# DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY SAFETY INITIATIVE – PHASE 1:

## Survey Results, Community Insights, and Recommendations for Temiskaming Shores

**Commissioned by:**
Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA)
and Temiskaming Shores & Area Chamber of Commerce

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# Executive Summary

This report addresses growing concerns about safety and revitalization in the downtown core of Temiskaming Shores. Over the past several years, businesses, residents, and community members have reported increased incidents of property crime, aggressive behaviour, loitering, sanitation challenges, and makeshift encampments. These issues carry not only social impacts but also tangible financial costs, reduced customer traffic, and declining confidence in the downtown as a safe and welcoming environment.

To better understand these challenges, the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA), conducted a community survey in August 2025. The study collected responses from 62 participants and 30 detailed incident descriptions. The findings provide a comprehensive picture of the frequency, types, and impacts of downtown safety incidents, along with strong community input on potential solutions. This initiative was spearheaded by the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA), both comprised of local business leaders. It is therefore rooted in a business perspective, reflecting the concerns of commercial property owners and downtown business operators who have consistently raised these issues within their networks.

This report represents Phase 1 of the Downtown Community Safety Initiative. Phase 1 focuses on identifying and documenting the scope of safety concerns in New Liskeard's downtown core and providing evidence-based recommendations. Future phases may build on this foundation through implementation, pilot projects, and evaluation.

Key findings include:

- Property crime and aggressive behaviour were the most frequently reported incidents, with many respondents experiencing problems on a weekly or even daily basis.
- Safety concerns carry financial consequences, from minor repairs to significant vandalism losses.
- Perceptions of safety differ sharply between day and night, with downtown viewed as particularly unsafe after dark.
- Respondents expressed strong support for a balanced set of solutions, including increased police presence, mental health supports, sanitation improvements, and better lighting.

The report presents a set of recommendations informed by these findings and supported by best practices from both Northern Ontario municipalities and tourism-driven

economies such as Niagara Falls and Banff. These recommendations progress from low-cost, community-driven actions to more resource-intensive interventions, and emphasize the importance of a balanced approach that combines enforcement, social supports, environmental improvements, and community engagement.

The Next Steps section proposes concrete actions to move forward, including forming a Downtown Safety Working Group, piloting immediate low-cost measures, strengthening enforcement partnerships, advancing mental health and addictions interventions, and securing funding for revitalization. The Conclusion highlights the opportunity for Temiskaming Shores to restore confidence in its downtown core, improve quality of life, and support long-term economic vitality.

Together, this report provides both evidence and direction, offering a roadmap for stakeholders to take immediate action while building the foundation for a safer, more vibrant downtown.

# Introduction

Concerns about safety and revitalization in the downtown core of Temiskaming Shores have grown significantly in recent years. Local businesses, residents, and community organizations have reported increases in incidents ranging from property crime and aggressive behaviour to loitering, sanitation challenges, and encampments. These issues not only affect day-to-day experiences downtown but also carry financial costs, reduce customer traffic, and undermine confidence in the community's economic future.

Recognizing the urgency of these challenges, the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA) partnered to gather community input and evidence. The goal of this report is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nature and frequency of downtown safety concerns, as well as to explore potential solutions supported by the community and informed by best practices.

The study combined both quantitative and qualitative methods, capturing perspectives from a wide cross-section of the community—including business owners, employees, residents, and service providers. In total, 62 individuals participated in the survey, supplemented by 30 detailed incident descriptions, creating a robust dataset that reflects both measurable trends and lived experiences.

This report presents the findings in four sections. The Methodology outlines how the data was collected and analyzed. The Results summarize the nature, frequency, and impacts of downtown incidents, as well as community perceptions of safety. The Recommendations section translates these findings into actionable strategies, drawing on lessons from both Northern Ontario municipalities and tourism-focused cities. The Next Steps and Conclusion provide a roadmap for local stakeholders to act on these recommendations, restore safety and vitality downtown, and position Temiskaming Shores for long-term resilience and growth.

# Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data sources.

## Survey Design and Data Collection

The quantitative data was collected through an online survey distributed via Chamber and BIA networks, social media, and community outreach. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and the survey remained open for a two-week period during August 2025. A total of 62 individuals completed the survey, and after data cleaning, all valid responses were retained for analysis. The survey included multiple-choice and scaled questions addressing incidents experienced downtown, frequency of incidents, financial impacts, perceptions of safety, and support for safety initiatives.

The qualitative dataset consisted of 30 incident descriptions, though this does not represent 30 unique respondents, as some individuals reported multiple incidents. These qualitative responses were gathered through community input channels such as online submissions or email feedback. Together, they provided rich detail on specific incidents, lived experiences, and suggested solutions. The qualitative data was coded thematically and organized into categories.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative survey responses were summarized using frequency counts and visualized through bar charts (Figures 1–8). To simplify reporting, some categories were regrouped. For example, respondents who identified as 'Business Owners,' 'Both (Business Owner/Commercial Property Owner),' or 'Ex-downtown business owner' were combined under a single Business Owner category. Similarly, 'Employees,' 'Administrators,' and 'Not-for-Profit representatives' were combined under Employees, while residents, taxpayers, homeowners, retired individuals, and other local citizens were grouped as Residents.

## Respondent Characteristics

As shown in Figure 1, the survey sample included 30 Business Owners, 25 Employees, and 7 Residents.

