



# RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Research Highlight No. 12  
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## LOCATION OF PANHANDLING ACTIVITY IN WINNIPEG

### Introduction

Panhandling activity in Winnipeg is highly concentrated in certain parts of the city. Where are these locations? Why are these places chosen? This Research Highlight will address these questions through information gained via two methods:

1. Field Observation research of panhandler locations, and
2. Interviews with 75 panhandlers

The two methods combined provide a good representation of the spatial characteristics for panhandling activities in Winnipeg's inner city.

### Study Area

The study area for the Panhandling in Winnipeg project<sup>1</sup> is shown in Figure 1. The methodology used to determine the study area and all steps in the mapping process are outlined in Research Highlight #11 titled *Panhandling in Winnipeg Project: Mapping Methodology*. The study was limited to this area, as this is where the vast majority of panhandling activity is commonly known to occur in Winnipeg. Panhandling takes place elsewhere in Winnipeg such as Polo Park, St. Vital Centre, and St. Boniface, but these areas were not included in the study in order to concentrate limited resources where panhandling occurs with greatest frequency and spatial concentration.

For more detailed analysis the study area was broken into the following eight sub-areas:

1. North Main/Exchange
2. Central East
3. Central West
4. Sargent Ellice West
5. Portage Broadway West
6. Broadway/Osborne
7. Broadway/Main
8. Osborne Village (See Figure 1).

### Geographic Concentration of Panhandling Activity

A total of 250 panhandling events were observed and recorded during the course of the research. 86% of panhandling events observed occurred in four primary sub-areas of North Main / Exchange, Central East, Central West, and Osborne Village. Figure 2 presents the distribution of these events in the four sub-areas (the sub-areas are highlighted by rectangles). In the pie chart (Figure 3), the top number indicates the number of panhandling events observed, and the bottom number shows the percentage of all 250 panhandling events occurring in each sub-area.

Not only were there many panhandling events observed in these four areas, but the density of activity is also important. Portage Avenue between Carlton Street and Smith Street and Osborne Street between Roslyn Road and Stradbroke Avenue contain particularly high concentrations. Due to these two stretches of concentrated panhandling activity, Central East and Osborne Village are the sub-areas that contain the most overall panhandling events – 57% of the total 250 events observed.

<sup>1</sup> For more details on this study please visit Canada Research Chair web site at [http://ius.uwinnipeg.ca/CRC/crc\\_publications\\_journals.htm](http://ius.uwinnipeg.ca/CRC/crc_publications_journals.htm)

## Interviews Confirm Panhandling Concentrations

This concentration of panhandling events is best explained by the panhandlers themselves. When the panhandlers were asked what makes a specific location good for panhandling, they said that a high volume of people passing by is the main factor in choosing a particular spot. Quite a few also mentioned that places where generous people pass by, and where the panhandler is known as a regular, are also good places to make money. However, one respondent felt that if a spot is regularly used, people learn to avoid it. One mentioned *“where there is a mix of people, so the working people see a lot of poor around and come to understand their situation with compassion”*. Panhandlers tend to avoid areas that they believe are unsafe therefore the safety of the area of the city is considered an important factor.

The interviews identified Osborne Village and the downtown portion of Portage Avenue as two areas in the city where panhandling activity is most prevalent. When asked where they usually panhandle, one third of respondents indicated Portage Avenue, and a quarter said Osborne Village. The next most often mentioned general areas were Broadway (11% of respondents), Downtown (8%), The Forks (5.4%), St. Boniface (4%), Graham Avenue (4%), and Ellice Ave. (2.7%). Among more specific panhandling locations respondents identified: the corners of Donald Street and River Avenue, Broadway Avenue and Main Street, Stradbrook Ave. and Osborne Street, and Donald Street and Portage Avenue, City Place, Portage Place, MTS Center, Place Louis Riel, The Bell Tower, APTN Building, Harry’s Food, Ramada Hotel on Smith, and the St. Regis hotel. The Bell Tower is located on the corner of Stradbrook Avenue at Osborne Street and all the other specific locations mentioned are on or near Portage Avenue.

Thirteen percent of the respondents said they panhandle outside malls, with Polo Park mall specifically mentioned by 7.3%.

## Islands of Smaller-Scale Panhandling Activity<sup>2</sup>

Some sub-areas display concentrations of panhandling activity on a smaller scale, but lack the overall number of panhandling events sustained over an extended multiple-block distance. These specific locations tend to focus on the intersections of major streets and/or specific amenities. They include: Harry’s Foods near the intersection of Portage and Arlington, the intersection of Portage and Broadway, the intersection of Broadway and Osborne, and the intersection of Main and York near the Winnipeg Hotel and Earl’s on Main. The Broadway intersections at Portage and Osborne involve both panhandling and squeegee activity, which sometimes even occur at the same time with one person washing windows and the other “flying a sign”.

