



City of  
**Peterborough**

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**TO:** Members of the Planning Committee

**FROM:** Ken Hetherington, Manager, Planning Division

**MEETING DATE:** February 6, 2012

**SUBJECT:** Report PLPD12-002  
Site Selection for a Downtown Public Square

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## **PURPOSE**

A report to recommend the site for a Downtown Public Square.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council approve the recommendation outlined in Report PLPD12-002 dated February 6, 2012, of the Manager, Planning Division, as follows:

That the site for a Downtown Public Square be established at the Louis Street Municipal Parking Lot and on Louis Street north of the Driveway entrance to Rivulet Apartments.

## **BUDGET AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no immediate budget or financial implications arising out of the selection of a site for a Downtown Public Square. While Council has approved capital funding of \$100,000 to undertake the Urban Design Study no construction funding appears in the capital budget forecast at this time. The next steps in the design process will lead to the development of a preliminary design and construction cost estimate for consideration by Council in a future budget year.

## BACKGROUND

The creation of a Downtown Public Square is one of the many key strategies of the Central Area Master Plan (CAMP). The strategy seeks to create a permanent Public Square in the Downtown for the benefit of the entire community. The CAMP recognizes that the City of Peterborough does not have a large multi-purpose outdoor venue for gatherings and community celebrations similar to many of the other great cities around the world. The text of the Strategy as it appears in the Master Plan is appended as Exhibit A. On May 25, 2009 Council adopted OPA No. 140 and as a result the 21 strategies of the Central Area Master Plan now form part of the Official Plan.

The Central Area Master Plan is a planning strategy that adds policy depth and clarity to the Commercial Land Use Policies for the Central Area already contained within the City's Official Plan.

Through the 2010 Capital Budget process Council approved project 7-1.09 "Central Area Master Plan Implementation". This project included a \$100,000 allocation for the completion of an Urban Design Study for the Public Square.

On June 15, 2011 the Administrative Staff Committee awarded Request for Proposal P-11-11 being an Urban Design Study for the Public Square, to EDA Collaborative Inc for a total of \$90,315.25. (PLPD11-047)

The urban design study has commenced. With public and stakeholder consultation, the study will confirm the best site for the Public Square, establish a program and complete a preliminary design. **At this stage in the process, the recommended location of the site is being brought forward for Council's approval.** The programming and preliminary design is projected to be prepared and ready for the Planning Committee's approval at the meeting in June, 2012.

Although the CAMP highlighted the Louis Street Municipal Parking Lot as the preferred location for the Public Square, it became evident through the consultation process that a more detailed assessment was needed to confirm the site. Stakeholder interviews were conducted through the fall of 2011. All of the comments were documented and EDA completed an assessment of the various locations expressed as candidate sites by the groups and individuals interviewed through the stakeholder consultation process.

The areas of the Downtown most often proposed as potential sites for the Public Square were as follows:

- i. A portion of the Peterborough Square property,
- ii. A portion of Louis Street and the Louis Street Parking Lot,

- iii. The Harvey's Restaurant property in combination with the block bounded by George, King, Water and Sherbrooke Streets,
- iv. The Ontario Court of Justice property at Simcoe and Charlotte Streets,
- v. Re-development sites west of the library on Bethune Street
- vi. The Downtown No-Frills property at George and Sherbrooke Streets
- vii. Victoria Park

EDA Collaborative devised a Site Evaluation Matrix with an accompanying discussion paper expressing the strengths and weaknesses of each site. The criteria for the evaluation is based on EDA's accumulated experience and knowledge with respect to the elements and qualities of a site that contribute to a public square's success. The Site Evaluation Matrix is attached as Exhibit "A" to this report.

With respect to a single criteria, if a check mark appears in the column on the left hand side under the "0" heading, the site is not awarded any points. If given a check mark under a column with "1" heading, the site is awarded one point. If a check mark appears under a column with a "2" heading, the site receives two points. Finally if the site obtains a ckeck mark under the "3" heading, it receives three points.

## **SITE EVALUATION DISCUSSION**

### **The Peterborough Square and the Louis Street Site**

The Louis Street location and the Peterborough Square property are identified as the best sites for the development of a successful Public Square. The Louis Street location scores higher than the Peterborough Square property because it is also in the Downtown Core Area, has main street frontage, is owned by the City, and is immediately adjacent to a large municipal parking facility.

The Peterborough Square site scores high when compared to other sites mostly because it is at the historic centre of the Downtown and possesses many of the contextual features that are thought of in conjunction with a public square. The site is encompassed by buildings, many of which possess heritage attributes. These buildings could form the edges of the space contributing to the ambience of the Public Square.

Historically, the Peterborough Square site was Peterborough's market square up until City Transit was located there and the market was moved to the Memorial Centre parking lot / Morrow Building. In the early 1970's, the Simcoe Street parking garage was developed and City Transit was moved off the Market Hall property and into the parking garage. In 1973 a Downtown mall was developed over the City's original market

square site. Today the Downtown mall continues to carry the original market square name: “Peterborough Square”.

Although the site scores well with respect to access, linkages and “urban context”, there is a privately owned building above and below ground level making it a very unlikely public square development site. A very large amount of capital would be required to carry out structural assessments, purchase the property and remove infrastructure and buildings to make way for the square’s development.

The Louis Street site is not at the very heart of the Downtown core, but is in the core area as defined by the City’s Official Plan. It also has frontage on Charlotte Street, a Downtown core main street. From the site’s north end there is a perfect view east down Charlotte Street to the Clock Tower.