*Figure 1. Distribution of survey respondents by role.*

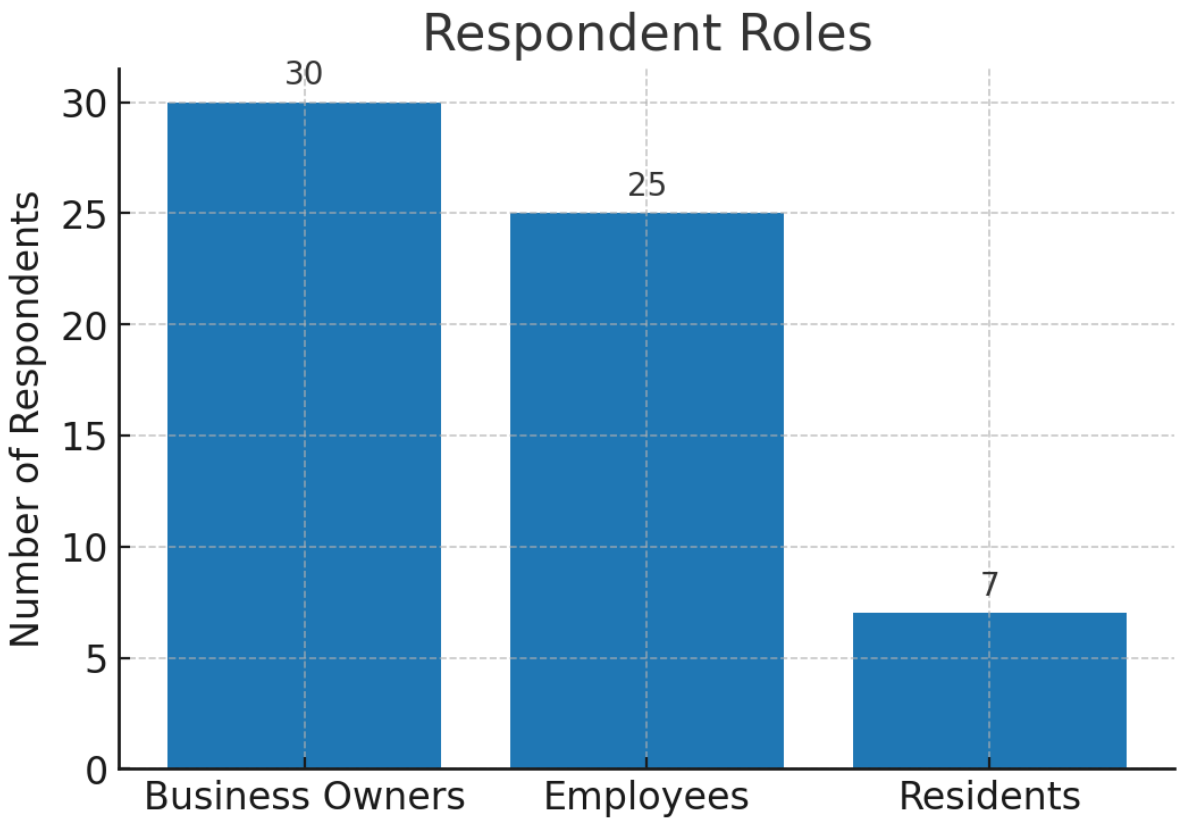
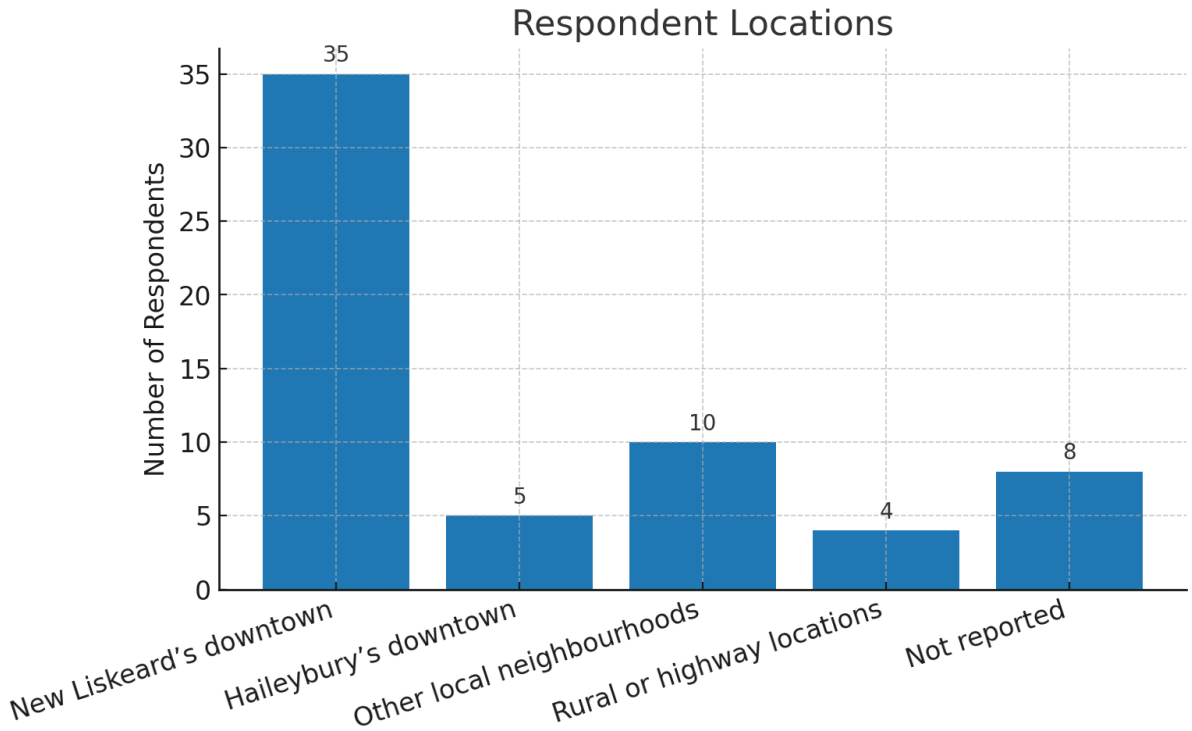



Figure 2 illustrates that 35 respondents were located in New Liskeard's downtown, 5 in Haileybury's downtown, 10 in other local neighbourhoods, 4 in rural or highway locations, and 8 did not report a location.

*Figure 2. Distribution of survey respondents by location.*




These respondent characteristics provide important context for interpreting the findings, ensuring that the perspectives represented are clearly understood in relation to respondent type and geographic location. The distributions provided here indicate that the survey captured a broad cross-section of perspectives, with particularly strong representation from the business community in the New Liskeard downtown core.

