



# Evaluating the Economic and Social Impacts of Street Closures on Locke Street

Prepared for  
The Locke Street BIA

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# Executive Summary

The Locke Street Business Improvement Area (BIA) organizes special events and activities, including street closures known as “Saturdays UnLocked”, to showcase local businesses. Street closures aim to increase economic and social development, but little is known about the impacts of these events on the local community and surrounding area.

On behalf of the Locke Street BIA, a team of researchers affiliated with the McMaster University Research Shop conducted a study to investigate the financial and social impacts of “Saturdays UnLocked”. To do so, they conducted an online survey of 306 attendees who participated in street closure events, carried out an online survey of 32 local business owners, and facilitated semi-structured interviews with 6 of the business owners who participated in the survey. The findings from this research describe the economic impacts of street closures, social factors impacting these events, and considerations for the process and implementation of future street closures.

Street closures do not appear to have any economic impacts for businesses within the Locke Street BIA, which is evidenced by mixed opinions about whether these events attracted attendees, no noticeable changes in the demand for products or services, and no change in sales revenue during and after street closures. Although most attendees reported spending money at these events, business owners did not observe increases in foot traffic or changes in the awareness of their business.

Street closures offered a multitude of positive social impacts for local community members. Most attendees who participated in “Saturdays UnLocked” reported that the event positively impacted their perception of the Locke Street neighbourhood and the city of Hamilton. Attendees felt like these events made them feel like part of the local community and provided ample opportunities to socialize with old and new friends, family members, business owners, and other visitors. There were calls to increase the social and cultural diversity of vendors and entertainers at “Saturdays UnLocked”, which should be considered in future planning.

Attendees frequently participated in “Saturdays UnLocked” in July and August (in contrast to September) and some called for fewer street closure events in the future. One of the most frequently discussed limitations of these events were affordable and accessible parking options. Business owners called for improvements to curbside pick-up options, advertising efforts, and attractions or entertainment offered at future street closures.

All findings from this research should be interpreted with care. The sample size was relatively small and might not be representative of all business owners and attendees, which impacts generalizability. Due to time constraints, we were limited in our outreach efforts for participant recruitment and sampling. Further research could

collect and analyze raw sales data to enhance our understanding of the financial impacts of street closures.

Overall, this study provides evidence regarding the impacts of street closures from the perspectives of local business owners and attendees who participated in “Saturdays UnLocked”. The findings from this report may be useful to promote or address the factors contributing to the success or downfall of street closures.

## Introduction

### Background

Locke Street is located in the centre of the Kirkendall neighbourhood in the city of Hamilton, Ontario.<sup>1</sup> Many restaurants, cafes, boutiques, personal care, and professional services are located along this street and the surrounding area – attracting both local residents and visitors from neighboring communities. The Locke Street Business Improvement Area (BIA) is an association that represents members located on and around Locke Street, and promotes business within its boundaries.<sup>2</sup> The Locke Street BIA organizes many special events and activities with community partners to enhance local economic and social development.

During the summer of 2021, the Locke Street BIA carried out “Saturdays UnLocked” street closure events to showcase local businesses, foster a sense of community within the jurisdiction, and encourage outdoor social gatherings. Originally introduced in 2020, street closures on Locke Street aimed to create a safe and friendly environment for pedestrians and provide an opportunity for businesses and other vendors to expand onto the streets. With most businesses within the Locke Street BIA participating in these events, many residents, students, and visitors attended this weekly series of street closures.

### Purpose

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the economic and social impacts of “Saturdays UnLocked”. The Locke Street BIA will use the findings to understand the perspectives of attendees and business owners towards street closures, identify factors related to the success of these events, and inform the planning for future events.

The research questions to answer in this study were:

1. To what extent do street closures impact sales for businesses within the BIA?
2. What is the social impact of street closures for local community members?
3. What are the factors that influence the economic impact of street closures on businesses within the BIA?

## Context

Many cities around the world organize street closures for different purposes and events. There are largely five distinct types of street closures discussed in the literature that have resulted in mixed effects or outcomes on the surrounding community.<sup>3</sup>

1. *Open Streets*: Closures typically occur on weekends for cars and public transportation, allowing pedestrians, joggers, and cyclists to freely use the road. “Saturdays UnLocked” is an example of this type of street closure.
2. *Play Streets*: Portions of streets are closed for recreational use. These provide space for community programs and events near schools or neighbourhoods.
3. *Market Streets*: Streets close for seasonal or farmer’s markets.
4. *Seasonal Closures*: Long-term closures for the duration of particular seasons.
5. *Special Events*: Short-term street closures for concerts, parades, celebrations, and festivals.

Limited research has been conducted to evaluate the impacts of street closures, and the findings available so far report both positive and negative impacts on the community.<sup>4</sup> In addition, most studies have evaluated street closures outside of North America, so the literature base to inform planning within Canada is sparse.

The main benefits of street closures that are reported in the literature include increased foot traffic and greater physical activity as closed streets promote pedestrianization.<sup>5</sup> Cyclists, skateboarders, and rollerbladers can also take advantage of the space more freely. Local businesses also stand to benefit during otherwise quiet business hours, and through event marketing that encourages residents to financially support local retailers. Street closures are most effective when they include artistic performances, outdoor food spaces, and other engaging activities. They may operate during daytime or evening/night hours. Commonly reported disadvantages of street closures include poor accessibility, long travel times, costs, and blockages for emergency vehicles.

## Scope

Our research was limited to investigating the impacts of street closures for business owners within the Locke Street BIA and attendees who participated in these events on Saturdays between July 17 and September 11, 2021. The study period

spanned approximately 15 weeks from September 2021 to December 2021, which limited the number of research questions we investigated, the recruitment or sampling timeframe, and the depth of our analysis.

## Key Terms

In this report, “street closures” refer to the closing or blockage of public streets to prohibit traffic vehicles and the restriction of an area to pedestrian use.<sup>5,6</sup> “Social impacts” refer to interpersonal or environmental impacts of street closures on business owners, residents, visitors, and others.

