

# Town of Whitby

## Staff Report

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**Report Title:     Roebuck Street Placemaking Project**

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**Report to:     Committee of the Whole**

**Date of meeting:**   February 27, 2023

**Report Number:   CAO 05-23**

**Department(s) Responsible:**  
Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

**Submitted by:**  
Sarah Klein, Director, Strategic Initiatives

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief Administrative Officer**

**For additional information, contact:**  
Christy Chrus, Manager, Creative Communities

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### 1. Recommendation:

1. That Council approve the semi-permanent closure of Roebuck Street in Downtown Brooklin (June to mid-September) to support placemaking opportunities and create an outdoor community gathering space.

### 2. Highlights:

- In 2022, the Town received a My Main Street – Community Activator Grant to support the closure of Roebuck Street for two months (August and September) as part of a placemaking pilot project to animate the streetscape through the addition of Muskoka Chairs, picnic tables, a road mural, and planters.
- 179 individuals provided feedback on the pilot project through a survey, and the results overwhelmingly indicate that the public liked the space (93%) and most visited a local business before or after visiting Roebuck Street (93%). The majority of respondents (89%) indicated that they would like to see the space open on a semi-permanent basis (i.e., either summer or full-year closure). Furthermore, 83% of respondents indicated that they did not experience a change in vehicular traffic as a result of the closure of Roebuck Street.
- Staff are recommending additional enhancements to support the space, such as a portable toilet, a new road mural, and the painting of the concrete barriers to animate the space.

- It is recommended that Roebuck Street be closed from June to mid-September to create a balanced approach between community and business needs and to support destination development and placemaking within Downtown Brooklin.

### 3. Background:

Placemaking inspires people to reimagine public spaces through community-based collaboration. The goal of placemaking is to look at a space, how it functions, and how it could be improved to make it better for the community's health, happiness, and quality of life. In 2022, Roebuck Street was chosen as a placemaking pilot project as it is a small street in the heart of Downtown Brooklin which, when closed, essentially acts as an extension of Grass Park. The closure creates a sense of identity in the community, allowing for cultural events and experiences to expand, such as Music in the Park.

In 2022, the Town of Whitby received grant funding through the My Main Street – Community Activator program funded by FedDev Ontario and administered by the Canadian Urban Institute for the Roebuck Street Placemaking Project. The Town closed Roebuck Street in Downtown Brooklin for two months (August and September) to animate the space by adding Muskoka chairs, picnic tables, planters, and a 'Brooklin' road mural, in which each letter was painted by a local artist.

The design, installation, and maintenance of the space was completed in-house by various departments within the Town of Whitby. Attachment 1 provides a photo collage of the project from start to finish, including the use of the space as part of Harvest Festival.

### 4. Discussion:

The Roebuck Street Placemaking Project included several stages to make the space come to life:

#### **Road Mural**

A Call for Artists was launched in April 2022, seeking local artists to create a road mural that says 'BROOKLIN' with each letter designed and painted by a different artist using the theme Brooklin – Past, Present, and Future. A jury panel was established by members of the various Advisory Committees from the Town of Whitby, along with a representative of the Whitby Station Gallery. Each submission was reviewed against set criteria, and selected artists were provided with a \$500 honorarium. The artists included individuals with various backgrounds, cultures, and abilities who collectively created a beautiful mural that became the highlight of the space.

#### **Road Closure / Installation of Furniture**

On July 25, 2022, the road was closed to traffic with the installation of concrete barriers. Staff installed picnic tables, Muskoka Chairs, and planters to liven up the space. Large Curbex signs were also installed at each end of the road to inform

the public about the project. Colourful umbrellas were added to the picnic tables, and with the help of staff from Tip Top Creamery, the umbrellas were taken out each morning and brought in each evening (for safety and security purposes).

### My Main Street – Community Activator Funding

The Town of Whitby was fortunate to receive a grant totaling \$34,590 from FedDev Ontario to support the implementation of this project. The grant covered 100% of the costs, including:

- furniture (concrete barriers, planters and plant material, Muskoka Chairs, etc.);
- communication pieces (i.e., Curbex Signs, survey postcards);
- artists honorariums and materials (i.e., paint, paint brushes); and
- staff time to implement and install the project.

