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Sydenham Street Revived

1. Introduction

*Sydenham Street Revived* was a pop-up park created by the community that was located on Sydenham Street between Princess and Queen from August 27th until September 12th. The purpose of this project was to test out a fun and engaging pedestrian-friendly design for Sydenham Street and to evaluate its impact before the start of the next phase of the Big Dig. In addition to landscaping and seating, *Sydenham Street Revived* provided opportunities to showcase local art and to bring people together for small-scale, community-driven events.

Why “Revived”? Revive has the following meanings: to activate or renew; to restore; to bring back into notice; and to reanimate or cheer.

2. What is a pop-up park?

A pop-up park is an example of a “Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper” (LQC) project - a relatively inexpensive, often temporary alteration to an urban space designed to test out a concept with direct community involvement.

Some of the benefits of LQC projects include
- Bringing together diverse stakeholders to generate solutions and develop a collective vision
- Generate the interest of potential investors, both public and private
- Inform best practices for later planning efforts
- Break down resistance to change
- Foster a community’s sense of pride in, and ownership of, their public spaces

3. Why Sydenham Street?

Location: Sydenham Street is the only downtown street between Division and Ontario that ends at Princess Street.

Timing: In 2016, Sydenham Street will be dug up for infrastructure improvements. Kingston’s *Downtown Action Plan* states “…while the pressing need to replace underground utilities is the ‘driving force’ for street reconstruction, these disturbed streetscapes offer an opportunity to further enhance the downtown’s open space character and support commercial and tourism potential”.

Intensification: Kingston’s *Official Plan* and *Council’s 2015 - 2018 strategic priorities* promote density in the downtown core along Princess Street (as well as in other key areas of the city). A growing downtown population is going to place increasing pressure on our existing public spaces.
4. Potential benefits of a permanent public space on Sydenham Street
More trees in the downtown: Greening the city by increasing the number of trees is one of Council’s 2015 - 2018 strategic priorities, as well as one of the goals outlined in of the Sustainable Kingston Plan (Theme EN4: Natural Areas). Re-imagining Sydenham Street as a public space would provide the opportunity to increase tree cover in this part of the downtown.

An opportunity to demonstrate sustainability leadership: Streets make up approximately a third of our city and are an important part of the public realm. The Sustainable Kingston Plan encourages Kingston to be a leader in the development and use of sustainable building standards for design, construction, and operation. Around Ontario, municipalities are rethinking how to better design their streets in order to improve sustainability and the quality of life of their residents, from developing comprehensive Complete Streets guidelines to more place-specific designs that enhance sustainability through the incorporation of green infrastructure and by creating opportunities for sociability and cultural expression.

Improving livability: Creating a livable city is one of Council’s 2015 - 2018 strategic priorities. Among other qualities, a livable city is one that promotes active transportation, embraces sustainability, and fosters a strong sense of identity and culture.

“Great public spaces are those places where celebrations are held, social and economic exchanges occur, friends run into each other, and cultures mix. When these spaces work well, they serve as the stage for our public lives.” - Project for Public Spaces.

5. Community engagement
On June 17th and 20th, the Sydenham Street Revived community group hosted public design and ideas workshops at Sustainable Kingston. Participants were asked to answer the following question: how would YOU revive Sydenham Street? The workshops were well attended by Sydenham Street residents, residents of the surrounding neighbourhoods, business, and people generally interested in helping create a lively public space in the heart of downtown Kingston. Information collected during these workshops informed the concept design and initial programming plan.
6. Pop-up park concept design
Feedback obtained during the public design workshops was overwhelmingly in favour of closing the whole street. The design was changed accordingly.
7. Project Budget

The budget for this project was approximately $20,000, which includes purchased supplies as well as donated services, materials and fees.

8. Sponsors

Western Landscape Services
Sustainable Kingston
GreenCity Initiatives
KEDCO
Keystone Property Management
Tara Natural Foods
Varsity Properties
The Illuminated
Burt’s Greenhouses
Senica’s Greenhouse
Thai House Cuisine
Menchie’s Frozen Yogurt
snapd
Sydenham Street Studios
MLTDWN
Keys Job Centre
Staples
Riley’s Garden Centre
Small Batch Cafe
Beacon Lite
Awesome Foundation Kingston
McNeely Engineering

Bray Heritage
St. Lawrence College ESET Program
Maureen Lascelles
9. Sydenham Street as an event space

Clockwise from top: Zumba in the Park; Manage Your Energy workshop by ENACTUS SLC; Thai House Cuisine Food Carving Workshop; Community mural painting activity; Music in the Park.
10. Sydenham Street as a place to socialize
11. Sydenham Street as a place to create
12. Evaluation: what makes a successful place?
Project for Public paces has evaluated thousands of public spaces around the world and has found that successful public spaces typically have the following four qualities: they are accessible; people are engaged in activities there; the spaces are comfortable and have a good image; and finally, they are sociable places, ones where people meet each other and where they take people when they come to visit.