## Report Structure

Our report is organized by the three research questions that were developed by the McMaster Research Shop in consultation with the Locke Street BIA. We begin by describing the Methods used to collect and analyze data, and then report our Findings organized by each research question. We present both quantitative and qualitative research findings, including tables and figures to display the data. Finally, we conclude with some evaluative judgements and suggestions or opportunities for future research.

# Methodology

## Overview

A team of researchers from the McMaster Research Shop started the project in September 2021 and completed it in December 2021. The team met regularly to develop the research question, plan the methods, collect data, conduct the analysis, discuss findings, and write this report. The Chair of the Locke Street BIA helped to design the data collection instruments and reviewed the research plan to ensure the data would be analyzed using ethical procedures that align with the BIA’s standards.

We used mixed methods to answer our research questions. This means both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied to collect and analyze data. This type of approach was appropriate to thoroughly answer the research questions and consider multiple facets of street closures that can be examined using complementary methods.<sup>7</sup>

We used three main sources of data for this research project: an attendee satisfaction survey, a business owner survey, and semi-structured interviews with business owners. The project collected data from both attendees who participated in

“Saturdays UnLocked” and business owners within the Locke Street BIA using the methods described below.

For this study, business owners included those who own and/or manage businesses operating within the jurisdiction of the Locke Street BIA. Attendees included those who participated socially or economically at any “Saturdays UnLocked” event in 2021. It is important to consider the perspectives of both business owners and attendees to ensure a comprehensive and more balanced discussion of street closures.

## Data Collection

### **Attendee satisfaction survey:**

The Locke Street BIA surveyed attendees who participated in street closures between July 17 and September 11, 2021. Attendees were recruited via social media and in-person while attending “Saturdays UnLocked”. For example, posters were displayed and postcards were distributed at the events. A chance to win a gift certificate from a Locke Street business encouraged participants to complete the survey.

The McMaster Research Shop and Locke Street BIA co-developed an attendee satisfaction survey comprising 35 questions that were mainly multiple-choice with some free-text responses. The attendees responded to the survey between the timeframe of August 14 to September 14, 2021. The survey aimed to gather opinions and perspectives about spending at local businesses during street closures and the implications of these events on the broader community. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

### **Business owner survey:**

All business owners within the Locke Street BIA were contacted via email in October 2021 and encouraged to complete the survey. A copy of the recruitment email distributed to Locke Street BIA members can be found in Appendix B. After two rounds of emails were distributed, the Locke Street BIA board members individually visited businesses on Locke Street in-person to encourage participation.

The McMaster Research Shop designed a survey in consultation with the Locke Street BIA to gather feedback from business owners on the economic and social impacts of street closures. The survey consisted of 22 questions, including both structured (e.g., multiple-choice, ranking/scale, checklist) and free-text questions.<sup>8</sup> The business owners completed the survey between October 13 and 25, 2021. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

### **Interviews with business owners:**

The final question in the survey completed by business owners recruited participants for the semi-structured interviews by asking for interested individuals to provide their contact information.

The McMaster Research Shop developed an interview guide and facilitated semi-structured interviews with Locke Street BIA business owners. The interview guide consisted of seven questions regarding the economic and social impacts of street closures. A copy of the interview guide used by the research team can be found in Appendix D. We conducted the interviews online via Zoom between October 18 and 22, 2021, which spanned around 20 minutes each. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the research team.

## Sample Size

We did not specify a target sample size in the original research plan for this study. Despite the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic (for example, strain on business owners and survey fatigue among community members) and the limited sampling timeframe, we were eager to hear from as many participants as possible.

## Analytic Approach

### **Quantitative data analysis:**

Quantitative data were collected in the attendee satisfaction and business owner surveys, and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The analysis included overall counts, frequency distributions, and proportions to summarize responses. Data were visualized using tables and figures, where applicable.

We also broke down (stratified) some of these measures by particular sub-groups, which were chosen in advance based on consultation with the community partner. For the attendee satisfaction survey, we stratified some measures by the attendee's postal code and the number of events they attended. For the business owners survey, some results were broken down by the business type and location. We did not compute any sample size or power calculations due to the descriptive nature of this study.

### **Qualitative data analysis:**

The research team used content analysis as the primary approach to analyze semi-structured interview transcripts and free-text survey responses. Content analysis involves distilling qualitative data into categories and themes that align with the research



objectives.<sup>9</sup> Codebooks were created for each data source to assign initial codes and establish categories. The researchers conducted the analysis in pairs to ensure the interpretations were consistent among individuals with different experiences, perspectives, and insights. The researchers also frequently referenced the project's research questions to make sure their analysis was targeted.

## Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from survey and interview participants by including a statement in the recruitment materials and interview guide explaining the purposes of the research, describing how information was collected and used, indicating confidentiality measures, and clarifying the voluntary nature of their participation. All data were deidentified to ensure anonymity.

## Limitations

There were a few limitations present in this study that may have affected the findings and interpretations. The sample size was relatively small and might not be representative of all business owners within the Locke Street BIA and attendees who participated in "Saturdays UnLocked", which raises concerns about generalizability. Due to time constraints, we were limited in our recruitment and outreach efforts which may have resulted in a smaller sample. Self-selection bias may be present among the individuals who responded to the survey and those who participated in interviews based on their strong opinions in support of or against street closures.<sup>10</sup> Those who held strong perspectives and had lots to say about the topic may have been more likely to complete the survey or to be interviewed.

# Findings

## Participant Characteristics

In total, 344 individuals participated in our study. We heard from 32 business owners associated with the Locke Street BIA who operate various types of businesses (Table 1) and, most of whom, have been operating for more than 10 years (Table 2). Most businesses were open during all the street closures from July 17 to September 11, 2021 (Table 3).

