

Coalition of Toronto Residents' Associations (COTRA)

City Wide Survey Results

Neighbourhood Retail & Services Study

Expanding Housing Options (EHON) Options in Neighbourhoods - City of Toronto

October 3 2025

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- Survey Results:
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COTRA:

- A city-wide coalition of residents and residents' associations, formed in response to the proposed EHON *Neighbourhood Retail & Services* (NRS) study.
- Wants residents to be aware of proposed zoning changes, and resident voices to inform decisions.
- Wants vibrant, thriving neighbourhoods that benefit everyone.
- Strongly supports local businesses.
- Wants thoughtful zoning changes to support this.

Our Approach:

- Build awareness and understanding for the proposed changes and the potential implications to residents.
- Maintain neutral, factual communication through our networks of residents' associations and community contacts.
- Gather resident feedback through surveys and outreach.

Our Goal:

- Drive transparency, awareness and community engagement.
- Work with Planning, Council and stakeholders for meaningful and appropriate policy changes.

- COTRA designed and distributed its survey city-wide.
- The survey explained the proposed changes and posed questions to understand residents' support, views and/or concerns.
- **Survey Period:** September 2 – 15, 2025 (2 weeks).

Distribution:

- 200+ residents' associations (RA) and community groups across Toronto encouraged to share the survey with members.
 - Wards 1–3: Distributed by the Coalition of Etobicoke Residents Associations (CERA).
 - Wards 4-19: Distributed by FoNTRA City Outreach
 - Wards 20–25: Distributed by Scarborough United Neighbourhoods (SUN).

Responses:

- **3,400+ respondents** city-wide.
- **3,700+ comments** to open-ended questions.

The survey outlined proposed zoning changes, clarified technical details, and identified key implications so residents could make informed responses.

Organized into four sections:

1. Residential Interior Streets

- Questions on permitting businesses on interior streets.

2. Major Streets

- Questions on allowing businesses on Major streets
- Included examples of Major streets in city Wards.

3. Revitalizing Commercial Areas

- Questions on existing commercial areas and potentially new businesses in neighbourhood interiors.

4. Awareness of Planning's NRS Consultation

- Questions on residents' awareness of NRS proposal.

- Survey questions were either: multiple-choice (*single or multiple response*) and open-ended (*the option to comment openly*).
- This approach gathered both quantitative and qualitative responses for a comprehensive view of residents' perspectives.

Survey Highlights

Overwhelming opposition to allowing commercial uses in both Interior Neighbourhoods (90%) and on Major Streets (77%).

Residents open to geographic-specific solutions: 57% support a new zoning category for selected Major streets, with consultation and a demonstrated local need.

Strong support for keeping Committee of Adjustment approval for any commercial conversion for Interior Neighbourhoods (92%) and Major Streets (90%).

Residents want support for existing commercial streets: Majority of residents (80%) want the City to implement policies to support existing commercial areas and to stop proposing commercial uses in residential spaces.

Low awareness from City's campaign: Less than 20% had heard of City Planning's survey, and fewer than 10% had heard of NRS via social media, pop-up events or direct communication from the City.

Top Concerns

Poor communication - Many residents feel blindsided or poorly informed about these significant proposed changes.

