

S-PARK PILOT 2013 PROJECT EVALUATION



What is a s-PARK?

A s-PARK (pronounced “spark”) is a fusion of two words: **street and park**

A s-PARK is a publicly accessible space. The intent is to enliven the public realm by creating opportunities for community building and neighbourliness, providing temporary open space to supplement neighbourhoods where public open space is lacking and to create a new sense of place in the community.

s-PARK pilot 2013

This project was an example of a strong collaboration between business units and the community association. The pilot was a response to community concerns regarding a shortage of community gathering places, lack of community identity and vibrancy, and cleanliness and safety issues.

In partnering with a downtown community that is struggling to build a sense of community, Administration was challenged to build a s-PARK pilot that would be an attractive and highly visible space over a long enough period of time to become a gathering place for residents.

Although the extended road closure was an issue for many residents and commuters, interest in the s-PARK grew over the length of the pilot and overall feedback from participants was positive.



s-PARK Pilot Outcomes: The Project Team made up of multiple business units and in partnership with the Downtown West Community Association accomplished the pilot project outcomes:

Creating a new sense of place in the community

- Representing a new approach to the design of public space, the s-PARK re-invented the street environment as a temporary community and pedestrian space, encouraging opportunities for interaction and community building.
- Mobile modular urban furniture and elements such as planters, bistro chairs and tables, wooden decking and place making design elements contributed to the development of an attractive and highly visible space.

Harnessing local interest and engaging community members

- Community residents were engaged throughout the planning process and as volunteer stewards, monitored activities and welcomed residents and visitors to enjoy the s-PARK space and participate in weekend programming.

Deliver a recreation program plan that balanced passive and active programming

- Creating enjoyable moments and experiences that highlighted the multiple ways in which the space could be utilized encouraged participants and visitors to interact, experience, recreate and socialize.
- During the week, residents/visitors were encouraged to experience the s-PARK as they would a neighbourhood park, socializing with friends, reading, enjoying coffee or lunch or just relaxing. On weekends, interactive programming animated the streetscape.

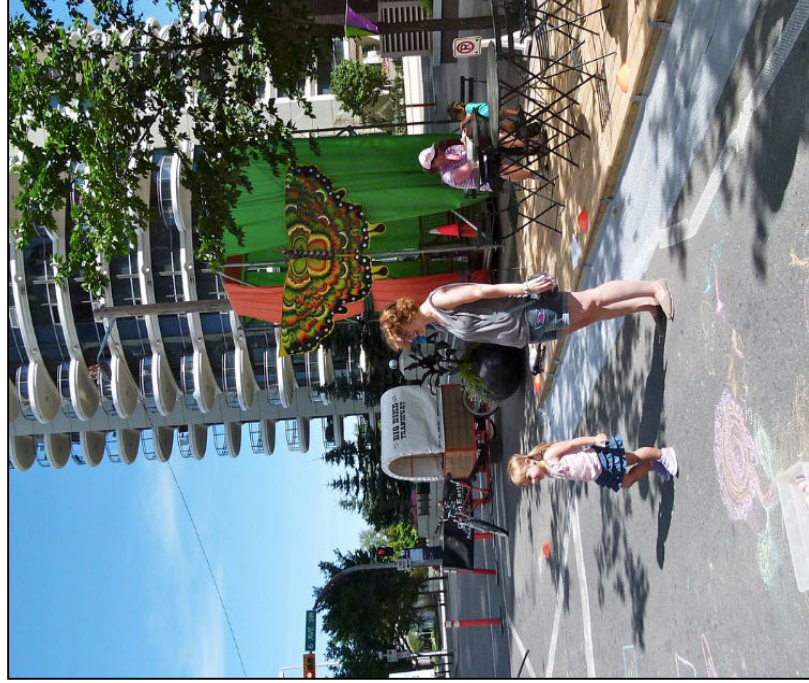
Introducing the s-PARK concept to Calgarians

- City wide communications both prior to and during the s-PARK resulted in media interest that introduced the s-PARK concept and promoted the community benefits of the program to Calgarians. Residents and return visitors often brought friends and family from outside of the community to experience the s-PARK.

Recreational Programming

s-PARK programming was not about creating an “event” but rather an opportunity to celebrate and bring the community residents together in a unique community space.

Funded through the Council Innovation Fund, structured recreation programming enlivened the s-PARK on weekends with free public programming that included street performers, musicians, visual artists, food trucks, Open Streets Calgary activation, street painting, swing dance lessons and children’s literacy and art activities.



Spanning the three weeks and as part of an international project, the “**Before I Die Wall...**” an interactive project that invites the public to write their hopes and dreams on a large chalkboard wall was extremely popular. Many residents and tourists took the time to read the hundreds of contributions and add their own personal statement.



s-PARK Participant & Stakeholder Feedback

Community Volunteers conducted on site surveys of s-PARK visitors, however, the surveys were misplaced and the Community Association has been unable to find them. Anecdotal, on-site observations and conversations with participants, businesses and residents by volunteers and City staff suggest:

- Individuals who participated in the s-PARK were positive about the concept and the activities, acknowledging the wide range and diversity of the programming.
- Residents expressed gratitude for easy access to activities in the heart of their community with many expressing a desire to see the Community Association continue to host activities to bring the community residents together in the future. Many felt that the idea of trying to give neighbours an opportunity to mingle would help to build a community identity. *“It would take time, but it’s a great start.”*
- People voiced their appreciation for the space and for the fact that the City of Calgary and the Community Association were trying something new and innovative.



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- Some visitors who unexpectedly came upon the s-PARK expressed surprise that this kind of event would happen in Calgary and hoped that this pilot would ignite future such activities throughout the city. Numerous tourists commented that they were pleasantly surprised to see streetscape animation in Calgary as they were familiar with such activities in other cities.
- Businesses were divided in their responses with some concerned about the road closure and loss of parking spots while others felt the s-PARK was a positive addition to the community and to their business.
- While the s-PARK created a relaxing new environment for people, for others, the street closure was an unwanted and unappreciated inconvenience that generated multiple complaints from residents and commuters. Many felt that the road closure was too long and that a shorter duration may have resulted in less of a negative impact on commuters.

- The bistro tables and chairs and flower planters were very popular. The “scaffolding” place making/design elements received mixed reviews however it was acknowledged by many that they helped to define the space and created a strong visual presence.

- The cedar decking created a practical, cost effective and innovative way to extend the public realm out onto the street and garnered many positive comments.

- At least one condominium building maintenance worker took pride in the infrastructure outside his door and helped out cleaning tables and watering the planters.



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In addition to the structured programming, opportunities for self-directed and passive activities were a critical element of the s-PARK.

- Residents and downtown workers were observed using the s-PARK to enjoy breakfast, lunch and coffee breaks.
- A couple of residents took pleasure in an outdoor painting session, happily sharing their work with passers-by.
- One local resident brought a table cloth and china tea set down to the s-PARK to enjoy an afternoon tea with friends.
- Blessed with sunny weather, other residents met daily over the three weeks to share a coffee and read a book.

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- Youngsters expressed their artistic talent drawing chalk pictures, playing the piano and dancing in the street.



- Food trucks were well received and many of the vendors expressed an interest in being a part of any future s-PARK programs.

Moving Forward

- Community Associations and not for profit organizations continue to express an interest in hosting a similar event in communities across Calgary.
- Administration will continue to champion the s-PARK concept and share our learning's from the 2013 pilot to assist community organizations and other business units in successfully implementing the program to create spaces for the community to interact, experience, recreate and socialize.