**Table 1.** Business types of survey respondents

Business Type	Count (%)
Specialty shop	6 (18.8%)
Food or drink establishment	6 (18.8%)
Other	5 (15.6%)
Personal care store	4 (12.5%)
Home furnishings, decor, or gift store	4 (12.5%)
Professional services	2 (6.3%)
Book, music, toy, or hobby store	2 (6.3%)
Health or wellness store/service	2 (6.3%)
Medical clinic	1 (3.1%)

**Table 2.** Length of time on Locke Street

Time on Locke Street	Count (%)
More than 10 years	15 (46.9%)
5 years to 10 years	2 (6.3%)
4 years to 5 years	2 (6.3%)
3 years to 4 years	3 (9.4%)
2 years to 3 years	2 (6.3%)
1 year to 2 years	6 (18.8%)
6 months to 1 year	2 (6.3%)

**Table 3.** Businesses' participation in "Saturdays UnLocked"

Participation	Count (%)
Yes, we were <b>open</b> during <b>all</b> the street closure events (i.e., all nine Saturdays)	20 (62.5%)
Yes, we were <b>open</b> during <b>most</b> of the street closure events (i.e., 5 or more)	4 (12.5%)
Yes, we were <b>open</b> during <b>some</b> of the street closure events (i.e., 4 or less)	4 (12.5%)
No, we were <b>closed</b> during <b>all</b> the street closure events	4 (12.5%)

Six business owners participated in interviews. The interview participants represented a variety of business types (e.g., personal care, specialty shop, home furnishings store) and each business owner participated in at least one street closure event in 2021.

306 attendees who participated in "Saturdays UnLocked" completed the satisfaction survey. Attendees participated in an average of 1.7 street closures on Locke Street, with the majority only attending one event (n=89; 29.1%). Attendees engaged in these events with a group size of 3.4 people, on average. Most attendees resided in areas with the postal code L8P (n=220; 71.9%), which is in central Hamilton. Only 19 attendees provided postal codes in areas outside of Hamilton (i.e., Burlington, Mississauga, St. Catherine's, Toronto, Kitchener, Niagara, Uxbridge, and Simcoe).

Under the following headings, we report our findings corresponding to each research question:

## Research Objective #1 – The economic impacts of street closure events

Based on the attendee satisfaction surveys, we found that particular “Saturdays UnLocked” were more frequently attended compared to others (Table 4). Specifically, August 14<sup>th</sup> was the most frequently attended event date among survey participants. The number of attendees largely dropped off by mid-August and into September, although this may reflect low survey visibility and not necessarily fewer people attending the events. We caution findings from this survey question as the responses may be biased by inconsistent survey outreach efforts across the event dates.

**Table 4.** Attendance at street closures by date

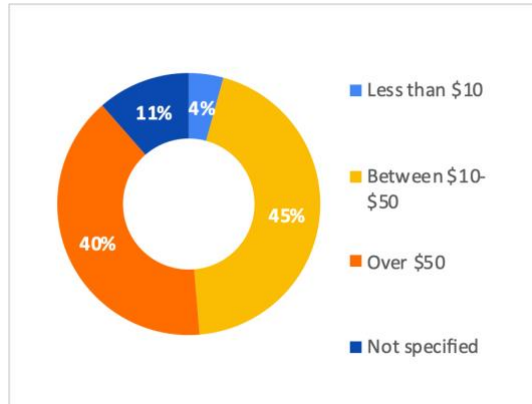
Date	# Attendees	Date	# Attendees
July 17, 2021	121	August 21, 2021	62
July 24, 2021	122	August 28, 2021	48
July 31, 2021	117	September 4, 2021	51
August 7, 2021	127	September 11, 2021	29
August 14, 2021	143		

When surveyed about their means of transportation to “Saturdays UnLocked”, 72.5% (n=222) of attendees walked or ran, 23.5% (n=72) drove their car, 2.0% (n=6) cycled, skateboarded, or scootered, 1.3% (n=4) used public transportation, and 2 participants used another form. We then stratified these results using participants’ postal codes to further analyze the data. Most people who walked or ran to street closure events live in the L8P postal code region, which consists of central Hamilton (n=193).

Regarding parking during street closures, 23.3% (n=7) of attendees who drove used the free parking at Melrose United Church or Blessings Christian Church on Stanley Avenue. Those who did not utilize this parking lot (n=23; 76.6%) were unaware of the free parking option or they found parking on a nearby side street.

271 attendees (88.6%) reported spending money (or planned to spend money) at street closure events. Most attendees reported spending between \$10 to \$50 during street closures. The approximate amount of money spent by attendees is displayed in Figure 1. The specific business types in which attendees reported spending money include those listed in Table 5. 155 attendees (50.7%) reported becoming aware of a new store or restaurant because of attending “Saturdays UnLocked”.

**Figure 1.** Amount of money spent by attendees during street closure events



**Table 5.** Business types where attendees spent money during street closure events

Business Type	Count (%)
Restaurant or other food establishment	245 (46.2%)
Store (any type)	180 (34.0%)
Farmer's market	100 (18.9%)
Public transportation or parking	3 (0.6%)
Personal care store	2 (0.4%)

From the business owners survey, 26 business owners (81.3%) reported that their operating hours were unchanged by “Saturdays UnLocked” (Table 6). We found that personal care businesses were more likely to reduce their business hours due to street closures, whereas food and drink establishments and specialty stores tended to extend their hours. Business owners expressed mixed opinions about whether street closures impacted the number of customers (foot traffic) at their business (Table 7).

