

Colour the Square

Final Report



March 2017





Table of Contents

1	Project Background	4
2	How Did the Community Participate?	7
3	Recommendations	12
	• Design for comfort and year-round use	13
	• Provide tools for community activation	17
	• Reform the permitting system	22
	• Reform the management structures	24
4	Next Steps for Colour the Square	27

1 — Project Background

What is Colour the Square?



The Downtown Whitby Action Plan is a bold vision, aiming to create a unique and vibrant downtown destination. Celebration Square, located adjacent to the Whitby Public Library Central Branch, is a valued public asset in the downtown brimming with potential. The Colour the Square campaign stimulated conversation and outside-the-box thinking on how to unlock that potential.

Conducted over the fall of 2016 and winter of 2017, the Town of Whitby and 8 80 Cities ran a series of pop-up community engagement hubs and workshops, gathering ideas about the kinds of programming that would draw residents to the square, and encouraging local stakeholders to take a more active role in making Celebration Square the place to be in Downtown Whitby.

Why Celebration Square? Why now?

When it opened in 2005, the Whitby Public Library Central Branch and adjacent Celebration Square received a number of design awards, including the Ontario Library Association's Building Award and the 2006 Public and Institutional Spaces Award of Merit for interior design. Over the past twelve years, the library has thrived as a bustling hive of life and activity in the downtown. Unfortunately, Celebration Square has not been quite as well used. Celebration Square represents a great opportunity for the Town of Whitby to invigorate an existing under-performing asset.

The Downtown Whitby Action Plan, adopted by Town Council in October of 2016, calls for enabling new opportunities for a prosperous,

innovative, pedestrian friendly downtown, that inspires cultural life and cultivates downtown connections. As the Town moves forward in putting this new vision into action, Celebration Square is poised to play a key role in re-animating the downtown core.

We believe that the Colour the Square campaign can serve as a launching point for putting the Downtown Whitby Action Plan into motion. Celebration Square can serve as a launch pad for testing out innovative placemaking interventions and serve to continue the conversation with communities across Whitby on how to build a successful, vibrant, dynamic, and inclusive downtown.

The Team Behind Colour the Square

The Colour the Square Campaign is led locally by the Town of Whitby. The Town has enlisted a consultant, 8 80 Cities, to conduct a thorough community engagement process. 8 80 Cities is a non-profit organization based in Toronto,

Ontario, who specialize in unconventional community engagement, public space, and active transportation.

2 — How Did the Community Participate?

Pop-up Engagements



The Colour the Square campaign held five pop-up engagements over two days, December 2, 2016 and February 16, 2017. We set up our engagement booths in places where community members typically go, pass through, or gather. This method is great for capturing ideas and thoughts from those who might not have known about the initiative and would not have otherwise participated. Over 200 people were engaged on each date. Residents had the opportunity to weigh in on the kinds of infrastructure and programmatic improvements that would draw them to the square more often, and encourage them to take a more active role in programming the square.

The Colour the Square team set up visually engaging large format surveys where participants of all ages could vote for their favourite ideas using dots, suggest improvements for the square on sticky notes, and weigh in on what tools would make it easier for them to be actively involved with animation efforts. The locations of the pop-up engagements included: the Whitby Public Library Central Branch, the Whitby Seniors Activity Centre, the Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony in Celebration Square, the Four Corners, and the Iroquois Park Sports Centre.

How Did the Community Participate?

Online Surveys

In addition to the pop-up engagement hubs, two online surveys were created to supplement the feedback we received in-person. Combined, the surveys received over 200 responses, providing valuable insight into the community's programmatic preferences for Celebration Square as well as highlighting

the major obstacles to residents obtaining permits to program the square themselves. The surveys also provided an opportunity for the Town to start building a network of community activators interested in taking a more hands-on role in activating Celebration Square.



Idea Lab Workshops

On January 20 and February 16, 2017, the Colour the Square campaign hosted two workshops, providing opportunities to brainstorm pilot project ideas for Celebration Square and Downtown Whitby. Both workshops were held at the Whitby Public Library, with one geared

towards participants from the Town and Library, and the other geared towards participants from the Whitby Youth Council. 30 attendees across the two days devised more than twenty pilot project ideas and generated more than 175 individual ideas.

How Did the Community Participate?