The following evaluation criteria have been adapted from Tackling Tactical Urbanism: Exploring the Potential for Improved Social Spaces on Queen’s University Campus, a School of Urban and Regional Planning graduate report co-written by Molly Smith and Shazeen Tejani in 2015. The criteria focus on the four qualities identified by Project for Public Spaces, and incorporate elements from Jan Gehl's Cities for People and the City of Toronto’s Draft Evaluation Criteria.

### ACCESSIBILITY, ACCESS AND LINKAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Can you see the space from a distance? Is its interior visible from the outside?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity</td>
<td>Is it close to other amenities, such as shopping, restaurants, public washrooms?</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Is there a good connection between the space and the adjacent buildings, or is it surrounded by blank walls? Do occupants of adjacent buildings use the space? Are there fences or other barriers? Does the space function for people with special needs?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkages</td>
<td>Do sidewalks lead to and from the adjacent areas? Do the roads and paths through the space take people where they actually want to go?</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient</td>
<td>Is the space in a bad location or difficult to access? Can people use a variety of transportation options - bus, car, bicycle, etc. - to reach the place?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Immediately adjacent to high-traffic Princess Street, this block of Sydenham Street enjoys good visibility and proximity to amenities, although the lack of public washrooms in this area proved to be a problem during events. Sydenham Street experiences a steady flow of pedestrian traffic, particularly in the morning and evening when people are walking to and from work, but the fact that the street ends at Princess Street must disrupt the pedestrian flow to some extent.

### ACTIVITIES AND USES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Are people participating in a variety of activities - walking, sitting, playing games, studying, eating?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>Are people of varying ages using the space?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>Are people stopping in the space? Taking pictures?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable</td>
<td>Are people using the space throughout the day?</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: During the pop-up park it was noticed that for the most part, people were not choosing to use the space
through the late morning and early afternoon. One reason for this may have been the weather. Between August 27th and September 12th, Kingston enjoyed an almost continuous stretch of sunny weather with temperatures typically between 20 and 30 degrees Celsius and high levels of humidity. With black asphalt on the ground and limited shade, it makes sense that people would choose to use this space during the cooler parts of the day.

**SOCIABLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>Are people meeting in groups, in pairs, or individually? Are people talking to one another?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td>Do people pick up garbage in the space?</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Do people seem to know each other by face or name? Are people smiling? Do people make eye contact with one another?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Do people point out the space to others? Do some groups of people use the space regularly?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>Are people stopping to talk to others in the space?</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Discussion: The pop-up park very quickly turned into a highly social space. One reason for this was the collaborative nature of the project - many different groups had come together to give their opinion or to help design and build the space. This created a sense of ownership and a shared sense of belonging. Volunteers setting up the space in the morning noted an increased degree of conviviality, with strangers regularly greeting each other and the volunteers as they walked by to go to work. Litter was a relatively minor problem.

**COMFORT AND IMAGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>Does the space feel safe? Are there more women in the site than men?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean / In Good Condition</td>
<td>Is the space full of litter? Are sidewalks and other infrastructure in good condition?</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sittable</td>
<td>Are there enough places to sit in the space? Are people able to choose if they want to sit in the sun or the shade?</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>Does the space make a good impression? Is the area attractive?</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic</td>
<td>Are there any buildings of historic significance?</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
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Discussion: The atmosphere and appearance of the pop-up park benefited from the lovely heritage and older buildings along the street. The mix of ages, genders, and people of different abilities indicated that people felt safe in the space. In terms of comfort, as noted earlier the lack of shade was a problem during some parts of the day. Feedback of the overall impression of the space was mixed. While some people enjoyed it as a charming temporary community DIY project, other people felt that the design fell short of expectations.
13. Community Feedback
On September 30th, the Sydenham Street Revived community group created an online survey to gather feedback about the pop-up park experiment and the long-term plans for this street. This survey is still active and collecting responses. The link to the survey has been shared with the business, community groups and individuals involved, through the project’s social media accounts, and also through Sustainable Kingston’s social media accounts. Before the survey closes, we would like to see if we can reach more of the regular users of the street.

A sample of responses to the question *Why should (or shouldn't) this street be made permanently pedestrian, either fully, or by closing half the street?*

- I think that we should be looking to increase the role of pedestrians, but that a better way to deal with it is through regular scheduled closures. For example, the street could close every weekend for events, perhaps a market, etc. It could be closed in summer evenings as well if there is demand. During the day, it could remain open for vehicles and parking could remain in place (supporting business along the street).

