

SUBJECT: Downtown Central Business District Community Improvement Plan and Urban Design Strategy – Review of Public Input on Market Square Options

1) PURPOSE:

Under the direction of the Director of Planning and Development, the purpose of this report is to provide Council with information regarding the views and opinions expressed by residents of Port Colborne towards the potential restructuring of the Market Square/King George Park areas as outlined in the Downtown Central Business District Community Improvement Plan (Downtown CIP) and Urban Design Strategy (UDS).

2) HISTORY, BACKGROUND, COUNCIL POLICY, PRACTICES:

At its meeting on May 30, 2011 Council received Planning and Development Services Report 2011-37 which provided background and funding information regarding the design work for the Downtown CIP and requested direction from Council regarding a potential redesign for the existing Market Square and King George Memorial Park areas. At this time Council directed Staff to obtain public input on the design and provide that information back to them at a subsequent date.

At Council's direction staff took the design concepts that were illustrated in the Downtown CIP to the public to acquire their opinions via a questionnaire (Appendix A) that was provided:

- Online until September 27, 2011;
- At City Hall until September 27, 2011;
- At Market Square during Market Day on August 26, 2011 (approximately 75 people attended);
- To the Downtown BIA at their Annual General Meeting (approximately 15 people attended); and
- At a public open house on September 15, 2011 (7 people attended).

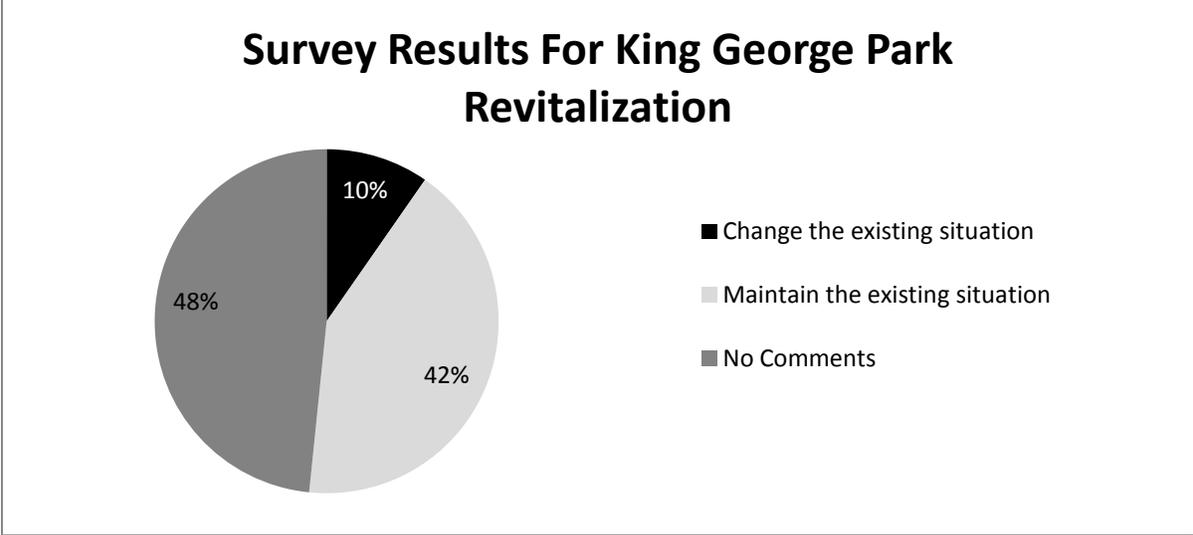
Notice requesting public input into the potential redesign of Market Square/King George Park area was provided in the quarterly City Hall Newsletter, which is part of the Tribune circulation.

3) COMMUNITY COMMENTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

The questionnaire created by Staff was broken up into two (2) sections, the first section dealt specifically with King George Park, the second with the Market Square Parking area. 24 Questionnaires were received back from the public with an additional seven (7) written responses for a total of thirty one (31) responses. Below is a breakdown of the comments received for each of the areas.

King George Park

The results for the potential redesign of the King George Park area are presented below. Only 3 individuals, 10% of the public who responded, thought that a restructuring of the entire plan was necessary. The other 13, or 42% of the public, believed that the King George Park area should be maintained in its existing situation. The majority of citizens, 48%, had no comments in regards to whether or not the King George Park should be maintained or updated in its original condition.