Engagement Results at a Glance

781

people connected, including residents, businesses, and community leaders

1,784

ideas generated

204

people participated in the online surveys

223

residents participated on February 16th

354

residents participated on December 2nd

Top 4 entertainment people would like to see:



Live Music



Outdoor Movies



Art Exhibitions



Live Theatre

Top 5 infrastructure improvements people would like to see:



Better Seating



More Shade



Dynamic Lighting



Public Art



Something for Children

Top 4 programs people would like to see:



Book Clubs/
Children's Story Time



Yoga/Tai Chi/Fitness



Art Classes



Dance Classes

Top 3 events people would like to see:



Farmers' Market



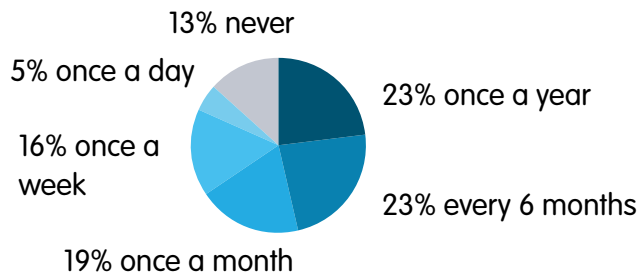
Food Truck Festivals



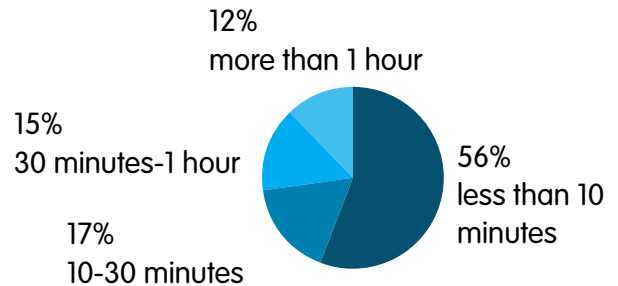
Arts and Crafts Market

How Did the Community Participate?

How often people visit Celebration Square:



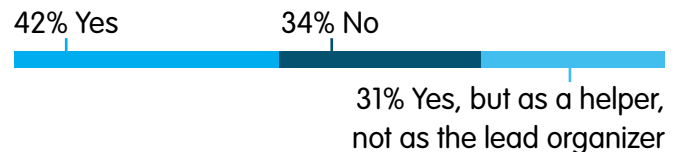
How long people spend in Celebration Square on average:



84%

respondents were not aware they could obtain a permit to program Celebration Square

“If you had access to resources and permits, would you be interested in organizing a class or community activity in Celebration Square?”



Top Events people would be willing to help organize in Celebration Square:

- **Movie Night**
- **Community Potluck**
- **Paint Night**
- **Community Water Balloon Fight**
- **Pumpkin Carving Night**
- **Yoga Class**
- **Video Game Tournament**
- **DJ Party**
- **Card Night**
- **Community Lego Building**
- **Chess Tournament**

Top 5 workshop pilot programs:



N.B some percentages may add up to more than 100% as residents were able to select more than one answer

3 — Recommendations

Design comfort and year-round use into Celebration Square

Celebration Square is a very attractive looking public space, as evidenced by the design awards it and the library received when they first opened. However, while the square may be nice to look at, one of the main messages we heard from the community is that the square is not the most comfortable space to spend any substantial amount of time in. 73% of residents spend less than half an hour on average in Celebration Square, with 56% spending less than 10 minutes. 62% of residents' primary purpose for visiting the square is accessing the library. It's clear that for most residents

Celebration Square is a space that you pass through, rather than one you seek out, and linger in.

There are a number of improvements to the square that can change this dynamic. One of the main themes identified during the workshops was the desire to create more inviting public spaces that are programmed, and comfortable twelve months of the year. The following suggestions attempt to achieve that goal.

1. Create flexible, comfortable, inviting multi-use seating options.

Through the community engagement process, it was clear that community members wanted improved and more varied seating in the square. The current seating was described as uncomfortable, often being too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. Residents want to be able to linger in Celebration Square, enjoy the architecture, have a cup of coffee, eat their lunch, meet friends, and people watch.

Investing in the types of seating that enable these kinds of public life activities will be key in bringing new animation to Celebration Square. Flexible seating options, like Adirondack chairs (\$25-\$100) that can be moved about the square depending on the type of programming taking place on any given day, and more permanent

options, like chess tables (\$800-\$1500) that can double as lunch spots or four-person swing seats (\$700-\$2000) can together create a friendlier space that encourages a much wider range of activities and uses.



