



Market Lands Pop-up  
(Source: Public City Architecture, 2017)

## POP-UP PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: EXPLORING WINNIPEG'S TAKE ON THE POP-UP

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### ABSTRACT

Public engagement is one of the most common parts of the planning process, but both planners and the public can become increasingly dissatisfied with the 'typical' methods used. Planners are rethinking the typical open house and town hall formats and are looking at new ways to reach the public. More recently in Winnipeg, pop-ups are sprouting up as a way to engage the public on planning projects. Pop-ups are temporary interventions that set up in busy public locations, to inform, or seek feedback, on a planning project. This case in point explores three recent pop-up typology examples that have emerged in Winnipeg, and identifies the lessons learned from all three cases:

**Intervention:** Pop-up consultations for the Eastern Corridor Study (Rapid Transit).

**Demonstration:** Pop-up bike lanes in the West Alexander to East Exchange Corridor Study.

**Activation:** Pop-up activities in the Market Lands redevelopment.

## BACKGROUND

### *Public Engagement & Pop-Ups*

It is well recognized that public engagement is critical in any planning project and has become engrained in the planning process. However, as engagement processes become more institutionalized, they are increasingly unattractive to the public (Toderian & Glover, 2014). There is also a growing lack of trust of public agencies to use feedback from citizens in decision-making (Christianson, 2015; Talen, 2015). Additionally, despite growing diversity in cities, these traditional engagement tools often only reach a certain demographic – namely, those with spare time, an interest in city issues, educated and middle-aged (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

In response to this, planners, designers and urbanists are developing new ways to engage the public – popping up wherever people are, sharing information about their project, and gathering feedback. Pop-up engagement is the process by which organizers *pop up* a temporary engagement in a busy location, a street corner, public event, or in the very space they are consulting on. They offer a simple, visual, and fun way for people to have their say (Biggs, 2016).

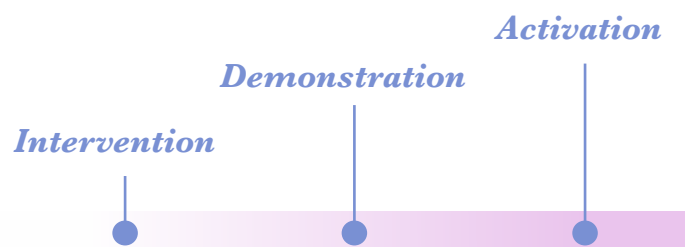
Pop-ups can appeal to a demographic that might not normally participate in other methods, and can be specifically geared to a group that is missing from existing feedback loops. They may also help dispel NIMBYism and imagined fears of change by showing what's possible and myth-busting some of those fears. They “show people different opportunities in the real world so that more informed decisions may be made by a more diverse audience of people” (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p.15). Those who participate in pop-ups can also be more representative of the general public, as they engage people at random, as opposed to those who are already interested in the project (Biggs, 2016).



*Centre Venture's pop-up consultation booth travels around the neighbourhood (Source: Public City Architecture & First Person Strategies, 2018).*

Pop-ups can also physically transform the very spaces that the public is being consulted on. They are an active way to help the public envision what can be, and to allow them to provide opinions on the future of a space or place. They are a “powerful way for people to envision future development alternatives and determine their preferences based on actual experiences. While traditional design professionals may find it easy to envision a transformed space on the basis of two-dimensional drawings, often the general public does not” (CUDC, 2014). Pop-ups can be seen in contrast to a more typical “design-present-defend” methods (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p.15).

In Winnipeg, a variety of pop-up formats have begun to emerge. Some bring engagement to the public, while others provide a temporary ‘placeholder’ and help people imagine what's possible. In what follows, we examine three pop-up typologies recently conducted in Winnipeg and what lessons are learned from all three.



