



City of
Peterborough

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

FROM: Erik Hanson, Heritage Resources Coordinator

MEETING DATE: February 11, 2010

SUBJECT: Report ACHAC10-001A
Broken City Lab

PURPOSE

A report to provide the Committee with information on the Artspace exhibit entitled Broken City Lab: Extended Fieldtrip #001 that could also be distributed to Council and relevant City managers.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee approve the recommendation outlined in Report ACHAC10-001A dated February 11, 2010 of the Manager of Arts, Culture & Heritage as follows:

That the report found in Appendix A from the Director of Artspace on the Broken City Lab exhibit be distributed to the Director of Planning, the Urban Design Planner, the Manager of Transportation and Council.

BUDGET AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications at this time.

BACKGROUND

Report ACHAC10-001 of the Manager of Arts, Culture and Heritage was presented to the committee on January 14, 2010. The Committee was very interested in the research conducted by the Broken City Lab artists and requested that a summary of their findings to presented to Council and relevant City managers.

The Director of Artspace has worked with the Broken City Lab artists to prepare a report with recommendations that can be found in Appendix A.

Submitted by,

Erik R. Hanson
Heritage Resources Coordinator

Ben Dick
Municipal Cultural Researcher

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Attachments:
Appendix A – Broken City Lab Report by Iga Janik

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REPORT: Broken City Lab Performance Residency at ARTSPACE: October 2009

**TO: Arts Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee
C/O Ben Dick Municipal Cultural Planning Researcher**

FROM: Iga Janik, Executive Director, ARTSPACE. Peterborough ON

SUBMITTED: February 1, 2010

BROKEN CITY LAB MANDATE

“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

During a four-day residency at ARTSPACE, members of the BCL under the direction on Justin A. Langlois, Research Director, undertook a series of exercises to explore Peterborough and learn about how broken our city may be. ARTSPACE served as the headquarters for the group, facilitating daily office hours for individual consultations with

members, as well as a Town Hall meeting for the general public. Questions asked explored the history of the city, its current state, positive and negative aspects of the community, and how it has been shaped into the city that it is today.

Upon arrival, the two artists from Broken City Lab, Justin A. Langois and Joshua Babcock were immediately impressed by the quality and function of the downtown, noting a high number of people on the streets at any given time, and the quality of shops and services available. They were also impressed by the natural landscape on the edges of downtown, 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.”

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 at:

Day 1: <http://www.brokencitylab.org/blog/extended-field-trip-day-1-stablecity/#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/>

Following these observations, the remainder of the 96 hour research project focused on exploring *why* Peterborough is ok, what makes it work, and what lessons could be borrowed to help other, more broken cities, become healthier.

A public questionnaire was developed and 21 individuals were sampled for answers on October 15th in the downtown core. Here are the results:

- 1) **Do you think Peterborough is okay?**
 - 100% said YES to just OK
 - 0% said NO

- 2) **What’s good about Peterborough**
 - Nearly 50% said Community, people, and small town feel, “Has its own culture” was a common response
 - Another 35% cited FOOD, MUSIC and the ARTS
 - One response said University/College

- 3) **What would you change about Peterborough (if anything?)**
 - Over 50% of responses cited Traffic, and/or Transit system to be the top problem
 - Second most common response was Drugs and Alcoholism
 - Third, lack of diversity in the population, ethnic representation, and unbalanced population with more seniors than youth

- 4) **Do you want to leave Peterborough?**
 - Response to this question was evenly split with half of respondents answering YES added they would like to return if quality work was available to them

- 5) **Is government planning important or could you do it all yourself?**
 - 60% said People are responsible for the quality of community
 - 30% said government should take credit
 - 10% agreed it is the combination of the two

- 6) **Do you feel it is possible for you to impact your community?**

- 90% said YES
- 10% said No or that they weren't sure they could

Conclusive observations:

- The quality of life in downtown Peterborough is mostly shaped by its citizens, their entrepreneurial nature, and cultivation of the community;
- 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.

NOTES and RECOMMENDATIONS from BROKEN CITY LAB

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 causal 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.¹

As a follow-up, it is necessary to reiterate some of ideas and concerns initially raised in the research phase of the Extended Field Trip #001. Peterborough, at the level of city government, appears to have done a good job at staying out of the way of the creatives, entrepreneurs, and downtown community as a whole. This downtown area (and all that is located within its bounds) is really the thing that could entice and encourage young talent and professionals to either stay or return to the city, and this is critical. By avoiding a disproportionate permanent flight of talent that so many other small to medium sized cities face, Peterborough remains an OK place to live and work and create. Again though, it's the many things that people are doing on their own, and feeling empowered by doing so, which has created this place and the conditions that make it a place at all. At some point though, the city inevitably needs to step in to make larger scale changes. The balance at this moment will be crucial in continuing to work closely and on the recommendations of people living in the downtown core, rather than making changes that suit outside visitors to the core (or to the city for that matter). What follows is a brief list of changes the city should consider in addressing the realities of retaining and attracting talent, increasing the social and cultural value of the downtown core, and making Peterborough a place that is more than just OK.

¹ Central Area Master Plan Update: Recommended Master Plan Strategies Chapter 9 Page 3.

- *Support and encourage initiatives for more sources for food downtown (a permanent venue for a 7-days a week market of local produce and goods, city should invest in a physical space and invite the participation of local farmers)*
- *Open up considerable funding opportunities for artists and entrepreneurs (peer-evaluated micro-grants for people with innovative ideas and projects, this could be cash or offsets such as rent for use downtown spaces)*
- *Update bus routes and schedules to address real-needs for living in downtown core (good bike paths cannot be an excuse not to have transit running at 10 minute intervals)*
- *Begin commissioning of public art immediately (local/provincial/national/international artists should contribute, semi-annual calls for works, sculptures along trail should not be considered as an example for newly commissioned public art)*
- *Commit 25% of available downtown space (city owned buildings and lots, and/or privately owned spaces in partnership with landlords) to commissioned graffiti murals (partnerships with local entrepreneurs and calls for participation at a national level)*
- *Transformation of more live/work spaces (requirement on landlords to provide access and habitable space on upper-floors of buildings, and discouraging any type of development that does not provide these multi-use types of spaces)*
- *Empowering the very people who live in downtown to brand it as necessary (significant funding to provide promotional opportunities and infrastructural improvements as decided by downtown entrepreneurs, residents, and workers)*

Justin A. Langlois (Research Director)