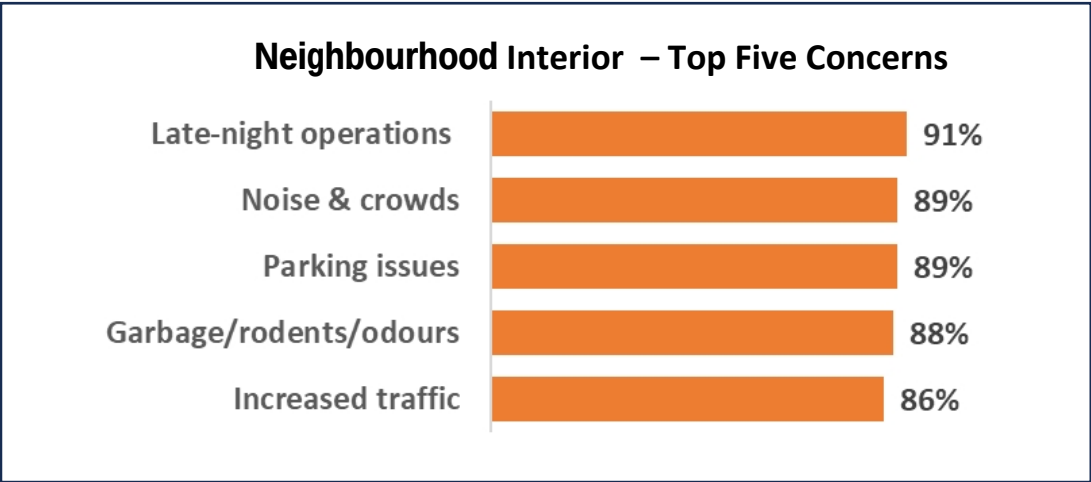
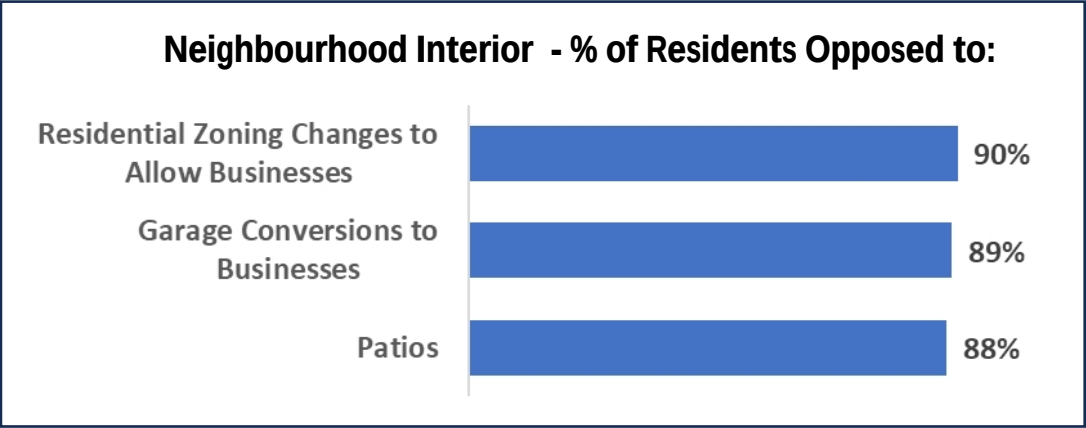
Protecting residential character – Strong desire to maintain quiet, family-oriented neighbourhoods. Many argued empty storefronts on Major streets should be filled first, through rent relief or incentives, instead of pushing businesses into residential zones.

Housing crisis contradiction – Many observed that converting homes to businesses could worsen the housing shortage by reducing the number of available of housing units.

Inadequate safeguards – Worries about traffic, parking, noise, and safety impacts. Overall sentiment is that city enforcement is inadequate and won't protect residents from adverse impact.

Flawed process – There was criticism that the city is rushing a one-size-fits-all approach without adequate consultation.

- Consistently high opposition to the proposal across all categories.
- Residents expressed strong concern over expected issues, limited guardrails and low enforcement, and the potential for cannabis shops.



What We Heard:

Quality of Life Impacts

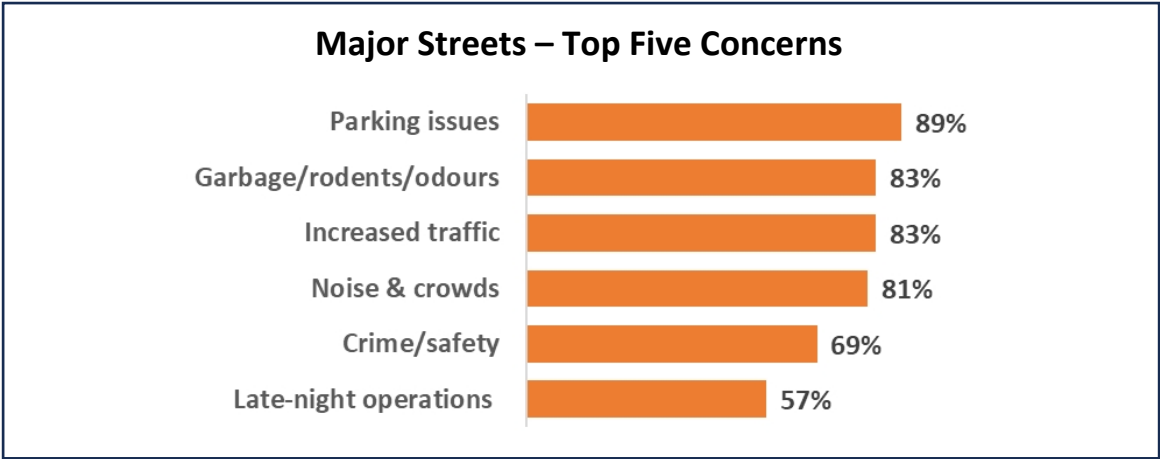
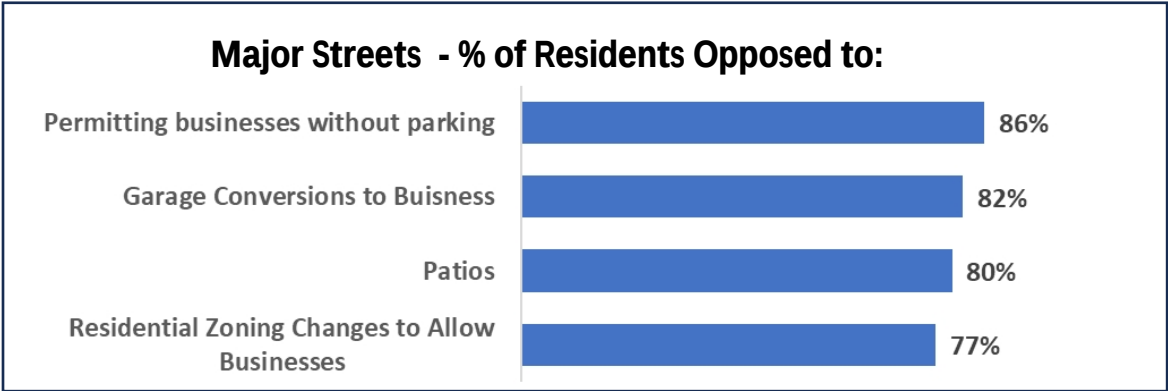
- “Why are we not protecting our neighbourhoods? These are the last peaceful areas in the city where people can have a quiet refuge.”
- “Residential neighbourhoods should be quiet- noise control will be a constant problem...When I am home, I want to relax and have quiet.”
- “Interior neighbourhoods should remain residential Introducing businesses would increase noise, traffic, and parking issues, along with late-night disturbances that disrupt children's sleep.”