## THE CASES

### *Intervention:*

### POP-UP CONSULTATIONS FOR THE EASTERN CORRIDOR STUDY

In 2017, the City of Winnipeg began planning for the Eastern leg of rapid transit (Winnipeg Transit, 2017). WSP, contracted to coordinate the public engagement, conducted a series of pop-up consultation booths throughout the summer of 2017. They set up where people often gather in the summer: farmer's markets, public events, sports games, and bus stops. The pop-ups acted both as promotion, to let people know the study was being conducted, as well as a chance to hear feedback (Segal, 2018). The pop-ups shared information on rapid transit from other cities and had large maps with pins that allowed people to identify where they live and places to connect to. The pop-ups drew the largest participation compared to other engagement opportunities (WSP, 2018).

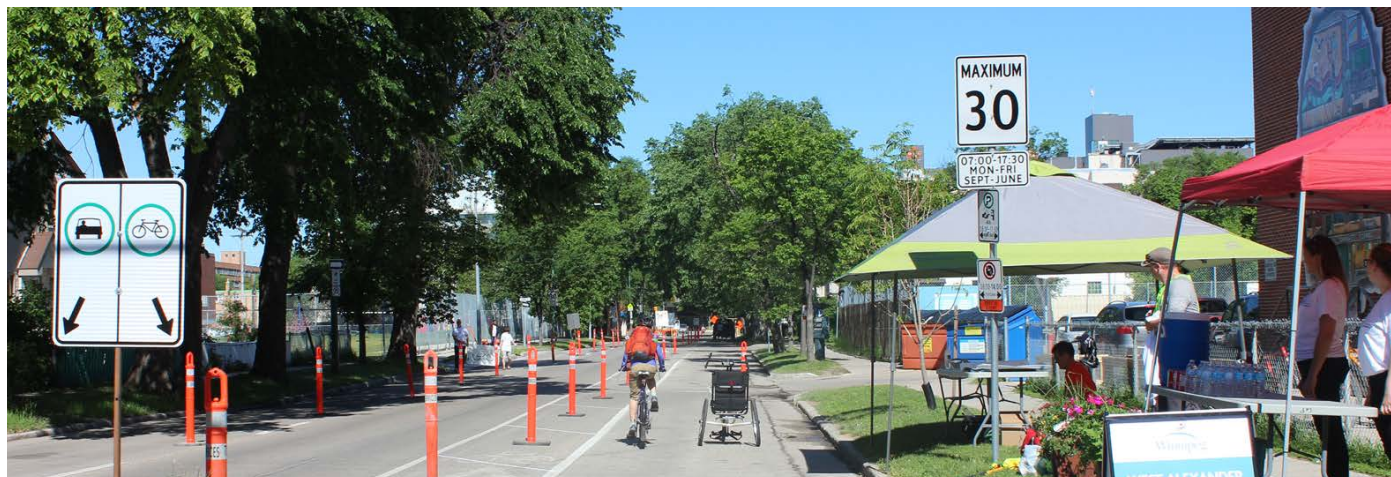
### *Demonstration:*

### POP-UP BIKE LANES FOR THE WEST ALEXANDER TO EAST EXCHANGE CORRIDOR STUDY

In 2015, the City and their consultants initiated public engagement on the West Alexander to East Exchange Pedestrian and Cycling Corridor. Faced with many options on how to connect Sherbrook Avenue to Waterfront Drive, they explored a creative way to try out options and gain feedback (Baker, 2018). In Phase I of the study, they conducted a series of pop-up consultations at restaurants and schools in the area, as well as a pop-up bike lane on Winter Bike to Work Day. The aim in this phase was to promote the study and gain feedback on priorities in the area (City of Winnipeg, 2017a). In Phase 2, the aim was to seek feedback on design options; they organized two pop-up bike lanes to physically demonstrate what the options could be. The demonstration allowed commuters to ride through the options and provide feedback on their experience (City of Winnipeg, 2017b).



