Look & Feel
Community Engagement Report
Proposed Park in Downtown Royal Oak
# Table of Contents

## Introduction  ........................................................................................................... 1

**BACKGROUND** ........................................................................................................ 1

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY** ....................................................................................... 1

**PLANNING PROCESS** ............................................................................................... 2

- Methods and Tools .................................................................................................... 2
- Public Engagement Process ....................................................................................... 3

## Community Input  .................................................................................................... 5

**STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS** .................................................................................. 5

- Interclub Council, DDA, and Homeowners Association Stakeholder Groups
  - August 24, 2018 – Library Friends Auditorium .......................................................... 6
- City Employees – September 7, 2018 – Library Friends Auditorium ........................... 6

**MEET, GREET AND LISTEN SESSIONS** .................................................................... 7

- I Dig Royal Oak – August 23, 2018 ............................................................................ 7
- Arts, Beats & Eats – August 31, 2018 ......................................................................... 7
- Farm Market/Library – September 8, 2018 ................................................................. 8
- Food Truck Rally – September 12, 2018 .................................................................... 8

**VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEYS** .................................................................................. 9

- Visual Preference Survey #1 ........................................................................................ 9
- Visual Preference Survey #2 ....................................................................................... 11

**ONLINE USER OPINION SURVEY** .......................................................................... 13

## Outcomes  ..................................................................................................................... 15

**Community Engagement Process Outcomes** .......................................................... 15

- Summary .................................................................................................................... 15
- Learning by Example .................................................................................................. 15
- Statements and Interpretations .................................................................................... 15
Appendix  .............................................................................................................. 19

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS .................................................................................. 19
  Downtown Development Authority: Questionnaires ........................................... 19
  Downtown Development Authority: White-boards ............................................ 26
  Homeowners Association: White-boards .......................................................... 31
  Royal Oak Women’s Club Input ......................................................................... 32
  Interclub Council: White-boards ........................................................................ 34
  Example Photos from Stakeholders ................................................................... 38
  Additional Stakeholder Notes ............................................................................. 43

MEET GREET AND LISTEN SESSIONS ................................................................. 44
  I Dig Royal Oak: Questionnaires ....................................................................... 44
  I Dig Royal Oak: White-boards ......................................................................... 68
  Arts Beats & Eats: Questionnaires .................................................................... 72
  Arts Beats & Eats: White-boards ....................................................................... 93
  Farm Market/Library: Questionnaires ............................................................... 94
  Farm Market/Library White-boards ..................................................................... 121
  Food Truck Rally: Questionnaires ..................................................................... 122

VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY #1 ..................................................................... 136
  Presentation and Responses ............................................................................... 136
  VPS #1 White-boards ....................................................................................... 174

VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY #2 ..................................................................... 184
  Presentation and Responses ............................................................................... 184
  VPS #2 White-boards ....................................................................................... 223

ONLINE USER OPINION SURVEY ...................................................................... 226
  Survey and Responses ....................................................................................... 226
  Open-ended Responses ...................................................................................... 273
  User Uploaded Images ....................................................................................... 299

Example Parks Referenced by Users .................................................................. 301
BACKGROUND

The City of Royal Oak is undertaking a significant revitalization for its central core downtown area. The area is boarded by 11 Mile Road to the north, Knowles Street to the east, 3rd Street to the south and Main Street to the west. The plan is to create a new civic area. The library, courthouse and city market will remain in place as well as the existing commercial businesses located along Main Street. The remaining area is going to change to include; a new 7 story parking deck, new City Hall, new Police Station, new proposed office building (Henry Ford Hospital), renovated parking lots and a new public park.

The Royal Oak City Hall and Police Department currently occupy approximately 2.05 acres of land in the center of this proposed downtown redevelopment area. Currently the proposed park location consists of two civil service buildings housing many city departments (city clerk, human resources department, water department, treasurer and police station), surface parking lot, sidewalks, plaza area and landscape/buffer areas. These buildings will be demolished and be built new immediately to the east of their present location (east of Troy Street). The two acres remaining is planned to become a public park.

The existing Marshall Fredrick’s sculpture, entitled “Star Dream”. It is a very tall sculpture and sites prominently on the SW corner of the Royal Oak Library at the end of 2nd Street, which dead-ends mid way between Main and Troy Streets. The sculpture was dedicated on September 10, 1997 in this location.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine the “Look and Feel” for the new downtown park. The City decided that it wanted to involve the community in determining what this precious 2-acre parcel should become so prior to designing the park or obtaining an expert it was determined the city would provide an opportunity for the public to give its impressions as to the future “look and Feel” for the open space or blank canvass.

