



Rink SOCIAL

Final Report for City of Toronto Parks, Forestry, & Recreation

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For Appendix, refer to file 'Rink Social Appendix'

Right picture: McCowan Rink Social



project background

project background

Evergreen and the City of Toronto began a conversation in the spring of 2018 exploring the City's interest in launching a series of place-making pilots across the City, aimed at bringing new life to some of Toronto's parks and recreation facilities. The first project identified was a winter pilot to be located at Toronto's outdoor rinks. Evergreen partnered with Montreal based placemaking firm, La Pepiniere to create a proposal for the City of Toronto.

The City's approach was to build the capacity of its staff to deliver site amenities and services to the public through placemaking, supported by the collective experience of Evergreen and La Pepiniere.

- West Mall - February 9/10
- Regent Park – February 16/17/18
- McCowan – February 23/24
- Mel Lastman – March 2/3



Left: Mel Lastman Rink Social

project overview

phase 1 – capacity building

project objectives

OBJECTIVE 1:

Capacity building for City staff

OBJECTIVE 2:

Co-create a program plan for rink activations

OBJECTIVE 3:

Create a design for a mobile placemaking unit

DELIVERABLES:

1. Programming charrette
2. Design charrette
3. Placemaking and mobilization workshop
4. Overarching program plan
5. Detailed design for mobile placemaking units



timeline

programming
charrette

9 participants

NOV. 6

design
charrette

12 participants

NOV. 12 & 13

placemaking &
mobilization
workshops

6 participants

DEC. 11

phase 2 – activations

project objectives

OBJECTIVE 1:

Capacity building for City staff

OBJECTIVE 2:

Produce detailed program plans and site designs for 4 chosen rinks

OBJECTIVE 3:

Deliver placemaking activations at 4 outdoor rinks

DELIVERABLES:

- Detailed program plans (x4)
- Detailed site designs (x4)
- Procurement of site furniture and program materials
- Program logistics
- Program delivery
- On site staff mentoring/training

timeline

west mall

FEB. 9/10

regent park

FEB. 16/17/18

mccowan

FEB. 23/24

mel lastman

MAR. 2/3



rink social by numbers

4 rinks
across the city

8 days of programming
9th day was lost to severe weather

15 programmatic offerings
per site

1,500 average attendance
per site

30% increase in attendance on Sundays

35%-75% off-ice activity (vs. on ice)

378 pairs of skates lent out

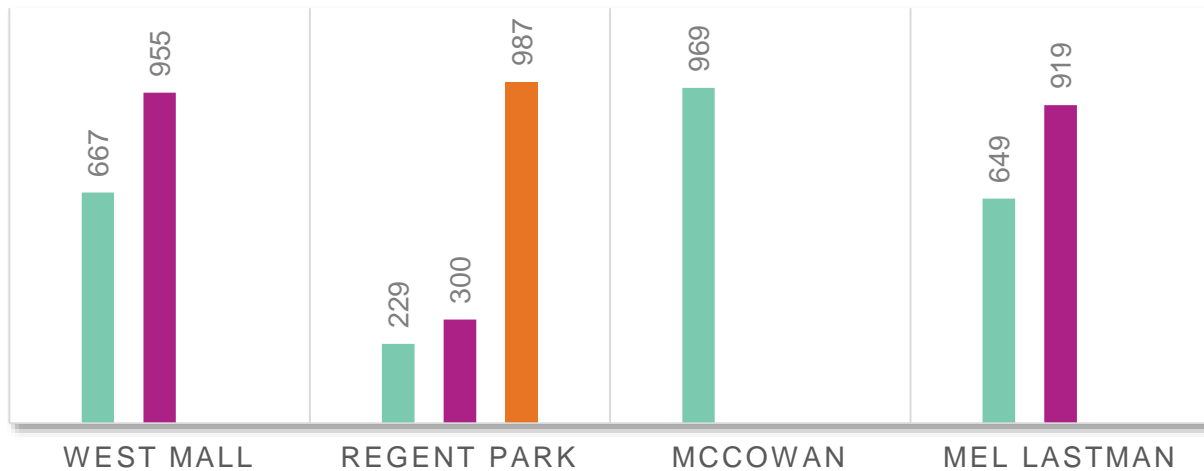
122 written comments from the public
109 positive, 13 constructive



attendance

TOTAL ATTENDANCE BY DAY

■ Saturday ■ Sunday ■ Monday



PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED IN OFF-ICE VS. ON-ICE ACTIVITIES