## Limitations

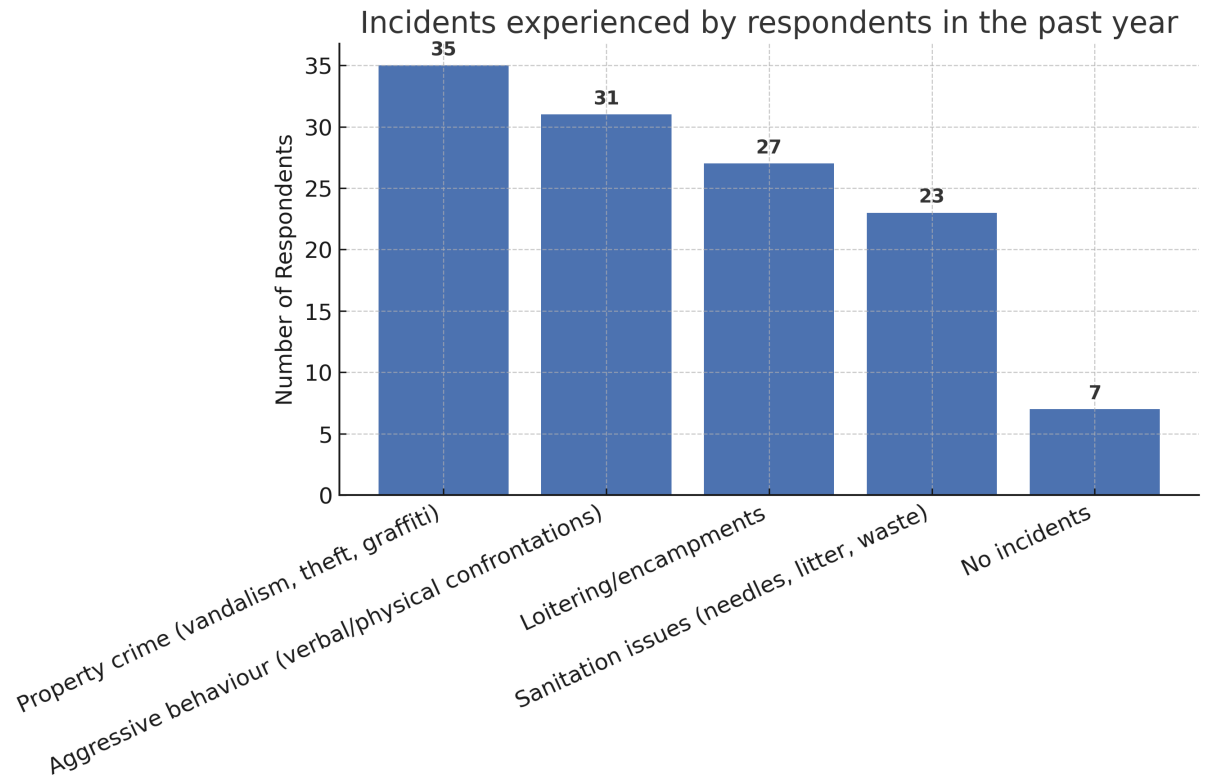
The findings presented are based on self-reported perceptions and experiences, which may be influenced by individual perspectives. In addition, the regrouping of role and location categories was undertaken to simplify reporting, but this may mask some nuance in the original responses. The results should therefore be interpreted as reflective of the views of those who chose to participate, rather than a comprehensive picture of the entire community.

# Results

## Incidents Experienced in the Past Year

Respondents reported experiencing a wide range of incidents in the downtown core over the past year. The quantitative results showed that property crime (35 respondents) and aggressive behaviour (31 respondents) were the most frequently reported categories, followed by loitering and makeshift encampments (27 respondents) and sanitation-related issues (23 respondents). Only 7 respondents indicated they had not experienced any incidents, underscoring the widespread nature of these problems.

*Figure 3. Incidents experienced by respondents in the past year.*




These survey results were strongly reinforced by the open-ended responses, which provided vivid examples of the types of incidents occurring:

*Table 1. Illustrative open-ended responses describing types of incidents.*

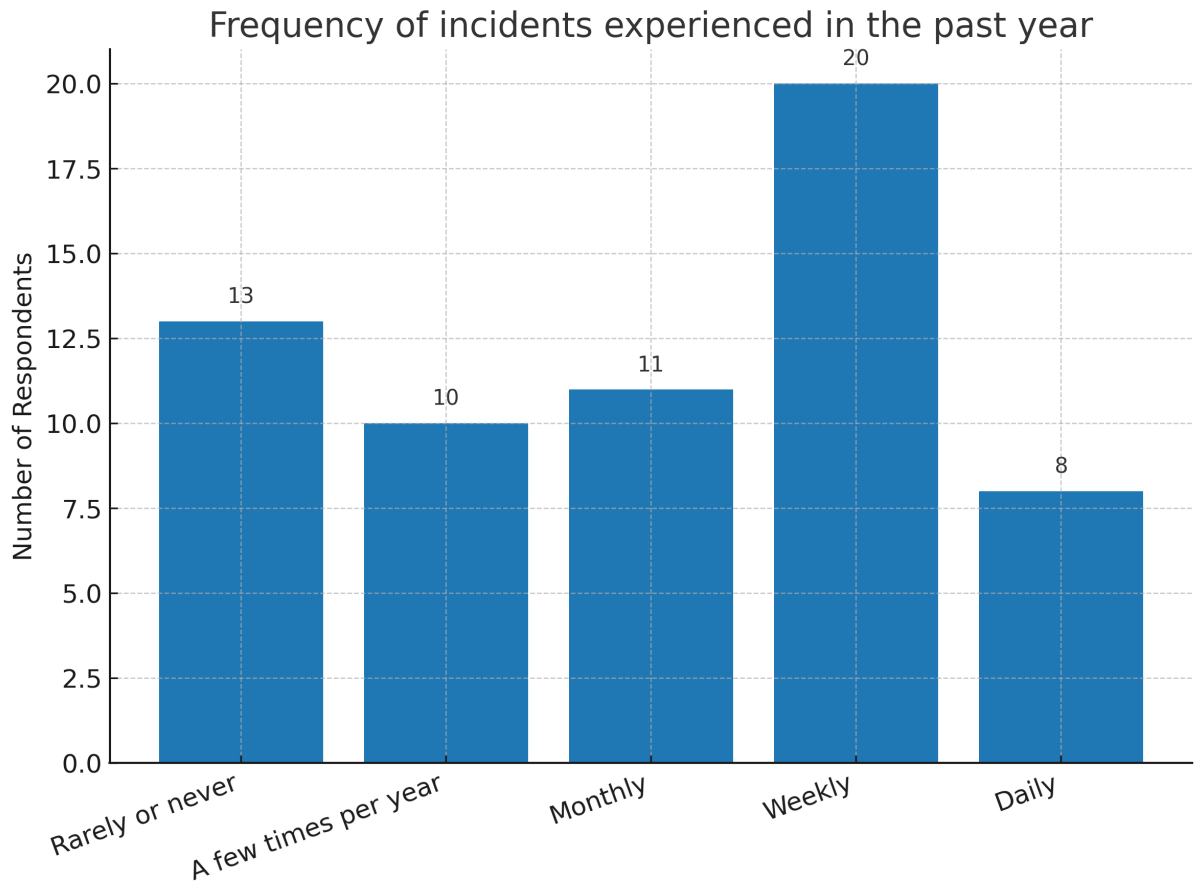
| Category | Example Respondent Comments |
|---|---|
| Property crime | "There was graffiti spray painted on two delivery trucks parked in the alley and an employee picnic table beside the building." "Fuse block stolen from air conditioner outside building." |
| Aggressive behaviour | "One [individual] tried to light his crack pipe … spit on the entrance door to the business … tried to punch the owner in the face." "At 6pm two well-known persons … waving a stick around yelling … children were about to exit through the doors." |
| Loitering/encampments | "A homeless person decided to build himself a home in the back of my store … customers don't feel safe coming in." "Our hot tub was so disgusting as [a homeless person] slept in it for the night … no respect for people's properties." |
| Sanitation issues | "25 needles, 6 used condoms and empty drug packets found outside the back door of a commercial building." "Two men, two women hanging out … left nut shells and coffee cups, one threw up on the street." |

Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings paint a consistent picture: safety concerns in the downtown area are not isolated or minor—they are widespread, visible, and affect both businesses and residents directly.

## Frequency of Incidents Experienced

Respondents were asked how often they experienced safety-related incidents in the downtown core over the past year. The responses showed that 13 respondents said incidents occurred rarely or never, 10 reported incidents a few times per year, 11 said monthly, 20 said weekly, and 8 reported incidents occurring daily. This indicates that while some respondents were rarely affected, a substantial proportion experienced incidents on a weekly or daily basis.

*Figure 4. Frequency of incidents experienced in the past year.*




Open-ended comments further illustrated the persistence of these incidents, with many respondents describing the regularity with which they encountered problems downtown:

*Table 2. Illustrative open-ended responses describing frequency of incidents.*

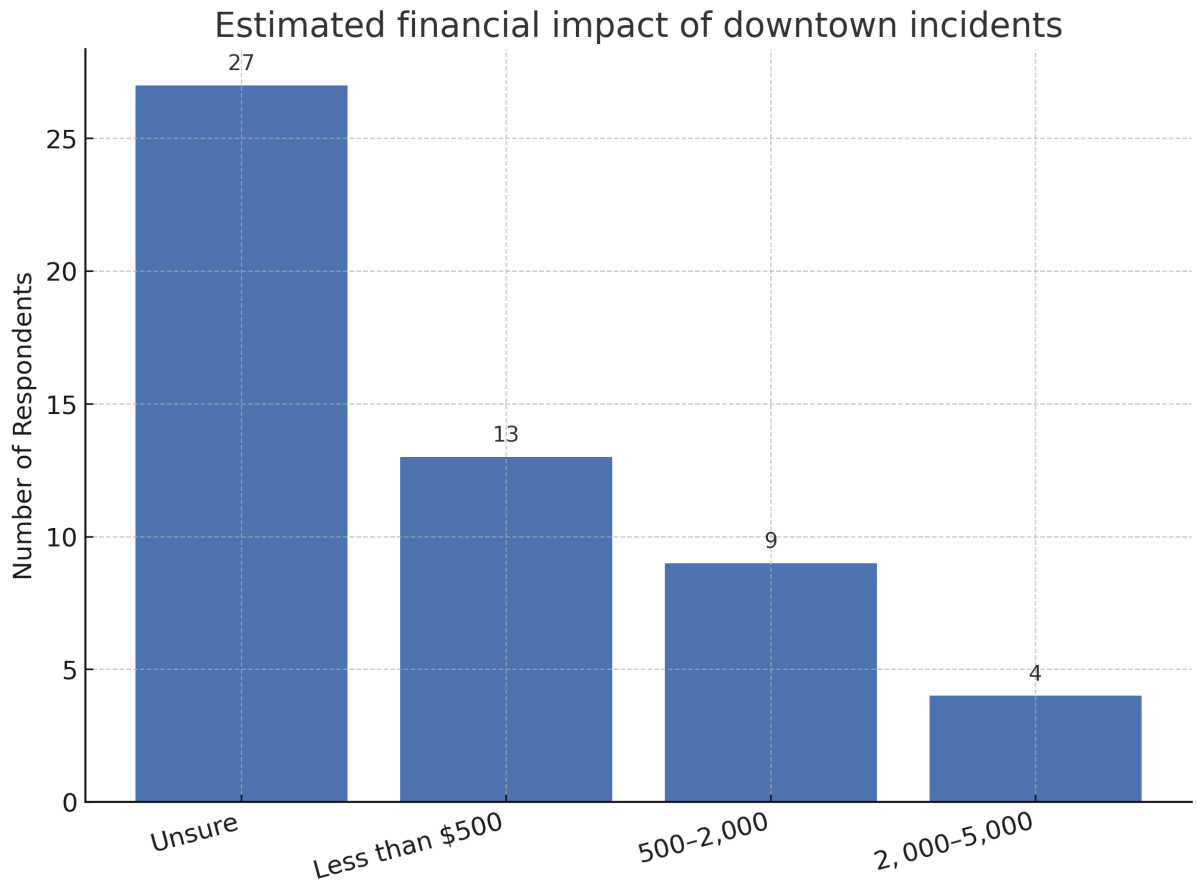
| Frequency Context | Example Respondent Comments |
|---|---|
| Daily | "Every day we have to clean up garbage or needles left outside the business." |
| Weekly | "It's weekly—sometimes daily—and nothing seems to change." |
| Occasional/Monthly | "Every so often there are big flare-ups of trouble, especially around paydays." |