Of the 10% of the people that responded that there should be a change in the existing situation, believe that the Park area should be modified via one or more of the concepts that were presented in the Downtown CIP and described below. The majority of the public (32%) indicated that tree plantings were the most important change they would like to see to the park.

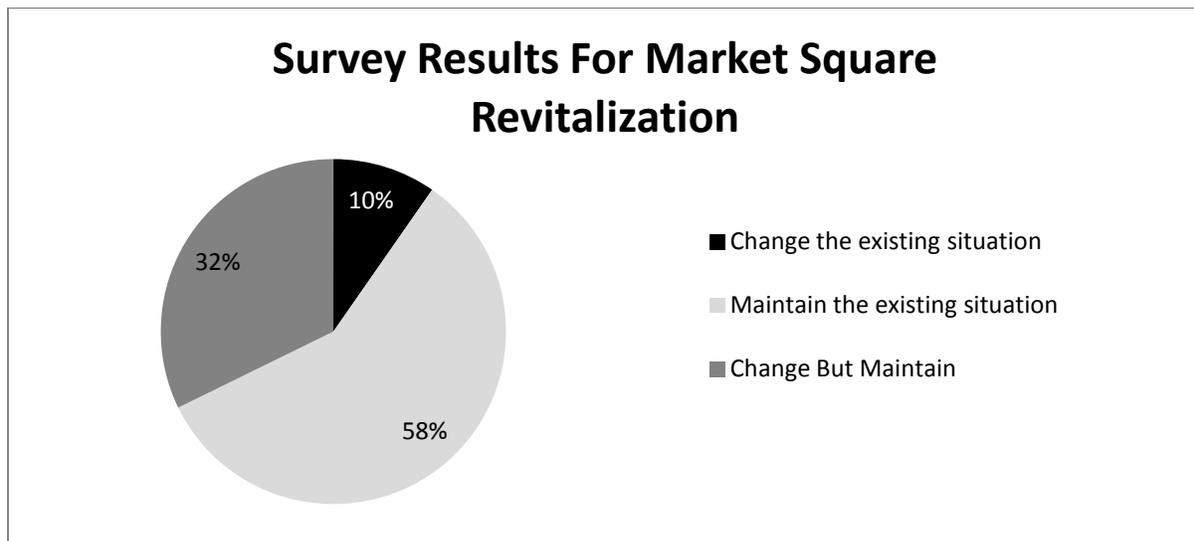
King George Park Area		
	Description	Percentage In Favour
1	Retain and redesign the existing commemoration function	6%
2	Include a permanent stage structure that can accommodate seasonal events (i.e. Canal Days)	6%
3	Incorporate ample seating opportunities, both formal and informal	20%
4	Include tree and foundation plantings to provide visual interest and colour along the edges of the space.	32%
5	Incorporate features similar to the gateway features along the edges of space, including pedestrian lighting and banner materials	16%
6	Incorporate public art and a community event board or kiosk	25%

Other ideas that were not identified through the Downtown CIP, but indicated by the survey results included: the creation of a memorial for Corporal Tyler Crooks as well as

a renaming of the Park to his name; public washrooms and drinking fountain; a cross walk at Catharine and Charlotte Street, a tree that could be lit at Christmas; installation of a fountain or water feature; installation of a skating rink in the winter; more handicapped parking spaces; and bike lanes.

Market Square

The results for the potential redesign of the Market Square Area are presented below. 18 citizens or 58% of the individuals who completed the survey, would prefer if the Market Square area was kept in its original condition. From the survey, 3 individuals or 10% insisted on a complete restructuring of the Market Square, while the other 10 people or 32% neither agreed nor disagreed with the concepts proved in the Downtown CIP, but included their own comments and ideas in regards to the Market Square area.



The majority of people who completed the survey felt that the Market Square should be maintained in its original condition. For example, parking spaces should be left alone and the vendor spaces that are currently used for the market need to be left alone. One comment specifically stated that more parking was needed and parking needs to be maintained.