■ Off-Ice ■ On-Ice

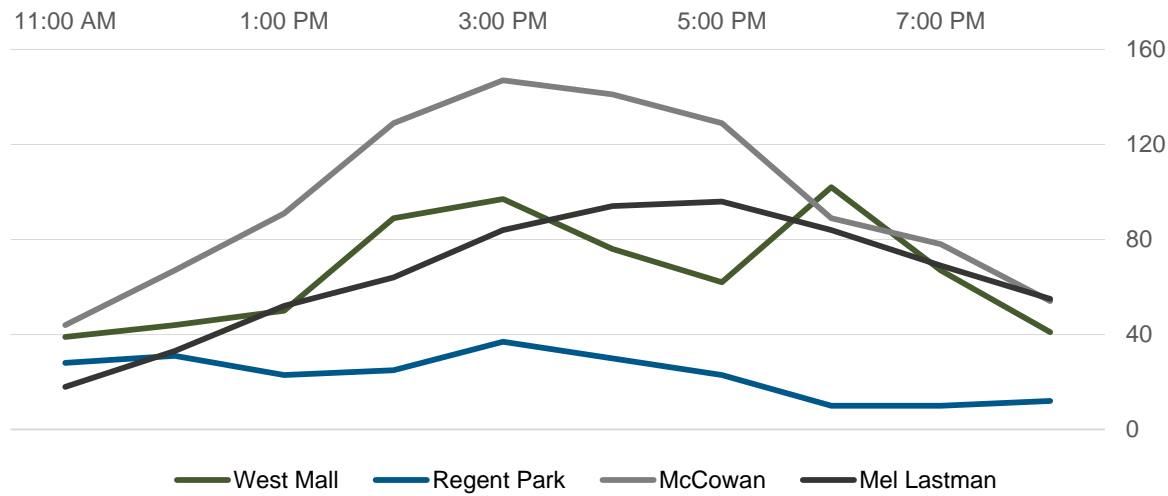


key insights

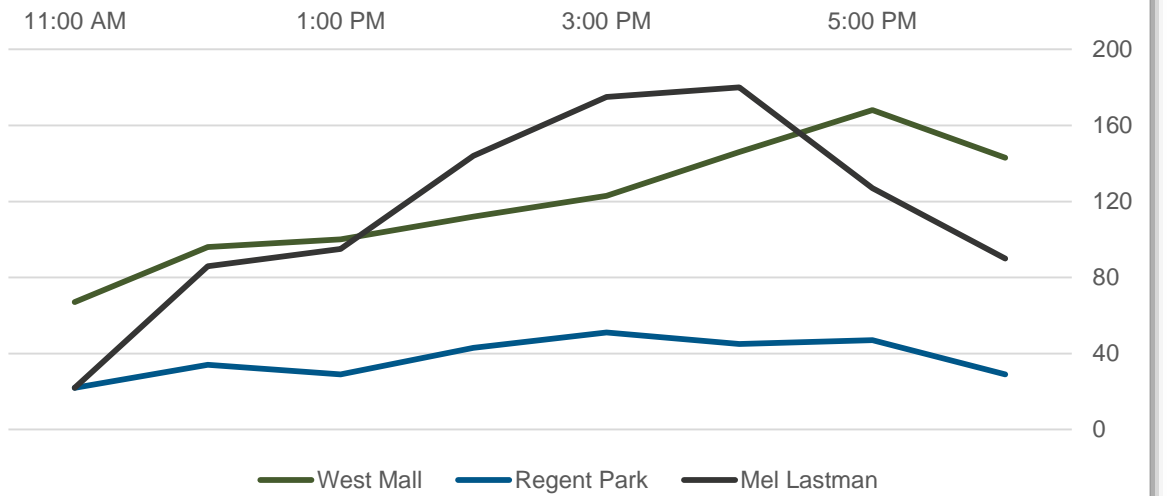
- Note ~30% growth on 2nd day from word of mouth
- Regent had low local promotion for Sat/Sun
- Monday boost at Regent was from MLSE event promotion
- West Mall and Mel Lastman had the biggest pleasure skating rinks and the corresponding level of on ice activity

attendance

ATTENDANCE BY HOUR (SATURDAY)



ATTENDANCE BY HOUR (SUNDAY)



key insights

- Peak hours roughly 2:30 PM – 5:30 PM both Sat. and Sun.



lessons learned

capacity building

Capacity deliverables in Phase 1 consisted of program and site design charrettes and a mobilizing workshop. In Phase 2, capacity building was carried out through briefings and ongoing mentoring/coaching of City staff during the activations.