No Need, Oppose Certain Uses and Concerns About Housing Loss

- “In the downtown area we don’t need another coffee shop that will potentially inhibit the movement of traffic, people and cause parking problems.”
- “There’s no need to put businesses in residential neighbourhoods. I don’t want a cannabis shop, or stores beside schools selling vapes, cigarettes, or alcohol.”
- “We do not need businesses in residential areas downtown — most services, including coffee shops, grocery stores are within a short walk.... no need to convert housing into businesses, especially when many former convenience stores have been redeveloped to provide much-needed multi-unit housing.”
- “We already have a housing crisis in Toronto we should not be decreasing the amount of livable properties by converting them into businesses. This city does not need more businesses it needs more livable units.”
- “I used to enjoy the local corner stores that sold milk and some green grocer products but now that beer and wine can be bought and there are no controls on cannabis shops or hours of operation, the model doesn’t work.”

Major Streets — Also Strong Opposition

- Strong opposition (77%) to the proposed changes, with residents saying that mixing commercial uses into residential areas will harm neighbourhood character, increase noise and traffic, and require proper review and consultation.
- Parking is a deal-breaker: 86% of residents oppose allowing new businesses on Major Streets if parking is not permitted on the property and 89% rate parking a top concern.



What We Heard:

- “I live on a major street. I live in my HOME with HOMES on either side of me. I don't want to be living in a strip mall.”
- “I have lived on a main street for over 35 years. I bought it knowing that it was a residential neighbourhood i would not want a canibas store next door, nor a cafe or retail establishment.”

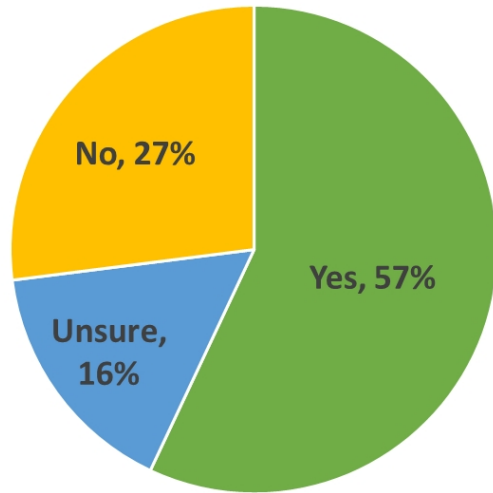
Safety, Traffic, Noise Concerns

- “SAFETY is a huge issue when allowing any business on these Major streets with NO PARKING available.”
- “These major streets already have extremely high volume of traffic we don’t need to add to the current problem.”
- “What happens to houses that back onto these rows of houses on major streets? Noise, traffic, parking, crime, property values all would negative impacts.”
- “My neighbourhood is already extremely noisy due to proximity to the beach and parks. Traffic is already a huge problem and there is limited street parking. Adding retail on our residential streets would be a disaster.”

