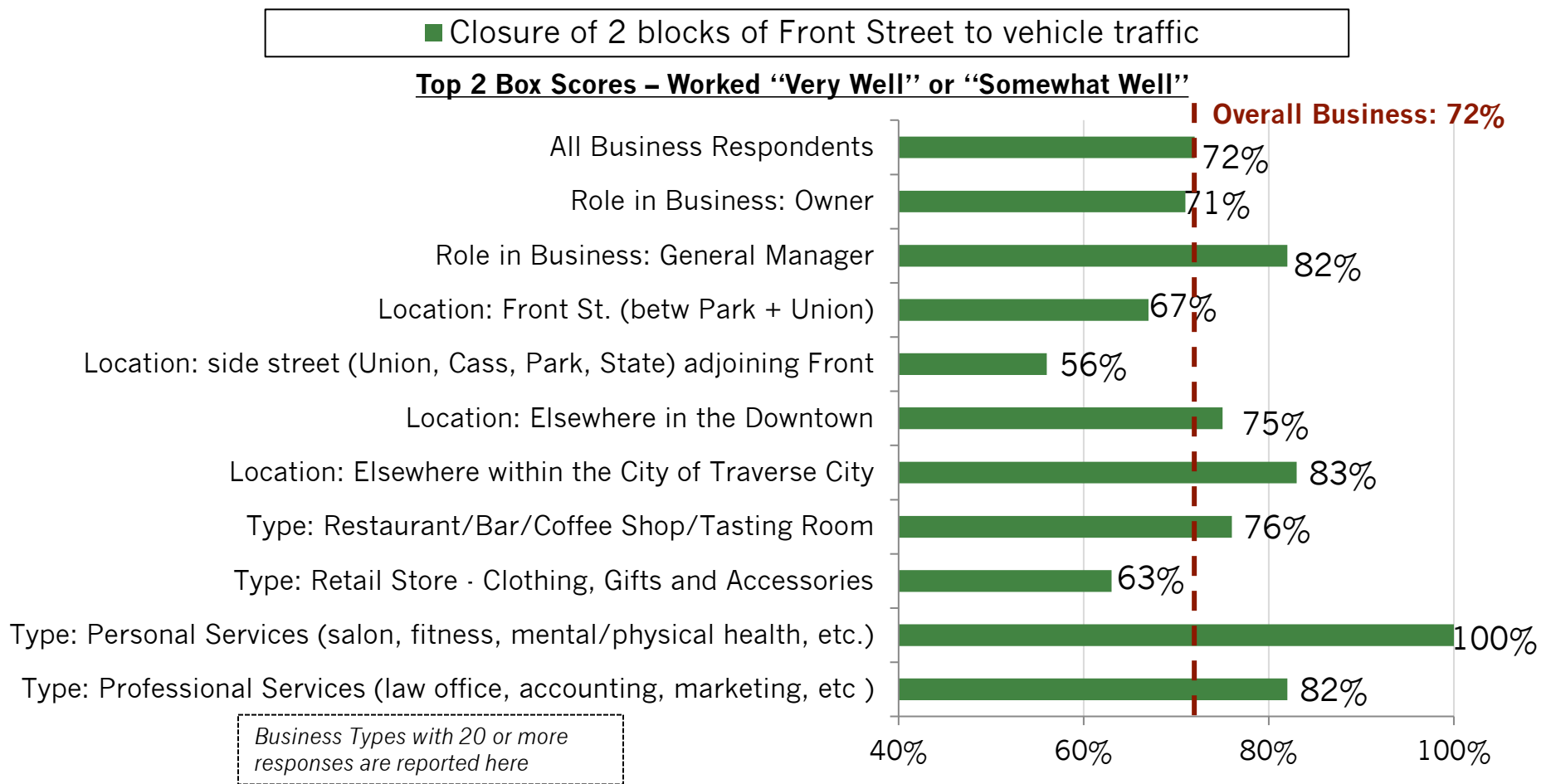
Question: Please rate the following during the summer of 2020 in Traverse City from 1 to 5 with "1" indicating "terrible" and "5" indicating "excellent." Indicate "N/A" for "not applicable" or "no opinion."

