

Evaluation Report: SE 37th and Hawthorne Seasonal Pilot Plaza

Permit Duration: May 22 – October 31

Recap Date: October 31, 2025

Situated on the north leg of SE 37th Avenue and Hawthorne Boulevard, the Hawthorne Seasonal Pilot Plaza is situated in the heart of a very active business and pedestrian area. The plaza sits within one block of restaurants, bookstores, coffee shops, a movie theater, gift shops, clothing stores, and other businesses. The plaza featured a variety of public seating options that included picnic tables, Adirondack chairs, and a large, custom-built bench system. There was a large street painting that was the result of a community design competition.

The primary plaza partner was the Hawthorne Boulevard Business Association (HBBA) with strong support from the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association (SNA).



The HBBA was successful in acquiring a \$46,000 grant from Venture Portland. The grant was initially to be used for a multipurpose kiosk. During the project development, the HBBA requested that the grant deliverables be updated to include the installation of a street plaza. Eventually, the plans for a kiosk were not realized but the plaza was successfully installed.

As stated in the proposal that PBOT received from HBBA, the community benefits that the plaza sought to create included:

Gathering Spaces: The plaza will provide community gathering spaces on a daily basis and a central location for locals and visitors to gather in the “Heart of the Hawthorne”.

Hub for Special Events: This space will function as Hawthorne’s Living Room increasing opportunities for special events.

Business Benefits: Activating the street with a plaza will draw more customers to SE 37th and to surrounding businesses and expand opportunities for sidewalk vending of adjacent shops and restaurants as well as creating space for employees to eat lunch and take breaks.

Added Amenities: This will enhance pedestrian access to amenities such as Wi-Fi, solar phone charging, and a local events and info board.

Inclusive Spaces for all ages and incomes.

Safe Places for Children to play in a car-free area bordered by planters

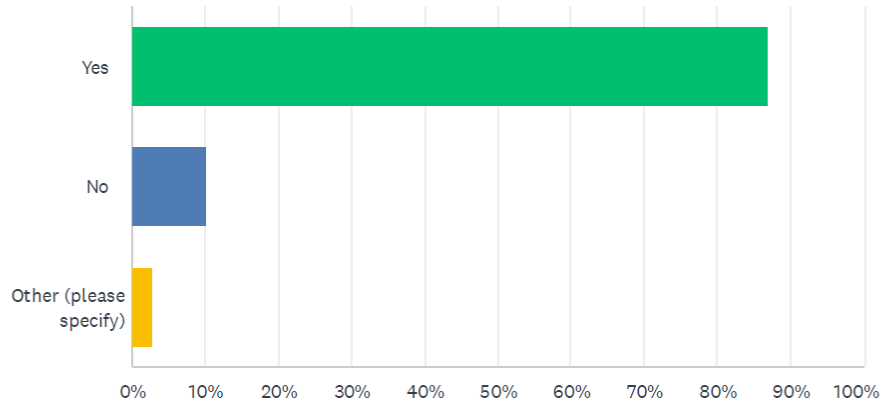
Beautifying & Enhancing the Streetscape: The plaza will include seating, tables, planters, art, interpretive info with wayfinding maps & cultural information on a small 4x8 solar kiosk.

Through observation and public feedback, PBOT deems the project successful with all aspects of these goals except for those that related to the installation of a proposed kiosk such as Wi-Fi, solar phone charging, and an information board.