Process and Community Input

- “Planning should identify where businesses are actually needed rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach. The list of Major Streets is shocking — many are 100% residential, and treating all Major Streets the same is unrealistic and inappropriate. Do residents even know this is being proposed for their neighbourhood?.”

Support For A New Zoning Category On Specific Major Streets Where There is a Need and With Resident Consultation



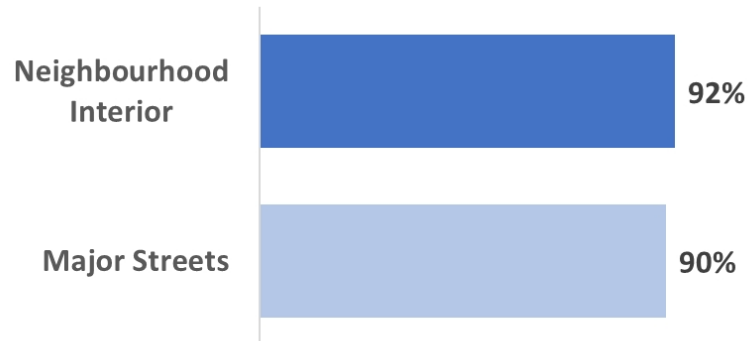
- Comments showed support for a needs-based, location-specific approach rather than blanket city-wide permissions.
- Residents want a proper analysis to determine where businesses are actually needed, noting that some Major Streets—or sections of them—might be suitable, but not all.
- This suggests that residents are not opposed to retail and services on Major streets, but see the need for thoughtful, street-by-street planning rather than a one-size-fits-all policy.

Survey Comments

- “Easing of restrictions to allow new business on Major residential streets must be done in a step-wise manner, allowing a gradual transition that respects the character of a neighbourhood and allows for residents to have input. Zoning categories with graduated criteria and restrictions might be a solution.”
- “A targeted approach ensures that commercial uses are introduced only where appropriate, supported by infrastructure and community input.”
- “....Residents who would be impacted most ought to have a major say. Perhaps a new Zoning category would be a step in the right direction.”
- “Gap analysis should be done in Neighbourhoods to first identify what services ... are not accessible”
- “On some sections of some major streets, additional businesses would be fine. In others, just not feasible for traffic congestion and lack of parking AND transit options”
- “I am not 100% against having local business on major streets that already have businesses but I am against having business allow on major streets that are highly residential and may well have streets near them that have services. That make no sense to me.”
- “Citywide blanket permissions are too broad, erode residential protections, and displace tenants. If changes are to be made, they must be done through careful consultation, targeted zoning categories, and mandatory approvals that respect community voices.”

- Residents overwhelmingly reject as-of-right zoning.
- Strong support for maintaining oversight through the Committee of Adjustment (CoA) process, ensuring proper review and neighbourhood input.
- Residents want a say in decisions that shape their community's future.

Support for CoA Review Process



What We Heard

- “If a business truly wants to open, there is already a Committee of Adjustment process, which gives neighbours the opportunity to participate in decisions that directly affect their community.”
- “If landlords can evict tenants, this is not appropriate - any such businesses should go through the C of A to ensure they are organizing their business with respect to the neighbours.”
- “More consultation is necessary with neighborhoods or resident associations. every commercial space application should go through the committee of adjustment for approval. “
- “The Committee of Adjustment is able to assess areas for local businesses and the impact of added people and traffic that would infiltrate residential areas. They should remain an integral part of any applications made.”
- “Neighbours should always have their say ... There is no sense of community or inclusion without going through the ‘Committee of Adjustment’ approval process.”
- “This seems like a drastic, sweeping proposal. It would affect many thousands of properties. Better to take this on a case by case basis.”
- “Each street is different and needs to be considered on a case by case basis.”
- “Blanket approval is ridiculous... case-by-case approval after vetting is only way to go! “

- Residents want the City to improve occupancy and support existing commercial businesses.
- Comments emphasized that vacant or struggling retail space on commercial streets should be filled before allowing businesses in residential areas.

Should The City Adopt Policies To Improve Occupancy and Support Businesses on Commercial Streets?