Of the 10% of the people that responded that there should be a change in the existing situation, believe that the Market Square area should be modified via one or more of the concepts that were presented in the Downtown CIP and described below however, the majority of the public (68%) indicated they had no suggestions for the potential redesign of the Market Square Parking area.

Market Square Parking Area Options		
	Description	Percentage In Favour
1	Hardscaped gathering space along Catharine Street that can accommodate seating areas (benches, tables) and a water feature.	3%
2	Incorporate a space for a winter skating rink abutting the stage and the hardscaped gathering space.	9.6%
3	Tree foundation plantings to provide visual interest and colour along the edges of the parking lot.	25%
4	No Suggestions	68.4%

The majority of citizens who thought that Market Square should undergo revitalizations suggested that tree plantings were a good idea. Other ideas that were not identified through the Downtown CIP, but indicated by the survey results included: a sign for market; more picnic tables; an enclosed building similar to that in St. Catharines with sliding doors that can be open in the summer and closed in the winter; and more handicapped parking spaces and bicycle lanes. The idea of a pergola which can double up as a stage for events that should be capable of building a stage on top of it for canal days was also suggested. Additionally, there was a thought that this stage idea could allow the City to host outdoor community movie nights.

All questionnaires and comments that were analyzed above have been provided to Council in Appendix B.

Downtowns are key areas within a community for gathering, socializing and passive recreation, thus they need appropriate spaces that can accommodate such functions. Downtown Port Colborne currently has an existing memorial space (“King George Memorial Park”) and parking lot space. This space is used for Friday “Market Day” in the spring, summer and fall, and a band area during Canal Days. The space is generally used as a municipal parking lot at most other times.

The design direction that was outlined in the Downtown CIP and UDS indicated that the existing memorial space and public parking lot known as “Market Square” (Catharine Street between Clarence Street and Charlotte Street) should be redesigned and restructured as the Downtown’s civic focus. The objective for these improvements is to provide a true civic square (“Market Square”) that can be a central gathering, socializing and resting place within the Downtown. These civic squares are spaces that are intended to be multi-purpose gathering spaces that provide for a range of public and civic functions.

The detailed streetscape design for the Downtown CIP was tendered earlier this year and the contract was awarded in the spring. Work on this detailed design is currently underway and includes streetscaping and infrastructure improvements for the entire Downtown CIP project area. The redesign of Market Square was not part of this tender, nor was it included in the 2011 budget allotment for this portion of the project.

4) OPTIONS AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

a) Do nothing.

Council can choose to do nothing and in doing so; the Market Square area and King George Memorial Park will remain as they are currently.

b.1)

Since the current CIP approves an update and improvement to the Market Square, Council could proceed based on this or any other plan. Staff would recommend this course based on Council's current policy; however, there is no majority appetite to make any changes to the market square according to the public input.

b.2)

Council could simply direct that staff take no action for a period of 3, 4 or 5 years (option 4.a with time). This essentially would defer annual budget request and staff annual reminder to proceed with upgrade and development of the Market Square for the time period directed (three years would be suitable given the life of the current Council). Staff would suggest that direction be provided that the matter be deferred for at least 3 years.

b.3)

Council can direct the CIP be amended to remove the reference to the upgrade to the Market Square. With only a deferral of upgrade as outlined in option 4.b2 rather than policy change, the matter can be brought forward again in the future without amendment to the CIP should there be a desire to make changes. As well leaving the approval in the CIP (not removing by amendment) also sets the criteria for future development when it is desired.

b) Other Options

Council can choose to incorporate any or all of the above mentioned design considerations and will be required to budget for any design work that is required.

5) COMPLIANCE WITH STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES:

The Downtown CBD CIP was made a priority during Council's 2009-2010 Strategic Planning Session.

6) ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A Market Square Questionnaire

Appendix B Public Comments

Due to their size, the public comments are available both online at www.portcolborne.ca and in hard copy in the Planning Department and Clerks Department for review.

7) RECOMMENDATION:

1. That this report be received for information purposes.
2. That Council provide direction on the design for the Market Square Parking area and King George Memorial Park to be funded subject to 2012 deliberations for its design and/or construction.

8) SIGNATURES:

Prepared on November 2, 2011 by:

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