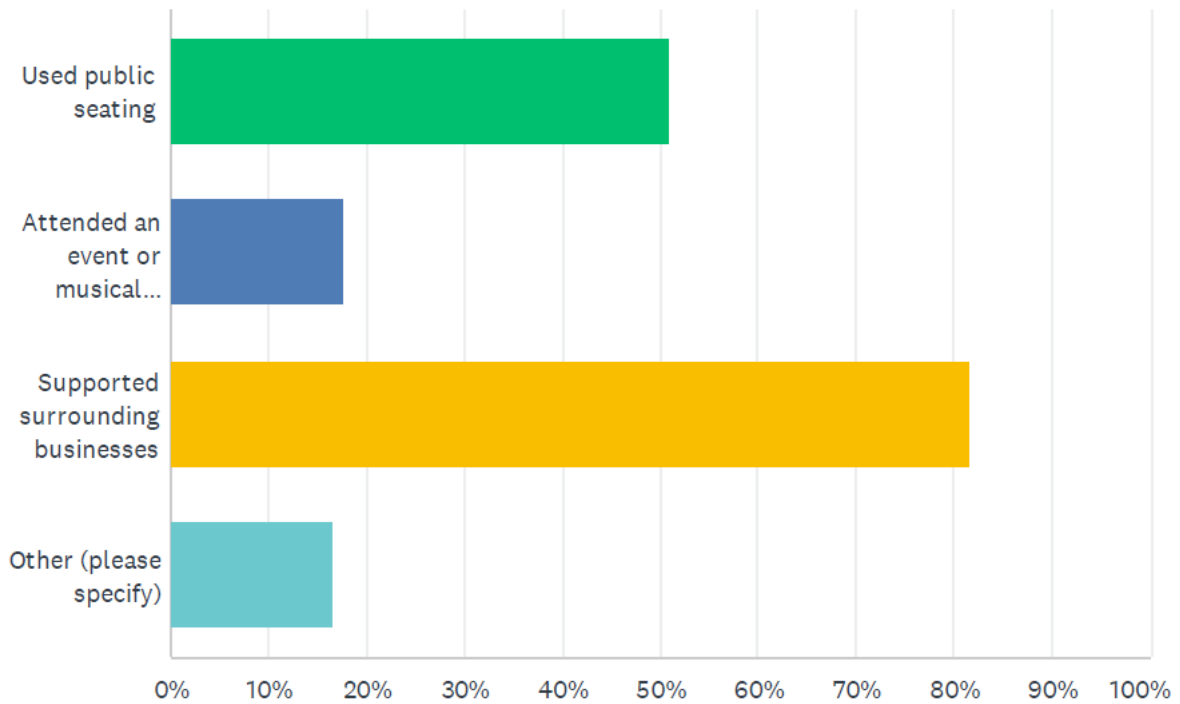
Plaza Evaluation Survey

From October 2 through October 18, PBOT conducted an online survey via [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). 4,644 postcards were sent to all addresses within ½ mile of the plaza. In addition, two posters were placed in the plaza to encourage survey participation. The survey was not on the PBOT webpage, social media, or any other forum. The response rate to the survey was exceptionally high with 960 responses. It is especially notable because the survey was only open for 18 days.

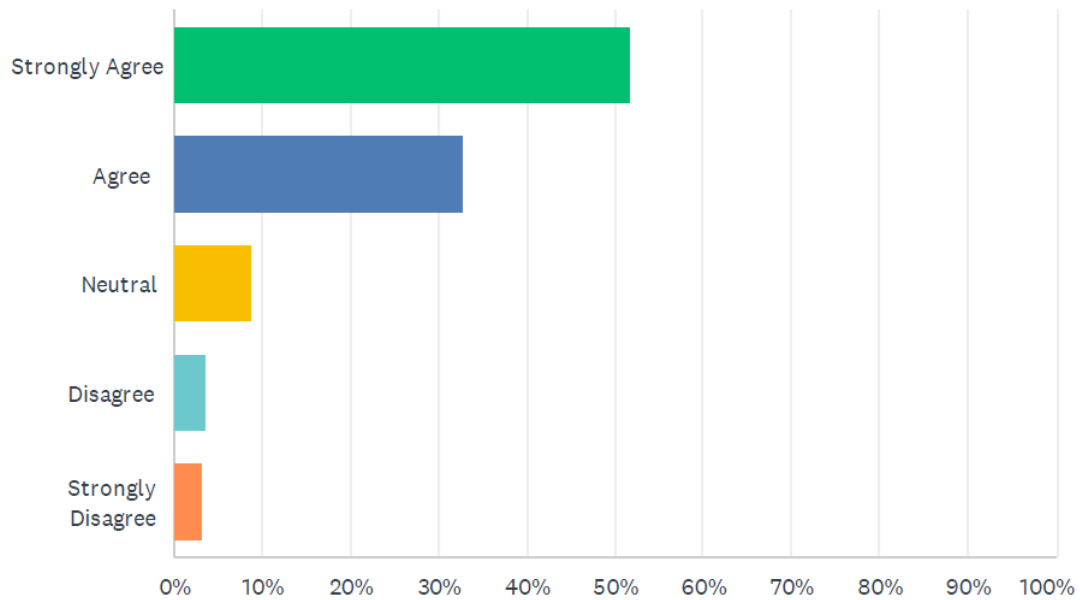
Survey responses indicated very strong support for keeping the plaza in place as a permanent feature in the neighborhood. When asked if it should remain permanently, 87% of respondents said yes.