- It [would] allow the downtown core more ‘livability’ in terms of relaxation, and less pollution.

- The street is not heavily used by vehicles, and one lane (one way) would be fine. I would prefer an all-pedestrian street, but I understand that this would not sit well with some of the local businesses. In the long term, however, those businesses will close, and this may be an opportunity to make it an all-pedestrian street. The new tenants would be businesses whose natural customers would not need cars.

- Because pedestrian space is extremely limited downtown due to massive wide vehicle lanes and the combination of parking & patios blocking the sidewalk.

- Trees in cities help to create calm cooler spaces. There is very little seating downtown except for patios at restaurants. Here people could gather with take-out food and gather to play games or music, or do a mural as they did during the recent street closure. It was wonderful to see.

- Should not [make] permanently pedestrian: It won’t be good for the business. Because the business in this area is too specific for people. No gifts shop, no fashions, no show for them to walk or spend their time.

- We need more pedestrian-friendly and green areas in downtown Kingston. The human scale of our downtown is its main appeal.

- It should be made permanently pedestrian because we need more public spaces and fewer cars downtown.

- No because there is a shortage of parking already.

- At least during summer months it should be for pedestrian use only to allow for community events and artistic performances or exhibitions.

- It should because we should encourage more walking and social behaviors in our city. Cars in the winter might be okay.
14. Recommendation
Remaking this street a place for people doesn’t necessarily mean removing cars altogether. Around Ontario there is a growing interest in flexible streets, streets that can function as public or event spaces when needed but that allow for cars and parking when it makes the most sense.

15. Examples of flexible streets in Ontario

**Market Street, Toronto**
The transformation of Market Street to a flexible street was completed in 2014. The flexible street was designed to meet the needs of a variety of users throughout the year - from winter to summer, to days of the week or time of the day. A mix of permanent and removable bollards allows for the flexible of the street. During the winter, parking is provided on both sides of the street. In the summer, parking is on one side of the street with the other side given to pedestrians. This allows the sidewalk to be occupied by outdoor patios. The curbless street design creates a barrier-free street surface. Considered a highly successful project by residents and business owners, the Market Street project has led to the rethinking of street projects in Toronto.

**King Street, Kitchener**
Six blocks of King Street, Kitchener’s main street were designed to be a flexible sidewalk parking system. Completed in 2010, the project involved the reconstruction of King Street downtown. The project includes removable bollards for flexible parking, permeable surface material, and storm water filtration planters. During the winter months bollards allow for on-street parking. In the warmer months, bollards are re-located to maximize space for pedestrians, cafes, performances or closed street events. In 2010, the Kitchener’s King Street received the Community Place Award from the International Making Cities Livable Council for innovation design of a flexible summer / winter sidewalk. The street was also recognized as a Green Street by Tree Canada.

**George Street, Oakville**
The 2015 Oakville Downtown Transportation and Streetscape Study is part of a process to provide guidance for the future of downtown Oakville. George Street, a natural extension of Oakville’s Towne Square, is envisioned as a flexible street that draws pedestrians and activity downtown. The design includes a double row of trees and extra wide boulevard with on-street parking on both sides of the street for typical day to day use. For events, the street will seamlessly accommodate vendors, pedestrians and activities.

**Dundas Street, London Ontario**
A comprehensive review of Dundas Street was carried in 2013 to re-invent the street. The result was the Dundas Place Transformational Project. This project includes as seamless,
flexible street with public space. A unifying surface will enable the space to easily transition to different functions. The design will provide public amenities to downtown residents and space for public events.

**John Street, Toronto**
The City of Toronto is working to transform John Street into a “cultural corridor” by redesigning the streetscape between Front Street and Stephanie Street. The City installed a series of planters along the east side of John between Adelaide and Queen as part of a pilot project to test out how a more pedestrian-friendly design might work. Planned improvements for John street include widening sidewalks and boulevards, reducing traffic to one lane in certain areas, creating a gentler slope from curb to roadway to allow the street to be used for events and increasing the tree canopy.

*Dundas Place, London (source: london.ca)*

*John Street, Toronto (source: torontoist.ca)*

*John Street, Toronto (source: Green Energy Futures, Flickr.com)*
16. What could a flexible design for Sydenham Street look like?

**IN THE WINTER**

**IN THE SUMMER**
17. Conclusion
We suggest that Sydenham Street between Queen and Princess be a flexible one way street that meets the needs of businesses, community and shoppers throughout the year. During the winter, parking could be provided on both sides of the street, in the warm months parking can be restricted to one side with an expanded pedestrian clearway, allowing room for outdoor patio and activities. For special events the street can easily closed. A curbless street design allows the street to be barrier free and easily transition to different functions.