## Portage Place: Impact on Panhandling

One interesting pattern that emerges from Figure 2 is the conspicuous absence of panhandling events on Portage Avenue at Portage Place mall even though several panhandlers identified it as a good place to panhandle. A relatively steady occurrence of panhandling activity was observed along Portage Avenue from Fort Street to Spence Street. Although the density is variable along this stretch, the only place where panhandling almost ceases to occur is the stretch of sidewalk that extends out from Portage Place between Carlton Street and Vaughn Street. Perhaps this phenomenon is somewhat explained by the fact that Portage Place employs private security that was observed as diligent in moving panhandlers along, away from this location. Comments from panhandlers confirmed this.

## Areas Where Panhandling is Less Common

Large gaps with no observed panhandling activity are apparent in Figure 2. Very little panhandling was observed south of Graham Avenue to Broadway Avenue. Other areas with limited panhandling events observed were: on Portage Avenue west of Spence Street, Ellice Avenue and Sargent Avenue west of Spence, and Main Street north of City Hall to Higgins Avenue. Generally speaking, these places have fewer people walking the sidewalks than the locations of panhandling activity concentrations.

Again, panhandler interviews offer additional explanations for places void of activity. When asked “Where would you *not* panhandle and why?” many avoid entire areas of the city that are considered to be too dangerous (e.g.. North End, North Main). Other areas where they indicated they would not panhandle included:

- Areas of high poverty where people simply do not have money to give. This could help explain North Main’s lack of panhandling events.
- Areas where there are many police officers, private security and Business Improvement Zone patrols.
- Areas where people know the panhandler and he/she is embarrassed to be seen panhandling.
- Areas of gang activity: *“It’s getting hard to pan because of all the gang members “You’re on our turf, you owe us taxes for standing on this corner.”*
- Rich areas: *“Rich areas aren’t good for panning in. People are snobby. They didn’t make their money by giving it away.”*

## Conclusion

Panhandling activity in Winnipeg is concentrated in the Central East and Central West sub-areas along Portage, in the North Main/Exchange, and in Osborne Village. According to panhandlers these are preferred places because of the large numbers of pedestrians and general mix of people. Other places that lack these traits are avoided altogether, especially if they are: patrolled by enforcement officials, perceived as dangerous areas, or considered less/too affluent. Islands of activity, especially at busy transportation and amenity nodes, do exist away from major concentrations. Overall, the results of both the mapped field observations and panhandler interviews support each other.

