

Central Memorial Park Study launched to deal with Beltline safety issues

Calgary, Alberta (December 03, 2003) – A comprehensive land use and programming study for Calgary’s oldest surviving park hopes to breathe new life into one of our city’s beleaguered public spaces. The study, commissioned by the Victoria Crossing Business Revitalization Zone as part of the Beltline Initiative, was recently awarded to a consultant team headed up by Carson-McCulloch Associates, a Calgary based landscape architecture firm.

Comprised of 1.91 hectares of land granted to the town of Calgary in 1885 from the Dominion of Canada as part of the survey plan for the original town site, Central Memorial Park and the Library sited along its eastern edge, are among our most important historical resources. Unfortunately, despite their significance and value, both the Park and Library have struggled to achieve a sustainable role since the Library ceased its central operation in the 1960’s. The site is now undervalued in terms of making an active contribution to the surrounding community and fails to function as a successful public space. Lack of adequate programming in the Park and its secluded surroundings have contributed to a conducive environment for the homeless, open alcohol consumption and drug and sexual activity. By addressing the physical planning of the Park and creating new opportunities for increased utilization, the Beltline Initiative hopes to alleviate some of the social and safety concerns within it, thereby aiding in increasing the Library’s usage and reinstating active, social use of the Park.

Madeleine King, Alderman for Ward 8, provided the initial motivation in mid 2002 and engaged the energy of various stakeholders to begin the evaluation of the Park. “I am a great advocate of reclaiming Central Memorial Park as a significant public space for the people of the Beltline,” says King. “A thorough evaluation of the types of uses that could be accommodated in the Park and introducing appropriate development to the site would serve to make the area more vibrant and attract more people to the Library.”

The report ***Rediscovering the Centre***, released by the Beltline Initiative last spring, identified the review of Central Memorial Park as an opportunity to develop bold new initiatives with respect to new capital investment, activities, and improved management and maintenance practices.

Eileen Stan, Victoria Crossing's Executive Director comments: "What we're trying to do is integrate Central Memorial Park with the surrounding residential and commercial revitalization that is happening in the Beltline. By addressing the Park's physical framework, introducing appropriate, sensitive development and ensuring proper restorative and management programs, we hope to bring people back into Central Memorial Park for the reason it was originally intended."

In a related effort, the Community Life Improvement Council (CLIC) has recently initiated its crime prevention pilot project in the Beltline. "In Central Memorial Park, increased activity and public safety go hand in hand. Increased activity in the Park will make it safer and increased safety will attract more people," adds Glenn Lyons, a consultant working with CLIC on the crime prevention project.

Fundraising for the project is ongoing with partial financial support provided by The Calgary Heritage Authority and Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Heritage Preservation Partnership Program. The study, which will include a public participation component, will commence in January and is expected to be completed by April 2004.

The Beltline Initiative is a collaborative organization of the Beltline Communities of Victoria and Connaught and the Uptown17, 4th Street and Victoria Crossing Business Revitalization Zones.

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