**Table 6.** Impact of street closures on business hours

Changes to business hours	Count (%)
No, we <b>maintained</b> usual business hours	26 (81.3%)
Yes, we <b>reduced</b> our business hours	2 (6.3%)
Yes, we <b>extended</b> our business hours	3 (9.4%)
Other	1 (3.1%)

**Table 7.** Impact of street closures on foot traffic

Increased foot traffic	Count (%)
Strongly agree	4 (12.5%)
Agree	6 (18.8%)
Neutral	12 (37.5%)
Disagree	4 (12.5%)
Strongly disagree	6 (18.8%)

21 business owners (65.6%) did not notice a greater demand for their products or services after street closure events ended (Table 8). However, we caution this finding as some confounding factors could not be controlled for (e.g., change in weather/seasons, fewer visitors from out-of-town, back-to-school season). Among those who reported decreased demands, 12 of these businesses were located in “Area B” on the map in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:**  
Business  
locations

A map of a section of Dundurn St S in Regina, Saskatchewan. The map shows several horizontal streets intersecting Dundurn St S. The streets are labeled from top to bottom: Hill St, Melbourne St, Charlton Ave W, Herkimer St, Stanley Ave, and Homewood Ave. Dundurn St S is labeled vertically on the left. The map is divided into four horizontal sections by three lines: a pink line at the top, a red line in the middle, and a blue line at the bottom. The letter 'D' is located in the top pink-shaded section, 'C' is in the middle red-shaded section, 'B' is in the bottom blue-shaded section, and 'A' is in the bottom white section. The letters are large and black. The pink line has a yellow dot at its intersection with Dundurn St S. The red line has a yellow dot at its intersection with Dundurn St S. The blue line has a yellow dot at its intersection with Dundurn St S. The letter 'A' is located in the bottom white section, below the blue line. The letter 'B' is located in the bottom blue section, above the blue line. The letter 'C' is located in the middle red section, above the red line. The letter 'D' is located in the top pink section, above the pink line. The map also shows other streets: Prosser St, Blanshard St, Pine St, Pearl St, Fanning St, Turbott St, Reginald St, Kent St, and Aberdeen Ave.

**Table 9.** Change in sales revenue during events (n=28)

**Table 10.** Change in sales revenue after events (n=28)

*Note: Only businesses who were open during all (n=20), most (n=4), or some (n=4) street closure events were included in the analysis for Tables 9 and 10. Businesses who were closed (n=4) during all street closure events were excluded.*

In an interview, one business owner expressed that street closure events were not “financially viable” for them, and that these events had an overall negative financial

impact on their business. The individual attributed this to the lack of parking available during street closures. In contrast, another business owner described how “Saturdays UnLocked” had a positive financial impact for their business:

*[Revenue] was definitely an increase... it was fabulous, and the general feedback was that if it wasn't raining more people would have been out, so we personally experienced a lot more foot traffic in the store and a lot more sales transactions. We had like neighborhood people, but we also had kind of outsiders like tourists from other regions coming to see what was going on and to discover something new, so our sales bottom line, our sales were fabulous those Saturdays.*

Some business owners expressed during interviews that the success of street closures may be tied to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of lockdowns on attendees. Some reported that the positive increase in sales during street closures may be due to people having been unable to attend social events for an extended period of time and felt safe doing so outdoors. As well, one business owner reflected on supply chain demands and shortages due to COVID-19 lockdowns, and expressed that customers may be more willing to pay for products they wanted or needed, such as those found in boutique stores.

## Research Objective #2 – The social impacts of street closure events

In the attendee satisfaction survey, 158 respondents (51.6%) strongly agreed that their experiences at “Saturdays UnLocked” made them believe (or increased their belief) that the Locke Street neighbourhood is a good place to live (Table 11). Of these respondents, 115 (72.8%) already reside in central Hamilton (i.e., L8P postal code). Among the 19 attendees who reside in areas outside of Hamilton, “Saturdays UnLocked” had a positive impact of their perception of the Locke Street neighbourhood.

**Table 11.** Impact of street closures on perception of Locke Street neighbourhood

“The Locke Street neighbourhood is a good place to live.”	Count (%)	
	All respondents	Respondents who live outside of Hamilton
Strongly agree	158 (51.6%)	9 (47.4%)
Agree	113 (36.9%)	4 (21.1%)
Neutral	29 (9.5%)	6 (31.6%)
Disagree	4 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Strongly disagree	2 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)

Regarding the broader Hamilton community, most attendees strongly agreed or agreed that street closures made them believe (or increased their belief) that Hamilton is a good place to live (Table 12). When we further examined this survey question

among those who reside outside of Hamilton, most reported positive perceptions of the city (i.e., they responded “strongly agree” or “agree”) (n=11; 57.9%).

**Table 12.** Impact of street closures on perception of Hamilton

“The city of Hamilton is a good place to live.”	Count (%)	
	All respondents	Respondents who live outside of Hamilton
Strongly agree	105 (34.3%)	6 (31.6%)
Agree	148 (48.4%)	5 (26.3%)
Neutral	48 (15.7%)	7 (36.8%)
Disagree	3 (1.0%)	1 (5.3%)
Strongly disagree	2 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)

The satisfaction survey asked attendees about the social atmosphere and environment during “Saturdays UnLocked”. Most attendees strongly agreed (n=118; 38.6%) or agreed (n=125; 40.8%) that their experiences at street closures made them feel like part of the local community (Table 13). Similarly, attendees tended to strongly agree (n=132; 43.1%) or agree (n=138; 45.1%) that street closures provided a welcoming environment (Table 14). In addition, attendees reflected on these events as providing ample opportunities to socialize with old and new friends or peers.

**Table 13.** Impacts on fostering a sense of community

“Street closures made me feel like part of the local community.”	Count (%)
Strongly agree	118 (38.6%)
Agree	125 (40.8%)
Neutral	52 (17.0%)
Disagree	8 (2.6%)
Strongly disagree	3 (1.0%)

**Table 14.** Impacts on providing a welcoming environment

“Street closures provided a welcoming environment.”	Count (%)
Strongly agree	132 (43.1%)
Agree	138 (45.1%)
Neutral	24 (7.8%)
Disagree	10 (3.3%)
Strongly disagree	2 (0.7%)

Upon reflection of how “Saturdays UnLocked” impacted attendees’ sense of community and fostered a welcoming environment, free-text responses of factors included: a positive atmosphere during events, enjoyment of supporting local businesses, and the clean and safe environment. However, some participants noted the lack of social and cultural diversity present in the Locke Street neighbourhood. One survey respondent indicated that Locke Street is not necessarily welcoming to lower-income communities, while others indicated that Locke Street is difficult to access for those with disabilities or mobility issues. One attendee “felt like an outsider because they did not have a child” at street closures, and believed the events were catered more towards those with families.

