

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

URBAN OPEN SPACE DESIGN TO MEET USER NEEDS: A comparative Case Study of Confederation Park and Springer Market Square in Kingston, Ontario

Topic and Purpose

This report evaluates the effects of a variety of social and physical factors in the life of public open spaces in downtown Kingston. The objective of this study was to identify the factors that contribute to the health and design that meet user needs of public open spaces.

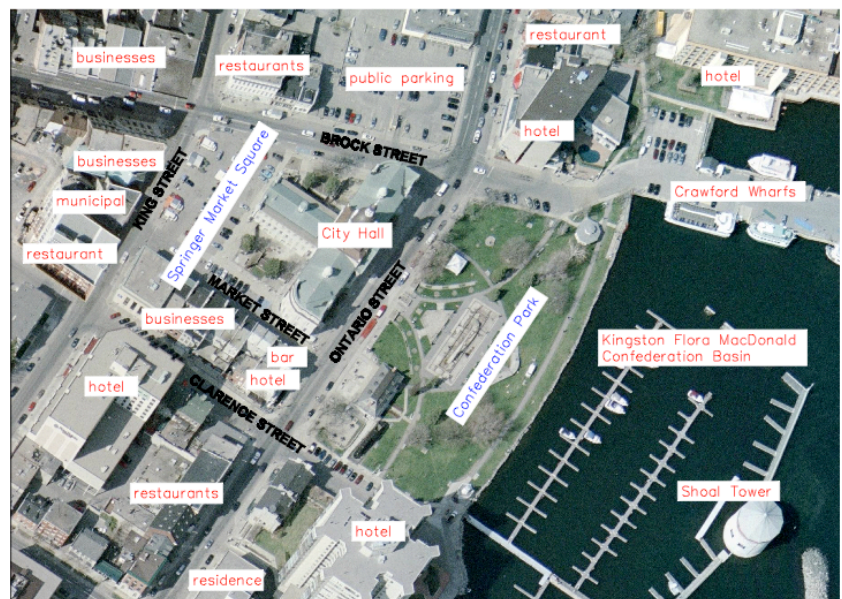
Two open spaces – Confederation Park and Springer Market Square – were chosen for evaluation. For the evaluation of Confederation Park, both the current design and proposed concept plan from the City of Kingston *Downtown Action Plan: An Infrastructure Renewal and Public Open Space Plan* (2004) were evaluated.

The evaluation was developed to answer two questions:

- *What design and planning features contribute to meeting user needs in the urban open spaces of downtown Kingston? and,*
- *What planning and urban design features could increase public use in Kingston's Confederation Park and Springer Market Square?*

Study Area

Both study areas are located in the downtown core on either side of Kingston City Hall - Confederation Park to the east and Springer Market Square to the west. These open spaces are used as event venues, have significant historical and civic context, are tourist attractions, and represent the City of Kingston as a whole. There is a diverse mix of surrounding land use, which offers a continual supply of potential users to each open space.



Evaluation

The research method employed within this report was adapted from an evaluation framework created by the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation Department, *A Comparison of Five Inner City Parks*, in 1988. To update the dated Toronto study evaluation tools, new similar and improved evaluation tools were integrated into this report. These include sources such as Project for Public Spaces, *Urban Open Space – Designing for User Needs* by Mark Francis (2003), and *Anatomy of a Park* by Dahl and Molnar (2003). The updated design criteria were grouped into three categories: contextual support, design framework, and social milieu. This evaluation framework assessed and compared each open space; the results are summarized in the table below.

Data for this study has been collected using five qualitative research methods. These include a site evaluation index, direct observation (ecological mapping and diary), user questionnaire, policy review, and visual representation.

Summary of Design Criteria

Design Criteria	Current Design for Confederation Park	Concept Design for Confederation Park	Springer Market Square
Contextual Support			
Microclimate/Environment			
Surrounding Land Use			
Enclosure/Edge Elements			
Accessibility			
Design Framework			
Focus and Identity			
Intricacy and Coherence			
Legibility			
Views			
Seating			
Vegetation			
Social Milieu			
Animation/Amenities/Attraction			
100% Location			
Territories and Turf			
Maintenance and Management			

Legend: ○ Not at all; ◐ Poor; ◑ Adequate; ◒ Good; ● Excellent

Conclusion

The contextual diversity of downtown Kingston may provide a continual source of potential users to open spaces but it also increases the complexity when attempting to design open space to meet user needs. In downtown Kingston, the prominent planning and design features that contribute to meeting user needs are the location, accessibility, and surrounding land uses. However, these features alone do not lead to successful open spaces; individual spaces should be analyzed separately to determine the features that would contribute to meeting specific user needs.

Confederation Park:

The location of the Park itself attracts many users as it is across from City Hall, has waterfront views, and is surrounded by hotels and restaurants. The park meets the basic needs of its users and is adequate for passive use. However, with the increase in public events and programming, the functioning of the park design no longer meets the intended use of the space. The clutter of artifacts within confuses the identity and detracts from the most important views within the park; the central fountain, flag poles, and stage tent obscure the views of City Hall and the waterfront.

The contextual support and social milieu features of the current Park design function well at meeting user needs. However, the design framework features are the least successful and deter potential users. These features include focus and identity, legibility, and views. The City of Kingston *Downtown Action Plan* (DAP) suggests changes that would significantly improve upon the design framework, which would make the space more attractive and could increase public use. The maps shown within the following pages identify the areas of use within Confederation Park and show the proposed design for the DAP concept plan. Also, some of the successful elements found within the re-development of Springer Market Square could be integrated into the Park (i.e., the street furniture and lighting design) and would not only tie both spaces together but also add to a healthy and well functioning downtown open space system.

Springer Market Square:

A mix of uses surrounds the Square, just like Confederation Park. This mix of uses provides a continuous flow of potential users to the area. However, with many of the surrounding buildings, the ground floor is used for offices and financial businesses and this can detract from potential users. The recent re-design of the Square has significantly improved public access and created more useful space for events and

programming. The farmers market, antique market, and skating rink are the Squares biggest and most successful attractions that provide interest all year around. The maps found within the following pages illustrate areas of use during market days and non-market days. A notable observation is that Square is void of users when there are no events or programming.

The Square is designed in solid materials leaving little room for natural vegetation that could provide shade, colour, texture, and different scents. The contextual support, design framework, and social milieu features of the Square's re-design have greatly increased public use, in comparison to its most recent parking lot and market design. However, by further improving upon the vegetation, attraction and animation features, the Square could see an additional increase in public use.

Recommendations

Confederation Park:

1. Design safe pedestrian crossing along Ontario Street
2. Remove artifact clutter
3. Improve waterfront promenade
4. Increase special events and programming
5. Design area for special events and programming
6. Increase seating
7. Add more flowers/gardens
8. Heritage design street furniture, garbage and pedestrian-scale lights

Springer Market Square:

1. Close off King Street and/or Brock Street during peak market hours
2. Increase the amount of shade available during mid-day
3. Provide more shelter and heat for wintertime skating rink
4. Promote supportive surrounding land use
5. Increase number of bistro tables
6. Add more flowers/gardens
7. Increase special events and programming
8. Increase spacing around and between vendors
9. Incorporate improved bus service and parking of area surrounding Confederation Park within a City of Kingston Transportation Study

INSERT CONFEDERATION PARK MAPS FOLD OUT

INSERT SPRINGER MARKET SQUARE MAPS FOLD OUT