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Figure 1. Study Area Map

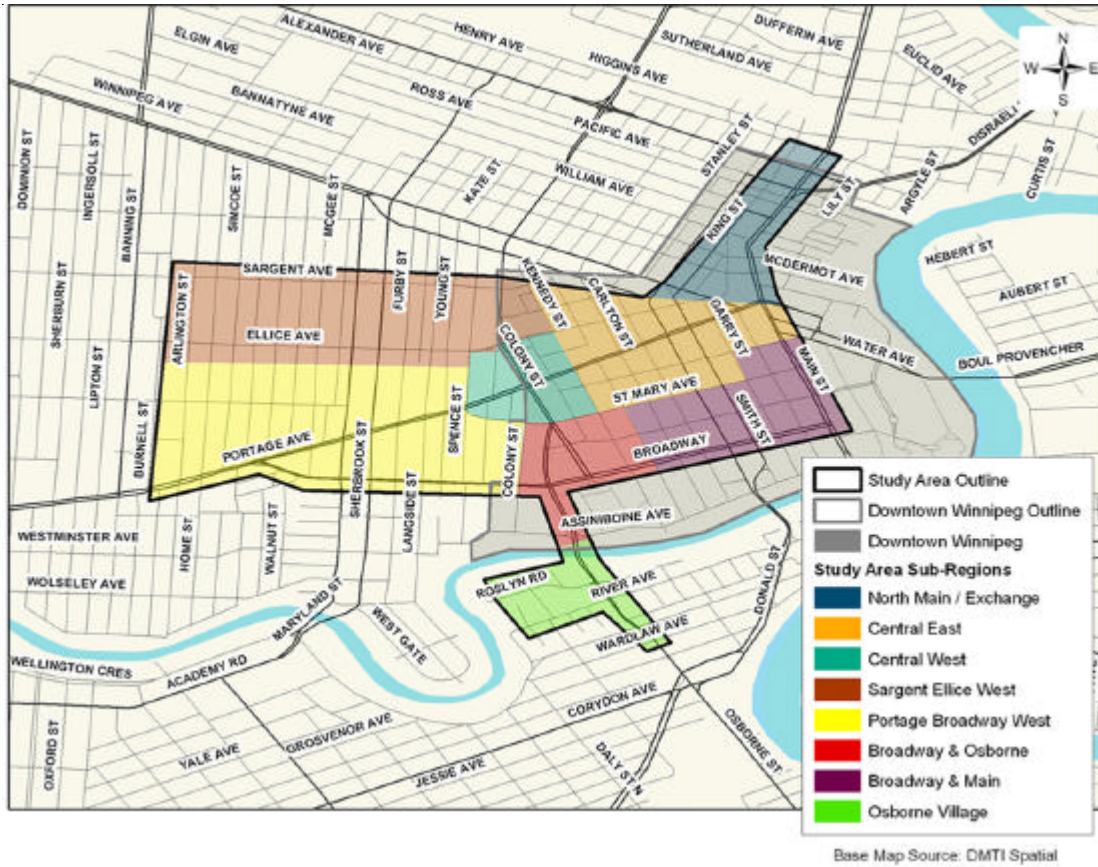


Figure 2. Concentration of Panhandling Activity

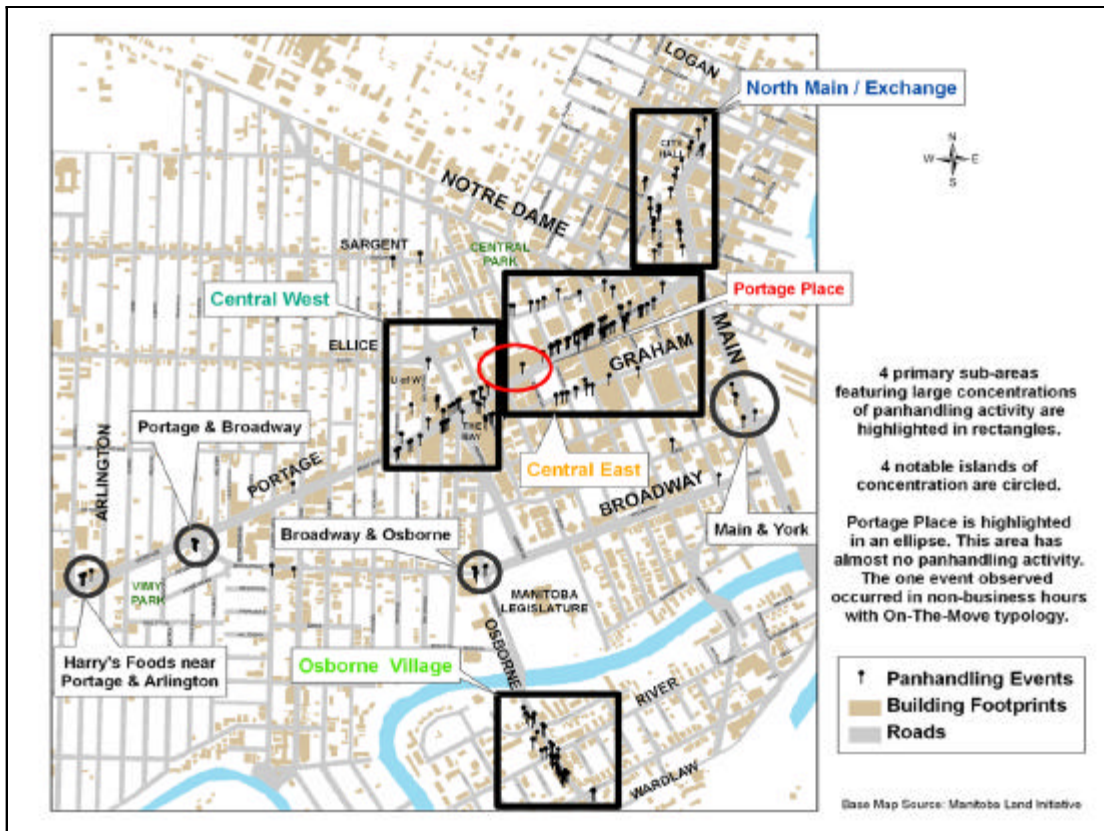


Figure 3. Panhandling Events by Sub-Area

