



City of
Peterborough

TO: Members of the Arts, Culture & Heritage Advisory Committee (ACHAC)

FROM: Becky Rogers, Manager Arts Culture & Heritage

MEETING DATE: January 14, 2010

SUBJECT: Report ACHAC10-001
Broken City Lab

PURPOSE

A report to provide the Committee with information on the Artspace exhibit entitled Broken City Lab: Extended Fieldtrip #001.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee approve the recommendation outlined in Report ACHAC10-001 dated January 14, 2010 of the Arts Coordinator as follows:

That the Arts, Culture and Heritage Division report on the Broken City Lab exhibit be received for information and discussion.

BUDGET AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications at this time.

BACKGROUND

Broken City Lab

“Broken City Lab is an artist-led interdisciplinary creative research group that tactically disrupts and engages the city, its communities, and its infrastructures to reimagine the potential for action in the collapsing post-industrial city of Windsor, Ontario.

The processes of Broken City Lab remain grounded in the lab’s observations and concerns about Windsor, as a city, as a community, and as a network of infrastructure, and aim to do two things: first, Broken City Lab works through interventionist tactics to adjust, critique, annotate, and re-imagine the city that we encounter; secondly, through these interventions, the lab seeks to educate, inspire, and facilitate a new way of viewing the potential for interacting with and in the city.

Broken City Lab’s creative activity is located at the intersection of social practice, performance, and activism. The lab attempts to generate a new dialogue surrounding public participation and community engagement in the creative process, with a focus on the city as both a research site and workspace. It is not about doing the work of the city’s officials, or social workers, or politicians; it is about finding new creative ways to address our concerns with the city, while recognizing that our concerns may be similar to those of other community members.”

Justin A. Langlois (Research Director)

Source: www.brokencitylab.org

Extended Field Trip #001: Peterborough

For one week in October, Broken City Lab conducted research on the similarities and differences between Peterborough and Windsor. They collaborated with Artspace on a series of community and inter-city research initiatives, workshops, and interventions. They wanted to understand Peterborough as a city - its infrastructure, and its communities. From October 12 to 16, 2009 Broken City Lab held public meetings, conducted an extended field trip, explored the city on foot, held a town hall meeting, and finally had a closing performance entitled “Home Work from an Extended Field Trip: Comparing notes on what to do with the city in 96 hours”.

Upon arrival, the two artists from Broken City Labs, Justin A. Langlois and Joshua Babcock were immediately impressed with the beauty of Peterborough, particularly the Otonabee River. They wrote in their blog that their first impression of this city is that it is “nice, strangely well-maintained and a place that just seems to work.” By the third day, they had reached the conclusion that Peterborough is in pretty good shape.

The Broken City Lab's blog identifies a number of features that impressed or concerned them:

Positive

- Adaptive re-use of older buildings, such as the Artspace building;
- Clean streets and alleyways;
- Trails along the river;
- Great bike paths;
- The downtown streetscape;
- Mixed-use space downtown;
- Apartments in the upper-floors of buildings that have retail downstairs (though they noted that there was not enough of this);
- Public art, including both commissioned and non-commissioned graffiti/murals as well as non-commissioned stencils;

Very little tagging, and what they found, they considered to be 'fairly sterile';

- The City has a Public Art Policy;
- Up-to-date, well organized public event boards;
- A lot of cyclists;
- Very few broken windows, broken lights and obvious signs of vandalism downtown;
- A considerable number of people walking around downtown
- A healthy theatre and live performance scene;
- There is an entrepreneurial spirit to Peterborough
- People have a good "grasp on local history and how it has come to shape the city"
- "Everyone thinks Peterborough is Ok, that individuals can affect change here, and that the city is (in the best way possible) a small town community".

Negative

- Insufficient bike racks downtown (despite the high volume of bike traffic);
- "An echo of an attempt at greening the downtown";
- Unattractive fences;
- Restrictions on skateboarding;
- Public bus runs every 40 minutes so people have to make up for that with bicycles;
- Missed opportunities for public art;
- The south side of the movie theatre is barren – "suggestive of the end of anything worth viewing".

The blogs can be found here:

Day 1: <http://www.brokencitylab.org/blog/extended-field-trip-day-1-stable-city/#comment-1533>

Day 2: <http://www.brokencitylab.org/blog/extended-field-trip-day-2-mapping/>

Day 3: <http://www.brokencitylab.org/blog/extended-field-trip-day-construction/>

Day 4: <http://www.brokencitylab.org/blog/extended-field-trip-day-4-everything-is-ok/>

Quote from Justin A. Langlois, Broken City Lab Researcher

“The best things happening in Peterborough have very little to do with what the city is trying to do and much more with what people on the ground level decide to do on their own. And again, this is at the heart of the difference I see between Windsor and Peterborough. Also, from what I remember, some of the initiatives actually taken on by the city (focus on tourism industry, increased parking in downtown for casual visitors) seem to miss the mark, focusing on working to impress a small, small percentage of people from the outside rather than working with the many, many, many great things already on the inside (support to the arts, infrastructure for downtown residents). Not that those things have to be mutually exclusive, but from my perspective as an outsider, the downtown core that has kind of shaped itself is infinitely more authentic and interesting than gateway initiatives at the edges of the core.”

SUMMARY

After the four days spent in Peterborough, the artists installed their work and presented their findings. Those findings include:

- Peterborough’s citizens, their entrepreneurial nature and cultivation of the community, shape the quality of life in Peterborough;
- The artistic community is united and has a sense of leadership and purpose;
- Business owners contribute to the community having cultivated a diverse and well functioning downtown by focusing on the overall community, not just their own specific business interests.

Broken City Lab concluded that the city works well in a variety of capacities even though it lacks both the cachet and the infrastructure of a city like Toronto. Much of the credit should go to Peterborough residents, as Peterborough’s identity is not based solely on geography, or the vibrant bar and restaurant scene, it works “because people decide to do something and then wake up the next morning and do it.”

In Peterborough, “EVERYTHING IS OK”

Submitted by,

Becky Rogers
Manager, Arts, Culture & Heritage

Ben Dick
Municipal Cultural Researcher

Contact Name:
Becky Rogers
Phone – 742-7777 Ext. 2380
Fax – 745-8958
E-mail – brogers@peterborough.ca