Another aspect of our study was considering whether “Saturdays UnLocked” impacted participants’ stance on where they live. In the free-text survey questions,

some attendees indicated an increased attraction or perception of Hamilton due to factors such as unique local businesses and admiration from visitors when introducing them to Locke Street. Comparatively, some respondents expressed there was no appeal to living in Hamilton having attended these events. One attendee reflected on the lockdown measures and physical distancing requirements during the pandemic and shared that “Saturdays UnLocked” acted as a great opportunity to meet new people in the Hamilton area.

During interviews with business owners, the positive social impacts of “Saturdays UnLocked” that were discussed included: greater sense of community, welcoming atmosphere, increased accessibility, promoting a safe space, fostering social connection, and strengthening attendee relationships. One business owner shared, “Yeah, definitely there was [a sense of community]. You know, a lot of locals that walked in and enjoyed the street being closed.”

Comparatively, three business owners expressed negative social impacts of street closures during interviews, such as: not providing new relationships with attendees, fewer people on the streets, and no sense of community. One business owner expressed that the fear of COVID-19 and entering crowded environments, such as street closures, had a negative impact on attracting attendees to street closures. The business owner noted, “I think it [COVID-19] kept away a lot of people [away] who were reluctant to go into a crowded situation.”

### Research Objective #3 – The process and implementation of street closure events

Locke Street business owners discussed several factors relevant to the process or implementation of street closure events. In the semi-structured interviews, business owners praised the design and implementation of “Saturdays UnLocked”, including the clear re-routing of public transportation and simple closure of a straight-line street (rather than nearby intersecting streets). There were no major complaints concerning the maneuverability or accessibility of storefronts. In terms of negative impacts, all interview participants discussed the limited availability of parking (n=6) and some raised concerns about the lack of curbside pick-up options (n=2) during street closures. The weather was also discussed by many interviewees (n=5) as a significant external factor that determined whether the business day was successful or not. Business owners discussed how the unpredictable nature of weather impacted their engagement during street closures (like putting displays or products outside) and deterring pedestrian traffic during precipitation.

In the interviews, business owners also provided several recommendations for future street closure events. There were suggestions regarding the time and day that street closures should occur. Some individuals preferred for these events to occur on Sundays (n=3) while others preferred Saturday (n=2), and some wanted them cancelled



all together (n=1). Interview participants also suggested improvements for future street closures, including: more events or attractions during street closures (n=3), financial support (or other incentives) for businesses to participate (n=2), and increased advertising (n=1).

In the survey to business owners, less than half of respondents (n= 15; 46.9%) modified their storefront during street closure events. Among those who did, strategies included: displaying signage, extending patios or seating areas, and putting products outside. Most business owners (n=25; 78.1%) reported not needing more staff during the events. The contributing factors that business owners perceived as impacting sales during “Saturdays UnLocked” include those listed in Table 15. The most significant factor imposing a large positive impact on sales was back-to-school season, whereas the weather was recognized as the most significant factor having a large negative effect. It should be noted that many business owners perceived these factors as having no effect on their sales during street closures or they were unsure.

**Table 15.** Factors impacting sales during street closures

Impacts	Factors						
	Weather	COVID-19 cases	COVID-19 vaccines	Back-to-school	Social media	Other marketing	Contests
Large negative effect	14 (43.8%)	5 (15.6%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.3%)	2 (6.3%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Minimal negative effect	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)	2 (6.3%)	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)
No effect	12 (37.5%)	18 (56.3%)	19 (59.4%)	15 (46.9%)	12 (37.5%)	14 (43.8%)	21 (65.6%)
Minimal positive effect	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)	4 (12.5%)	3 (9.4%)	7 (21.9%)	6 (18.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Large positive effect	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)	4 (12.5%)	2 (6.3%)	2 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Unsure	2 (6.3%)	5 (15.6%)	6 (18.8%)	5 (15.6%)	7 (21.9%)	8 (25.0%)	10 (31.3%)

In addition, attendees were surveyed about ways to improve “Saturdays UnLocked”. The recommendations included more diverse booths and vendors (n=51), more entertainment (n=35), improved parking (n=21), and extended store hours (n=8). Adding more seating areas was also suggested to help individuals take a break and relax (n=34), which can also be coupled with having tents for protection from the weather (n=15). Attendees also suggested offering these events on a different number of days throughout the year (n=7) or during different hours of the day (n=6).

In the attendee satisfaction survey, participants expressed that “Saturdays UnLocked” could be improved with a larger variety of food (n=52) and shopping (n=14) options. They also suggested the events should be dog-friendly (n=16), have more areas to consume alcohol (such on the closed street) (n=8), and increased accessibility for strollers and mobility devices (n=4).

# Discussion

This study investigated the economic and social impacts of “Saturdays UnLocked”, as well as gathered feedback for future improvements to the event. Our findings suggest that street closures had a minimal economic impact for businesses within the Locke Street BIA. Although most attendees reported spending money at these events, most reported spending money at the farmer’s market, restaurants, and other food establishments that might normally experience high attendee volumes on Saturdays. As such, business owners had mixed opinions about whether “Saturdays UnLocked” attracted more attendees than baseline levels and, on average, reported little to no changes in the demand for products or services and sales revenue compared to other Saturdays. The perceived lack of economic impact may be related to COVID-19 policies and fears around gathering in high-traffic locations, as well as adverse weather experienced during some of the events.

In contrast, our findings provide a wealth of evidence for the positive social impacts of street closures. Most attendees who participated in “Saturdays UnLocked” reported that the event positively impacted their perception of the Locke Street neighbourhood and the city of Hamilton. Attendees felt like these events made them feel included in the local community and provided ample opportunities to socialize. However, statements from attendees suggest the social benefits of “Saturdays UnLocked”, and street closure events more generally, are restricted to a subset of the community, possibly due to the high price point of goods and services on Locke Street and a lack of social and cultural diversity of vendors. As such, the social benefits of future street closure events could be amplified by engaging underrepresented communities in planning to strategize on ways that they can be made more inclusive.