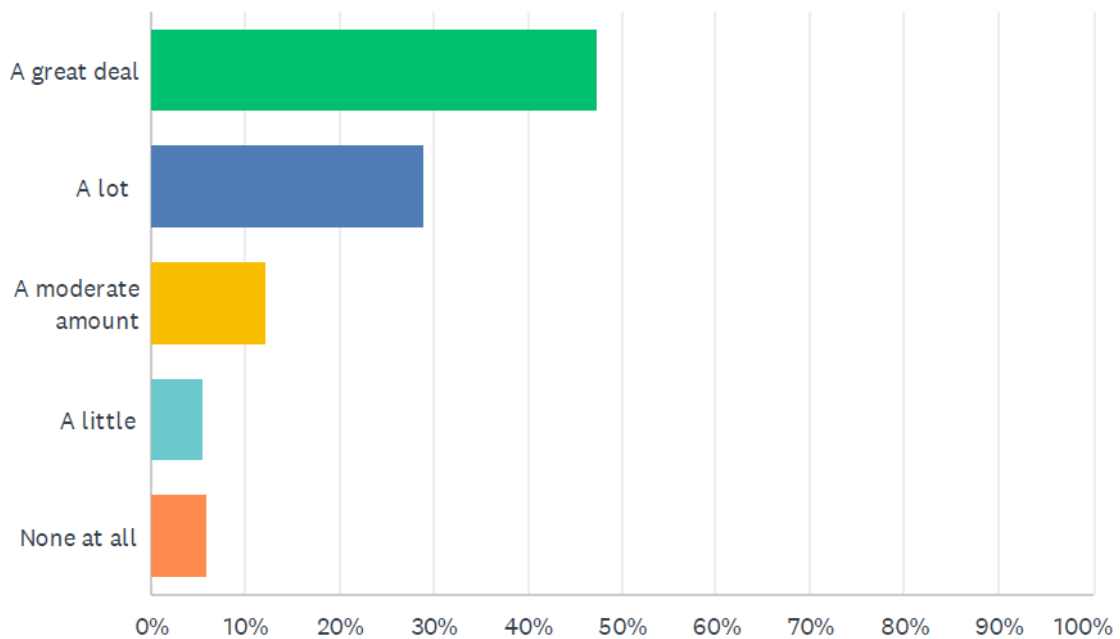
In response to the question, “What brought you to the plaza”, 82% of people said they visited to support surrounding businesses.