The City sought proposals from qualified engineering, planning and landscape architectural firms in 2017. The City of Royal Oak retained Nowak and Fraus, an engineering firm, located in Pontiac Michigan and its sub-consultant, Landscape Architects and Planners, Inc., (LAP + Creative), to provide a facilitation process for this unique public engagement opportunity. The process would provide inspiration through a series of impressions, opinions and collective thinking from the community. This process provides first impressions and samples from their experience which will help drive the design process with the community speaking prior to a park designer entering the project.
**Introduction**

The goal is to create a new “Downtown Park” which will be a civic focal point and gathering spot for the Royal Oak community and guests. It will also service the Henry Ford Outpatient Branch which will occupy a new five-story building, currently under construction immediately west of the proposed park and just north of 3rd Street, City Hall visitors and City Market patrons. It will also provide uses for the restaurants, retail businesses, employees and customers that frequent Main Street as well as the office workers and personnel that service the downtown.

**PLANNING PROCESS**

*Methods and Tools*

The methodologies and tools used for this project are of great importance to the City of Royal Oak. The City wants both stakeholders and the public to be notified and informed throughout the entire process. It is also important to them to allow people to speak their minds in an organized fashion with meaningful outcomes, but also in a relaxed and comfortable manner so that everyone could have a conversation with the facilitators and know that their input would be heard and incorporated. The consultants responded by offering a unique blend of interviews with community organizations (Stakeholders), a series of public outreach engagements entitled “Meet, Greet and Listen” Sessions, Two “Visual Preference Surveys” (VPS) and a similar online public opinion survey mimicking the VPS.
"Look and Feel" Public Engagement Process

Listening Sessions (Complete)
- I Dig Royal Oak
- Farmer’s Market
- Arts Beats & Eats
- Food Truck Rally
- Library

Stakeholder Meetings (Complete)

Visual Preference Survey, Session 1
(October 6, 2018)

Visual Preference Survey, Session 2
(November 3, 2018)

Online Survey
(November 7, 2018)

Public Engagement Process
- Stakeholder Interviews (41 Representatives)
  - Interclub Council
  - Downtown Development Authority
  - Homeowners Association Groups
  - City Employees
- Meet, Greet and Listen Sessions (86 questionnaires received, 100+ Conversations)
  - I Dig Royal Oak
  - Arts, Beats and Eats
  - Farm Market
  - Food Truck Rally
  - Library
- Visual Preference Surveys - 300+ participants
- Online User Opinion Survey - 882 surveys received
- Conversations with residents throughout the process
Introduction
STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

These meetings were designed to gain knowledge of how the leadership members of community organizations, support groups, and other agencies value the new park, how they intend to use it and how they can benefit from its appearance, function, and draw. Most of the interviews were conducted at the Royal Oak Library which allowed people to view the project area. Some were conducted at the groups normal meeting locations. Standard questions were proposed to the group in an open-ended format gathered around a table. Groups were then given an opportunity to share additional thoughts that they may have toward the look and feel of the new park. Notes were taken and thoughts and ideas were written on large white-boards. A full inventory of notes can be found in the appendix.

The standard questions that were asked of these groups are as follows:

1. Did you know that the City of Royal Oak is proposing to develop a new park located in the middle of downtown adjacent to where the City Hall is now located? If you did, how did you learn about this proposed development and what were your initial thoughts about it?

2. Does your organization have any particular needs or wants that are related to the proposed downtown park?

3. What do you think needs to happen to make this park exceptional and something that the City will be proud of years into the future?

4. How would you like to be involved in defining and/or participating in the park programs for this new park? Do you have any ideas currently that you would like to suggest? Do you see any partnership opportunities with between your organization and the City regarding the proposed park?

5. What is the best way to be keep your organization informed about your relationship with the development of the new park?