Some Survey Comments

- “Small businesses continue to fail in our neighborhood so can’t see any need especially in the highlighted areas. Drive around and see what a mess it is with derelict and unkept buildings both occupied and vacant.”
- “There is enough empty stores on major streets, you don't need to make new ones.”
- “Toronto has many older commercial strips, small plazas, and industrial lands ... Do not change the zone regulation unless there is no space.”
- “We need our main street businesses to be full before this should even be a consideration.”
- “Look at all of the retail space that is vacant. Why do you want to create more?”
- “Encouraging strong ‘Main Street’ commercial areas makes so much more sense.”
- “There are numerous vacant business frontages on major city streets across this city ... The city should focus energy and attention on attracting small business and retail to these empty/derelict store frontages instead. There is ample retail space available for small businesses to open a shop, they do not need to expand into the peaceful residential side streets.”
- “We need to support business in currently established, but failing commercial areas. The cost of rent to these businesses is becoming prohibitive. Rent controls should be established for commercial enterprises.”
- “Commercial units are unrentable on major streets now, This would hurt the dynamics for the major streets.”

- Residents want the City to stop proposing commercial uses in residential zones.
- Comments reflect a clear message that businesses do not belong in residential neighbourhoods.

Should The City Stop Proposing Commercial Uses in Residential Zones?

Yes, 80%

Unsure
12%

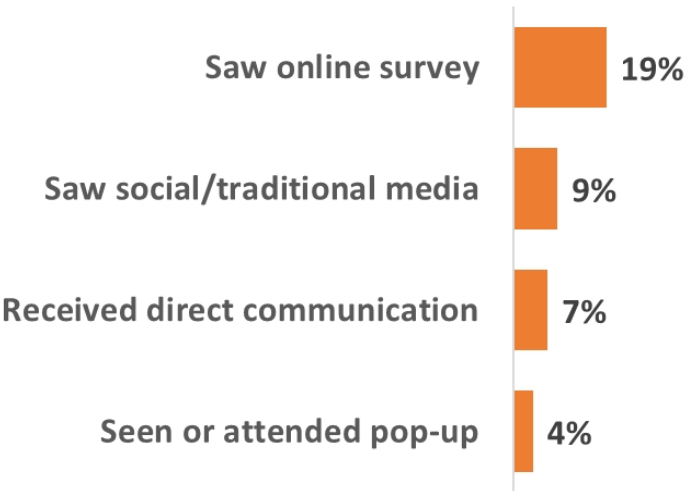
No
8%

What We Heard

- “There should not be ANY business of any kind allowed on residential streets.”
- “Residential streets are not the place for businesses ... This will not only affect an adjacent home’s value but also leave homeowners with no recourse.”
- “Absolutely no businesses should be allowed to open on residential streets!”
- “This proposal could tear a neighbourhood apart.”
- “No business in residential areas! ... The potential to totally destroy the quiet charm and peaceful atmosphere of established neighborhoods.”
- “I think that this proposal should be struck down and not considered again. This is not good for the people of Toronto.”
- “These streets are called residential for a reason.”
- “I haven’t seen anything about this until now, and I can’t believe the City is even proposing it. Residential streets aren’t designed to handle the extra traffic businesses bring. City Planning claims these will be “local businesses,” but that’s nonsense — people travel across town for the best pizza, burger, or bar. And let’s be honest: businesses don’t care about the neighbourhood when their customers come from all over the city. The idea that they’ll just “be good neighbours” is complete nonsense. This proposal should be sent back and buried. Stay out of our residential neighbourhoods! “

- Survey results indicate a low awareness of the proposal.
- The comments indicated a level of frustration with the City for not properly notifying residents early in the process. Many respondents only learned about the proposal through neighbourhood associations or by chance, not through official city channels.

