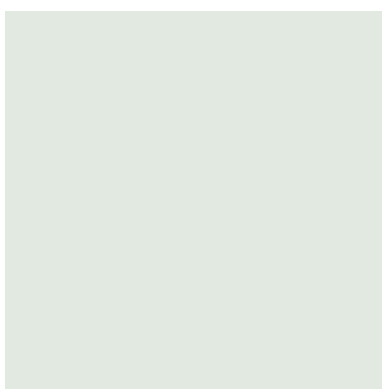
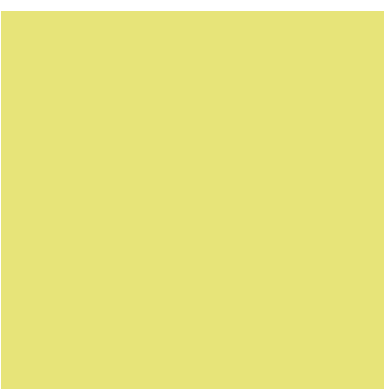


**BUILDING MISSISSAUGA
AROUND PLACES**
A Vision for City Centre Parks
and Open Spaces in the 21st Century

FINAL REPORT, DECEMBER 2006



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Report Prepared for:
The City of Mississauga, Department of Community Services

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
Goal	5
Present Day Mississauga	6
The Challenge	6
The Power Of Ten	7
What Makes A Great Civic Place?	8
SUMMARY OF PROCESS	11
Task I: Public Outreach, workshops	11
Task II: Preliminary Concept Development and January Workshops	12
Task III: Concept Refinement	13
A VISION FOR CITY CENTRE	15
DETAILED PROGRAM AND RECOMMENDED SHORT TERM IMPROVEMENTS	19
A Civic Square Showcasing The Best Of Mississauga	19
Around City Hall	21
Library Plaza	23
Living Arts Centre: A Destination For The Arts	26
City Centre's New Parklands	28
Destinations	30
ACTION ITEMS	37
GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MOVING FORWARD	38
CONCLUSION	41
APPENDIX	45



INTRODUCTION

Public spaces are the stage where our public lives unfold. They are the parks where celebrations are held, where children play, and where cultures mix. They are the sidewalks in front of homes and businesses where we run into our friends, where social and economic exchanges take place. They are the “front porches” of our public institutions—libraries, community centres, city halls, hospitals, post offices—where we play important roles as neighbors and citizens. People living in cities with thriving public spaces enjoy a strong sense of community; people that lack thriving public spaces feel less connected to one another.

In short, good public spaces are what make cities great. Mississauga, to join the ranks of great cities and great downtowns, needs vital destinations that establish a positive identity and attract new residents, businesses and investment. A good destination might be a main street, a downtown park or waterfront, a library, coffee shop, or the square in front of a church—anywhere people like to gather.

GOAL

In late 2004, the City of Mississauga asked Project for Public Spaces (PPS) to propose a vision for revitalizing the public spaces in and around downtown Mississauga, with particular focus on the new parks and open spaces in the City Centre. The program was

envisioned as an integrated campaign involving high-level training, targeted Placemaking workshops, and an interactive website documenting and facilitating improvement plans.

At the centre of the concept of Placemaking is the desire to involve the community early in the planning process. Local stakeholders were identified as potential partners in the creation of better performing public spaces in Mississauga’s downtown core areas, and were invited to participate. The City by listening to the ideas of the community, which includes existing residents, businesses, arts and sports groups, service organizations, developers, educators, and health and social service providers, has a greater opportunity to make informed decisions about what will be done to improve the existing public places, and to shape a vision for new places.

This report serves as a summary of the ideas generated through the Placemaking process. As with any public process all ideas are welcome and encouraged at the beginning of the process to open the door to all possibilities and test the boundaries of preconceived notions. Therefore many of the ideas contained in this report still need the benefit of time and further investigations as the next stage of the process moves into detailed design for each of the individual spaces.



Many of the ideas generated by the public also went beyond the original focus of the study—to generate park development, program, and design ideas—and looked at planning and transportation issues in the city core. These ideas are also valid and warrant further investigation by appropriate city departments because creating a vibrant downtown core requires all the components of city building to work seamlessly together to achieve larger goals. Although some of these ideas appear beyond the original scope, they are presented here in relation to the context of the scope of work that lays ahead as the City of Mississauga moves forward in transforming the downtown core into a vibrant people place.

