

BRIEFING NOTE

Granville Pedestrian Zone: Initial Observations from the 2026 Extension

Date: September 2026

Purpose

To provide an initial overview of the seven-week extension of the 2026 Granville Pedestrian Zone, including its objectives, early indications of success and the lessons that will inform future summer pedestrian zones on Granville Street.

A detailed, data-informed assessment will be completed over the coming months in collaboration with the City of Vancouver.

Background

The 2026 Granville Pedestrian Zone was initially established to support Vancouver's hosting of the FIFA World Cup. The tournament brought extraordinary energy, activity and visibility to Granville Street. Following the World Cup, the pedestrian zone was extended for seven weeks, concluding on September 7. The extension provided an opportunity to build on the momentum created during the tournament while testing whether Granville Street could support a successful pedestrian environment without the draw of a major international event.

The extension was organized within a very short planning period. It included daily activities, large and small special events, family programming, live entertainment, markets, workshops, business promotions and other activations intended to attract people to the street and encourage them to stay longer.

Throughout the extension, Downtown Van closely observed how the street was being used and gathered feedback from businesses, visitors, residents, partners and other members of the community. Based on those observations and the feedback received to date, Downtown Van is encouraged by the initial results and the level of public support for the pedestrian zone.

Defining Success

The extension was not expected to resolve every challenge facing Granville Street. The street continues to experience high storefront vacancy, significant social disorder and very different conditions from one block to the next. Some businesses were also better positioned than others to benefit from increased pedestrian traffic because of their operating hours, business models and ability to engage directly with the street. Weather, limited planning time and the different characteristics of each block also affected programming and business outcomes.

The extension was approached as a pilot. Its value would come from both its successes and its challenges, providing information that could be used to strengthen future summer pedestrian zones.

Downtown Van identified the following objectives for the extension:

- Continue the momentum created during the FIFA World Cup, including encouraging new interest in leasing and investing on Granville Street.
- Begin establishing a sustainable level of summer activity without relying on a major international event.
- Use programming and special events to attract larger-than-usual crowds to the street.
- Increase everyday foot traffic and vibrancy between programmed events, particularly on weekdays and among children and families.
- Support Granville Street businesses by attracting potential customers and increasing awareness of the businesses and experiences available on the street.
- Improve public perceptions of Granville Street and help people see its potential in a new way.

Initial Observations

Although the full assessment is still to come, several encouraging areas of success emerged during the extension.

Changing perceptions of Granville Street

The pedestrian zone generated significant positive attention through social and mainstream media, helping to present a different and more hopeful story about Granville Street. Downtown Van heard increasingly positive word of mouth about Granville Street throughout the summer. Frequent comments included that the street felt different and that people were seeing and experiencing Granville in a new light. People commented on the everyday experience of walking, gathering and spending time on the street. Many expressed appreciation that Granville had not simply returned to its previous condition following the FIFA World Cup.

High-profile events

Our post-FIFA special events drew large crowds and significant public attention. A performance by Vancouver DJ Felix Cartal brought more than 3,000 people to Granville Street on a Wednesday evening, while the Belmont Cameli look-alike contest generated national and international media attention and attracted a large, mostly younger and highly engaged crowd.

These events demonstrated Granville Street's ability to host creative and timely mid-week programming that connects with new audiences while generating positive attention for both the street and downtown Vancouver.

Smaller, targeted programming

Smaller events were also an important part of the extension. Programming such as the Baby Rave, soccer tennis, dance lessons, live music, markets, workshops and family activities attracted specific audiences and gave people new reasons to visit Granville.

These events helped Downtown Van better understand which kinds of programming work at different times of day and how daytime activities can complement Granville's established evening and nightlife economy.

Business-connected activations

Regular giveaways and free activities helped attract people to the street and introduce them to Granville businesses. Wherever possible, these activations were designed not only to bring people downtown, but also to encourage them to stay longer, explore the surrounding blocks and become more familiar with businesses they may not have previously visited. This approach provided important insight into how programming can more directly connect increased pedestrian traffic with business opportunities.

Weekday and family activity

At various points throughout the extension, weekday activity and public use of the street exceeded expectations. The presence of children and families was particularly encouraging and demonstrated that Granville can appeal to a broader range of visitors than it has traditionally attracted. Creating consistent activity between major programmed events remains an area for continued work, but the extension provided promising examples of what is possible.

Hospitality business results

Restaurants, bars and other hospitality businesses reported significant successes during both the FIFA World Cup and the extension. Some experienced record-breaking sales or unusually strong customer volumes, while busy patios helped create energy and activity along the street. These results were not experienced equally by every business or on every block, which will be an important part of the final analysis. However, the response from many hospitality businesses demonstrates the economic potential of a well-planned pedestrian zone.

Retailer participation

Many retailers developed creative ways to engage pedestrians and encourage people to enter their stores. These efforts created immediate business opportunities while also increasing awareness among potential future customers. The experience reinforced an important lesson: programming can bring people to Granville, but close coordination with businesses is essential to convert increased pedestrian traffic into meaningful economic benefits. Strengthening that connection will be a priority for future planning.

Key Lessons

One of the most important purposes of the extension was to better understand how to strengthen Granville Street without the extraordinary draw of the FIFA World Cup. The seven-week pilot allowed Downtown Van and its partners to test a wide range of programming, activations and approaches. Some worked exceptionally well, while others identified areas where changes will be required. Initial lessons include:

- Large, distinctive events can attract significant crowds and generate positive attention for Granville Street.
- Smaller, targeted programming is important for attracting families and other audiences during the day.
- Consistent activity between major events remains essential to creating a successful pedestrian environment.
- Stronger coordination with businesses can help translate increased pedestrian traffic into more direct economic benefits.
- Programming and operating strategies must respond to the significantly different conditions found across the five blocks.

- Future planning will benefit from a longer lead time and the experience gained during the 2026 extension.

Next Steps

Over the coming months, Downtown Van will work with the City of Vancouver to complete a detailed assessment of the pedestrian zone and its economic and social impacts. The assessment will consider available data alongside feedback from businesses, visitors, residents, partners and other stakeholders. It will also examine the different experiences of individual blocks and business sectors.

The findings will help determine:

- Which programs and activations were most effective.
- How the pedestrian zone affected visitation and business activity.
- How benefits can be more consistently experienced across different blocks and business sectors.
- What operational, programming and business-engagement changes should be made in future years.
- How future summer pedestrian zones can contribute to the longer-term revitalization of Granville Street.

Conclusion

This summer demonstrated that Granville Street can change, that people want to spend time there, at all hours of the day and night, and that thoughtful programming can help create a more welcoming and vibrant public space.

The pedestrian zone was not experienced in the same way by every business or on every block, and Granville Street's longstanding challenges will not be addressed through programming alone. Future success will also depend on continued attention to public safety, cleanliness, storefront vacancy, transportation, business participation and the conditions affecting individual blocks. However, the extension provided encouraging evidence of what is possible. Downtown Van now has a much clearer understanding of the opportunities and challenges involved and is better positioned to build on this experience in the years ahead.