WHAT WENT WELL

- City staff were keen participants in all workshops and were especially interested in the design charrette
- On site mentoring/coaching of program staff (during activation) was effective for refining site layout and public interaction

WHAT WE LEARNED

- More lead time was needed to enable broader participation in Phase 1 capacity building sessions
- Having a greater mix of leadership and public facing staff would help the dialogue in the training sessions
- Design charrettes would have been significantly enhanced if site selection had occurred beforehand so the session could have been more applied
- Off site training of front line staff would have been a valuable addition (eg. At Evergreen Brick Works)

INSIGHT

- Adequate lead time and advance site selection would have enabled greater participation and more applied learning for participants



planning

The planning for Phase 1 of this project began in the spring of 2018 for delivery in late fall. The planning for Phase 2 of the project began in mid-December of 2018 for delivery beginning in February of 2019.

WHAT WENT WELL

- Clear goals and objectives for the pilot project
- Problem solving spirit of the collaboration between the City and Evergreen
- Going the extra mile at the City to make a number of special arrangements for the pilot project to occur

WHAT WE LEARNED

- Timeline was the biggest challenge
- Lots of lead time is needed for all the pieces to be organized at the City
- Key parts of the planning process are held up until sites are selected
- Site selection is best if informed by site visits and connections with the community and partners
- More lead time is required for alignment with City staffing and facilities planning cycles. Perhaps even more advance warning is required for Facilities teams in particular in winter (ie. Snow and ice removal)

INSIGHT

- Site selection is both a key process in and of itself and in placemaking work has such a high impact on all aspects of the planning process that the earlier it can happen, the better.



site selection

The site selection process focused on choosing one site in each of the four quadrants of the City.

WHAT WENT WELL

- Rink Social was successfully adapted to each of the four sites (four different neighbourhoods and four different facility layouts) – a very flexible program
- Rink Social worked easily and as a great compliment to companion events (ie. MLSE family day & Caribana on Ice)

WHAT WE LEARNED

- When there was a pleasure skating rink (all except Regent Park), a greater focus of Rink Social on-ice activities resulted
- Site visits by activation leads are key to ensure the site is viable
- Site capacity for local promotion can be a key factor in attendance

INSIGHT

- A cooperative mentality amongst site staff/leadership and motivation to participate in a pilot project are likely more important criteria for choosing a site than any perceived physical limitations



site programming

Rink Social featured a suite of four different on-ice activities and up to sixteen different off-ice activities

WHAT WENT WELL

- The experience of an open fire is captivating and delightful for all ages
- Roasting apples on an open fire was a source of much surprise and delight
- Maple taffy is a huge crowd pleaser – timed during ice resurfacing to maximize participation
- Nature play area was a source for immersive play, for small children through to elementary ages. Captivating also for watching and sometimes participating parents
- Jenga and ping pong were popular and could be easily located inside or out. Small sized ping pong tables could also work inside and out.
- Sledge hockey was a runaway hit. People were very curious and delighted to have a chance to try and it was an activity that was universally humbling and exciting. Constantly busy and requires staff support.
- Broomball, skittles and shuffleboard were silly fun activities that brought out a surprising amount of free play and laughter on the ice. Great for both new and experienced skaters
- Touch table by the fire was a draw for children and adults alike

WHAT WE LEARNED

- While some activities are more popular than others, having the right number of activities (more than 10) and a variety of types is central to success
- Sledge hockey is constantly busy and requires staff support
- Staff frequently need to be the spark to ignite activity and invite participation when new ideas are being explored.



INSIGHT

- Activities need to be evaluated based on their contribution to the suite of offerings, not solely on their own merit. A good number and variety is key.

site design & furnishings

Rink Social featured a suite of site furnishings including chairs, tables, fire pit, love seats, swings, propane heaters skate friendly matting and string lights along with decorative accessories like lanterns, blankets and pillows.

