

OBIAA 2023 AWARDS SUBMISSION

Contact Name: Kevin McHale	Pillar & Category: Public Realm
BIA/Organization: Sparks Street BIA & Mall Authority	Time period: Spring 2022 - ongoing
Entry title: Sparks Street Green Zones	
Project description: <i>Sparks Street BIA implemented a pilot project of creating placemaking green spaces for the public to use while visiting our pedestrian street. With the use of custom-built cedar boxes and planting of climate appropriate trees, flowers, and vines to grow up trellis, complemented with sustainable seating, we have provided new, shaded spaces for the public.</i>	

NEED OR OPPORTUNITY

Sparks Street is within a Heritage Conservation District just a block away from Parliament Hill and Wellington Street which is known as the linear division between 'Town' and 'Crown'. Surrounded by UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Rideau Canal, the National Gallery of Canada, Confederation Square, the National Arts Centre and the ByWard Market, there is a large number of visitors, locals, government, and business individuals who frequent Sparks Street. For over 50 years, Sparks Street pedestrian mall has been an iconic place to visit in downtown Ottawa and has reached a point where physical improvements would greatly benefit the pedestrian street. As such, Sparks Street BIA underwent public consultation as part of the City of Ottawa's Public Realm Plan information gathering proceedings to gain insights into what people who visit or frequent the area were looking for on the pedestrian street. One strategic design identified as a public priority was the additional of green scaping along Sparks Street. This included perennial planting, shade and seasonal comfort, and seating.

AUDIENCE

Located in the heart of the nations' capital, Sparks Street is in a unique position located just South of Parliament Hill in a busy business district surrounded by hotels, a major conference centre, and shopping mall, while maintaining the status of a vibrant tourist-friendly area. The BIA's audience covers a large variety of visitors both local and frequent who either live in the surrounding area or commute to the core for work, as well as out of town and international visitors who come to see Canada's capital and iconic sites. Whether our visitors are looking for an escape from the office to eat lunch outdoors or seeing Ottawa for the first time, Sparks Street BIA caters to all who patron our pedestrian thoroughfare. As such, we know our street stands out as a unique opportunity to create spaces for gathering and relaxing in an urban setting. We wanted to go beyond the benches and add welcoming spaces with seating, shading, and fresh air experiences for all who walk our street.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Measurable goals and objectives:

- Meet the Public Realm Plan's identified needs for green scaping and placemaking in order to meet the public's requests for more usable green spaces thus encouraging more visitors.
- Ensure implementation of climate and geographically appropriate plants that can thrive in the urban environment we are located in and avoid exotic or invasive species to follow best practices planting with the City of Ottawa.
- Add more sustainable, inviting seating and reasons for visiting and extending stays on Sparks Street.

IMPLEMENTATION

To accomplish our goals, we hired a contractor whose vision aligned with our own for the street and its possibilities. Lafleur de la Capital had the expertise to build sustainable planters using locally sourced white cedar as well as the expertise and passion to maintain the planters and trees for years to come. We put in the order for the construction of the new planter infrastructure during the winter months in order to achieve spring planting goals for 2021.

In order to create spaces that were in line with and beyond the required 'green', we incorporated additional elements such as our Little Library. We installed AV towers into four planter boxes that have a number of uses: mounts for lighting and sound equipment, event signage, as well as acting as an urban trellis for vines and ivies to crawl up. This past winter, we used the AV trusses to support an art feature called 'Light Court', inviting visitors to either stay longer after the sun had set or to visit in the evenings hours. The additional seating we included on the street is 100% recycled plastic red Muskoka chairs, both tying into our brand's main colour. These chairs offer wide arms and deep seating for more relaxed stay and space to set your coffee cup or meal.

Through a combination of canopy honey locust trees, Elm trees, above ground planters, small greenspaces, seasonal installations, hanging baskets and boxes of flowers and perennial gardens, Sparks Street is fulfilling one of its primary roles as a pedestrian oasis through the Central Business District.

The vines include Boston Ivy, Virginia Creeper, and Climbing Dipladenia. Other boxes feature petunias, Potato Vine, and Dracaena (Spike Plant) as well as Birch Brush and the aforementioned four young honey locust trees.

With the Public Realm Plan confirming our need for more public green spaces, we went forth with our first pilot project implementing four honey locust trees in custom-built cedar planter boxes accompanied by an additional four raised custom-built cedar planter boxes featuring trellis for vines to climb. These were first located in a single designated area in front of the recently vacated CIBC building where there was noticeably less natural shade provided during mid day on the street.

As this project was identified from the Public Realm Plan, the BIA committed staff resources along with a project budget of \$30,000.

The main challenges faced on this project were material supply shortages and staff shortages during the pandemic. This accounted for longer construction delays for the cedar infrastructure and taught us the new timelines going forward.