Together, the survey counts and open-ended feedback reveal that safety issues are not rare occurrences. For many respondents, they are a consistent part of downtown life, contributing to the overall perception of decline in safety.

## Financial Impact of Incidents

Respondents were also asked whether incidents downtown had resulted in financial costs for their businesses or households. The results showed that 27 respondents were unsure of the financial impact, 13 reported minor costs (less than $500), 9 indicated moderate costs ($500–$2,000), and 4 experienced significant costs ($2,000–$5,000). These results suggest that while many respondents could not estimate the financial toll, a notable portion reported direct financial consequences, underscoring the tangible costs associated with safety concerns downtown.

*Figure 5. Estimated financial impact of downtown incidents.*




Open-ended responses offered additional detail about the kinds of costs respondents faced:

*Table 3. Illustrative open-ended responses describing financial impacts.*

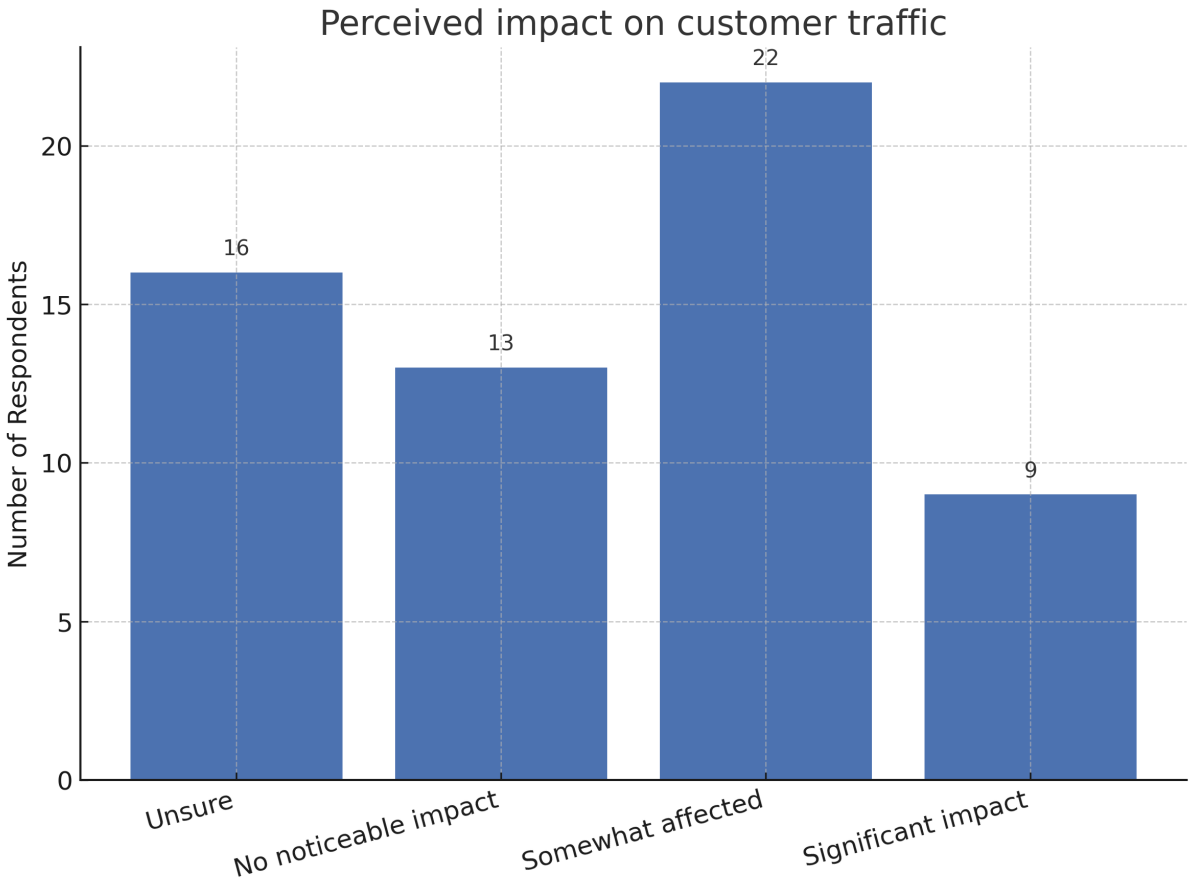
| Impact Level | Example Respondent Comments |
|---|---|
| Minor | "We had to replace a broken lock and window after a break-in—around $300." |
| Moderate | "Graffiti removal and extra security measures this year have cost us several thousand dollars." |
| Significant | "One major vandalism incident resulted in over $10,000 in repairs and lost revenue." |

Together, these findings highlight that downtown safety issues are not only a matter of perception but also carry real financial consequences for many respondents, affecting their ability to sustain and grow their operations.

## Impact on Customer Traffic

Respondents were asked whether safety issues have affected customer traffic. The results showed that 16 respondents were unsure, 13 reported no noticeable impact, 22 indicated customer traffic was somewhat affected, and 9 reported significant impacts. While not all businesses observed a change, many perceive a connection between safety issues and reduced downtown traffic.