Design comfort and year-round use into Celebration Square

2. Create more opportunities for shade in the summer and warmth in the winter

A secondary reason the community often cited for not feeling comfortable in Celebration Square is a lack of protection from the elements. The square can get quite hot in the summer and very cold in the winter. By increasing the number of days the square can be comfortably used, the Town will be maximizing the utility of the infrastructure dollars already invested in Celebration Square. With some small-scale adjustments, like patio umbrellas (\$20-\$1500) and portable heaters (\$125-\$550), Celebration Square can become more people friendly all year round. Larger scale interventions can also achieve the same results, as we discuss in the next recommendation.



Design comfort and year-round use into Celebration Square

3. Explore opportunities to utilize public art as multi-functional installations

Community members repeatedly highlighted the desire to see more public art in Celebration Square. Beautifying public space is, in of itself, a worthy goal, but there are additional benefits public art can bring to the square. The Forks, a public meeting place and park in downtown Winnipeg is leading the way internationally in terms of utilizing public art to accomplish multiple goals. An international architecture competition takes place every year, with designers creating public art that doubles as warming huts for the outdoor skating rink located in the park. The cities of Edmonton and

Toronto are copying this idea in their own public spaces. Public Art can cool as well as warm, doubling as shade and seating structures in the summer.

The Forks in Winnipeg have collaborated with local artists on the creation of these artistic warming huts. The Town of Whitby could do the same, partnering with the Station Gallery, Durham College, OCAD University and other local and regional institutions to create a made in Whitby competition.



Design comfort and year-round use into Celebration Square

4. Utilize existing infrastructure in Celebration Square to create greater opportunities for greenery

Another reason often cited by residents for feeling uncomfortable in the square is the perception that the square is too harsh with too much concrete. A very popular suggestion was to find ways to increase the amount of greenery in the square.

This may be more of a perception issue, as Celebration Square does have some planters along the northern, eastern, and southern edges of the space. These planters represent an opportunity for community gardening, which we will discuss a little further down. However,

the structure that runs along the northern edge of the square, parallel to Dundas Street West, does hold the potential to add additional greenery. The Barbican Centre in London, England, uses similar structures as hanging gardens, enlivening and softening what can otherwise be harsher pieces of infrastructure. Alternatively, planter boxes (\$35-\$60) could be installed along the pillars of the structure, with the greenery changing to match the season. Many Business Improvement Areas utilize this approach in their catchment areas.



Provide the tools for Town, business, and community activation of Celebration Square

Celebration Square can be an incredibly successful event space, as evidenced by the fantastic success of the Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony. The Town can foster that kind of activation in the square on a more regular basis by taking a more active role in

bringing together community partners and supporting efforts to use the square in new and exciting ways. The following tools can help shift how outdoor public space is utilized in Downtown Whitby.

1. Create an internal working group with the Whitby Public Library, Corporate Communications, Parks and Recreation, Economic Development, and other Town stakeholders on bringing Town programming out into the Square

There is no greater provider of programming in Whitby than the Town itself. From skating and swimming lessons to book clubs to youth dancing classes to instructional classes for seniors, the Town of Whitby has all the expertise and experience required to fully program Celebration Square every day of the year. By working inter-departmentally with existing recreational and cultural programs, the Town can identify services that would benefit from outdoor exposure, and can help facilitate experiments in moving those programs into Celebration Square. The Town can also identify spaces within the downtown core it would like to see activated more often and pilot bringing classes into those spaces. The newly formed Corporate Communications Division, also tasked with special events, would be perfectly positioned to convene this working group and

coordinate implementation of action items. We will discuss the role this new division can play more fully in the section related to reforming management structure of Celebration Square.



2. Build on the success of the Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

The Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, held in Celebration Square on the Friday evening before the Santa Claus parade, is hugely popular, seeing upwards of 1,500 people over two hours. With live music and caroling, seasonal crafts, children’s activities, hot chocolate, snacks, and dynamic lighting, the event celebrates the holiday season and contains all the ingredients necessary for successful winter programming. The event’s success is something the Town should build upon.

Celebration Square hosts a weekly evening of arts and culture in the summer, but no such equivalent exists during the winter. Working from the successful Tree Lighting template, the Town could create a winter calendar of events in Celebration Square, one that takes advantage of the unique opportunities winter has to offer. Following the lead of Igloofest in Montreal, an outdoor electronic music festival independently organized and funded by the City of Montreal,

the Province of Quebec and corporate sponsorship, the square could be home to Whitby’s premier outdoor winter music festival. Many European cities, including Berlin, Brussels, and Copenhagen, host winter markets, which showcase local artisans, crafts, and delicacies. 2017 sees Toronto’s Distillery District hosting the inaugural Toronto Light Festival, a free outdoor winter art exhibit organized by local businesses and property owners, bringing renewed energy and joy to the year’s darkest months.

Light, music, and warming foods are key to properly activating space during colder months. The community expressed a desire throughout the consultation process for live music, dynamic lighting, and food-based programming. Workshop participants wanted to create spaces that are utilized all year long. Celebration Square can play host to those events and more, creating an entirely new face for winter in Downtown Whitby.



3. Pilot a pop-up skating rink in Celebration Square



One of the most popular recreational opportunities amongst the community was the desire to skate in the square. Along with light, music, and warmth, movement is a critical aspect of any successful winter activation. Pop-up skating rinks have been successfully trialed in many cities, including Hoboken, New Jersey, Sherman Green, Connecticut, and Denver, Colorado. If a pop-up skating rink can be created on the roof of a skyscraper in Toronto's

financial district, why not Celebration Square? Pop-up skating rinks come in many different shapes and sizes, synthetic or real. Costs can range from \$5,000-\$100,000 depending on a number of factors including the size of the rink, access to power and water, and the type of rink boards. We recommend the Town arrange an onsite consultation with one of the companies (Centre Ice Rinks, NiceRink, Custom Ice Inc., First Line Rinks) in the Greater Toronto Area that specializes in creating pop-up rinks to learn more about how a pop-up rink in Celebration Square would function.



4. Make Celebration Square the new home for the Whitby Farmers Market

The Whitby Farmers Market currently runs once a week from May to October at the former firehall site of 201 Brock Street South. This site, however, is slated for redevelopment, and the market will need to find a new home.

This represents a fantastic opportunity for Celebration Square. Community members throughout the consultation process highlighted a farmers market as one of their top choices for events in the square, as did workshop participants. With the market in need of a new

location, the Town has an opportunity to ensure the market remains in a central location while simultaneously providing Celebration Square with a new anchor tenant for the summer months.



5. Partner with local stakeholders on an outdoor movie festival

Outdoor movie nights were an incredibly popular idea amongst the community. With the beautiful architecture of the library serving as a backdrop, Celebration Square would make a fantastic location for outdoor movies.

In Toronto alone there are many examples of the various kinds of partnerships that can be fostered through outdoor screenings. The Riverdale Park East movie night partners with local children's charities and donates the proceeds. Harbourfront Free Flicks has partnered with Pride Toronto on LGBT themed movie evenings. The Aga Khan museum hosts Bollywood themed movie nights. The St. Lawrence BIA has allowed local businesses to select a film that suits their products and program around the screening accordingly (i.e. a local pet store sponsored a screening

of the movie Best in Show, a film about the Westminster Dog Show). As Durham's Business Centre, there are no shortage of local businesses who could be collaborated with on this kind of initiative. Given the diversity of Whitby's population, the opportunities to work with local cultural organizations on foreign film screenings are immense. The cost of hosting an outdoor movie screen varies from \$700-\$6000 and is a cost-effective way of bringing new life to the square while supporting a wide range of local stakeholders.



6. Enable day-to-day activation of Celebration Square

Many of the recommendations thus far have focussed on larger scale events, but it is important to balance larger scale programming, with smaller every day kinds of activities. Popular ideas from the community for every day programming in the square focussed on yoga, music, games, and child and senior friendly activities. Partnering with the library, the Town can invest in, and make available to all yoga mats, instruments, bocce balls, board games, Frisbees, card tables, and Lego. These low-cost items can be stored in the library and managed by their staff on site. Similarly, slightly larger yet still portable items like ping pong tables or giant chess sets could also be managed by the library.

The planter boxes along the eastern and western edges of the square also provide an opportunity for smaller scale, day-to-day activation. These planters are excellent opportunities for community gardens. Through partnerships with local residents, the library, Whitby Youth Council and local schools, the Town can make these planters available to parties interested in taking a more active role in beautifying the square.

These kinds of interventions may not have the wow-factor of larger one-off events or festivals, but they are crucial factors in fostering community ownership of and connection to the square while providing the tools for a Celebration Square that is utilized and energized daily.



