



Report to: General Committee

Report Date: May 5, 2014

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**SUBJECT:** Shared Places Our Spaces, Markham's Public Realm Draft Strategy  
**PREPARED BY:** Brett Lucyk, Public Realm Coordinator, ext. 2700  
Catherine Jay, Manager Urban Design, ext. 2520

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1) **That** the staff report titled "Shared Places Our Spaces - Markham's Public Realm Draft Strategy", dated May 5, 2014 be received;
- 2) **And That** the document "Shared Places Our Spaces - Markham's Public Realm Draft Strategy" dated May 5, 2014 be endorsed in principle including the Public Realm Vision and Strategy;
- 3) **And That** Council direct the Commissioner of Community & Fire Services to engage the community for input on the draft strategy and document, and report back based on public feedback and any recommended changes by February 2015;
- 4) **And That** Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the draft *Shared Places Our Spaces, Markham's Public Realm* (Draft) strategy and provide recommendations regarding the implementation of the City's public realm strategy.

**BACKGROUND:**

The public realm contributes to a quality of life that attracts and retains diverse and talented residents, supports a community-wide commitment to lifelong active living and learning, and advances Markham's future prosperity in a rapidly growing creative and knowledge-based economy.

The importance of the public realm is identified in the *New Official Plan*, the *Greenprint*, *Building Markham's Future Together*, the *Integrated Leisure Master Plan* and the *Culture Plan*. There are many policies, programs and practices in various city departments that enhance the public realm, but there is no cross-commission, city-wide framework that ensures our public realm is successfully delivered.

In 2010, Markham initiated the Public Realm program and a cross-commission Public Realm Staff Working Team. In 2011, the Public Realm Advisory Committee was formed. The Public Realm Advisory Committee has three goals: to increase awareness; engage residents; and receive input regarding the City's public realm.

In 2013, Peter J. Smith & Associates was hired to conduct research and assist staff with the development of the Public Realm Strategy. Research was undertaken along with staff

interviews. It was discovered that although public realm guidelines and plans had been developed in Ontario for mixed-use districts, no municipality had undertaken a city-wide public realm strategy. This strategy would make Markham a leader in this initiative.

Input was received from the Public Realm Staff Working Team, the Public Realm Advisory Committee and regional stakeholders as part of this process. The process identified gaps that informed the development of the strategy.

### **OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:**

**Markham's Public Realm Strategy is a plan to ensure that all who live, work and play within our City share ownership and responsibility and aspire to create and maintain our great public spaces.**

The intent of the document is to raise awareness about the importance and benefits of the public realm and its role in creating a great city. The document provides a review of best practices, and identifies the city's current practices and policies; gaps and areas of improvements; areas of focus; and action items as part of an implementation strategy. Overall, the goal is to educate and enable staff, residents, visitors, developers and businesses owners to understand the importance of the public realm as well as each person's role in ensuring its success.

**Peter J Smith & Associates, a design firm with expertise in public realm policy, was hired to assist in the development of the strategy.** The terms of reference and scope of work required Peter J Smith to:

- Review and provide a summary of current best practices, highlighting elements of other cities' public realm that was relevant and could be adapted for Markham.
- Conduct and summarize cross-commission interviews which sought input from staff about their current role in implementing the public realm.
- Identify what is currently working in Markham and where there are gaps for improvement in implementing the public realm.
- In addition to the terms of reference, the strategy has been guided by a cross-commission staff working team and the Public Realm Advisory Committee. Information gathered from these sources have been incorporated into the document.

The *Shared Places Our Spaces* document establishes areas for improvement in the delivery of the public realm focusing on five goals & objectives:

1. Made in Markham Innovation and Design,
2. Keeping Markham Beautiful,
3. Animating Our Neighbourhoods and Districts,
4. Harmonizing Our Efforts and Sharing Resources, and
5. Creating Gateways and Destinations.

### **Made in Markham Innovation and Design**

Markham's public realm will deliver high quality public realm city wide by applying innovative design standards, comprehensive oversight measures, precise construction practices and thorough inspection processes within our new development, capital and

redevelopment projects. Markham has established numerous policies and programs that identify the importance of developing and maintaining a great public realm (new *Official Plan*, *Greenprint*, *Building Markham's Future Together* etc). This strategy will coordinate these efforts and allow Markham to build on the foundation of our current innovation and design.

### **Keeping Markham Beautiful**

Our public realm needs to support residents and businesses to maintain and beautify private and public properties. Maintenance of both our private and public lands is a key component to a successful public realm. A well-maintained city creates a positive image that in turn creates opportunities to build upon. Elements of our public realm that help keep Markham beautiful include well-maintained green assets, promotion and care of our heritage areas and well-maintained public and private properties. It is imperative that the City, residents and businesses work together to promote current programs and devise new initiatives as the City grows and demands change.