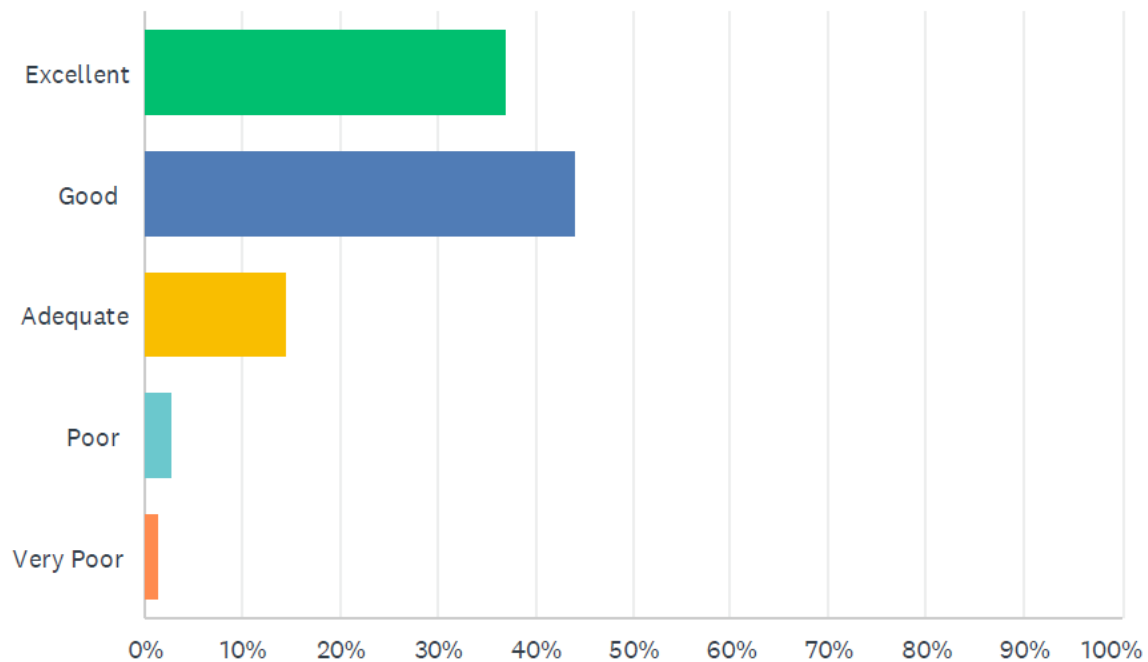
In response to the question, “Does the plaza feel safe and welcoming”, 84% of people agreed or strongly agreed.



When asked about how much community benefit the plaza provides, 89% said that it provides benefit. 76% of respondents said that it provided a lot or a great deal of benefit.



96% of respondents said that maintenance and upkeep of the plaza was adequate or better.



Contributions

PBOT:

- Street painting (paint and labor)
- 9 unplanted planters (4 large, 5 medium Terracast Step planters)
- 3 sign/poster holders with plaza signage
- Traffic control plan and devices (delineator wands, traffic signs, parking signs, barricades)
- Relocated a loading zone from midblock on Hawthorne between 37th and 38th to the corner of 37th and relocated an ADA parking space from 37th to a corner of 38th
- Regular parking enforcement at the plaza, particularly the north end of the plaza
- Provided pedestrian plaza designation and associated plaza rules signs.
- Removed small graffiti from furnishings.
- Liaison with Portland Police, the city's Impact Reduction Program, and the city's public trashcan program.
 - City Trash Program in Bureau of Planning and Sustainability added two new public trash cans to the plaza.
 - Portland Police began regular monitoring of the plaza when social problems arose.
 - The Impact Reduction Program has responded to the plaza to evaluate any camping for remediation. No camps have remained in the plaza long enough to require remediation.

HBBA:

- Picnic tables, Adirondak chairs, umbrellas, and custom bench.
- Engineered umbrellas to be difficult to steal.
- Provided regular maintenance to ensure that trash was picked up, furniture was in the correct place, and graffiti was addressed.
- Had a management contract that maintained and watered all planters within the plaza, addressed graffiti, removed trash and debris, as well as general cleaning and upkeep.
- Hosted 12 free public events in the plaza
- Brought forward business and community concerns

Key Findings

PBOT used the following framework to evaluate the Heart of Hawthorne Plaza:

TOPIC	GOAL	EVALUATION CRITERIA
Traffic Control and Operations	Plazas control vehicle traffic as intended with safe, clearly defined spaces for emergency access and people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly resets of traffic control devices reported by maintenance vendor• Observation by PBOT staff and plaza partners of traffic issues in the plaza
Plaza Access and Public Use	Plazas are frequently trafficked by people and feel welcoming to all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feedback from the public and plaza partners• Observation by PBOT staff on regular maintenance visits and special events
Maintenance	Plazas look clean and cared for.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly reports by maintenance vendor or plaza steward• Feedback from the public and plaza partners• Observation by PBOT staff
Programming	Plazas host a variety of community events such as markets, movies, performances, games, or art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plaza partner reports• Tracking by PBOT staff
Plaza Partner Capacity	Plazas have responsive plaza partners who work with PBOT to manage and activate the plaza.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication between PBOT and plaza partners• Overall plaza management• Events hosted or promoted by plaza partners
Public Support	Plazas are embraced by adjacent businesses, local organizations, community members, and visitors who live, work, and play in the area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public feedback• Annual plaza survey• Plaza partner feedback• Observation by PBOT staff

The following are PBOT's findings based on these evaluation criteria:

Traffic control and operations: There were no major impacts to traffic operations observed from the closure of SE 37th just north of Hawthorne. Traffic control signs stayed in place and a PBOT contractor inspected and replaced or repaired signs as needed. PBOT accepts complaints about traffic via 311 and the safe@portlandoregon.gov email address. Through these resources, PBOT receives over 1,000 concerns per year about traffic throughout the city. During the 5-month pilot period, PBOT did not receive any public complaints via these systems. There were comments in the evaluation survey, discussed below, that commented on both feeling more safe as a pedestrian with the roadway closed as well as comments about the added inconvenience while driving.

Plaza access and public use: The plaza successfully activated the area, encouraging foot traffic and drawing in visitors. People frequently walked through, sat with coffee or lunches, relaxed, and played music. The floral street painting gave the plaza a sense of place, making it feel more welcoming to pedestrians.

Maintenance: This plaza did require regular maintenance. People moved the furniture frequently and there was minor graffiti to clean. The HBBA began paying Tov Coffee for daily services to put furnishings back in place as well as do a general scan of the plaza. This helped with containing the maintenance needs.

Programming: Events in and around the plaza during the summer kept the space lively and engaged visitors. HBBA hosted 12 events including music and a grand opening celebration. In addition to the events hosted by HBBA, there were twelve additional events hosted by community members. There was also regular impromptu art and music making in the plaza.

Plaza partner capacity: The HBBA was an outstanding partner with PBOT who did a lot of work to ensure that the plaza was a success. HBBA contributed significantly with furnishings, stewardship, and activation. With the support of the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association, the HBBA was able to be responsive and make collective decisions as needed.

Public support: The plaza evaluation survey demonstrated very strong support for the plaza. This support was demonstrated both by the percentage of people saying that the plaza should remain permanently and by the large number of survey participants. The survey was open from October 2 to October 20 which is a relatively short period of time for a survey. There were 960 responses which was the second highest number of survey responses that PBOT received in 2025. This shows great public enthusiasm for the plaza as well.

Additional Items That Went Well:

- **Community Involvement:** HBBA held two community open calls that invited the public to submit recommended names for the plaza as well as street painting designs. These open calls resulted in the name and street painting design for the plaza.

- **Engagement from Police:** The Central Precinct Neighborhood Response Team was very responsive and proactive in addressing problems that happened in the plaza.
- **Public Trashcans:** The Bureau of Planning and Sustainably public trash can program installed and regularly services two new public trash cans in the plaza.
- **Traffic Operations:** During the pilot, PBOT did not receive any concerns from the public about the effect of the plaza on traffic operations.
- **Response to Social Issues:** PBOT, HBBA, the adjacent businesses, and the Portland Police Bureau collaborated to address issues related to social problems. Of note is that the Police began to regularly monitor the plaza when camping was present as the weather moved from Summer to Fall. The combination of businesses reporting problems, PBOT coordinating city response, and Police actively engaging with the space resulted in a significant reduction in these problems.