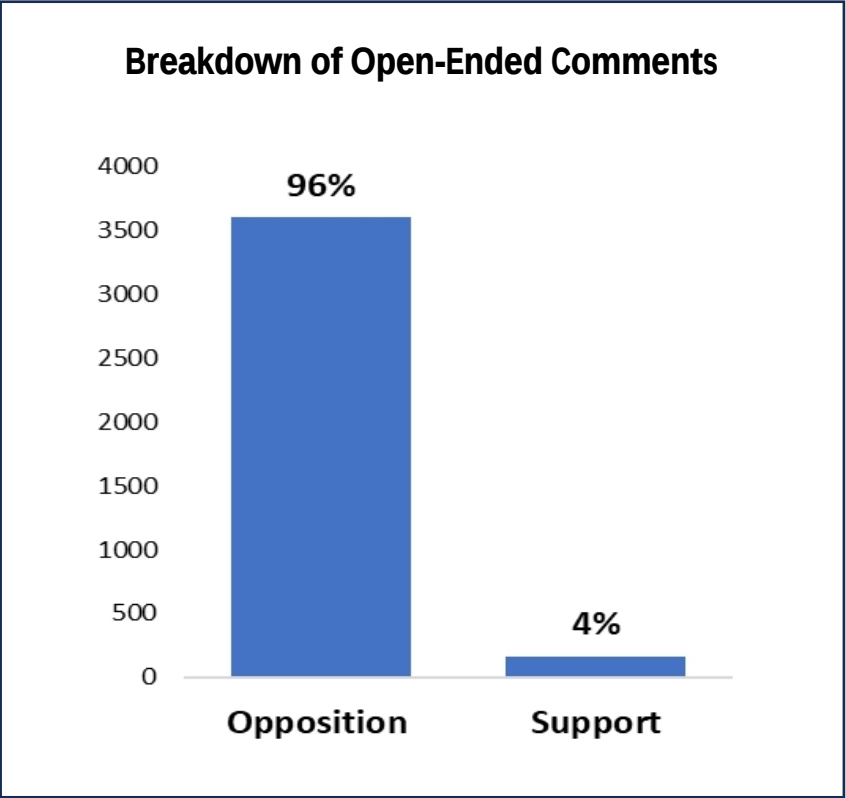
Level of Awareness: NRS Proposal



What We Heard

- “I only learned about these changes through my RA — nothing from the City.”
- “The City did not do any pop-up events in our area. We will be impacted in a major way, and they ignored communities that will be impacted.”
- “I am sure that the vast majority of residents in the City have no idea that this ill-conceived idea is being brought forward by City Staff.”
- “I only heard about this through the local Facebook group. Terrible communications from the city, as usual.”
- This lack of communication from the city is extremely concerning and I’m very upset that I’m just learning about this now.”
- “No, this has been the first notice I have seen. Better communication is crucial.”
- “There has been insufficient communication about this dramatic change.”
- “This entire re-zoning has been kept hidden from residents of the city. Such a large change should have had far more public exposure, publicity, information given to residents, etc. What is the city trying to hide?”
- “This is being done so underhanded. I was only informed from a friend that works for the city. No one I know has been informed of these proposed changes. I say this is very sneaky and underhanded.”

A review of all 3,700 + open-ended comments showed that 96% of responses expressed opposition to the city-wide proposal.



To better understand these concerns, the comments were categorized into thematic areas (see table).

Thematic Analysis of Comments

Category	Summary
Quality of Life Impact	Residents fear constant noise, traffic congestion, loss of parking, safety risks, and privacy violations.
Loss of Neighbourhood Character	Strong concern that commercial creep would destroy the peaceful, residential feel of their streets.
General Opposition	Many residents reject the proposal, calling it unnecessary and harmful.
Flawed Planning & Site Suitability	Opposition to a blanket, city-wide approach; support for case-by-case review instead.
Prioritize Existing Commercial Areas	Widespread belief that vacant storefronts and existing retail zones should be filled first.
Opposition to Specific Uses	Strong rejection of bars, patios, cannabis, alcohol, and vape shops near homes and the need for restrictions.
Enforcement & Regulation	Distrust in the City’s ability to regulate noise, parking, and bylaw violations and need for by-law enforcement.
Housing & Residential Loss	Concern that the plan undermines housing supply by displacing tenants and reducing units.
Communication & Awareness	Anger at poor consultation, misleading information, and lack of transparency from the City.
Other / Technical	Worries about infrastructure capacity, heritage preservation, and City fiscal priorities.
Positive Impacts & Support	A minority support walkability and small local businesses.

Focus on Existing Commercial Enterprises and Policies to Increase Housing

- Do not undermine existing Mainstreets and Malls
- Prioritize and invest in existing commercial areas where businesses are struggling and where store-front vacancies exist.
- The conversion of existing residential properties into businesses will reduce the housing supply, which directly contradicts EHON's goal to increase housing availability.

Avoid Blanket Permissions on Major Streets

Implement targeted zoning for retail and services on certain streets where retail and commercial uses are needed.

- Require consultation with residents/local Resident Associations.