Although the site is very different from the Peterborough Square site, EDA Collaborative points out that it is the front-runner for the creation of a Public Square. Where Peterborough Square is strong in the “existing urban context” category, the Louis Street site presents many strategic development opportunities for the Downtown. With vision and careful planning, the area can be transformed and become a catalyst for future development projects appropriate for the Downtown Core. With the in-filling of some existing private surface parking lots, and the re-development of some prime properties, the establishment of a Public Square at Louis Street could dramatically contribute to the area’s vibrancy and economic vitality.

The other unique advantage this site has over all the others, is that it is owned by the City. As a result, there are very few obstacles to implementation, and the benefits associated with its development can be realized in the short term.

The proximity of the King Street municipal parking garage is another key strength of this site. The King Street Parkade is “next door” to the Louis Street site making it much more convenient for people who choose to drive to the Public Square to take part in events held there or patronize the Downtown Farmer’s Market. The Downtown Farmer’s Market has expressed an interest in continuing to operate at the Louis Street location.

The EDA site evaluation paper highlights the Louis Street site as being ideally located adjacent to some transit routes. The City Transit Terminal is also only a block north of the site. Adding to its list of attributes, the section of Charlotte Street is not often used as a through route. As a result, it is relatively quiet relative to Water Street and George Street, with little industrial traffic and lower volumes of road traffic.

The site can also be made more open to views into and out of it, improving its profile. In examining the elements that lend to the success of public squares in existence around the world, one of the more interesting revelations is that most often, vehicular traffic such as public transit is allowed to permeate its boundaries. This can lend a

heightened sense of vitality to the space when it is not being used for specific functions, as there are always people moving through it.

Public squares blended with streets are everywhere in the world. This concept presents an interesting opportunity even in the short term for the Louis Street site, as Charlotte Street is the site's "main street" frontage. The revitalization of Charlotte Street is also a Central Area Master Plan objective, and there has been a Capital account established for its design and construction from Aylmer Street to George Street.

With the planned and budgeted improvements to Charlotte Street, there is an opportunity to program the design of the street between Aylmer and George Streets to close the street to vehicular traffic when there are major events taking place at the Public Square. This would allow a spill-over of people into the road allowance space. Charlotte Street would become entirely pedestrianized on special occasions allowing large numbers of people to walk freely to take part in other events or visit the many restaurants and retail establishments on the street and in the area.

The establishment of a Public Square at the Louis Street site in conjunction with the first phase of the Charlotte Street improvements presents an exciting opportunity to transform and rejuvenate the area. With the Charlotte Street buildings and the Clock Tower at its east end, including Charlotte Street in the Square's design conceptualization improves the relationship of the Louis Street site with its urban surroundings.

### **Other Potential Sites**

The remaining potential locations for a Downtown Public Square identified through the stakeholder consultation process possess additional weaknesses when compared to the Louis Street and Peterborough Square sites. They are outlined in the EDA Collaborative discussion paper attached as Exhibit "B" to this report. The greatest weakness associated with these locations is either the private ownership of property or the urban context in which they exist or both. Many of the others could provide strategic development opportunities for the areas in which they exist but significantly lack the ingredients necessary to secure the success of the Public Square's development.

Participants at the consultation meetings identified the redevelopment opportunity in the Bethune Street area behind the Library. However the area is not as suitable for a Public Square when compared to other potential locations, as there is no main street frontage. The site is deemed to be not prominent enough to be appropriate for a Public Square.

Participants also pointed to the No Frills grocery store site, the Harvey's restaurant site and the Ontario Court of Justice sites as having potential. However, access, comfort and urban context, were perceived as issues with these locations. It appeared to the consultants and staff that a separate desire surfaced to redevelop properties along the Otonabee River to establish more compatible land-use along the Downtown waterfront.

Although the idea to create more green/open space along the river may have some merit, the sites mentioned above are not the best for an urban square.

Victoria Park was proposed as having potential as a Downtown Public Square site, it being noted that it was used at one time as an outdoor market place. However, the location does not score well due to its peripheral location and that fact that it has challenging topography, and with its mature trees, provides important green space.

## SUMMARY

The Louis Street site has the greatest potential to be developed as a successful Downtown Public Square. Not only because it is owned by the City and can be developed and used in the shorter term, but as time goes on, there is the potential for it to expand over a greater area and develop the active edges needed to better create the sense of place needed to ensure a greater degree of success. An active edge could include restaurants with outdoor tables, attractions such as private art galleries with areas for outdoor artisans, and places of entertainment.

The establishment of a Public Square at the Louis Street site in conjunction with the first phase of the Charlotte Street improvements presents an exciting opportunity to transform and rejuvenate the area. This sort of public investment can be a catalyst for private investment, as was experienced subsequent to the creation of the Hunter Street Café District.

The timing of the Charlotte Street improvement provides an opportunity to coordinate with the design of a new Public Square at Louis Street. For large public gatherings, Charlotte Street can be temporarily closed to vehicular traffic (between Aylmer and George Street) allowing for better connectivity with the heart of the Downtown Core.

Submitted by,

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Attachments:

- Exhibit A - Public Square Strategy – Central Area Master Plan
- Exhibit B - EDA Collaborative Site Evaluation Matrix
- Exhibit C - EDA Collaborative Site Evaluation Discussion Paper