

S-PARK PILOT PROJECT REPORT BACK ON USE OF THE INNOVATION FUND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

s-PARKS are a series of street parks or portion of a street right-of-way that doubles as parks space. First introduced in the Centre City Plan (2007) and further supported in the Centre City Parks & Public Realm Enhancement Plan (2010), s-PARKS reinvent the street environment as a temporary community and pedestrian space encouraging both passive and animated activities. The 2013 s-PARK Pilot Project was approved for funding through the Council Innovation Fund for up to \$20,000 to support recreation programming for the pilot. An overview of how this funding was used is summarized in the report findings.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Priorities and Finance Committee receives this report for information.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

At the 2013 July 29 meeting, Council approved TT2013-0504 S-PARK Street Bylaw (20M88) Amendment to address the approval and issuance of permits for Temporary Parks on Streets.

At the 2012 July 30 meeting, Council approved report C2012-0507 to approve the application to the City of Calgary Council Innovation Fund for the s-PARK Pilot in the amount of \$20,000 as set out in PFC2012-0405.

At the 2012 July 16 Council meeting, Council directed that PFC2012-0405 be referred, as amended, to Administration to return with a report to the 2012 July 30 Regular Meeting of Council in order to allow time to address issues with respect to the road closure.

On 2012 July 03, the Priorities and Finance Committee considered PFC2012-0405 and recommended that Council approve the application to the City of Calgary Council Innovation Fund for a grant to support the s-PARK pilot project.

BACKGROUND

In 2012 The City of Calgary and the Downtown West Community Association were working together to identify and develop initiatives to address community concerns, including a shortage of community gathering places, lack of community identity and community vibrancy, and cleanliness and safety issues. Centre City Planning & Implementation, in collaboration with multiple business units, proposed a pilot project to create a "s-PARK" to be temporarily installed on 10 St. S.W. between 6 and 7 Avenues during 2012 August/September.

A s-PARK (pronounced "spark") is a fusion of two words: *street* and *park*. s-PARKS are a series of street parks or portion of a street right-of-way that doubles as parks space. The concept embraces converting a street environment into a temporary public space that accommodates diverse programming and event types. The Ward Alderman sponsored an application to the City of Calgary Council Innovation Fund for a grant to support the pilot project and, pending a positive evaluation, establishing an on-going s-PARK program. However conflicts with West LRT construction in the area and issues with respect to road closure forced the postponement of the pilot project until 2013.

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INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

In late 2012 Administration engaged Sturges Architecture to investigate options for design elements and to develop a streetscape concept and a kit of parts for the s-PARK pilot. The streetscape concept used existing infrastructure including bistro tables, chairs, benches and flower planters and combined them with new wooden decking, modular furniture and place making/design elements to help define the space and create a community gathering place.

Administration partnered with the Downtown West Community Association to implement the pilot in Downtown West from 2013 August 09 to 25. During this time the south end of the block between 6 and 7 Avenues on 10 Street S.W. was closed to create a community passive 'park'. On weekends the north end of the block was also closed and recreation programming enlivened the space.

The s-PARK was supported and monitored by a small group of volunteer s-PARK Ambassadors - residents who engaged and self-identified as wanting to be a part of bringing the s-PARK to life in their neighbourhood. They volunteered to monitor activities, provide pilot project information, and generally welcome the residents and greater public alike into the space.

With programming funded through the Council Innovation Fund (Attachment 1), Administration engaged the Downtown West Community Association to develop and implement a recreation program plan for the pilot that balanced passive and active programming. Residents/visitors were encouraged to use the s-PARK as they would a neighbourhood park. During the week visitors participated in passive activities such as reading, socializing with friends, enjoying coffee or lunch in the park. On the weekends the full block was closed with free public recreational programming animating the streetscape (Attachment 2).

Community and internal stakeholders participated in a follow up evaluation of the s-PARK pilot. Feedback from participants was generally positive with an overall appreciation of the concept and the programming. In particular participants acknowledged the wide range and diversity of the activities/programs. Many indicated an interest in seeing the community association continue to host activities to bring residents together in the future. There were complaints regarding the road closure from some residents, businesses and commuters. Many suggested that a partial road closure or shorter program duration would have been preferred.