6. Are there any suggestions you can provide that will help with the development of the new park?

7. How best can your organization notify and ask people to attend community workshops this fall to help define the program and physical elements for this new park?
Interclub Council, DDA, and Homeowners Association Stakeholder Groups
August 24, 2018 – Library Friends Auditorium

Some of the most discussed items from these stakeholder interviews included:
1. Performance opportunities (bandshell)
2. Local Events/programming
3. Seating – benches
4. Landscaping/Trees
5. Total cost of ownership/operation cost

City Employees – September 7, 2018 – Library Friends Auditorium

Some of the most discussed items from the city employee interviews included:
1. Local events, programming
2. Seating
3. Trees/Landscaping
4. Lighting
5. Security concerns
6. Open Greenspace
MEET, GREET AND LISTEN SESSIONS
These sessions were conducted on site during specific events in Royal Oak. The goal of these sessions was to gather public input from a great number of people who were attending these events. Participants were invited to discuss their vision with the project team, fill out questionnaires, and write their thoughts and ideas on large white-boards. A full inventory of the scanned questionnaires and white-boards from the events can be found in the appendix.

I Dig Royal Oak – August 23, 2018
The project team was on site to collect input at the I Dig Royal Oak event. I dig Royal Oak was a free event to help launch and celebrate the upcoming ground breaking for the new police station and City Hall. The family-friendly event offered activities for elementary aged children including a rock climbing wall, arts and crafts, outdoor games, sand box discoveries, cooperative play activities and more.

A few of the most received comments included:
1. Seating – benches
2. Tied - Restrooms, Landscaping/Trees
3. Fountain
4. Performance Opportunities

Arts, Beats & Eats – August 31, 2018
The project team was on site to collect input at the Arts, Beats & Eats Festival. This festival offers more than 200 performances on nine stages, a highly ranked Juried Fine Arts Show, and local restaurants with some of the finest cuisine in Metro-Detroit. Each year these international, regional and local festival attractions make the City of Royal Oak the premier destination for Labor Day weekend.

A few of the most received comments included:
1. Restrooms
2. Seating
3. Fountain
4. Tied - Landscaping/Trees, Play structure
5. Tied - Open Greenspace, Local Sculpture/Art
Farm Market/Library – September 8, 2018
The Royal Oak Farm Market is a weekly event that features fresh locally grown produce and other great food and craft items for sale. The project team was on site to collect input at the market. Upon closing of the market the team moved across the street to gather additional input at the Royal Oak Public Library.

As a result of the new police station and City Hall the Farm Market will be losing a portion of its adjacent parking. This issue was the main focus of the respondents.

A few of the most received comments included:
1. Loss of Parking was the major response
2. Trees/Landscaping
3. Seating
4. Restrooms
5. Tied - Performance opportunities, Play Structure, Fountain, Local sculpture art

Food Truck Rally – September 12, 2018
Royal Oak Farmers Market Food Truck Rally is every second Wed of each month. The project team was on site to collect input at the Food Truck Rally on September 12.

A few of the most received comments included:
1. Restrooms
2. Tied - Performance Opportunities, Landscaping/Trees
3. Tied - Seating, Play Structure, Open/Greenspace
4. Water feature/“Squirt” zone
5. Local sculpture art
VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEYS

Visual Preference Survey #1
The first visual preference survey (VPS) was conducted on Saturday, October 6, 2018 at the Royal Oak Middle School from 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM. The event was promoted on various forms of social media, 3x5” post cards, City web site and newspaper. This session had a total of 209 participants. Throughout this VPS community members used hand-held clickers to respond to various questions and comparisons. First a series of programmatic images were presented and the community members were asked to rate how much they would like each element to be included in the park. Community members were then presented with contrasting images of parks and asked to select what best reflected their impression of what would be appropriate for the downtown park. After each question, the participants were able to see the results in real-time. Included below are two example questions from the presentation along with the applicable response totals. A full inventory of the questions and responses can be found in the appendix.

Example Questions:

How important to you is a water feature in the park?

A. I really don’t want it.
B. I would prefer not to have it.
C. Doesn’t matter to me either way.
D. I would prefer to have it.
E. I really want it.

15. How important to you is a water feature in the park? (Multiple Choice)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I really don’t want it.</td>
<td>7.29%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would prefer not to have it.</td>
<td>4.69%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t matter to me either way.</td>
<td>14.06%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would prefer to have it.</td>
<td>28.65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I really want it.</td>
<td>45.31%</td>
<td>87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>192</td>
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After the conclusion of the visual preference survey, a second meeting (casual conversation) was held in a separate room for those that wanted to stay and engage in conversation about the park. Many people provided comments, pictures, sketches and other forms of input regarding the “look and feel” for the park.