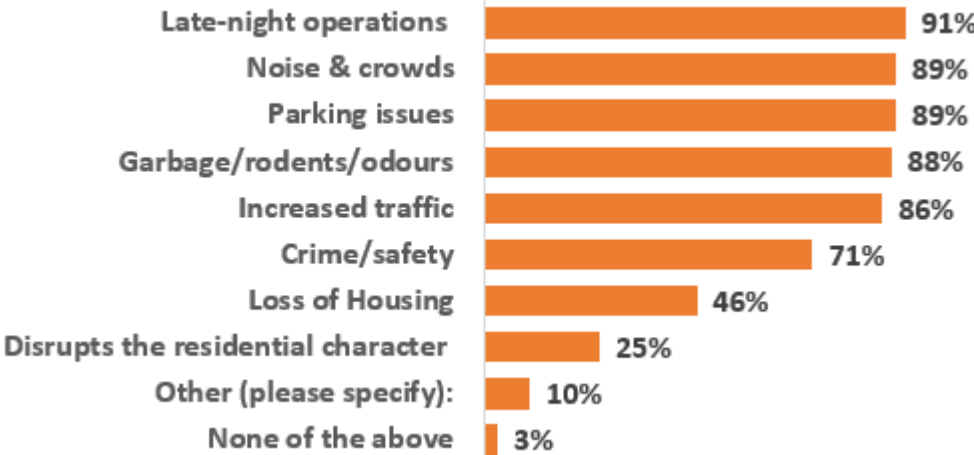
Protect Neighbourhood Interiors

- Do not allow retail and services in neighbourhood interiors as-of-right due to adverse impacts on residential character and quality of life. Small retail stores are not seen as viable solutions for issues like food deserts and delivering healthy and affordable food.
- Retain the existing Committee of Adjustment process for applications seeking to convert residential properties into businesses giving neighbours the opportunity to participate in decisions that directly affect their community.

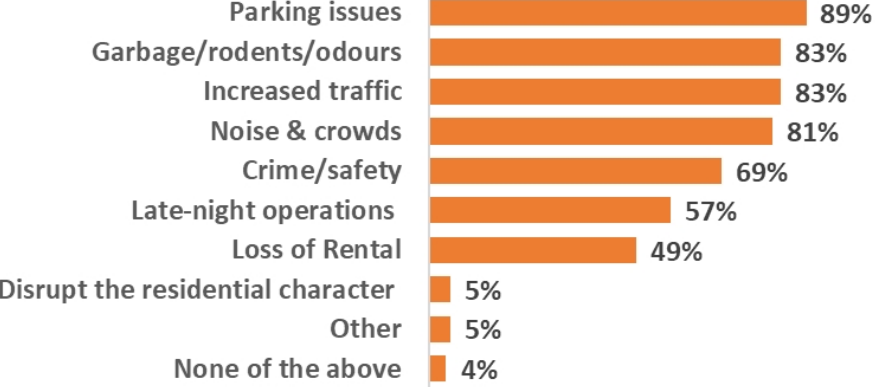
Note: Planning data show 90% of retail/service/office applications in Neighbourhoods were approved (Jan. 2018– Nov. 2023) This appears to show that the CoA review is not a barrier to opening new businesses, making as-of-right permissions unnecessary.

Survey Questions and Responses

Appendix: Survey Results — Interior Neighbourhoods

Do you support changing the zoning rules to allow the proposed businesses to open inside Interior Neighbourhoods without needing any further approval?	■ No -90% ■ Yes -7% ■ Unsure - 3% 																						
Do you support allowing an attached garage (part of the main house) inside Interior Neighbourhoods to be used for a retail shop or café/restaurant?	■ No-88% ■ Yes - 8% ■ Unsure -4% 																						
Do you support allowing patios to open on front yards and side yards inside Interior Neighbourhoods?	■ No -88% ■ Yes -8% ■ Unsure -4% 																						
Should properties in Residential Neighbourhoods continue to be required to get approval through the Committee of Adjustment with mandatory notices to neighbours before opening a business?	■ Yes -92% ■ No - 5.4% ■ Unsure 3% 																						
What concerns do you have about allowing businesses into Interior Neighbourhoods? Check all that apply.	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Concern</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Late-night operations</td> <td>91%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Noise & crowds</td> <td>89%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Parking issues</td> <td>89%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Garbage/rodents/odours</td> <td>88%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Increased traffic</td> <td>86%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Crime/safety</td> <td>71%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loss of Housing</td> <td>46%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Disrupts the residential character</td> <td>25%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other (please specify):</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>None of the above</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Concern	Percentage	Late-night operations	91%	Noise & crowds	89%	Parking issues	89%	Garbage/rodents/odours	88%	Increased traffic	86%	Crime/safety	71%	Loss of Housing	46%	Disrupts the residential character	25%	Other (please specify):	10%	None of the above	3%
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Appendix: Survey Results — Major Streets