Figures (clockwise from top left): Eastern Corridor Pop-ups at a market (Source: WSP); Pop-up bike lane in Phase I West Alexander to East Exchange (Source: City of Winnipeg, 2017a); Pop-up bike lane in Phase II (Source: City of Winnipeg, 2017b).



## Activation:

### POP-UP ACTIVITIES IN THE MARKET LANDS REDEVELOPMENT

The Market Lands, in the heart of Winnipeg's Exchange District, are publicly-owned lands, once home to the Public Safety Building and set for redevelopment. Centre Venture and their consultants, Public City Architecture and Blue Print (formerly, First Person Strategies), coordinated an innovative pop-up engagement process which physically transformed the space itself. They used art to draw people in, from painting the site as a wayfinding strategy, to hosting youth programming, and developing a DIY Market Lands Kit. The Lands became home to a temporary train-car as a drop-in consultation kiosk, hosted events in the space, a pop-up bike valet, youth programs, and night-time parties (Public City Architecture & First Person Strategies, 2018). The variety of programming pre-vitalized the underutilized space and helped people imagine that anything was possible. They also moved the consultations around the neighbourhood with a cart (and bubble machine), giving people an opportunity to provide feedback on the future of the Lands (Stewart, 2018).

Market Lands Site Activation  
(Source: Public City Architecture, 2017).



Market Lands DIY kit to let people show what they wanted the site to look like (Source: Public City Architecture, 2017)

## LESSONS LEARNED

In general, the project coordinators in each example spoke positively about the pop-up as a method for public engagement. They suggested that the benefit of the tool is in its flexibility and adaptability to any project or site; while the main drawback is the quick interaction time, with limited opportunity to engage on bigger or more complex details.

Many of the lessons learned from this evaluation of the pop-up are important considerations to any public engagement method or strategy, and the biggest takeaway is that the pop-up is just one method in a planner's toolbox. It is effective and flexible, but may only be successful if it is the right fit for the project, done at the right time in the process, or paired with other engagement methods.

Below are some of the key lessons learned for planners to consider when determining if the pop-up is the most effective tool for their project.

### **FLEXIBILITY**

The pop-up is very flexible and can be used differently in each project or site. All coordinators also mentioned that the pop-up can be very economical, and an efficient use of staff resources, if available. They can also be particularly beneficial during times of the year when it is harder to get people to attend a more formal event, as in the summer months. The 'lightweight' nature of pop-ups provide the flexibility to set up in places where people already are, such as public events, markets, or bus stops.



*Eastern Corridor study pop-ups at a public event (Source: WSP).*

### **ABILITY TO TARGET STAKEHOLDERS**

Pop-ups allows planners to engage a wide array of stakeholders, as well as reach people who move *through* a project area. In this way, the method is particularly beneficial for projects impacting Winnipeg as a whole, or transportation projects. They can catch a user that would likely be missed by other static or venue-based consultation methods. Additionally, the flexibility of the pop-up can help planners fill the gaps in who they have already consulted, and target demographics that are missing.

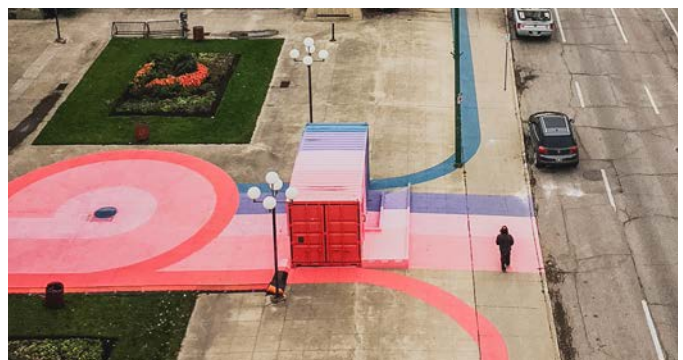
The Eastern Corridor Study was aiming to get more participation from the Francophone community in the St. Boniface neighbourhood, so they did a pop-up at a Goldeyes baseball game on Francophone night. For Market Lands, the project team was able to capitalize on summer being an already busy time in the Exchange, drawing people in from across the City. Activating the site during busy events, they were able to engage a wide cross-section of people, some who didn't even know what the Public Safety Building was, or that it was being redeveloped.