A few of the most mentioned items include:

6. Water feature
7. Seating – benches, built in, café tables/chairs, movable seating
8. Green areas
9. Shade
10. Play feature
11. No Playground
12. Art – changeable or permanent
13. Flexibility in uses
14. All ages
15. Winter uses
16. Maintainable/Low maintenance
17. Gardens
Visual Preference Survey #2

The second VPS gathering was held on Saturday, November 3, 2018 at the Royal Oak Middle School. It was advertised in the same manner and was run the same as the first VPS. There were a total of 92 participants in this session. This session used the findings from the first VPS as a premise for refinement of those features and topics.

A full inventory of the questions and responses can be found in the appendix.

Example Question: In the first VPS participants rated Cumberland Park in Nashville, TN the highest among all of the park images that were presented. In the second VPS community members were shown this same park image and asked what they liked most about it.

Which of these things do you like most about this park?

A. The curvilinear pathways
B. The changes in elevation
C. The play elements
D. The blend of natural and artificial elements
E. The lawn space
F. The amount of trees

```
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<td>The curvilinear pathways</td>
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<td>The changes in elevation</td>
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<td>The play elements</td>
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<td>The blend of natural and artificial elements</td>
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<td>The lawn space</td>
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<td>The amount of trees</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>78</td>
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</tbody>
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Example Question: In the first VPS the community members rated a water feature as being very important to them. In the second VPS the community members were shown several images representing various styles of water features and asked which one of the images that they prefer.
Which of these water features do you prefer?

A.  

B.  

C.  

D.  

In the same format as the first VPS, at the conclusion of the second VPS a second meeting (casual conversation) was held in a separate room for those that wanted to stay and engage in conversation about the park.

A few of the most mentioned items include:
1. Lighting – options, 24 hr/nighttime, for safety
2. Seating – comfortable/inviting, covered, variety for all age groups, long wood benches with tables
3. Connectivity with Farmers Market
4. War memorial – reorient the memorial – concern about damage to memorial
5. Fire feature – better options, multiple
6. Winter activities – ice skating
7. Restroom
8. Clock/timepiece
9. Play area for children
10. Landscaping – Flower/colorful, see rotation with local florist
11. Digital signs with scrolling text – upcoming events, etc.

ONLINE USER OPINION SURVEY
An Online User Opinion Survey (UOS) was launched Tuesday, November 6, 2018 and closed on Tuesday, November 20, 2018 during which **882 responses** were received. The UOS questions and format mimicked that of the Visual Preference Surveys. It also provided the UOS participant an opportunity to upload photos, sketches and images to better demonstrate their idea of what the look and feel of this park should be, which mimicked the casual conversations that followed the VPS. A **full inventory of the questions and responses can be found in the appendix.**
Outcomes

Community Engagement Process Outcomes

Summary
The Royal Oak Community Engagement process was launched in August of 2018 and is concluding in December of 2018. The intent was to discover what residents thought about the proposed Downtown Park which will replace the existing City Hall and Police Department, approximately 2 acres. The result was not meant to be an analytical report. Instead it was intended to be an organic process from the bottom up resulting in a general summation of views leading to statements about what the residents wanted the future park to “Look and Feel” like.

Learning by Example
Throughout the community engagement process, participants were asked to provide examples of parks that they have researched or experienced that represent what they think the new park in downtown Royal Oak should “Look and Feel” like. There were 60 example park references cited. This process provided a window into each persons’ experience and expression for what they think the future park could become. Through these reference parks the participants are speaking to the future design team and telling them what they think is significant and what they cherish. Although their references represent a menagerie of ideas, there are elements within each image that were repeated and that speak to the “Look and Feel” which will help inspire, excite, encourage and ultimately shape the future park. The future design team will understand what is being asked of them and the challenge that is before them. That challenge is take multiple elements and programs and meld them into a beautiful mosaic that is yet simple and cohesive.

A full Inventory of the example parks referenced by participants can be found in the appendix.

Statements and Interpretations