WHAT WENT WELL

- Designs were very success at each site in concentrating activity, maximizing space usage and promoting circulation
- Matting provided by the City was key in affording greatly expanded circulation with skates on
- Furnishings added colour and a warm aesthetic throughout
- Fire setting was a central hub in all locations and wooden swings and loveseats were a huge draw
- Layouts that enabled families to spread out but stay in visual contact was maximized
- Stock tanks with cedar trees were very successful at defining and warming the site
- String lights overhead and twinkly lights in trees were a strong presence from twilight through the evening

WHAT WE LEARNED

- Lightweight plastic items didn't survive wear and tear very well (small side tables, skate racks)
- Treating the interior of the rink building as part of the activation was important – with lighting, furniture, table clothes, etc.
- Heaters were popular and most effective when paired with high-top tables



INSIGHT

- Natural elements mixed with site furniture with warm colours and textures got a strong positive response from the public. Tweaking layout to concentrate activity and adapt to site patterns and sightlines is key.

food & drink

Each Rink Social site featured at least one food truck and up to three providing a variety of warm food and drink.

WHAT WENT WELL

- Hot drinks were very popular with the public
- The most successful food truck vendor was “Choccochurros” providing fried, sweet churros that weren’t very expensive and made for a popular rink side treat that was easily shared with friends and family.

WHAT WE LEARNED

- The availability of food trucks is very limited in winter and vendors aren’t very keen in situations where there isn’t a proven audience
- Rink Social could become more viable for food truck vendors if it had a regular audience
- Alcohol was only piloted at Mel Lastman square and sales were extremely low. Fair to conclude that serving alcohol wasn’t a success for this version of Rink Social and notably, required a significant effort from both Evergreen and City staff in order to have the event properly permitted. Sourcing a vendor serving warm alcoholic drinks and extending the evening hours could make this offering more viable

INSIGHT

- Not as easy as it seems. Cultivating relationships with suppliers and building a regular audience for them is key to success for this key component of this placemaking project



communications

Communications deliverables included: Branding, graphic design and production of: promotional poster, site signage (welcome banner, community engagement board, wayfinding signs)

WHAT WENT WELL

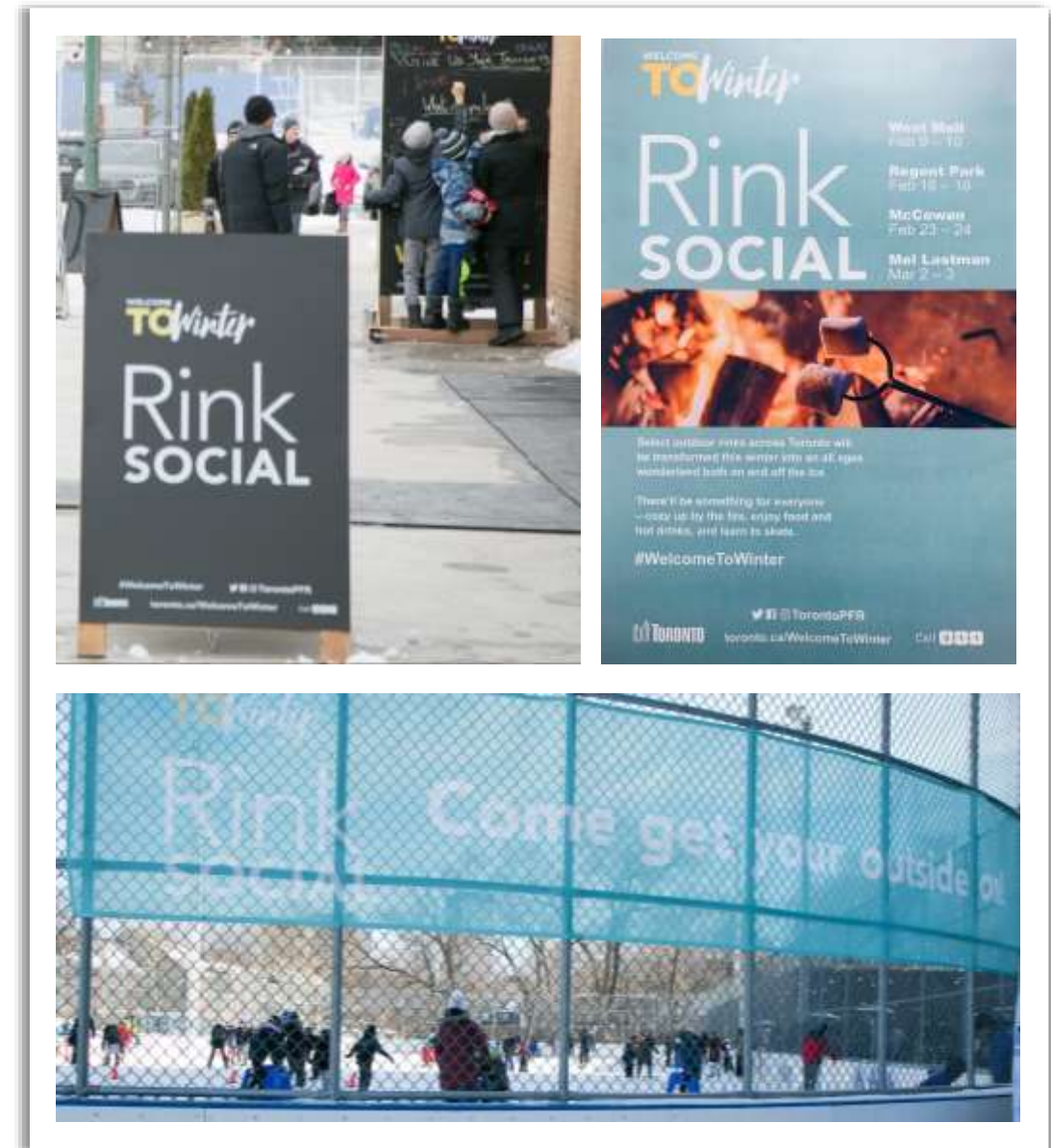
- Branding was well received by the public and staff
- Positioning worked well as a community level happening vs a special event
- 8ft sign that introduced Rink Social and provided context was highly visible and received 122 comments over the four sites
- 22ft banner was positioned to be seen from road/main entry and was effective
- 3 - 4ft 'A' frames were effective at reinforcing branding throughout sites and the public was often seen getting their photos beside the signs