PRESENT DAY MISSISSAUGA

Mississauga is a large city that is known for its excellent city services, infrastructure and financial management. Several indicators tell us that in many ways Mississauga offers much as a city:

- It is the safest city in Canada.
- It is the sixth largest and one of the fastest-growing cities in the country.
- It has the fourth largest office centre in the country, and 51 of Fortune's Global 500 companies are located here.
- One university and several technical colleges are located here.



- Residents enjoy world-class sports and recreation facilities, parks and trails, community centres.
- Incomes are higher than average and the city had the highest educational attainment in Canada in 2001.
- It is a leader in the Healthy Cities movement.
- Its mayor was a finalist for the 2005 World Mayor Award.

But while most indicators point to Mississauga as a great place to live, its downtown lacks an identity and currently offers little to its residents in terms of attractive places and destinations. With the city's population approaching 700,000 and millions more living within close driving distance, there is a growing demand for a livelier downtown with more places for people to go. Downtown's many assets – whether a community centre, arts centre, or library – stand as separate facilities, poorly connected to one another and accessible almost exclusively by car. The vast investment in these developments has not yet added up to a great downtown or an appealing urban environment.

THE CHALLENGE

The challenge and opportunity now is to grow, activate, and pull together these destinations. Downtown's public spaces should bring out the best of Mississauga's institutions and private developments, and make all of them a part of something larger. It is



this “something larger” that each part of the city can contribute to – indeed it is what makes cities great. The ability of different sectors of city government to collaborate in retrofitting downtown’s buildings, roads and open spaces – as well as developing the capacity to actively manage these places – will be the key to their success.

The purpose of this Placemaking project is to look at the “ground floor” of the City Centre – its streets, sidewalks, parks, buildings and other public spaces – and discover how it can foster a healthier, more social and more economically viable environment. This will set the stage for more sustainable urban growth and development, which is absolutely necessary as the city centre expands outward to incorporate the Credit River / Riverwood area and the Lake Ontario Waterfront park system.

THE POWER OF TEN

“The Power of Ten” refers to the way great cities provide people with a diverse choice of destinations and activities. A good rule of thumb is that every public place—whether a bus stop, a farmers market, or a church—should provide ten things for people to do to succeed as a destination. Likewise, every downtown needs ten such destinations. The destinations should then be linked together with a network of pedestrian-friendly streets to create a



district that invites walking and exploration. The idea is to enhance the destinations themselves, then create connections among them, rather than simply doing a streetscape, building a park, or redesigning a roadway in isolation from one another.

The Power of Ten also stresses the fact that Placemaking should be accomplished at different scales. At the regional scale, Mississauga is one of ten destinations identified in the Province’s Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. It is charged with serving as both a work and leisure destination, in addition to housing a large percentage of the Province’s population. At the city scale, Mississauga needs at least ten great major destinations. Some of these destinations already exist, while others need to be made stronger, building on existing assets. During our observations and workshops we identified many of the ten key places, including the City Hall plaza, the Central Library and plaza, Square One, the Living Arts Centre (LAC), the Credit River, Kariya Park, and the two new parks west of the LAC, adjacent to Zonta Meadows.

While the City Centre places listed above emerged as the highest priorities, Mississauga has many other great destinations outside the scope of this report, like “Riverwood Park” along the Credit River and “Mississauga Valleys” Community Centre along the Cooksville Creek. Fortunately, these other destinations are located within a ten minute drive of one



another. Unfortunately, many are only accessible by car, so they feel very disconnected. As the City Centre becomes a more cohesive district, it will be important to connect these other destinations to the improvements recommended in this report. This will entail creating consistent, contiguous pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly links between them and the existing City Centre. Improving the walkability of Mississauga this way will not only improve the health and physical well-being of its residents, it will expand the City Centre itself, creating a downtown area that fully embodies the Power of Ten.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT CIVIC PLACE?