Overall this project was a strong collaboration between multiple business units and the community association. By choosing a downtown community that is struggling to build a sense of community Administration was challenged to build an 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. The project team accomplished the project objectives to work with the community to create a community gathering place and introduce the s-PARK concept to Calgarians. Centre City Planning & Implementation will continue to champion the s-PARK concept and encourage community organizations and other Business Units to identify opportunities to implement the program to create spaces for the community to interact, experience, recreate and socialize.

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The pilot project provided Administration with a good understanding of the benefits and the potential challenges that a community organization may face in hosting an s-PARK in their community. Lessons learned include:

- Community volunteers were engaged throughout the planning process and developed a real sense of stewardship of the s-PARK. The more community volunteers and ambassadors are involved, the greater the ownership and participation.
- The bistro tables and chairs, decking and flower planters were very popular. Simple infrastructure and design elements such as lawn chairs, picnic tables, flower pots and banners can create an attractive gathering place at little cost to an organization.
- The cost for road closure and use of paid parking spaces was \$13,571 for the duration of the pilot. Where possible s-PARK road closures should take place on roadways with limited or no paid parking spaces to lessen expense.
- Partial road closure or a project of a shorter duration will have less expense and may also lessen the negative impact on commuters.
- The road closure was a surprise to some residents and commuters despite advanced communications and engagement efforts. It is never too early to engage as many stakeholders as is feasible at the beginning of the project planning.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

As outlined in this report, the s-PARK Pilot Project 2013 was a strong collaboration between multiple Business Units and the Downtown West Community Association. It has laid the groundwork for continued partnerships on future projects to enhance the community.

The Downtown West Community Association worked with Administration to communicate the pilot project to residents, businesses and local organizations. A presentation at the Community Association Annual General Meeting, posters/flyers, community meetings and open houses, and 'door knocking' at local and neighbouring businesses were some of the communication tactics used within the community. City wide communications included a news release regarding the road closure and detours, a news release regarding the s-PARK Project, a blog story on Calgarycitynews.com, s-PARK web page on Calgary.ca, Downtown West Community Association web site and promotion via City of Calgary social media channels on Facebook and Twitter.

Strategic Alignment

The s-PARK project aligns with Council's Fiscal Plan for Calgary with a particular focus on "Investing in great communities and a vibrant urban fabric".

This focus on 'community well-being' also supports the 2020 Sustainability Direction and aligns with the *imagine*Calgary vision of strong and complete communities.

The s-PARK pilot project contributes to the vision of the Centre City Plan (2007) "to make Centre City a liveable, thriving and caring Centre City". The project supports many of the fundamental principles of the plan that are easily transferable city-wide to benefit all Calgary communities:

- Build Liveable, Inclusive and Connected Neighbourhoods

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- Put pedestrians first
- Create great streets, places and buildings - for people
- Create and maintain a caring and safe centre city environment
- Create a lively, active and animated environment (Centre City Plan, Chapter 2.2.1)

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

s-PARKS are flexible, eco-friendly places/connections that complement neighbourhood activities and create spaces for the community to interact, experience, recreate and socialize. s-PARKS provide a place for temporary activities that bring life to a community supporting residents and businesses alike. s-PARKS can help to engage a diverse group of people, foster a healthy social exchange, and build a sense of community.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

The Council Innovation Fund covered recreation programming costs. The project team used existing infrastructure where possible and funded additional project components from existing 2013 operating budgets (Attachment 3). It is anticipated that future s-PARK projects will be funded by the sponsoring organization/Business Unit.

Current and Future Capital Budget:

No capital dollars were expended on the pilot project. Major structural components of the modular furniture and place making/design elements were rented. There is no expectation of capital budget requirements for future s-PARKS.

Risk Assessment:

There are no significant risks associated with this project.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

This report fulfills the requirement to report back to Council through the Priorities and Finance Committee indicating how the money was spent and the project outcomes within 12 months of the approval of funding as per the Council Innovation Grant Terms of Reference (PAC2011-06).

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. s-PARK Pilot Project Innovation Fund Programming Budget
2. s-PARK Pilot Project Recreation Programming Summary
3. s-PARK Pilot Project Budget