Lastly, we gathered feedback on the implementation of the events. We found that attendees most frequently participated in “Saturdays UnLocked” in July and August, and many suggested for future events to occur less often or be held on different days. Business owners and attendees positively discussed the simple closure of a single street, clear re-routing of public transportation, and great accessibility. However, one of the most frequently discussed limitations of these events was parking. Many attendees drove to the event but expressed disappointment about the lack of parking options; therefore, improvements to parking should be considered in future planning. Business owners also suggested improvements for curbside pick-up options, advertising efforts, and additional attractions or entertainment offerings at future events. Some businesses called for financial support from the BIA for signage and extended patios or seating areas.

A major strength of our study included the use of multiple data sources that incorporated the perspectives of both business owners and attendees. However, our study is not without limitations. The sample size was relatively small and might not be representative of all business owners and attendees. However, we found that a variety of business types responded to the survey and participated in interviews. Due to time

constraints and our limited recruitment timeframe, we were limited in our outreach efforts for participant sampling. Future research could involve enhanced recruitment efforts to obtain a larger sample, which may allow for greater power to conduct subgroup analyses. For example, while we were interested in examining how the proximity of businesses to nearby amenities or modes of transportation used by attendees impacted their perceptions of street closures, we did not have enough individuals to stratify our findings by these variables. A larger sample of business owners would also provide more power to measure associations between independent variables (exposures) and outcomes of interest (e.g., changes in sales revenue). Lastly, future work could collect and analyze raw sales data to enhance our understanding of financial impacts of street closures.

## Conclusion

Our study investigated the economic and social impacts of “Saturdays UnLocked” for community members and local business owners. Our findings suggest the events had a minimal or neutral economic impact but a strong social impact on local businesses and attendees. Our work also revealed some of the factors that may have contributed to these outcomes, such as cognitive effects (e.g., fears) surrounding COVID-19. These findings should inform planning of future street closure events within and beyond the Locke Street BIA.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A – Attendee satisfaction survey questions

### Section 1 – Survey Information

The Locke Street Business Improvement Area is working with the McMaster Research Shop to evaluate the social and economic impacts of an open street like Saturdays UnLocked. We are looking to gather feedback from attendees to help us understand these impacts.

We plan to use your feedback to:

1. Make decisions about hosting future events like Saturdays UnLocked,
2. Improve the quality of our events, and
3. Apply for grants to support initiatives like Saturdays UnLocked.

Time Required: This survey will take approximately five minutes.

At the end of the survey you'll have a chance to be entered into a draw for a gift certificate from a Locke Street business!

This survey is confidential, and any identifying information we collect (e.g., your email for the gift card draw) will not be associated with your responses.

If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please contact Heidi Vanderkwaak: [heidi@lockestreetshops.com](mailto:heidi@lockestreetshops.com).

### Section 2 - Visitor Information

1. What Saturday did you attend (or are you attending) Saturdays UnLocked?  
(Select all that apply)
  - ☐ July 17
  - ☐ July 24
  - ☐ July 31
  - ☐ August 7
  - ☐ August 14
  - ☐ August 21
  - ☐ August 28
  - ☐ September 4
  - ☐ September 11
  - ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are you filling this survey out for yourself, or on behalf of your family/group?
- For myself → **Go to Section 4**
  - For my family or group → **Go to Section 3**

### **Section 3 - Visitor Information for Families or Groups**

3. How many people are in your group?
4. How many in your group are under the age of 18?

### **Section 4 - Event Feedback**

5. Why did you choose to attend Saturdays UnLocked? (Select all that apply)
- Socializing with neighbours or friends
  - Shopping
  - Dining in the street
  - Playing in the street – cycling, walking, skateboarding, scooter, hopscotch
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
6. How did you hear about Saturdays UnLocked?
- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)
  - Poster
  - Word of mouth
  - Friend
  - Local media (Urbanicity, Spectator, CHML, Channel 14, etc.)
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. How did you get to Saturdays UnLocked?
- Walk/run
  - Automobile
  - Public transportation
  - Cycle/skateboard/scooter
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Section 5 - Event Feedback (continued)**

8. Did you park in one of the free parking spots at Melrose United Church or Blessings Christian Church on Stanley Ave?
- Yes
  - No – I didn't know about the free parking
  - No – I found parking on a side street
  - No – I found paid parking
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 6 - Location

9. What are the first three digits of your postal code?

## Section 7 - Social Impact

10. My experience at Saturdays UnLocked makes me believe (or increases my belief) that the Locke Street neighbourhood is a good place to live.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

(Optional) Please elaborate on your response:

11. My experience at Saturdays UnLocked makes me believe (or increases my belief) that Hamilton is a good place to live.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

(Optional) Please elaborate on your response:

12. My experience at Saturdays UnLocked makes me feel proud to live where I live.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

(Optional) Please elaborate on your response:

13. My experience at Saturdays UnLocked makes me feel like a part of the local community.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral

- Agree
- Strongly agree

(Optional) Please elaborate on your response:

14. Saturdays UnLocked provides an opportunity to socialize with old and/or new acquaintances.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

(Optional) Please elaborate on your response:

15. Saturdays UnLocked provides a welcoming environment for everyone.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

(Optional) Please elaborate on your response:

16. Did you run into anyone unplanned that you knew today on Locke Street? (Select all that apply)

- A neighbour
- A friend
- A store owner or staff member on Locke that I know
- An acquaintance

## Section 8 - Economic Impact

17. Did you spend or do you plan on spending money today at a store or restaurant on Locke Street?

- Yes → **Go to Section 9**
- No → **Go to Section 10**



## **Section 9 - Economic Impact (continued)**

18. How much money did you spend or do you plan on spending on Locke Street during one Saturdays UnLocked?

- ☐ Less than \$10
- ☐ Between \$10-\$50
- ☐ Over \$50
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

19. Where have you spent or do you plan on spending your money? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ At a restaurant
- ☐ At a store
- ☐ At the farmer's market
- ☐ Public transportation/parking
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Section 10 - Awareness**

20. During Saturdays UnLocked, did you become aware of a new store or restaurant on Locke Street?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

## **Section 11 - General Satisfaction**

21. Overall, how satisfied are you with Saturdays UnLocked?

- ☐ 1 – Very satisfied
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Not satisfied

22. How likely are you to recommend Saturdays UnLocked to a friend?

- ☐ 1 – Very likely
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Not likely

23. Are you likely to attend another Saturdays UnLocked (or similar event) in the future?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

24. What was/is your favourite things about Saturdays UnLocked?

25. What would have made Saturdays UnLocked better?

26. Please share any additional comments, thoughts, or suggestions for Saturdays UnLocked:

### **Section 12 - Information for Gift Card Draw**

27. Do you want to be entered into a draw for a gift certificate from a shop on Locke?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

28. Email address to be contacted regarding prize:

*Thank you for attending Saturdays UnLocked!*

## Appendix B – Recruitment email sent to business owners

Hello,

We are a team of volunteer researchers at McMaster University working with the Locke Street BIA to evaluate the recent street closure events (Saturdays UnLocked) that happened in your business area. We are currently collecting feedback from businesses and hope you might be willing to participate.

We are hoping to gather feedback on the economic impact of street closures (e.g., effects on sales), as well as the social impact on the local community. Better understanding the impact of the street closures (good and bad) will help the Locke Street BIA assess the value of continuing to hold street closure events. Your perspective would therefore help shape the future direction of street closure events in your area.

Your feedback would also help the Locke Street BIA:

1. Make decisions about how events like Saturdays UnLocked are planned and implemented,
2. Evaluate how events like Saturdays UnLocked can be improved in the future, and
3. Apply for grants to support initiatives like Saturdays UnLocked.

**Action:** We are asking for you to complete a brief five-minute survey. You can access the survey by clicking here: <https://forms.gle/skeMjmWhHKwMaMsP6>

If interested, there is also an opportunity for you to participate in an interview with a member of our research team to elaborate on the social impacts of street closure events. Please indicate whether you are interested in participating in an interview in the **final question of the survey**.

Please note that we are a neutral (third-party) entity in data collection and analysis. This survey is confidential, and any identifying information we collect will not be associated with your responses.

If you have any questions or concerns about the collection or analysis of data for this project, please contact Rebecca Correia ([correirh@mcmaster.ca](mailto:correirh@mcmaster.ca)). Alternatively, please contact Heidi Vanderkwaak ([heidi@lockestreetshops.com](mailto:heidi@lockestreetshops.com)) with any general comments or questions about this research project.

Many thanks,

The McMaster Research Shop

## Appendix C – Business owner survey questions

### Legend:

- ◇ Tick box (Users can select multiple options or responses)
- Radio button (Users can select one options or responses)

Thank you for your interest in completing our survey. We look forward to your feedback and thoughts towards street closure events within the Locke Street BIA. \*Please only complete this survey once per business\*

What is the name of your business within the Locke Street BIA? (Please note that the name of your business will not be associated with any survey responses)

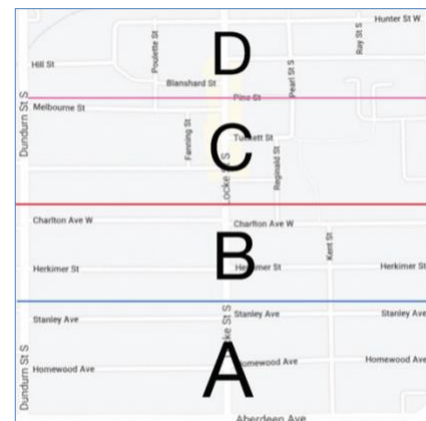
### Section 1: Information about your Business

1. What kind of business do you own within the Locke Street BIA?

- ◇ Book, music, toy, or hobby store
- ◇ Clothing/fashion store
- ◇ Food or drink establishment (e.g., bakery, restaurant)
- ◇ Health or wellness store/service
- ◇ Home furnishings, décor, or gift store
- ◇ Personal care store
- ◇ Professional services
- ◇ Specialty grocery store
- ◇ Specialty shop
- ◇ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What portion of Locke Street is your business or property located within?

- A
- B
- C
- D
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



3. How long has your business been located on Locke Street?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 year to 2 years
- 2 years to 3 years
- 3 years to 4 years
- 4 years to 5 years
- 5 to 10 years

- More than 10 years
4. Which of the following amenities are located near (within 10 meters) of your business or property?
- ◇ City bus stop
  - ◇ Free parking spaces or lot
  - ◇ Paid parking spaces or lot
  - ◇ Bench
  - ◇ Wheelchair ramp
  - ◇ Street intersection
  - ◇ Clear and legible storefront sign
  - ◇ Bike racks/hubs
  - ◇ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2: Participation in Street Closure Events

5. Was your business open during the Street Closure Events on Locke Street from July 17 through September 11, 2021?
- Yes, we were open during all the Street Closure Events (i.e., all nine Saturdays)
  - Yes, we were open during most of the Street Closure Events (i.e., 5 or more)
  - Yes, we were open during some of the Street Closure Events (i.e., 4 or less)
  - No, we were closed during all the Street Closure Events
6. Were your business hours impacted by the Street Closure Events?
- Yes, we extended our business hours
  - Yes, we reduced our business hours
  - No, we maintained our business hours as usual
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. How did you modify your storefront during street closure events, if at all?
- ◇ Extending your patio/seating area
  - ◇ Putting out signs
  - ◇ Putting products outside
  - ◇ Having staff outside
  - ◇ None of the above
  - ◇ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 3: Economic impact

8. If you were to estimate the change in sales, on average, **DURING street closure events** compared to a regular Saturday, what percentage would you give this change?