*Figure 6. Respondent views on whether safety issues have affected customer traffic.*




Open-ended responses further illustrated how businesses perceived changes in customer traffic:

*Table 4. Illustrative open-ended responses about customer traffic impacts.*

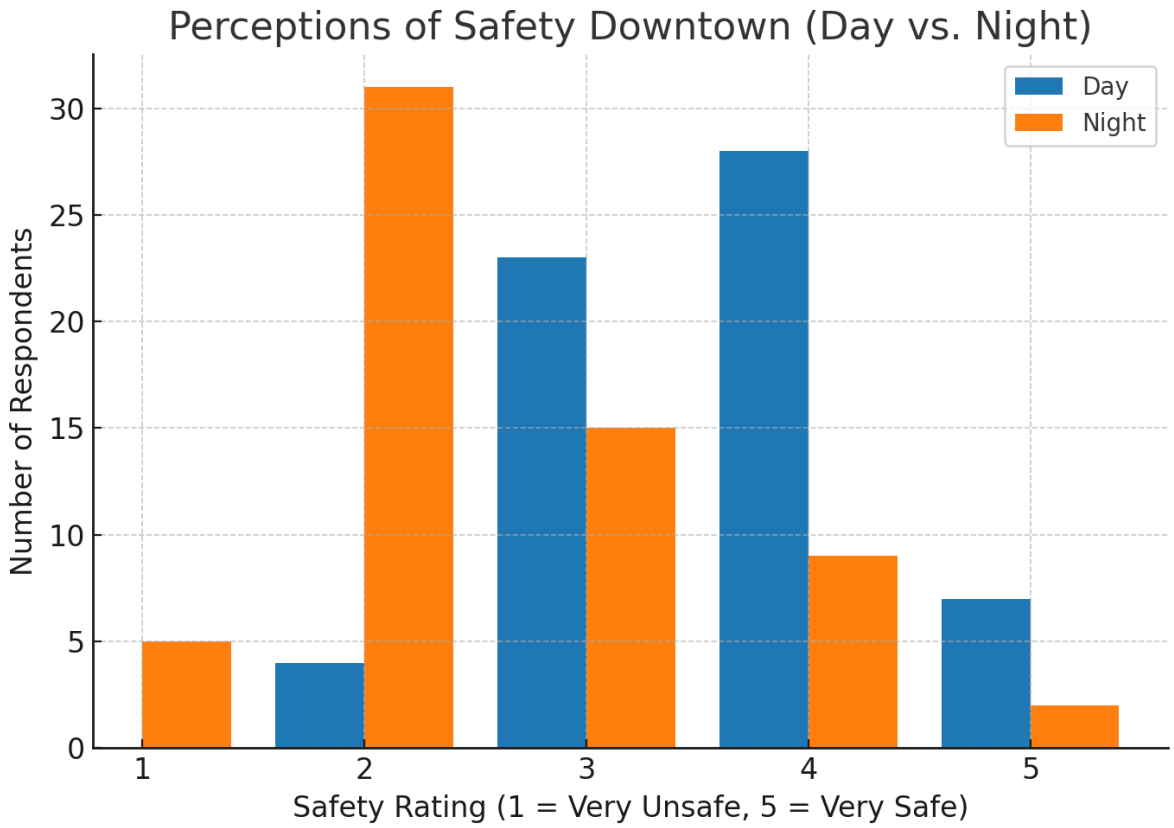
| Impact Level | Example Respondent Comments |
|---|---|
| No noticeable impact | "Our customer base has remained stable despite issues downtown." |
| Somewhat affected | "We have noticed fewer walk-ins during the evenings when safety feels questionable." |
| Significant impact | "Several clients told us they avoid the downtown area altogether." |

Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings show that perceptions of safety can have a direct influence on customer traffic, with some businesses reporting notable declines linked to downtown safety concerns.

## Perceptions of Safety: Day vs. Night

Respondents were asked to rate how safe they feel downtown during the day compared to the evening or nighttime, using a scale of 1 (very unsafe) to 5 (very safe). During the day, perceptions were generally more positive, with 28 respondents rating safety at 4 and 7 rating it at 5. However, during the evening and nighttime hours, perceptions declined markedly, with 5 respondents rating safety as very unsafe (1) and 31 also expressing low levels of safety. This contrast highlights the heightened sense of vulnerability associated with the downtown core after dark.

*Figure 7. Perceptions of safety downtown during the daytime versus nighttime.*




Open-ended responses reinforced these findings, emphasizing how perceptions of safety change between day and night:

*Table 5. Illustrative open-ended responses about daytime versus nighttime safety perceptions.*