WHAT WE LEARNED

- Need more local promotion (schools, libraries, community centres, arenas) in the form of on site and neighbourhood postering as well as social media.
- Needed more outreach to local community organizations.
- Need more lead time for both (4-6 weeks recommended)

INSIGHT

- Leveraging local partnerships and adequate lead time for promotion are critical to build participation



public response

Rink social provided a prominent feedback board that combined information with the opportunity to react and reflect.

WHAT WENT WELL

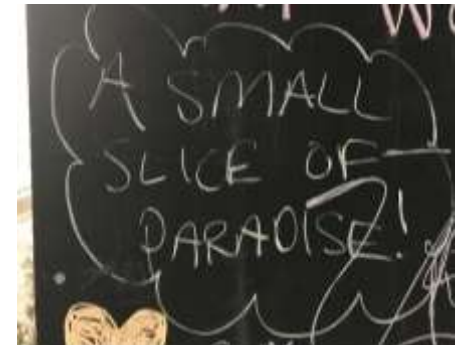
- The feedback board was popular and received lots of comments at each site.
- The most common expression of written feedback was “we loved everything”.
- New Canadians were a majority audience and loved the program. They expressed how happy they were to get outside, with their families, meet neighbours and experience Canadian traditions

WHAT WE LEARNED

- The positive feedback reinforced that the sum of the site design and program was greater than the parts – right ambiance, number and mix of activities and warm support from staff
- It was observed that the average stay at the rink for users was extended from ~30-60 minutes to an average of 1.5-2 hours. Many families that visited on Saturday returned to the sites on Sunday and stayed for 3+ hours, taking full advantage of the offering.
- Rink Social was popular with newcomer families that were looking for free, fun and healthy family outings

INSIGHT

- The public is hungry for enhanced experiences with their families that are both active and social at City rinks and are deeply appreciative of them



summary of insights

capacity building

Adequate lead time and earlier site selection would have enabled greater participation and more applied learning for participants.

planning

Site selection is both a key process in and of itself and in placemaking work has such a high impact on all aspects of the planning process that the earlier it can happen, the better.

site selection

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site programming

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recommendations

recommendations



1

create new routines

Take steps towards enabling Rink Social to stay longer at chosen sites to build audience and routines with the public and City staff – 1 month to season long residencies at given sites

2

experiment with scale

Refine staffing requirements and material/storage needs so that Rink Social components can be scaled at a given site throughout the rink season (ie. More furniture out on weekends, fire one day a week, sledge one day a month, etc.)

3

invest in internal leadership

Build City staff capacity by considering assembling a small placemaking group that could play a leadership role internally and support the refining of routines, designs, materials and programs

4

maximize value year round

Map out current and potential placemaking locations throughout the year to better understand which materials and programs could be repurposed to other seasons and locations

5

build on the momentum

Rink Social was so well received by the public and was catalytic in extending the public's outdoor, active and social time in winter. Adjust the offering for next winter while building on the success of the first pilot

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