- ☐ My sales revenue was over 50% less
  - ☐ My sales revenue was 25-50% less
  - ☐ My sales revenue was 0-25% less
  - ☐ There was no change in my sales revenue
  - ☐ My sales revenue was 0-25% higher
  - ☐ My sales revenue was 25-50% higher
  - ☐ My sales revenue was over 50% higher
9. If you were to estimate the change in sales, on average, **AFTER street closure events** compared to a regular Saturday, what percentage would you give this change?
- ☐ My sales revenue was over 50% less
  - ☐ My sales revenue was 25-50% less
  - ☐ My sales revenue was 0-25% less
  - ☐ There was no change in my sales revenue
  - ☐ My sales revenue was 0-25% higher
  - ☐ My sales revenue was 25-50% higher
  - ☐ My sales revenue was over 50% higher
10. Do you believe you were able to attract new customers to your business during the street closure events?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Maybe
11. Please rate your agreement with the following statement: "There was an increase in customers/foot traffic at my business during the street closure events."
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Neutral
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
12. Have you noticed a greater demand for your products or services after the street closure events ended?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Unsure
13. Did you need more staffing on the days of the street closure events?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

#### **Section 4: Factors Impacting Street Closure Events**

14. From your perspective, please rate how the following factors, on average, impacted your sales during the street closure events (if at all). (Please rate from 1 to 5, 1= negative effect, 3=neither positive or negative effect (neutral), 5= positive effect; include "unsure" option)

- ◇ Weather conditions:
- ◇ COVID-19 cases/spread:
- ◇ COVID-19 vaccination rates:
- ◇ Back-to-school season:
- ◇ Social media campaigns/events:
- ◇ Media promotion of event:
- ◇ Contests:

15. Please rate your agreement with the following statement: "I think street closure events should continue to happen."

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

16. Please rate your agreement with the following statement: "I think street closure events should happen more often."

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

17. Please rate your agreement with the following statement: "I think street closure events should happen less often."

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

### **Section 5: Future Planning**

18. What day of the week would you prefer to have a future street closure event, if not a Saturday?

--

19. What resources or support would you like to receive if future street closure events happened?

--

20. From your perspective, how could future street closure events be improved?

21. Please use this space to give any additional feedback or expand on any of your answers.

**Interested in Participating in an Interview with the Research Team?**

We will be conducting short interviews with a select number of business owners to collect further feedback on the street closures. Please provide your email address and/or phone number if you are interested in participating in a short telephone interview.

*Thank you for completing the survey!*



## Appendix D – Interview guide for business owners

Thank you for participating in this study and joining our interview today!

We are a team of volunteer researchers at McMaster University working with the Locke Street BIA to evaluate the recent street closure events that happened in your business area.

As you know, the Locke Street BIA has been facilitating the “Saturdays UnLocked” events on Saturdays from July 17 to September 11, 2021. We’re interested in learning from your insights and experiences as a business owner to identify the factors that influence the success of street closure events. For example, COVID-19 is a big factor that we will be considering throughout our research.

We would also like to gather any constructive feedback or suggestions to inform the planning of future events that will be held on Locke Street.

Please note that my research team at McMaster University is a neutral (third-party) entity conducting this study. Your identity will remain confidential from other business owners and the BIA.

Over the next 20 to 30 minutes, we will be asking you a few questions relevant to our research objectives.

Do I have your consent to begin the interview and record your responses?

1. To begin, let’s talk a little bit about your business.
  - a. Can you tell us about the type of business you own/operate on Locke Street?
  - b. What type of products or services does your business provide? (e.g., retail, services, food)
  - c. How long has your business been operating on Locke Street?
2. In general, how do you feel about Saturdays Unlocked?
  - a. (Prompt) Do you think the events went well for your business? The street/community?
3. How, if at all, did Saturdays Unlocked financially impact your business?
  - a. (Prompt) On average, did you witness an increase, decrease, or no change in revenues?
  - b. (Prompt) Do you think street closure events increase, decrease, or have little to no effect on access to your business? Please explain your answer. (e.g., impacts on parking, public transportation, walkability, wheelchair accessibility)

4. Can you describe any other impacts street closure events have had on your business? (e.g., customer satisfaction, expanding your business to new customers)
  - a. (Prompt) As a result of street closure events, have you connected with any business owners on a more regular basis?
  - b. (Prompt) Did the street closure events impact your relations with customers? (e.g., regulars or new customers) If so, how?
5. What factors do you think shaped the success (or lack of success) of Saturdays Unlocked?
  - a. (Prompt) Did you do or notice anything different during the events?
    - i. Did you have more employees staffed?
    - ii. Did you have customers arriving earlier?
    - iii. Was there more foot traffic/customers?
    - iv. Decorate outside your storefront?
    - v. Leave the door open?
    - vi. Host a contest?
    - vii. Offer a sale?
  - b. (Prompt) What about factors outside your control?
    - i. (Prompt) How, if at all, do you think COVID-19 impacted the success of the event?
      1. Consider the impacts of masking, capacity restrictions, physical distancing requirements, screening protocols, vaccine mandates on the event's success.
    - ii. (Prompt) How about the weather? The setup/planning of the event? Parking?
6. Let's also consider the impact of street closures from the customer's point of view.
  - a. Who was the main clientele attending street closure events at your business? (e.g., students, elderly persons, families, etc.)
    - i. Is this clientele different from consumers you might expect on a regular business day?
  - b. Have you received any feedback from customers about the street closure events? If so, what were their thoughts?
  - c. What was the atmosphere like during the events?
  - d. Was there a sense of community during the street closures?
    - i. After the street closures ended on September 11<sup>th</sup>, did this sense of community continue into the following months? Was there a similar sense of community? Or did it decrease?
  - e. Has your business identified any barriers of street closure events that prevent customers from participating?

7. Final conclusion

- a. Would you opt to do more street closure events in the future? Why or why not?
- b. If you were the organizer, would you do anything differently with regards to the planning and/or management of future street closure events (if they happened)?
- c. Do you have any final thoughts or comments?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. I will turn off my recording device now.