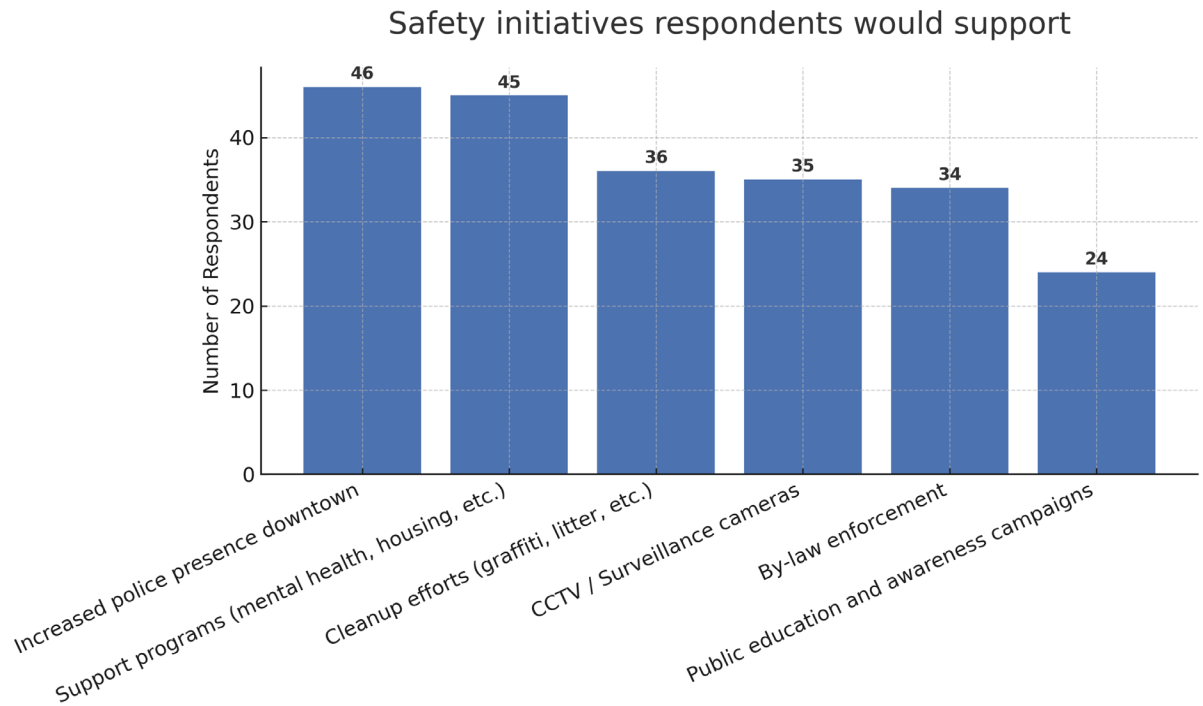
| Time of Day | Example Respondent Comments |
|---|---|
| Daytime | "I feel comfortable walking downtown during the day when businesses are open and there are people around." |
| Nighttime | "I avoid downtown at night due to poor lighting and groups loitering in certain areas." |
| Nighttime | "I would never let my kids go downtown after dark—it just doesn't feel safe." |

The combined findings make clear that perceptions of safety are highly dependent on the time of day. While daytime activity provides reassurance, nighttime conditions raise significant concerns for most respondents. This pattern suggests that improving evening safety downtown could be a key focus for future interventions.

## Support for Safety Initiatives

Respondents were asked which safety initiatives they would support to improve the downtown area. The most widely endorsed measures were increased police presence (46 respondents) and support programs for mental health, housing, and related needs (45 respondents). Cleanup efforts targeting graffiti and litter (36), CCTV/surveillance cameras (35), and by-law enforcement (34) were also strongly supported. Public education and awareness campaigns received 24 mentions. These results show that respondents recognize multiple avenues for improving safety—spanning enforcement, social supports, environmental maintenance, and community engagement.

*Figure 8. Safety initiatives respondents indicated they would support.*




Open-ended responses provided further detail on the types of initiatives respondents would like to see downtown:

*Table 6. Illustrative open-ended responses about desired safety initiatives.*

| Initiative | Example Respondent Comments |
|---|---|
| Increased police presence | "A visible police presence would discourage loitering and aggressive behaviour." |
| Improved lighting | "Better lighting at night would make me feel safer walking downtown." |
| Security cameras | "Installing cameras would help deter vandalism and support police investigations." |
| Sanitation improvements | "Regular clean-up and maintenance would help make downtown more welcoming." |

Taken together, these findings highlight that respondents do not see safety as a problem that can be solved by enforcement alone. While increased police presence and surveillance remain top priorities, there is equal recognition of the need for investments in mental health, housing, and support programs, alongside practical measures such as improved lighting, sanitation, and by-law enforcement. The clear preference is for a comprehensive, balanced approach—one that combines visible deterrence with long-term prevention and community supports to create a safer, more welcoming downtown.

## Summary of Findings

Across both the quantitative survey and the qualitative responses, a consistent picture emerges of significant safety concerns in downtown Temiskaming Shores. Incidents such as property crime, aggressive behaviour, loitering, and sanitation issues were reported by the majority of respondents, with many noting that such problems occur on a weekly or even daily basis. These incidents were not just nuisances—they also carried tangible financial costs for businesses and households, ranging from minor repairs to major vandalism losses.

Safety issues were further linked to declining customer traffic, with many businesses reporting that negative perceptions discouraged people from coming downtown. Respondents also drew a sharp contrast between feeling relatively safe during the daytime and highly unsafe at night, underscoring the importance of addressing after-dark conditions.

When asked about potential solutions, respondents expressed strong support for a balanced mix of initiatives. Enforcement measures such as increased police presence and surveillance were highly endorsed, but so too were social supports (mental health, housing), environmental improvements (cleanup, lighting, sanitation), and community engagement (by-law enforcement, education campaigns). Together, these findings highlight the need for a comprehensive approach that combines immediate deterrents with longer-term investments in prevention and support.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations are informed by both the quantitative survey results and the qualitative responses provided by community members, as well as best practices from both Northern Ontario municipalities and tourism economies such as Niagara Falls and Banff. They are presented in a progression from low-cost, community-driven actions to more resource-intensive investments, recognizing that a comprehensive mix of approaches will be required for sustainable change.

## 1. Community-Driven, Low-Cost Actions

Survey respondents consistently emphasized the importance of visible, proactive engagement at the street level. Incidents such as property crime, aggressive behaviour, and loitering were described as frequent and highly visible problems, contributing to a sense of decline downtown.

Volunteer patrols and neighbourhood watch initiatives, supported by partnerships with local businesses, can help deter low-level disorder and demonstrate community ownership. Examples from Kirkland Lake and Timmins show that coordinated community visibility reduces loitering and improves perceptions of safety. Timmins, for example, introduced downtown “ambassadors” to increase visibility and direct individuals to services. Respondents highlighted a strong desire for reassurance: 'We just need to know someone is there who cares and is watching.'

## 2. Enhanced Enforcement and Presence

The survey revealed overwhelming support for increased police presence and by-law enforcement. Dedicated downtown enforcement units that combine police foot patrols with by-law officers, as seen in North Bay and Sudbury, provide a balanced deterrent against aggressive behaviour and encampments. Sudbury, for instance, partnered with local service providers to co-locate supports in the downtown core, ensuring enforcement is paired with service referrals. Respondents noted that while compassion is important, there must also be clear rules and accountability: 'We pay taxes for safe streets—this has to be enforced.'

## 3. Mental Health and Addictions Supports

Respondents made it clear that enforcement alone is insufficient. Support programs for mental health and housing were nearly as highly prioritized as police presence. Best practices in Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie show that crisis intervention teams, safe beds, and addictions outreach programs can reduce repeat incidents while addressing root

causes. However, community feedback also emphasized that voluntary participation is often not enough to break cycles of addiction and street-level incidents.

Mandatory intervention models—whether through addictions treatment or forensic mental health pathways—were identified as stronger alternatives to voluntary outreach. Where charges are laid, courts can, where appropriate, direct individuals into structured treatment or addictions programs (including forensic pathways such as those available at the North Bay Regional Health Centre). These enforced pathways provide a realistic opportunity for stabilization and rehabilitation while reducing repeat incidents. As one respondent noted: 'Don't just move them along—get them the help they need so they can change their lives.'

## 4. Revitalization and Environmental Improvements

Safety perceptions are closely tied to the downtown environment. The survey found strong support for sanitation improvements, CCTV/surveillance cameras, and improved lighting. Investments in lighting, streetscaping, and security infrastructure can enhance perceptions of safety, particularly at night, when respondents reported feeling most vulnerable. Niagara Falls and Banff, as tourism-focused cities, have demonstrated that clean, vibrant, and well-lit downtowns contribute significantly to both actual and perceived safety. Banff has successfully linked beautification efforts with strict by-law enforcement, protecting its tourism appeal. One participant explained: 'People will come downtown if it feels alive and cared for.'

## 5. Balanced, Comprehensive Approach

Taken together, the findings underscore that respondents do not see safety as a problem that can be solved by enforcement alone. Instead, they favour a holistic strategy that includes:

- Immediate deterrents (police presence, by-law enforcement, surveillance)
- Social supports (mental health, addictions, housing programs, mandatory intervention models)
- Environmental improvements (lighting, sanitation, beautification)
- Community-led engagement (patrols, watch programs, partnerships with local businesses)

This balanced approach acknowledges the tangible financial impacts, declining customer traffic, and time-of-day safety gaps identified in the survey results. By combining prevention, deterrence, intervention, and revitalization, Temiskaming Shores can create a safer, more welcoming downtown for all.

# Next Steps

The recommendations outlined above provide a comprehensive framework, but action requires coordination and prioritization. Based on the survey findings, qualitative input, and best practices identified, the following next steps are proposed:

**Legal and Policy Context**

Recent court decisions, such as the Region of Waterloo case, prevent municipalities from clearing encampments unless adequate and accessible shelter beds exist. This limits purely eviction-based approaches and highlights the need for alternative, legally sustainable strategies.

With the passage of Bill 6 (Safer Municipalities Act, 2025), police and by-law officers now have authority to act on public drug consumption and trespassing in public spaces. If individuals refuse to comply, officers can issue charges that, in turn, may result in mandatory placements into treatment or addictions intervention programs, including forensic pathways such as those offered at the North Bay Regional Health Centre (NBRHC). This effectively creates a Charter-compliant pathway that both upholds individual rights and provides a structured, supervised "safe bed" alternative.

Incorporating this legal and policy context into downtown safety planning ensures that enforcement actions align with recent legal precedent while also making use of new legislative tools. It balances enforcement with access to structured interventions, addressing both immediate community safety concerns and long-term rehabilitation opportunities.

## 1. Establish a Downtown Safety Working Group

Bring together representatives from the Chamber, BIA, City of Temiskaming Shores, Police Services, health and social service agencies, and local businesses. This group would coordinate implementation, monitor progress, and provide regular updates to the community.

## 2. Pilot Immediate, Low-Cost Measures

Start with community-driven actions that require minimal funding but can have a visible impact:

- Launch a volunteer patrol or "Downtown Ambassador" pilot to establish a presence on the streets.
- Organize a sanitation and beautification initiative (graffiti cleanup, lighting audits, and garbage removal).

## 3. Strengthen Enforcement Partnerships

Work with the City and Police Services to explore the feasibility of a dedicated downtown enforcement unit (police + by-law), similar to the North Bay and Sudbury models. Begin by redeploying existing resources to increase visibility during peak times of concern (evenings and weekends).

## 4. Advance Mental Health and Addictions Interventions

Engage local partners—including the North Bay Regional Health Centre (NBRHC) where appropriate—to explore the feasibility of adopting mandatory intervention models**.** These models would ensure that individuals repeatedly involved in downtown incidents are not only charged but also directed into structured treatment or addictions programs before re-entering the community. At the same time, crisis response partnerships should be expanded to provide immediate support options, reducing repeat incidents while connecting individuals to longer-term rehabilitation pathways.

## 5. Secure Funding for Revitalization and Infrastructure

Identify municipal, provincial, and federal funding streams (e.g., Community Safety and Policing Grant, Ontario revitalization programs, FedNor, FedDev) to support investments in lighting, surveillance, and streetscaping. Align these funding requests with the broader goal of attracting residents and visitors back downtown.

## 6. Public Communication and Progress Reporting

Communicate early wins and pilot efforts through the Chamber, BIA, and municipal channels. Transparency will build public trust and encourage further community participation.

# Conclusion

This report has demonstrated that safety concerns in downtown Temiskaming Shores are widespread, persistent, and directly linked to both financial costs for businesses and declining public confidence. At the same time, the findings reveal strong community support for a balanced, multi-faceted response—one that combines enforcement with mental health supports, visible presence, and revitalization investments.

By taking the next steps outlined here, Temiskaming Shores has the opportunity to reverse the current trajectory, restore a sense of safety and pride in its downtown core, and create the conditions for long-term economic and community vitality.

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