

Planning and Development Services Briefing to

Executive Committee
2023 November 01

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Council Innovation Fund Update: Activate + Experiment on Stephen Avenue

PURPOSE OF BRIEFING

The purpose of this briefing is to share the results of the Activate + Experiment on Stephen Avenue program.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

In October 2020, The City completed the [Public Realm Action Plan](#) for Stephen Avenue. In March 2020, Council approved the Council Innovation Fund application for Activate + Experiment ([PFC2020-0274](#)) in the amount of \$300,000. The purpose of the program was to prototype and test ideas with learnings provided for consideration for the upcoming Streetscape Master Plan (currently underway) which will create a new design for Stephen Avenue. The program also supports activity on the Avenue and helps build excitement for its redesign.

From June 2021 to July 2023, Activate + Experiment implemented eight projects along the Avenue ranging from seating and planting installations to a temporary art studio in an on-street parking space. The City partnered with the University of Calgary on four completed projects through an Urban Alliance agreement, which brought together teams of researchers to apply their work to the Avenue. For each project, data was collected to understand impacts, and projects were communicated through signage, partner websites, social media and/or news releases. Details on each project and outcomes can be found in Attachment 2.

The program resulted in many positive outcomes, with key highlights listed below:

- Projects produced many design learnings including material choices, maintenance considerations, successful seating locations, identification of supportive infrastructure required for on-street activations and governance considerations.
- Installations and projects engaged citizens and created excitement about upcoming changes on the Avenue. Installations were paired with signage, QR codes and social media posts that engaged users to provide feedback on designs and understand what users wanted to see along the Avenue.
- Strong partnerships, networks, and connections were built. Various organizations, researchers and participants collaborated on projects, discovered shared interests, and continue to work together.
- All University of Calgary projects leveraged additional support and funding, such as heavily discounted commercial space, funding for graduate student research assistant positions, industrial fabrication services and material costs and additional funding to support programmed events. Additional funding and in-kind support for University of Calgary projects was equivalent to \$420,000.
- Successful programming-based projects identified community needs and have been adopted by other groups. For example, Contemporary Calgary and Kerby Centre have continued their collaboration to host Seniors Open Art Studios and Chinook Blast has adopted the Winter City Design Competition.
- The program fostered a culture of experimentation. University researchers received a rare opportunity to implement their ideas directly on the street with support for permitting, data collection and partnerships. City of Calgary departments were encouraged to support unique ideas that challenged The City's standard ways of operating.

- The Downtown Strategy team gained valuable experience on implementing small scale projects in public spaces. These projects although small in size, are complex to initiate and execute, with a variety of considerations including partnership creation, permitting, procurement, design, data collection etc. This work has embedded institutional knowledge within the team and The City for public space experimentation, and lessons learned will inform future programming and activation strategies for the downtown.
- A summary report is included in Attachment 2 that shares learnings with the public and others looking to enact *lighter, quicker, cheaper* installations.

Activate + Experiment was a unique and creative placemaking program that built on the research and learnings from Phase 1: Public Realm Action Plan to launch ideas, prototypes and partnerships in the area. The lasting effects of this innovative approach will be seen through design features in the Stephen Avenue Streetscape Master Plan. The continued collaboration among Activate + Experiment partners, and the on-going programming, sets a strong foundation and culture for continued experimentation that will support future activations and enhanced vibrancy.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Background and Previous Council Direction
2. Activate Experiment on Stephen Avenue Summary of Results
3. University of Calgary Activate Experiment on Stephen Avenue Urban Alliance Summary Report
4. Activate Experiment on Stephen Avenue, Report for Design Team
5. Activate Experiment Program Budget Summary

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General Manager Debra Hamilton concurs with the information in this Briefing.