Do you support changing the zoning rules to allow the businesses listed on the previous page to operate from all residential properties on all Major Streets citywide?	■ No -77% ■ Yes -14% ■ Unsure - 3% 																						
Do you support allowing an attached garage (part of the main house) on a Major Street to be used for any of the proposed businesses?	■ No-82% ■ Yes - 11% ■ Unsure -4% 																						
Do you support allowing patios on front yards and side yards on Major Streets?	■ No -80% ■ Yes -13% ■ Unsure -7% 																						
Should businesses be allowed on Major Streets without adding new parking or loading zones?	■ No -86% ■ Yes - 6% ■ Unsure 8% 																						
Should properties on Major residential streets continue to be required to get approval through the Committee of Adjustment with mandatory notices to neighbours before opening up a business?	■ Yes -57% ■ Unsure -27% ■ No-16% 																						
Should City Planning --- in consultation with local residents create a new Zoning category to allow businesses only on specific Major Streets if there is need for such services?	■ Yes -90% ■ No - 7% ■ Unsure 3% 																						
What concerns do you have about allowing businesses to open in every property on Major Streets. Check all that apply:	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Concern</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Parking issues</td> <td>89%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Garbage/rodents/odours</td> <td>83%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Increased traffic</td> <td>83%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Noise & crowds</td> <td>81%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Crime/safety</td> <td>69%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Late-night operations</td> <td>57%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loss of Rental</td> <td>49%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Disrupt the residential character</td> <td>5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>None of the above</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Concern	Percentage	Parking issues	89%	Garbage/rodents/odours	83%	Increased traffic	83%	Noise & crowds	81%	Crime/safety	69%	Late-night operations	57%	Loss of Rental	49%	Disrupt the residential character	5%	Other	5%	None of the above	4%
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Should the City adopt policies to improve occupancy and support businesses on existing commercial streets?	■ Yes-80% ■ No -12% ■ Unsure -9% 
Should City Planning stop proposing changes to allow commercial businesses to open in areas zoned Residential?	■ Yes- 80% ■ No -12% ■ Unsure - 8% 
Have you seen City Planning's online survey regarding the Neighbourhood Retail and Services proposal?	■ No-74% ■ Yes -19% ■ Unsure -6% 
In the last few months, have you received any emails or written material from City Planning regarding Neighbourhood Retail and Services proposal?	■ No-85% ■ Yes -9% ■ Unsure -6% 
In the last few months, have you seen anything on social media or in traditional media sponsored by City Planning regarding Neighbourhood Retail and Services proposal?	■ No -86% ■ Yes - 7% ■ Unsure -7% ■  
In the last few months have you seen or attended a community 'Pop Up' event with City Planning regarding these proposed changes?	■ No-94% ■ Yes -4% ■ Unsure -2% 

Appendix: Survey Results — Open Ended Comments

Open Ended Questions	In addition to the themes noted on previous slides the following comments were also raised:	
Other Concerns about allowing businesses to open: • Inside Interior Neighbourhoods? • in every property on Major Streets. Any comments about patios on: • Interior residential streets. • Major Streets. Do you have any additional comments or concerns that you would like to share about the proposed changes?	Lack of Enforcement and Oversight • “It has proved to be impossible for the city to enforce noise by-laws in residential areas with respect to loud parties etc. so I have no confidence they would be able to enforce any additional areas that have the potential for problems.” • “Noise bylaws are currently not enforced.... I highly doubt there will be any enforcement at all.” • “lack of adequate policing should illegal activity occur” Weapons / Crime Concerns • “My friend in BC had this happen on her street and a store selling guns opened up about half a block away.” • “There have been 4 shooting already in our neighbourhood - several bad actor restaurants and now you want to open it up for more and next door to houses?” Flawed Planning • “Official Plan already identifies appropriate mixed-use corridors, major streets, and nodes where commercial and residential uses coexist by design. These areas are supported by transit, infrastructure, and design guidelines. Expanding commercial permissions indiscriminately is unnecessary when planned, mixed-use areas already serve this purpose.”	Discrimination and Equity Concerns: • “Toronto’s diverse population includes Muslim residents, many of whom are prohibited from consuming alcohol due to religious beliefs. we see this as a racially motivated, ill-considered affront designed to discourage multi-family home ownership.” Nuisance Concerns Garbage and Pest Concerns: • “The amount of noise and mess, including vomit and urine on the near y sidewalk has mad this a dreadful option. I speak from experience” • “we already have issues with corner "stores" that were converted to restaurants which are not managed. Block traffic, making street parking impossible, create a lot of garbage, rats out of control because the city is not doing its job of managing” • “We lived on such a street, we couldn't move away fast enough. With late night drinking, even later night garage and bottle pick ups (very noisy), drunken screaming, ... cars parked everywhere sometimes in our driveway ..., lastly (but the list could continue) special effects (sporting, street festivals, long weekends, contests, etc...) would take over the neighbourhood.” Positive Support • “As long as they are closed by a reasonable time (11pm) it’s a wonderful addition!” • “ .. businesses should be allowed so long as the business owner resides there as well and operates from within their own community. I would not support, for example, Tim Hortons franchises ... That would defy the community spirit of this entire concept.”