### **Animating Our Neighbourhoods and Districts**

Our public realm spaces need to celebrate Markham's cultural diversity by assisting in event organization and promoting community use. These range from single meditative-use in a local park, to the Canada Day celebration in Milne Park, to the Night It Up Festival at the Civic Centre. A diversity of functional, safe and well-maintained public realm spaces allows for flexible programming and a wide variety of potential events. Community engagement is critical to the success of the use of these public spaces and Markham will continue to nurture and refine our current relationships as well as forging new initiatives.

### **Harmonizing Our Efforts and Sharing Our Resources**

Markham has long standing relationships with corporate and community groups. It is essential for Council, staff, residents, businesses, as well as resident and service groups to coordinate efforts to create a vibrant public realm. Existing programs must be assessed and new relationships established in order to respond to ever changing demands. Design, implementation and maintenance standards must be reviewed and refined in order to create consistent public realm solutions across the City. Review, budget and inspection protocols need to be consolidated and prioritized in order to achieve a cohesive approach.

### **Creating Gateways and Destinations**

A great public realm creates memorable gateways and destinations within our City that provides lasting impressions for visitors and residents of Markham. Our public realm defines our City and distinguishes our neighbourhoods. The expression of the public realm is critical in 'placemaking' and supports the development of civic identity and pride. Residents and visitors to Markham should immediately recognize our community as they enter our city limits and move throughout our neighbourhoods.

### **Recommended Next Steps –**

The next step for the public realm strategy is to take the draft strategy out to the public in order to raise awareness about the public realm and receive feedback from residents,

ratepayer and community groups, businesses and developers. This will be accomplished in a variety of ways that will be determined at a later date. The public input will be reviewed, summarized and appropriate revisions will be incorporated within the document. An implementation plan for the action items will be prepared in conjunction with the final document. A Workshop for the Committee to review the revised document will be organized for January 2015. The final document, *Shared Places Our Spaces*, and the implementation plan will then be reported back to General Committee for review and approval. It is anticipated that this will be completed in February 2015.

#### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TEMPLATE**

There are no financial considerations at this point of the study. Consideration for capital funding will be discussed as part of the 2015 capital budget process.

A review of funding and partnership opportunities is recommended as part of the strategy. Consideration for other funding sources such as the gas tax, Section 37 and Development Charges will be further investigated as part of this strategy.

#### **HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:**

Not Applicable

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

Sustainability and environmental health are important components of every public realm project. Interconnected natural areas provide opportunities for walkways and trails, improve air quality and microclimates while supporting ecological diversity. Well-designed and well-maintained streets, cycleways and walkways enhance our commuting experiences and provides alternate and healthy ways to get around. Encouraging residents to seek local leisure activities and utilize walkable communities reduces their environmental footprint.

#### **ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS:**

The Accessibility Guidelines have been and are an important design component as part of the strategy. Sustainability Office staff are members of the Public Realm Staff Working Team and provide input on an ongoing basis.

#### **ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

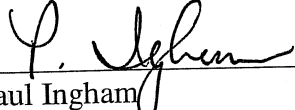
The Public Realm Strategy is closely aligned in *Building Markham's Future Together*, the *GreenPrint*, *Official Plan*, *Integrated Leisure Master Plan* and the *Culture Plan*. Effective and engaging public spaces are positive outcomes for growth management. Accessible pathways allow for sustainable transportation; public space enhancements have environmental benefits; municipal services will be improved when the public realm is considered in planning and capital improvements. All public spaces will take safety into consideration. Civic engagement will encourage input from our diverse community.


#### **BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:**

The Public Realm Staff Working Team includes members from Operations, Planning and Urban Design, Heritage Planning, Engineering, Sustainability Office, Bylaw

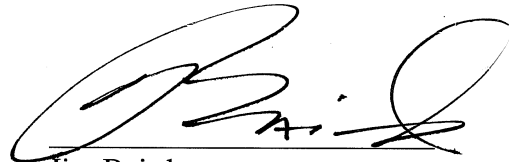
Enforcement and Licensing, Culture, Markham Public Library and Corporate Communications and Community Engagement. Contributions have also been made by York Region and the Public Realm Advisory Committee.

**RECOMMENDED BY:**

  
Paul Ingham  
Director, Operations

  
Rino Mostacci  
Director, Planning and Urban Design

  
Brenda Librecz  
Commissioner, Community & Fire Services

  
Jim Baird  
Commissioner, Development  
Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Shared Places Our Spaces, Markham's Public Realm Draft Document date April 11, 2014