2020 Traverse City DDA Survey
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Traverse City Business Owners/Managers: Ratings of Modifications Made in 2020, Comparisons By Respondent Role and Business Type and Location

- Across types of businesses and respondents, the majority support the 2020 Front Street closure; however some groups are less supportive

Ratings of Modifications: Worked Well for Downtown Traverse City? (Traverse City Business Owners/Managers)



Question: Which of these modifications would you say worked well for Downtown Traverse City?

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Traverse City Business Owners/Managers: Remote Work

- Although many Traverse City businesses have higher rates of remote work at present, most intend to revert to something close to pre-COVID rates

Past, Current and Likely Future Rates of Remote Work (Traverse City Business Owners/Managers)

Business Types with 20 or more responses are reported here

Type and Location of Business	% of Employees Working Remotely		
	Before March, 2020	Today	June, 2021 If no COVID restrictions
All Business Respondents	10%	18%	12%
Type: Professional Services (law office, accounting, marketing, etc.)	14%	30%	16%
Type: Personal Services (salon, fitness, mental/physical health, etc.)	6%	27%	18%
Type: Retail Store - Clothing, Gifts and Accessories	4%	5%	5%
Type: Restaurant/Bar/Coffee Shop/Tasting Room	6%	4%	3%
Location: Front St. (between Park + Union)	4%	6%	5%
Location: side street (Union, Cass, Park, State) adjoining Front St.	22%	31%	9%
Location: Elsewhere in the Downtown	15%	29%	21%
Location: Elsewhere within the City of Traverse City	11%	23%	15%

Question: How many employees (full time equivalents) work in person at this location? How many work remotely? Please answer for the time before March 14, 2020 and today. Also, please make your best guess of what might happen in June, 2021 if all COVID-related mandates have been lifted.

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Traverse City Business Owners/Managers: Verbatim Responses to Summer of 2020

- Select verbatim comments give a sense of the intensity of negative feeling held by some

Some Saw a Direct Negative Impact On Their Businesses or the Downtown

- *“We had more customer traffic in June before the street closure and in Sept after the street was opened back up.” (Front Street Retail Store: Clothing, Gifts and Accessories)*
- *“The terrible ratings above are in no way due to a lack of space except relating to PARKING. Gazing daily at the empty street where there would normally be traffic and parking was frustrating. Public mostly used sidewalks like always.” (Front Street Retail Store: Clothing, Gifts and Accessories)*
- *“Our mature customers found it difficult to shop.” (Front Street Retail Store: Specialty Foods)*
- *“Closing the street was a terrible idea that I hope will NEVER happen again other than for one day or evening special events. It was bad for the businesses and will destroy the Downtown. See Kalamazoo, etc.” (Side Street Professional Services Firm)*

A Handful Feel That Modifications Were Necessary for ‘20, But Should Not Be Extended

- *“Overall, business was down - but probably due to COVID. I was happy to try the Front St. closure, but can't see it working well along with festivals. Given the choice, I would prefer the festivals.” (Front Street Retail Store: Clothing, Gifts and Accessories)*

Question: (optional) Use this space if you would like to explain any of your answers to the previous 2 questions about the summer of 2020 in Traverse City.

2020 Traverse City DDA Survey
197 Traverse City Business Owners/Managers

Key Audiences: Summary of Modification Ratings

- At a high level, the majority of respondents from each group are supportive of key modifications in 2020; support is somewhat lower (but still majority) for extending these modifications in 2021

Summary Ratings for Modifications in 2020 and 2021
(Top 2 Box Scores: 2020 “Worked Well” or “Somewhat Well”;
2021 “Strongly Support” or “Somewhat Support”)

Modifications	TC Business Owners/Manager		Downtown TC Employees		TC Residents		2020 Downton Visitors	
	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
Closure of 2 blocks of Front Street to vehicle traffic	73%	69%	84%	80%	88%	87%	88%	85%
Change to 2-way traffic on portions of State Street	68%	62%	72%	69%	79%	76%	77%	69%
Additional outdoor restaurant/café seating allowed on city streets	79%	75%	90%	82%	91%	90%	91%	89%
Colorful paint on Front Street	64%	61%	77%	73%	80%	78%	76%	70%

Questions: Which of these modifications would you say worked well for Downtown Traverse City? AND Looking forward, in your opinion should the DDA and City of Traverse City consider implementing any of the following modifications in 2021?

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