The statements within the summary were derived directly from what the participants provided us including their; hand sketches, narratives, references, photographs, images, opinions and oral descriptions. When you see “quotation marks” it means that the residents are speaking directly to you and when there aren’t quotations it is the professionals’ interpretation, capsulizing fragmented thoughts, impressions and emotions into succinct statements.

Living, Breathing and Interactive Landscapes
- An open space designed for flexible uses
- “We don’t know the differences between artificial and natural turf, so educate us. Let the experts help us make the right choice.”
- Pastoral scenes using trees, flowers and grasses (The “Royal Oak” Tree was highly favored of course).
- Our City’s namesake: “The Royal Oak is the English oak tree within which the future King Charles II of England hid to escape the Roundheads following the Battle of Worcester in 1651”.

Outcomes
Outcomes

- Allow the landscape to embrace children, adults and seniors.
- “The park has to look alive if you want it to be alive.”
- Indigenous plants contained within crisp forms (dichotomy)
- “Prefer a park that has more green spaces and plantings as opposed to concrete and steel.”
- “I would like the park to have lots of trees, greenery and flowers”

A Refined Artistic Composition
- Let the art be sophisticated, diverse and inspirational.
- Embrace all forms of art but be selective and set a high bar.
- Feel free to relocate the “Star Dream” but only if it makes a significant contribution to the overall look and feel of the park.
- The Veterans Memorial is a sacred and artistic commemoration and we must continue to pay the utmost respect to our fallen hero’s. It makes sense to move the memorial but only if there is a better place, orientation or position to enhance the overall design of both the park and the memorial.
- “We need to promote our local artists as much as possible.”

Physical and Mental Contemplation
- “I would like to feel calm and comfortable”
- “Something renewing to the spirit”
- “Please do not force things, let them evolve naturally”
- Provide contemplative spaces and allow for quiet solitude
- A place to relax and enjoy the out of doors within the City
- Comfortable, movable, attractive seating
- A place to meditate, stretch and feel good about our park/city
- “Provide spaces conducive to lingering, resting, engaging, exercising, working and contemplating”
- “Keep it functional, fun and inspiring”

Soothing, Playful and Entertaining
- “I would like to keep as much vintage charm of the city as possible.”
- “Relax and stroll, Sit and reflect, Chit chat with friends and Read.”
- “A place for a break in a beautiful truly aesthetic atmosphere”
- “Add a little culture to the day.”
- “I would like to listen to music in the park.”
- “It is important that our park is not empty and unused. It needs to have features that draw people to it so that it is filled with activity and people. Placemaking activities that bring people together will make the park a lively, happy place.”
- Provide four season interest, including winter activities such as ice skating and others.
The park needs to have its own voice
- “We (the park) need to say that “We are authentic Royal Oak.“, not Birmingham or Troy”
- The park should be designed for this city. Give us a park that can host all types of things but not look like any one of them. It should look like Royal Oak.
- This area of the city should not be referred to, not as a park, but rather a “Town Square” or “City Center” and add a “Cool Factor”
- The park must provide what downtown is missing “Greenery, water and a play center for children”.
- “Would like the park to be warm and welcoming for all ages”

Water allows for expression, fun and beauty
- Allow the water to be seen.
- Allow the water to be heard.
- Allow the water to cleanse.
- Allow the water to be touched.
- Allow the water to appear and disappear.

Illuminate, Manipulate, Stimulate
- Provide for different-types and scales of light
- Bright light – security
- Subtle light – recognition of shapes
- Mood light – creates an effect
- Versatile light – change it up – light shows

Natural and Artificial Elements
- Provide for both elements in a harmonious composition.
- Use form and function to create intrigue and style.
- Use color, shapes, texture, proportion and scale to complement one another.
- Change the ground elevation to provide more interest.
- Include playful and intriguing elements using both natural and artificial forms.
- Provide for fun engaging educational experiences whenever possible.
Elements that merit consideration and management

- The new downtown park is moving forward so make it functional and affordable.
- The park needs to be secure, clean and safe for citizens to feel comfortable. One of the ways for that to succeed is to program and use the park on a regular basis. People love watching and engaging with one another, which naturally promotes safety and comfort.
- The new City Park and the City Market need to co-exist and support one another from a design, flow and management perspective.
- There should be enough parking to serve the people who want to use our park but also our City Market, City Hall, Police Dept. and Court.
- Resist the temptation to allow sponsors, advertisers and special interests to dominate the park. Let this park remain open and free from advertising. It should remain as the "people’s park”
- Keep the cost for development and maintenance manageable so as not to over burden the citizens with additional taxes and mileages.
- Not everyone will appreciate the noise that the park will generate, especially the nearby neighborhoods. Therefore, noise should be a consideration when programming events.