### **PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY**

Everyone mentioned the pop-up served a dual purpose: consulting on specific project elements and promoting the project as a whole. Additionally, the interactive nature of pop-ups are often appealing to media, which can generate further free promotion for the project. Planners are also able to promote other opportunities for feedback, such as online surveys, or other engagement events during a pop-up.



*Market Lands hosts a workshop in the pop-up train car (top) and the bold painted Market Lands site (bottom). Source: Public City & First Person, 2018).*



## MATERIALS MATTER: VISUALS AND ART

A pop-up allows you to visually present options or possibilities, but the tools and visuals need to be engaging to someone who may be quickly passing by (especially if a location has a policy that restricts approaching people with flyers). In the Market Lands, the bold graphic design of the site had to be strong enough to attract attention to the space. Furthermore, having activities that are quick, easy, and fun to participate in is very important. For the Eastern Corridor Study, the project team found that people were more interested in using tactile maps and pins than the digital tablets that were also available.



Market Lands art-based consultation (Source: Public City & First Person, 2018).

## TIMING

Pop-ups often provide very quick interactions – you might only be able to engage with someone for a couple minutes. While this can be beneficial for drawing people in for feedback, it can be challenging to communicate the full breadth of a project. This can be a drawback for more complex and comprehensive projects, where it is difficult to communicate all aspects of the project within the time available. Because of the quick interaction, this method is not often the most effective way to empower participants in decision-making, and will likely fall more towards the inform or consult stage on the spectrum of participation levels (IAP2, 2014).

*Inform . Consult . Involve . Collaborate . Empower*

Image adapted from IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum, indicating the public's increasing impact on decision-making.

## LOGISTICS

A downside of the pop-up is that it is a very uncontrolled environment, in contrast to an open house, for example. This means planners may have to contend with unforeseen challenges. Depending on the project or site, weather and logistics may be a challenge. For example, on the second day of the pop-up bike lanes, it rained, melting the chalk and signs that were used to demarcate the lane. Organizing a street closure with the pop-up bike lane also necessitated communication with multiple City departments, requiring additional logistical organization.

## LACK OF EVALUATION

Because of the quick interaction with public, the method does not typically provide an opportunity to get feedback on the engagement process. Meanwhile, in a public workshop or open house, a formal exit survey provides an opportunity to evaluate the engagement process itself. With pop-ups, the only real way to measure success is based on the number of people interacted with, and organizers' reflections of the event. This might leave planners wondering what the public felt about the engagement process itself.



City staff sets up the pop-up bike lanes with spray chalk (Source: City of Winnipeg, 2017b).

## CONCLUSION

As seen in all three Winnipeg cases, there are benefits and drawbacks to using the pop-up as a tool for public engagement. The lessons learned indicate that pop-ups can be successful when seeking feedback on specific project elements and at specific decision-making points. The cases examined suggest that pop-ups can be great when enhanced by strong arts and visuals to draw people in, or when pre-vitalizing an underutilized space to help reimagine possibilities. They can also be particularly beneficial for transportation projects as they provide opportunities to engage with people who pass through the area, but do not live or work there, or for large-scale projects that affect the city, as a whole.

All coordinators said they would use this method again, but noted that the placement of this method within a project can influence its success. For example, in the Eastern Corridor Study, pop-ups may work once potential routes are examined, as they can engage with people along proposed routes. For Market Lands, as they begin to solidify plans for development, they may seek longer interactions and more detailed feedback, so may find other methods more fitting.

As with any other tool in the planner's tool box, the pop-up will only be successful when it is when it's the right fit for a project, done at the right phase, and combined with other methods. Hopefully, the lessons outlined in this case in point can help planners determine if the pop-up is the right fit for their project.



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