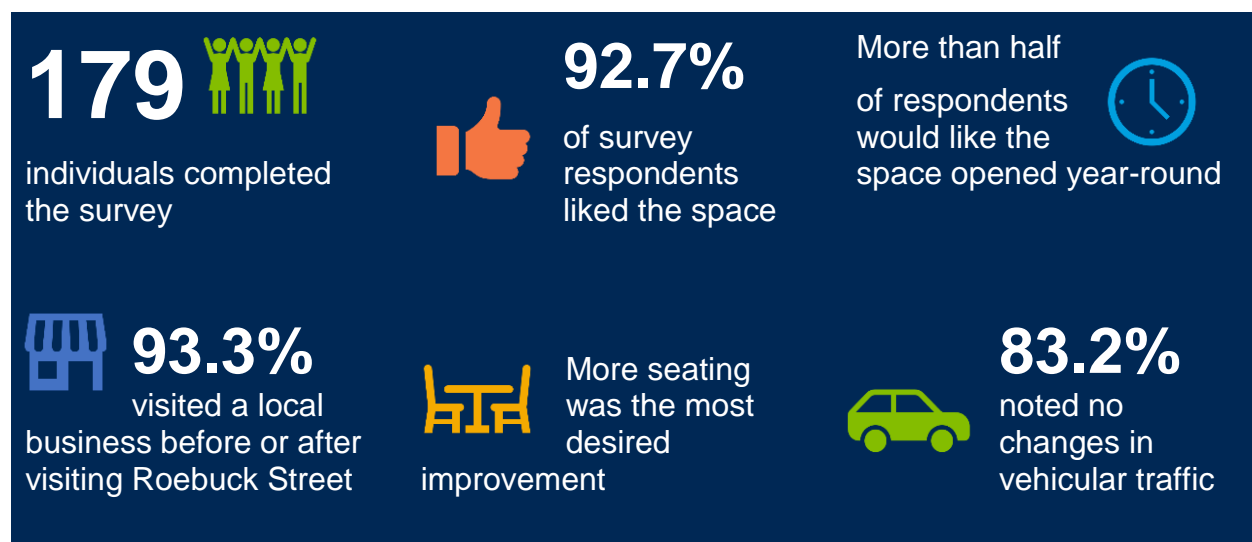
### Activation of the Space

The space was used quite heavily during the summer months, and several activities supported the area, including the Grand Opening Celebration event (August 12), the Music in the Park series (on Thursday evenings in August), Sounds of Broadway Culture Pop-Up by DreamCo (August 30), and Harvest Festival (September 12).

### Public Survey

A public survey was created through [Connect Whitby](#) to provide residents, users, and business owners with a chance to submit feedback on the project. A-frame signs that included a QR code linking to the online survey were available on site, and postcards were handed out at various community events asking for feedback.

Figure 1: Key Findings from the survey



Some of the key findings and themes that emerged from the public feedback include:

- Created a welcoming gathering space;
- Increased safety;
- Provided an extension of Grass Park;
- Provided additional seating opportunities;
- Prioritized pedestrians versus vehicles;
- Added vibrancy through road mural; and
- Encouraged visits to local businesses.

Some of the respondent comments included:

- “I love how inviting it is! We (as parents) immediately felt more relaxed having Roebuck Street shut down so our family could enjoy music and ice cream without the worry of cars! It is bright, colourful and feels like a great community meet up spot!”
- “The wide open spot encourages more gatherings, and it was a genius idea. The added bonus of the artistry and sidewalk chalk for the kids made for such a community feel to the area and the chairs and tables was a perfect addition. Excellent work Town of Whitby!”
- “Not only is the BROOKLIN artwork on the pavement amazing, that portion of street invites the visitor to this spot to sit back and relax while enjoying the environmentally friendly area.”

### **Business Feedback**

Staff have connected with the business and property owners along Roebuck Street, both prior to the installation to ensure any concerns were addressed and after the project was completed to obtain feedback. Overall, the business and property owners were generally supportive of the project and the improvements it provided to the streetscape and overall atmosphere of Downtown Brooklin.

One particular business saw a 15% sales increase year-over-year, indicating that the road closure was a big contributing factor to the increase. It was noted that the space was used by all ages during the day/evenings, including local office/business employees who would hold meetings in the space.

Some concerns noted include the additional garbage, the use of washrooms by non-patrons, challenges with the delivery of goods and products, parking in unauthorized areas, and the need for better evening lighting. Staff are continuing to work with the business and property owners to address their concerns and provide up-front communication about the project scope.

### **2023 Project Scope**

Based on the feedback received and the overall success of the project, staff are recommending a semi-permanent closure of Roebuck Street from June to mid-September to provide a balanced approach to address community and business needs.

Staff observed that the space was underutilized in September after children returned to school and the weather started to get cooler. Therefore, it is recommended that the closure of Roebuck Street conclude after Harvest Festival, which occurs generally around the second weekend in September.

There were several great recommendations provided by the community, business/property owners, and staff that are being considered for 2023, including the addition of:

- Painting of the concrete barriers by local artists;
- New road mural – new call for artists/design ideas;
- Signage to ‘Please Keep This Space Clean’ and additional no parking signs;
- Kids games and activations i.e., hopscotch, leapfrog;
- Portable toilet;
- Regular cleaning/power washing; and
- Possible extension of the Baldwin Bistro patio.

Other opportunities to enhance the space that would be subject to future capital budget approval include:

- Outdoor foosball table;
- Corn hole game;
- Bike racks; and
- String lights.

## 5. Financial Considerations:

The 2022 Roebuck Street Pilot Project (capital project # 55227402) was 100% funded through a My Main Street - Community Activator Grant in the amount of \$65,123. Due to lower than anticipated staff labour requirements, the total cost of the Roebuck Street pilot was \$34,590, which included furniture, artist honorariums and materials, communication pieces, and staff time for design and installation.

For 2023, the Creative Communities operating budget will support the proposed enhancements such as paint materials, the new road mural and signage to further enhance Roebuck Street.

## 6. Communication and Public Engagement:

The Roebuck Street Placemaking Project received overwhelming support from the community, with a total of 179 responses to the survey. Many positive comments were shared, and overall, people loved the space and the community atmosphere it provided in Downtown Brooklin. Staff will update the Connect Whitby project page with the survey results and build out a project launch for 2023.

**7. Input from Departments/Sources:**

Staff from Fire and Operations Services, Community Services, Planning and Development, Strategic Initiatives, and Financial Services were asked to provide input on the consideration of a semi-permanent closure for 2023. Their input has been included in this report.

**8. Strategic Priorities:**

The Roebuck Street Placemaking Project aligns with the Corporate Strategic Plan by designing service delivery around customer needs and measuring results in pursuit of ongoing improvements to the customer service experience. The project also empowers staff to use their creativity and collaboration to develop innovative and engaging opportunities to support the community. The project took into consideration accessible design principles by ensuring paths of travel met Town standards and offering an accessible picnic table seating option. The project supported the Town's sustainability goals by creating shade seating options, adding planters/softscaping to the site, and using QR codes to support online survey feedback.

**9. Attachments:**

Attachment 1 – Staff Report CAO 05-23 Photo Collage of Roebuck Street Placemaking Project