Reform the Permitting System for Celebration Square

The enthusiasm amongst residents to roll up their sleeves and get involved with activating Celebration Square was overwhelming. 42% of residents advised they would be interested in programming the square if they had access to resources and permits, with another 31% saying that would be willing to play a supporting role in organizing activations. Unfortunately, permitting the square is not an easy process, and the residents' enthusiasm is left untapped. Several of the recommendations mentioned

already (improved seating, additional shade and heating infrastructure, making yoga mats, board games, bocce balls etc. available for daily use) address some of the resources required to foster greater community activation of the square, but the permitting and special event system in particular need some reform. The following recommendations are designed to make it easier for residents and businesses to obtain permits and organize successful special events in Celebration Square.

1. Create an online permitting system

Under the current system, it is extremely difficult to obtain a permit for an event in Celebration Square. There is no information available online about how to even begin this process. It was only through our contact at the Planning Department that we were put in touch with the staff member responsible for permitting Celebration Square. If finding the most basic information on special event permits was difficult for us, we can only imagine how much harder it would be for residents not familiar with municipal processes. Certainly, this service can be improved upon.

In contrast, obtaining a parking permit from the Town of Whitby is a simple and user friendly process. The application is readily available online. The application itself is short, and Town Staff respond to submissions within 48 hours.

The same simplicity and ease-of-use approach that is in place for parking permits should be applied to special events. Both are requests by members of the community to utilize public space. The City of Toronto and City of Edmonton both have online forms that can serve as examples of special event permitting made accessible.

Reform the Permitting System for Celebration Square

2. Eliminate special event permitting costs for community groups, non-profit organizations, and small businesses

At a cost of \$400, obtaining a special event permit for Celebration Square is not cheap. In order to encourage local resident groups and small businesses to take a more active role

in programming the square, we recommend eliminating this charge for community and non-profit groups and small independent businesses.

3. Develop Programming Toolkits for Public Use

Conceiving, planning, advertising, and executing an event is not an easy undertaking, particularly for small independent business owners or local community groups without substantial financial resources. The Town can follow the lead of other municipalities in supporting smaller programmers by creating easy how-to toolkits.

For example, The City of Waterloo provides a resource for community groups programming

their public spaces that lays out a variety of marketing and social media tools. The City of London supports neighbourhood events with an Outdoor Movie Night event kit. The City of Guelph has created a special event user guide. All of these resources provide a step-by-step action plan for any interested resident group to program public space. We recommend that the Town of Whitby develop their own toolkits to further enable community activation of Downtown Whitby.

4. Advertise the availability of special event permits

A full 83% of survey respondents did not realise that they could obtain a permit to program Celebration Square. By getting the word out through Town media releases, social media channels, library newsletters, and Council communications, the Town can start to chip away

at this number. In conjunction with simplifying the permitting process and eliminating fees for programming the square, the Town can strengthen the platform for greater community engagement in Celebration Square.

Reform Management Structures for Celebration Square

Effective management is a key factor in creating successful vibrant public spaces. Much as we wouldn't expect a school or a recreation centre to be successful without proper staffing, we can't expect to have dynamic outdoor public spaces without the same level of committed

management. Currently, Celebration Square is suffering from a lack of management and ownership, both from the Town and from the local community. The following recommendations working in concert can fill this gap and help create a foundation for lasting success.

1. Build on momentum from new Corporate Communications Division

The Town of Whitby is blessed with fantastic parks and public spaces, Celebration Square chief amongst them. There is a strong desire from the community to see these spaces more heavily programmed. With the newly created Corporate Communications Division, which is responsible for, amongst other things, the development of a new special events strategy, the Town has perfectly positioned itself to immediately begin capitalizing on resident enthusiasm. The recommendations in the previous section pertaining to the reformation of the permitting system would make an excellent starting point for the new division's special events related portfolio.

By liberalizing the permit system, the Town will be taking a giant first step towards empowering residents to take a more active role in the square's management. The Town must move in lockstep with the community and provide a platform for greater town staff management of

the square as well.

Some of the most successful cities and public spaces around the world are using proactive management as the driving force behind their success. The City of Copenhagen employs 54 park supervisors, each one responsible for overseeing the day-to-day programming of one city park. Yonge-Dundas Square in Toronto employs a full-time Events Co-ordinator,



Reform Management Structures for Celebration Square

responsible for ensuring the square achieves a balance between large scale events and smaller scale activations. Bryant Park in New York employs a Director of Public Events, who fulfills a similar role for that space. Copenhagen's parks, Yonge-Dundas Square and Bryant Park are all internationally renowned for their dynamic public life, and engaged management is a key aspect of their success.

