



## THE CITY OF CALGARY OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

### Application to the City of Calgary Council Innovation Fund

**Date:** February 15, 2017

**Name of Project:** 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue Pocket Plaza

**Sponsor:** Councilor Evan Woolley      **Phone Number:** (403) 268-2451

**Address:** PO Box 2100, Stn. M, #8001B

**Affected Business Unit(s) and/or Departments:** Transportation, Centre City  
Implementation, Transit, Parks

**Amount of Funds Requested:** \$375,000

#### **Summary Description of Project (Max 1 page):**

(Please attach all relevant information)

The 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue Pocket Plaza project is a community-led initiative to reclaim an under-used space as a public place along one of Calgary's main streets. The site, at the corner of 5a Street and 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW, is a typical example of forgotten, residual space in Calgary's inner city; filled with gravel and garbage, unpleasant to walk through, yet situated in a prime location currently underserved by open space.

Like many of these residual spaces, the Pocket Plaza site is physically small, jurisdictionally complex, and holds little revenue generation potential, which makes it an unlikely candidate for a City-led project or a private investment. However, it is these same characteristics that make it a wonderful opportunity for community members who are willing and eager to volunteer their time to build partnerships and become involved in community-driven placemaking at a neighbourhood scale.

Led by a collective of community members that include professional planners, architects and educators, this project has actively and creatively engaged user groups, including students from the adjacent high school, as well as neighbouring residents. The 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue Pocket Plaza project has drawn and benefited from the resources and input of its partners, including the Cliff Bungalow-Mission Community Association, the Calgary Board of Education, Western Canada High School, the 17th Avenue BRZ, and various departments and business units at The City of Calgary (Transportation, Centre City Implementation, Transit and Water Resources).

The 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue Pocket Plaza project is timely, as it aligns with The City of Calgary's Main Streets program mandate to find opportunities to provide additional public space along the identified Main Streets, and would ideally coincide with the City-planned 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue Reconstruction project. It will also move us closer towards the City's 10% target for open space, a target which the Beltline and Cliff Bungalow-Mission communities are currently far from reaching.

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In addition to revitalizing the site along 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW, this experimental project will lead the way for other community groups to pursue similar meaningful public space improvement projects in their own communities throughout the city. It is our goal that this project will inspire changes to City procedures resulting in an improved, streamlined and robust approach to supporting, facilitating and approving community-driven public space improvement projects.

#### **Proposed Timeline (including proposed date of final report):**

Prior to February, 2017

- Project Commencement
- Public and Stakeholder Engagement
- Site Review with CBE

February, 2017

- Submit application for Council Innovation Fund

March – May, 2017

- Design Development
- Design Review with CBE
- Preparation of Construction Documentation

*April – Mid August, 2017*

- *Construction work between 5 Street and 6 Street SW for the 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW redevelopment project*

May – June, 2017

- Submit Request for Quote to selected Contractors
- Award Contractor

June- Mid August, 2017

- Pre-Construction Phase

Mid August – Mid September, 2017

- Construction Phase

September 15, 2017

- Final Construction Approval with CBE

Winter 2018

- Final report

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#### **How does this project meet the criteria of the fund as set out in the Terms of Reference for the Council Innovation Fund?**

The project addresses the following Term of Reference:

‘Pilot projects or experiments that have the potential to change city-wide policies and procedures.’

In our inner city neighbourhoods and main streets where density is set to increase and the neighbourhoods have already been built out, creative partnerships will be needed to secure public space in prominent or well-situated locations. While it may not be viable to purchase lands needed to create public space, there are many examples of left-over or under-utilized spaces throughout the city.

Members of the public don't concern themselves with property lines or jurisdiction, but read and use space as public if it appears to be so. In this way, citizens are better-positioned to see opportunities to revitalize spaces in their community that may be otherwise overlooked. However, the complexity associated with gaining approvals for such projects can be a deterrent to otherwise inspired community members. With their intimate knowledge of community landscapes along with their energy and expertise, these community members are a valuable, untapped resource that, if harnessed, can be a strong and passionate source for placemaking and community enrichment. When carried out by residents, these types of projects inspire others to take ownership and responsibility over their neighbourhood, generating a sense of place and belonging.

This proposal is an experiment in community-led cross-organizational collaboration where community assets, untapped citizen expertise, external partnerships and City resources are leveraged to meet City goals, including those found in the Municipal Development Plan, the Centre City Plan and the Cliff-Bungalow ARP. This project intends to showcase how City departments have, in the case of this project, and can, in the case of future projects, play a supportive and solutions-oriented role - one that is integral to the success of community-led projects. It is these innovative and collaborative actions that will give us a sense of pride with our communities and allow us to retrofit our main streets.