What Didn't Go Well:

- **Sporadic camping:** There were nights where people slept in the plaza. In general, they set up their camps after businesses were closed and the camps were broken down and removed by the time businesses opened again. Hawthorne Boulevard has a history of camping along the corridor. There was not an increase in reported camping between 30th and Cesar Chavez during the pilot program. However, beginning in October, SE Hawthorne BLVD did see a general increase in camping and drug use. These problems became apparent in the plaza but could be mitigated due to City Title 17.43 that establishes rules for pedestrian plazas.
- **Parking violations:** During the first two months of the plaza being in place, there was persistent illegal parking at the north end of the plaza. People were parking in the middle of the street which blocked bicycle access into the plaza as well as access to two residential driveways. Violations began to slow in early August but were still too common. In late August, PBOT installed NO PARKING TOW ZONE signage at the north end of the plaza that was much more successful in significantly reducing the amount of illegal parking at the north end of the plaza. Illegal parking does continue to happen and PBOT continues to provide enforcement to discourage this behavior.
- **Kiosk, Wi-Fi, Wayfinding Signage, and solar phone charging:** These were not installed as part of the seasonal pilot.
- **Business Concerns:** PBOT did not hear any direct concerns from businesses during the pilot phase until camping became present. Once camping was present, complaints from adjacent businesses increased which resulted in the collaboration discussed above. PBOT is aware that there are concerns about parking and motor vehicle traffic not being able to travel through the north leg of Hawthorne and 37th. There was also business concern about access to a loading zone. To address this, PBOT relocated a loading zone to be directly adjacent to the plaza.

Unexpected Issues:

- **Furniture Movement:** It was surprising that people were moving plaza furnishings on a regular basis. These moves were generally related to placing furniture in the sun or shade. However, there were some unusual movements such as a man taking an Adirondack chair in front of Powell's Bookstore to sell newspapers. To address this, HBBA entered into an agreement with Tov Coffee, a business adjacent to the plaza, to check furnishings, trash, and table cleanliness daily. This arrangement resulted in plaza furnishings consistently being in the correct location.

Recommendations for Future Plazas:

1. Update Stewardship Agreement:

- The stewardship agreement should make it clearer that the agreement is a guide for the working relationship between the plaza partner and PBOT. It should be clearer that elements of the agreement are flexible requirements and a framework for how the partners work together.
- Clarify the procedure for how PBOT evaluates requests for plaza activation.

2. Evaluate Parking Signage

- PBOT should evaluate the pilot plaza location to decide if there are potential parking violations that the pilot plaza may introduce. When identified, PRSA will consult with Traffic Engineering and Parking Enforcement to seek guidance and approval to proactively address parking concerns where possible.

3. Plaza Designation:

- PBOT's practice has been to not designate pilot plazas as pedestrian plazas for the purpose of enforcing city code 17.43 that establishes rules of conduct for pedestrian plazas.
- As sporadic social issues emerged at the Hawthorne Pilot Plaza, the city was not able to respond as quickly as needed due to the lack of plaza designation. PBOT addressed this by creating the designation and installing plaza rules signs.
- PBOT should designate seasonal pilot plazas as pedestrian plazas prior to the launch of the pilot plaza. If the plaza does not remain in place, PBOT should remove the plaza designation for the location.
- PBOT should install plaza rules posters upon launch of a seasonal plaza and consider adding plaza rules signs on posts on a case-by-case basis.

Conclusion

The seasonal pilot plaza at SE 37th and Hawthorne successfully provided a public space for people to gather and relax in the heart of an active commercial district. While challenges were present, collaboration between the plaza partner, PBOT, and other city agencies reduced or

eliminated those challenges. The public very strongly supports the plaza remaining in place permanently.

With all of the factors discussed in this evaluation, PBOT recommends that the Heart of Hawthorne Street Plaza remain as a permanent feature on the north leg of SE 37th Avenue and SE Hawthorne Boulevard.