

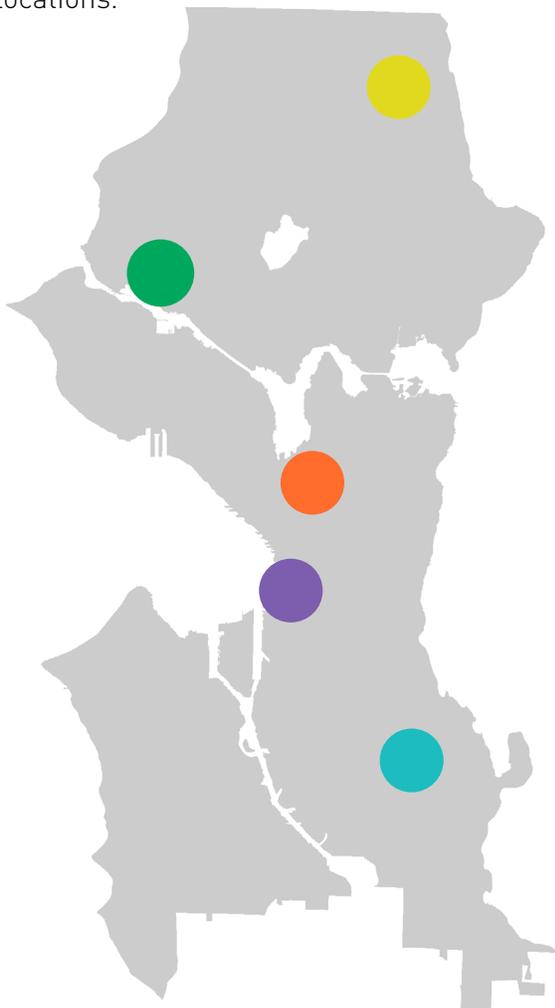
PUBLIC LIFE IN SEATTLE DURING COVID-19



Seattle
Department of
Transportation

ABOUT

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) has explored ways to bring activity vital for local business districts into the right-of-way to allow for safe operation. SDOT developed a variety of [temporary permits](#) to meet the urgent needs of the pandemic, including commercial street closures, merchandise display, vending, and restaurant seating. In the fall of 2020, SDOT staff visited some of the business districts using these permits to gain an understanding of public life during COVID-19. With the help of [Gehl](#)'s data collector app, staff observed each space for one day over the course of six hours to understand how people are using these spaces. In some cases, we are able to compare to data collected in 2018 in the same or similar locations.



Lake City — *Lake City Way NE*

- Curb space activation - 1 block face
- 1 restaurant with outdoor seating
- 12 commercial seats available

Ballard — *Ballard Ave NW*

- Curb space activation - 2 block faces
- 5 restaurants with outdoor seating
- 150 commercial seats available

Capitol Hill — *Melrose Ave*

- Street closure
- 4 restaurants with outdoor seating
- 20 seats provided

Pioneer Square — *Occidental Ave*

- Pedestrian street
- 3 businesses with outdoor seating
- 38 commercial seats provided

Columbia City — *Rainier Ave S*

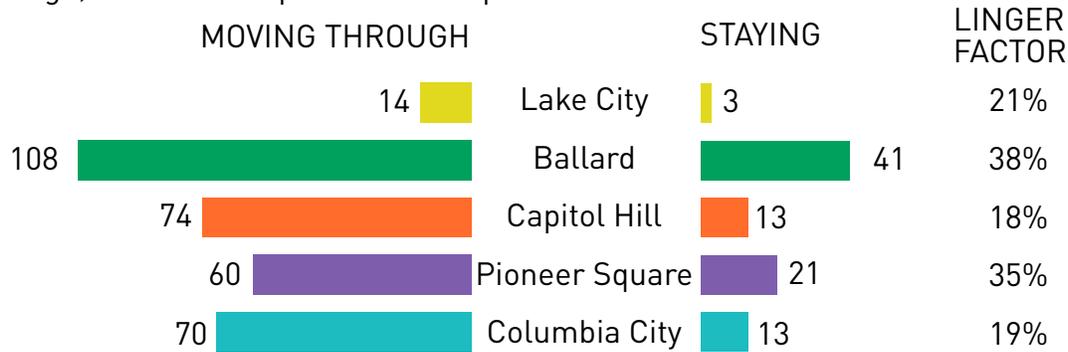
- Curb space & sidewalk activation - 1 block face
- 2 businesses with outdoor activities
- 10 seats provided

Source: GA Greenways Twitter



PEOPLE ARE STILL VISITING OUR LOCAL COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS DURING COVID-19

On average, we observed per 20 minute period:



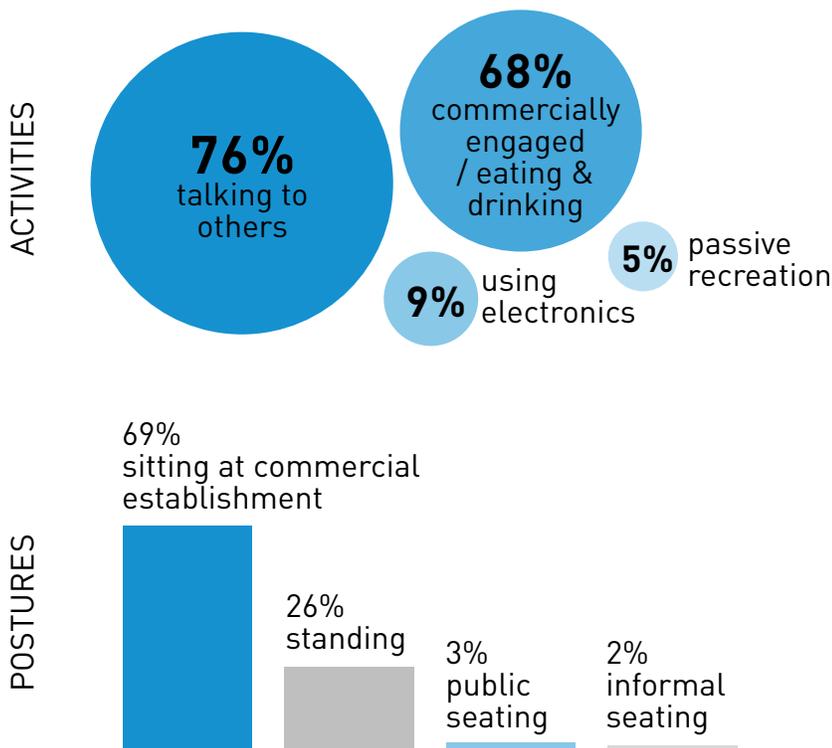
Spaces are successful at encouraging passersby to linger.

Each of these spaces is very different in context, so it's expected to see different levels of activity. Notably, in all spaces we saw a higher linger factor compared to the average observed citywide in 2018 (9%).

In fact, we saw more activity in some areas compared to a pre-COVID-19 study.

Compared to 2018, we observed **twice as many people staying** in **Lake City** and **Columbia City**, and **twice as much moving activity** in **Lake City** (pedestrian counts remained consistent in Columbia City). **Ballard** had **50% more staying activity** than in 2018.

BUSINESS USE OF PUBLIC SPACE IS LIKELY DRIVING MOST ACTIVITY IN THESE COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS



Most active in the evening.

Activity increased **2.5x** in the evening (5-7pm) compared to mid-day (11am-1pm), likely due to most restaurants opening in the evening. **Columbia City** had a **20x** increase in activity and **Ballard** had a **4x** increase.

These spaces are now more social.

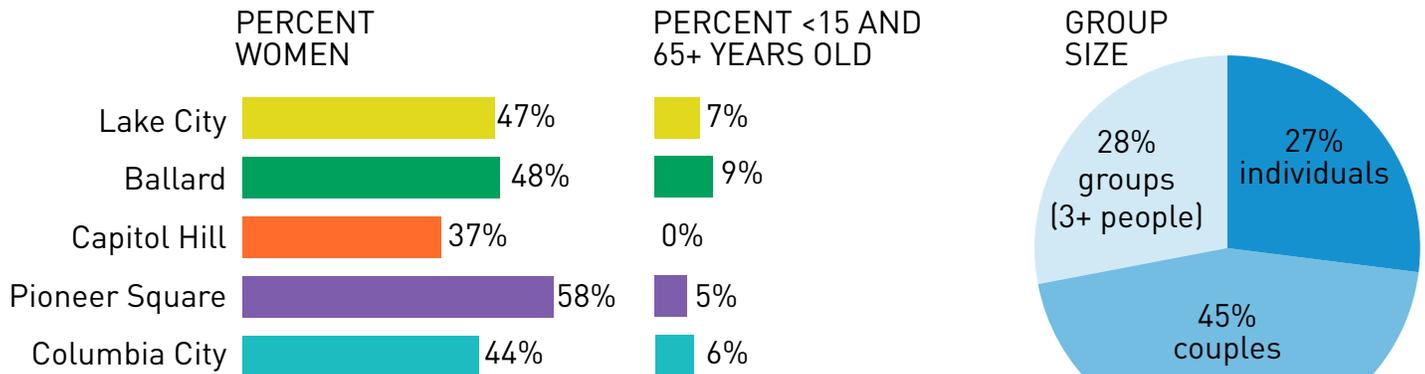
Talking to others was the most commonly observed activity at every site, regardless of location and amount of activation (ranging from 45% to 85% of total activity).

In **Ballard**, we saw **35 people talking to others** on average per 20 minute period, compared to only **8** in 2018.

THESE SPACES APPEAR TO BE SEEN AS SAFE AND WELCOMING BY USERS

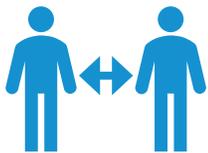
Documenting who uses our public spaces can help us understand how they invite different user groups and can illuminate how friendly, safe, and inviting these spaces are perceived to be by the public. For instance, a healthy public space will have an even split between women and men; women are sensitive to concerns about safety and thus are more discerning when it comes where they choose to go and linger.

Who is using these spaces?



Pioneer Square successfully encouraged women to linger. While only 35% of people passing through were women, women represented 58% of those staying. This is double the proportion of other sites in the neighborhood in 2018.

PERMITTING ACTIVITIES CAN HELP MITIGATE—AND POTENTIALLY EXACERBATE—RISKS OF COVID-19



Proper social distancing is observed more frequently when pedestrians have more dedicated space.

At locations with streets closed to traffic, 87% people maintained distance, compared to 30% at locations with only sidewalk space dedicated to pedestrians.



Eating and drinking at restaurants decreases mask wearing in public spaces.

Only 29% of people eating/drinking wore masks compared to 57% of all other people in these spaces.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Seattle Department of Transportation contributed to the development of the Public Life Data Protocol in 2017. Since then, SDOT launched the Public Life Program, conducted a citywide study, and completed our first public life action plan. Visit our [webpage](#) for more information. Contact us at SDOTpubliclife@seattle.gov