#### **What does success look like and how will it be measured?**

We see three levels of success for this project. (1) Pocket Plaza is realized; (2) citizen groups are inspired to pursue similar projects in their own communities; and (3) The City of Calgary uses lessons learned from the Pocket Plaza process to develop a model to support citizen-initiated public space improvements.

(1) **Pocket Plaza is realized.** The concrete outcome - that Pocket Plaza is completed and brings vibrancy and a unique character to 17th Avenue - is the first level of success. Success measurements include:

- Improvements are made to the Pocket Plaza site
- An increase in the number of users of the site is observed

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- A broader demographic of users on the site is observed
- A broader range of use of site, including use after dark, and on winter and non-school days is observed

(2) **Citizen groups are inspired to pursue similar projects in their own communities.** While completion of Pocket Plaza is success in itself, we see real value and innovation if this project influences others. Thus our second level of success is that the completed Pocket Plaza will inspire and empower other citizen groups to initiate projects in their own communities. Success measurements include:

- Users of Pocket Plaza are aware that it was a citizen-led project
- Cliff-Bungalow Mission CA continues to support and pursue citizen-initiated public space improvement projects
- Other communities initiate their own public-space improvement projects

(3) **The City of Calgary develops a model to support citizen-initiated public space improvements.**

The true success of this project will be realized when changes are made to City of Calgary processes to better support citizen-initiated projects like Pocket Plaza. Success measurements include:

- Lessons learned from Pocket Plaza are compiled and shared with City administration
- City administration partners with Pocket Plaza volunteers and other citizens who have led similar initiatives to collaborate on the development of a support model
- Single point of contact available for citizens, through their community association, to bring their ideas for public space improvements to The City
- City of Calgary support model in place that assists community groups with approvals, funding, project coordination etc.

### Background Information

After encountering this lost space nearly every day on their commute, a young group of engaged urban dwellers decided that rather than simply grumbling about the uninviting gravel lot in the heart of their neighbourhood, they would take an alternative approach and drive the change themselves. Located on the corner of 5A and 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW, this underutilized corner of land fronts Calgary's most prominent and beloved main streets. It provides an invaluable opportunity to retrofit 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the surrounding neighbourhoods, which are greatly underserved by open space, with a vibrant public place to sit, people watch and take in city life. Boasting an innovative and creative design, the new space will provide a strong focal point and contribute to a sense of place worthy of Calgary's favourite street. With students, neighbours and visitors using this block nearly every minute of the day, the proposed pocket park provides an opportunity to connect the community while providing a welcome reprieve from the bustling inner city streets.

Located adjacent to Western Canada High School, the proposed plaza area combines a busy city sidewalk with publically accessible property owned and maintained by the Calgary Board of Education. The renewed space will benefit and be designed for the students, the community and

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Calgary at large. Many users of the site wait for the bus while sitting on the existing retaining wall or sitting under one of the large tree canopies. Others try to lean on the protruding stones in an attempt to finish their sub or slice of pizza from the nearby restaurants. Along the 17th Avenue sidewalk, three large trees provide shade for pedestrians and transit users. The combination of these trees and the extra wide sidewalk beg for seating in this space. Turn the corner down 5A Street and there is the slightly quieter and slower space with another exquisite tree creating shade and semi-privacy.

After identifying the site and its possibilities, it was essential to gain a deep understanding of the space, its current use, its potential use and the needs and desires of potential users. In order to ensure the needs of all stakeholders were considered and understood, students and the larger community have been engaged from the onset, contributing their time, thoughts, opinions, memories and experiences of the space and surrounding neighbourhood to shape the design. Community engagement began with sessions at Western Canada High School, where workshops were held with both the Environment Club and the design class. Broader engagement followed with a workshop that welcomed community members and Calgary residents to playfully and creatively re-imagine the space through interactive design exercises. Thanks to the enthusiasm and efforts of more than 45 participants, strong themes and thoughtful insights began to emerge. In particular, people displayed a thirst for colour, enhanced lighting and public art.

After input from community, students and other stakeholders (CBE, Cliff Bungalow-Mission Community Association, 17th Avenue BRZ, Water Services, Transportation and Centre City Implementation), an innovative and impactful design was created. The design takes into account the need for more seating in front of the Western Canada High School bus stop, a desire for space to enjoy take-out food and drink and an appetite for a unique and magnetic corner that draws in students and the public alike.

This project has been driven by a group of local community members in partnership with the Cliff Bungalow-Mission Community Association, completely within a volunteer capacity. It has been driven by a love for the city and deep-rooted desire to help create and shape our communal spaces – those places where we intersect.



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