We recommend that the new Corporate

Communications Division include, as part of their special events portfolio, a position responsible for programming all public spaces in the downtown. By empowering this division to become the stewards of Whitby's cherished public assets, the Town can begin taking on a more proactive role in increasing levels of public life and activation, in accordance with the Downtown Whitby Action Plan.

2. Form a Friends of Celebration Square Advisory Board

The enthusiasm from the local resident and business community for Celebration Square and public space in the downtown was something we heard loud and clear. We recommend the Town take steps to give this enthusiasm a formal shape, by forming an advisory board for the square, made up of Town and Library staff, local residents, local businesses owners, and other key stakeholders. The Central Park Conservancy, and the Yonge-Dundas Square Board of Management can both serve as examples of wildly successful public spaces that benefit from a governing structure that balances city-wide priorities with local interests.

The Town does not need to do all the heavy lifting in Celebration Square by itself. By involving local stakeholders in the day-to-day management of the square, the Town can foster a greater sense of community ownership over the square, lessening the burden on Town staff. A volunteer advisory board can also help ensure that the

Town is meeting local community needs while serving the interest of the Whitby as a whole.



Reform Management Structures for Celebration Square

3. Explore potential sponsorship and revenue generation opportunities for Celebration Square

With a prominent location in Downtown Whitby and adjacent to a high trafficked library branch, there may be opportunities to utilize Celebration Square as revenue generator for the town, subsidizing some of the activation costs. We recommend the Town explore the revenue models of the Bryant Park Corporation in New York City, Yonge-Dundas Square in Toronto, and The Forks in Winnipeg. While all three of those public spaces are surrounded by significantly more density than Celebration Square, there may be useful lessons that can be applied to a smaller scale.

We also recommend the Town work with sponsors it already has relationships with, Scotiabank, Canadian Tire and Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment. Each has a history of partnering with municipalities on a variety of infrastructure improvements and may be interested in the unique opportunities Celebration Square provides. The Town has also worked with sponsors on programming a summer calendar of events in Celebration Square, most recently with Menzies Chrysler in 2016. We recommend the Town investigate extending this sponsored calendar season into a year long program of events.

4. Partner with newly created Business Improvement Area

The Town has recently approved the creation of a Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA). This is fantastic news for downtown businesses and residents, as well as for the Town as a whole. There are many ways in which the BIA can support the Town on achieving the goals we have enumerated in this report. BIAs can assist with cost-sharing on infrastructure

improvements, supplement day-to-day maintenance of public spaces, organize large and small scale events, and connect businesses interested in sponsoring activities in the square to the Town. We recommend ensuring the BIA has a seat at the table for all future discussion around Celebration Square.

4



**Next Steps for
Colour the Square**



Next Steps for Colour the Square

The Colour the Square campaign has helped spark conversation amongst the community about best and most engaging uses for Celebration Square. It has identified residents interested in taking a more active role in programming the square and the kinds of activities residents say would draw them to the square on a more regular basis. It's time to start putting the feedback we've received into practice. It's time to Colour the Square!

We recommend creating a series of pilot projects over the next 9 months, pulling from the ideas that most strongly resonated with residents. Below is a list of interventions, both programmatic and infrastructure based, that fall outside the current scope of the campaign, but could form the foundation of the second phase of Colour the Square.



Improved seating



Patio umbrellas



Heaters for the Presse Café patio



Pop-up greenery and planters



Monthly Movie Night



Pumpkin Carving Night



Pop-up skating rink



Farmer's market/Food truck festival



Free to play board games, chess boards, frisbees in the square



Library programming in the square

Next Steps for Colour the Square

We recommend that these pilot projects be accompanied by an evaluation process that provides both quantitative indicators of success (Does foot traffic in the square increase? Do people feel differently about the square? How long are people spending in the square?) as well as qualitative indicators of success (Who is using the square? What are they doing in the square? How do they feel about the activations?). These pilot projects, which can be explored as part of a second phase in partnership with 80 Cities, represent the natural evolution of the Colour the Square campaign.

The Town of Whitby has set itself ambitious goals for its downtown. Vibrant, walkable, prosperous cores do not happen over night. Creating a destination downtown requires work and investment by Town Staff and local elected officials. By fostering the right set of conditions in public spaces, and providing the right set of tools to local communities, the Town will set the stage for vibrancy, prosperity, and walkability. The Colour the Square campaign, and the recommendations contained in this report, are designed to act as a roadmap for creating those right sets of conditions in Celebration Square. We hope Town of Whitby finds the report useful as it continues towards implementing their vision for the downtown core.