Looking at any one of Mississauga's ten major places in detail, what are the principles that will ensure it will become a great destination? In addition to having at least ten things to do, a great square or park should also account for the following:

IMAGE AND IDENTITY. Historically, public spaces such as parks and squares were the centre of communities, and they traditionally helped shape the identity of entire cities. Sometimes a fountain was used to give the place a strong image: Think of the majestic Trevi Fountain in Rome or the Swann Fountain in Philadelphia's Logan Circle. The image of many central public spaces was closely tied to the great civic buildings located nearby, such as cathedrals, city halls, or libraries. Today, creating a public space that becomes the most significant place in a city—that gives



identity to whole communities—is a huge challenge, but meeting this challenge is absolutely necessary for cities to improve quality of life.

ACCESSIBILITY. To be successful, a place needs to be easy to get to. The world's best public spaces are always easily accessible by foot: Surrounding streets are narrow; crosswalks are well marked; lights are timed for pedestrians, not vehicles; traffic moves slowly; and transit stops are located nearby. A place surrounded by lanes of fast-moving traffic, however, will be cut off from pedestrians and deprived of its most essential element: people.

AMENITIES. A good public space feature amenities that make it comfortable for people to use. A bench or waste receptacle in just the right location can make a big difference in how people choose to use a place. Lighting can strengthen a square's identity while highlighting specific activities, entrances, or pathways. Public art can be a great magnet for children of all ages to come together. Whether temporary or permanent, good amenities will help establish a convivial setting for social interaction.

FLEXIBLE DESIGN. The use of a public space changes during the course of the day, week, and year. To respond to these natural fluctuations, flexibility needs to be built in. Instead of a permanent stage, for example, a retractable or temporary stage could be used. Likewise, it is important to have on-site storage for movable chairs, tables, umbrellas, and games so they can be used at a moment's notice.



SEASONAL STRATEGY. No place can flourish with just one design or management strategy. Great public spaces such as New York’s Bryant Park, the plazas of Rockefeller Center, and Detroit’s new Campus Martius change with the seasons. Skating rinks, outdoor cafés, markets, horticulture displays, art and sculpture help adapt people’s use of the space from one season to the next.

ATTRACTIONS AND DESTINATIONS. Any great park or square has a variety of smaller “places” within it to appeal to various people. These can include outdoor cafés, fountains, sculpture, or a band shell for performances. These attractions don’t need to be big to make the place a success. In fact, some of the best public spaces have numerous small attractions such as a vendor cart or playground that, when put together, draw people throughout the day. As discussed above, the idea of “The Power of Ten” sets a goal for destinations within a given place. Creating ten good places, each with ten things to do, offers a full program from which to develop infrastructure, management and design parameters for a successful public space.

ACTIVE EDGES. Visionary park planner Frederick Law Olmsted’s idea of the “inner park” and the “outer park” is just as relevant today as it was over 100 years ago. The streets and sidewalks around a public space greatly affect its accessibility and use, as do the buildings that surround it. Imagine a square fronted on each side by 15-foot blank walls – that is the worst-case scenario for the “outer park”. Then imagine that same square situated next to a public



library: the library doors open right onto the square; people sit outside and read on the steps; maybe the children’s reading room has an outdoor space right on the square, or even a bookstore and cafe. An active, welcoming outer park is essential to the well-being of the inner park.

REACH OUT LIKE AN OCTOPUS. Just as important as the edge of a public space is the way that streets, sidewalks and ground floors of adjacent buildings lead into it. Like the tentacles of an octopus extending into the surrounding neighborhood, the influence of a good gathering place starts at least a block away. Vehicles slow down, walking becomes more enjoyable, and pedestrian traffic increases. Elements within the public space become visible from a distance, and the ground floor activity of nearby buildings entices pedestrians to move toward it.

MANAGEMENT. Central to the Solution. The best public spaces are ones that people return to time and time again. The only way to achieve this is through a management entity that understands and manages the pulse of the place. For example, a good manager understands existing and potential users and gears events to both types of people. Good managers become so familiar with the patterns of how people use the place that waste receptacles get emptied at just the right time and refreshment stands are open when people most want them. Good managers create a feeling of comfort and safety in a place, fixing and maintaining it so that people feel assured that someone is in charge.



DIVERSE FUNDING SOURCES. A well-managed public space is generally beyond the scope of the average city department, which is why partnerships have been established to operate most of the best places in North America. These partnerships seek to supplement what the city can provide with funding from diverse sources, including—but not limited to—rent from cafés, markets or other small commercial uses on the site; taxes on adjacent properties; film shoots; and benefit fundraisers.