In order to let the public know of the newly dedicated space, we created a blog post and promoted it on our social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), tagging in local partners who could amplify our message, such as the City of Ottawa, Ottawa Tourism, Ottawa Coalition of BIAs, etc. We routinely included the messaging reminding people of the space, whether through dedicated posts showcasing the plants growing, or as an aside within other messaging pertaining to events happening on the street (i.e.: during Poutinefest, to remind visitors of the great seating options available to take their steaming treats to relax and enjoy). We also located the first Green Zone where our pilot project Wi-Fi Zone was also up and running, ensuring visitors had somewhere to sit while connecting.

RESULTS

When the Green Zone pilot project proved successful, the BIA obtained \$75,000 in funding from the Canada Community Revitalization Fund in order to expand the project to include a second dedicated Green Zone by our beloved Shed. The Shed is our performance area where we host bi-weekly summer programming of a local artist playing live music during the summer months. By the summer of 2022, we had four more raised cedar box planters with trellis built, eight more cedar boxes for trees, and it was at this stage we implemented the AV towers into their

own four cedar boxes to ensure vines could climb the trellis we had chosen specifically for the project's future goals. The AV trusses added to both the new Green Zone they was located in as well as working to enhance the artistic performance for our Shed. The additional Muskoka seating provided more comfortable and inviting spaces for audiences to linger and enjoy the summer performances from.

Our social media posts about Green Zones did significantly and noticeably better in obtaining likes and reshares than our average posts. Our partners picked up our content and shared it willingly upon being tagged. Local news station CBC tends to use our Green Zones as a backdrop to their on-street media spots or in their news article images.

More recently, we have entered into an agreement with Environics Analytics Data where we are now able to obtain footfall traffic counts on Sparks Street. This data has helped us identify peak times of visits and we hope to learn more from the metrics as we go into spring of 2023.

From the feedback we have received on our project to our successful grant application to expand it, we believe the Green Zones have truly improved our BIA and street overall, gaining visitors and for longer stays, all while implementing our Public Realm Plan goals. The future of including green and sustainable spaces, especially in urban areas, is up to us, and we are proud to be able to help the planet in any small way we can.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Blog: <https://www.sparkslive.com/post/sparks-street-green-zone>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CRZHHqBljMK/?hl=en>

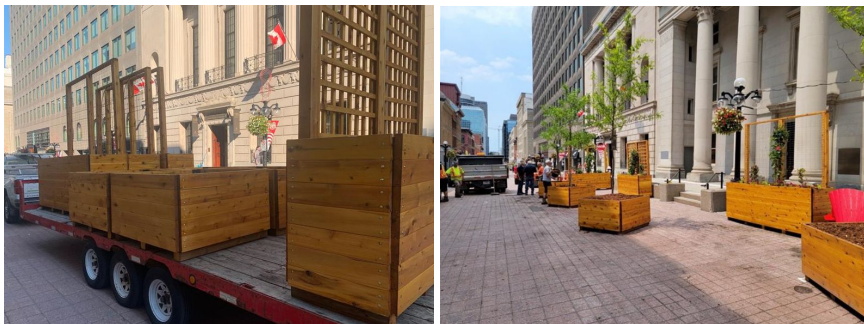
Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/SparksStreet/posts/pfbid024ATxoTCExr4dk1bkqDYY4wHfXwS6P6yxPpy9atai2cg2vH6yqAwuNd8sbAR7vqI>

Sparks Street Public Realm Plan: <https://ottawa.ca/en/planning-development-and-construction/community-design/community-plans-and-studies/other-community-studies/sparks-street-public-realm-plan>

Images:

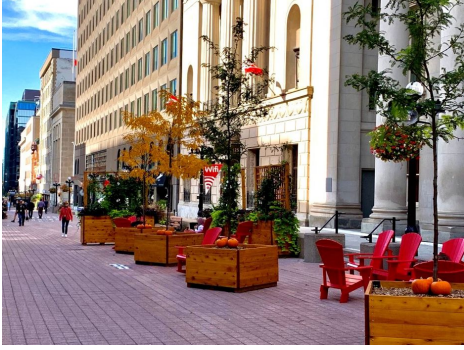
Implementation:



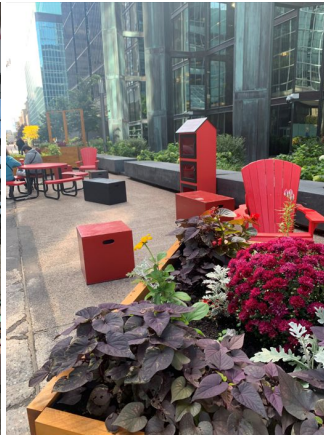
Result of Green Zone 1 upon installation:



After growth opportunity by fall:



Additional Green Zones:



AV trellis tower:

