



CITY HALL  
● PARK

imagine



This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.



# **REPORT ON ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS FOR IMAGINE CITY HALL PARK**

## **INCLUDED WITHIN:**

**PROJECT BACKGROUND**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY**

**SURVEY RESULTS**

**ENGAGEMENT SESSION SUMMARY**

**INTERVIEW NOTES**

**SUMMARY OF PUBLIC RESPONSE TO DESIGN**

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2011, Burlington City Arts received a \$50,000 Our Town matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to engage the community in creative activities that imagine the future of City Hall Park and result in a new master plan.

BCA was well-positioned to receive this grant thanks to its strong history facilitating public projects and working with artists, and its leadership with the Mayor's City Hall Park Task force, a group that includes representation from the BBA, surrounding park businesses, local non-profits and other city departments. The group has a shared interest in restoring City Hall Park's role as a central gathering place for our community and a common goal to advance long-term and short-term solutions to issues in City Hall Park.

BCA has completed a four month period of engaging the community to provide input for the new master plan, and activities are being planned and inventoried for summer 2012. In late 2011, BCA managed a competitive process to select a landscape architecture firm for the design. The selection committee included members of the business community surrounding the park, the City Parks Planner, the Legacy Project Director and the Executive Director of the Burlington Business Association. Based on information collected during community engagement, we are now in the early phase of design development with H. Keith Wagner Partnership, Landscape Architects.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Community engagement took place in several forms: as artistic activities with youth, persons with disabilities, families, seniors and new Americans/ESL residents; with surveys that took place during activities in or near the park, in surrounding business lobbies and online; and with facilitated sessions with several adult groups.

Overarching themes from all surveys and engagement sessions include a love of green space in downtown, a desire for events balanced with the respite expected of a park space, an appreciation of a water feature but frustration with the current fountain design, and a love of the Farmers' Market but concerns about its impact on the park green space. Finally, the behavior and safety issues are a continual obstacle that must be addressed; most people feel more comfortable when the park has a critical mass of people during events to help "self-monitor" behavior.

To meet the expectation of community desires and to protect investments in the space, long-term improvements will need to have a sustainable model for maintenance and programming. Coordination with the Church Street Marketplace Business District and a Friends of City Hall Park model combined could be effective in raising funds to help support City services.

The Plan BTV analysis should be reviewed.

## **THE CITY HALL PARK TASK FORCE REVIEWED THE RESULTS OF THE DATA AND EMPHASIZED SEVERAL ISSUES:**

The Farmers' Market must have a short-term location solution that allows the park to recover and be maintained. Moving vendors to the park perimeter and closing St. Paul Street has been discussed with the market. The current configuration of the Market and its popularity have begun to create frustration among patrons, as the small size of the park does not accommodate the crowds well and ambulation has been voiced as an issue during peak Market hours. Long-term, the consultants from PlanBTV have recommended a permanent structure on the waterfront that would allow the Market to grow and operate year round, which Farmers' Market participants reportedly met with an open mind in the Plan BTV Charette. In spite of their love for a downtown location, they are attracted to the possibility of a permanent structure—an option that cannot occur in City Hall Park.

The park should be designed with 4 seasons of activity in mind.

It is important to emphasize the way the park has changed to fit the community needs over the years in a presentation of what a new design of City Hall Park may look like. People have a difficult time imagining what isn't there now and become very attached to what they know, as though it's always been that way.

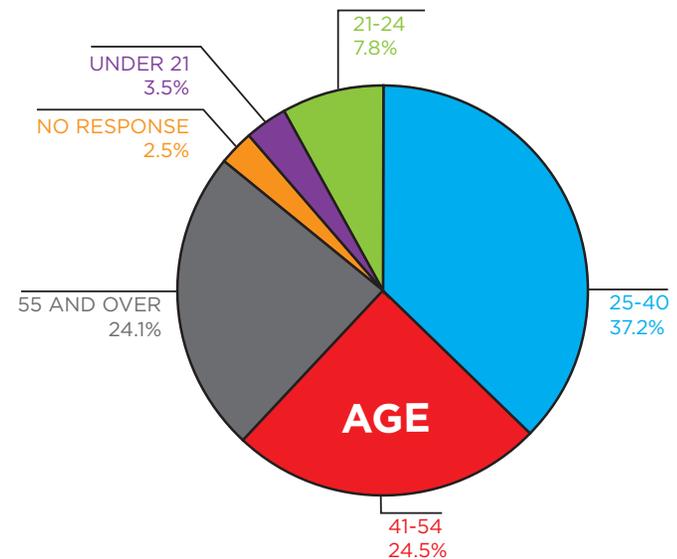
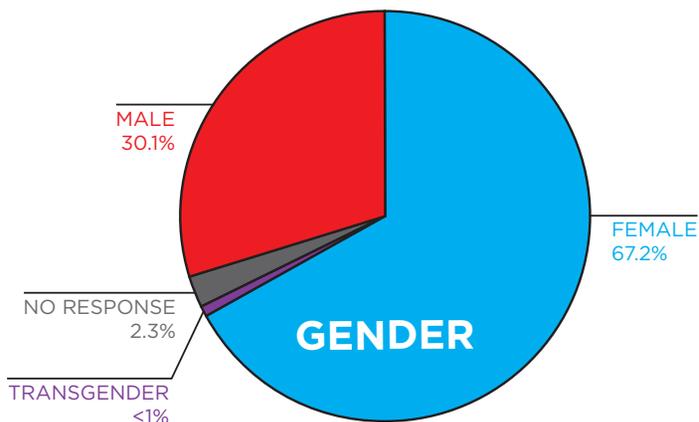
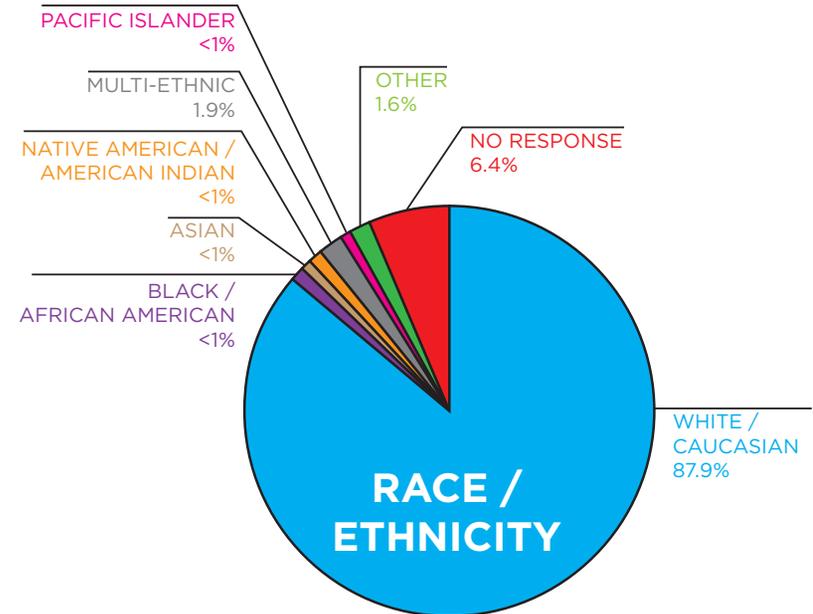
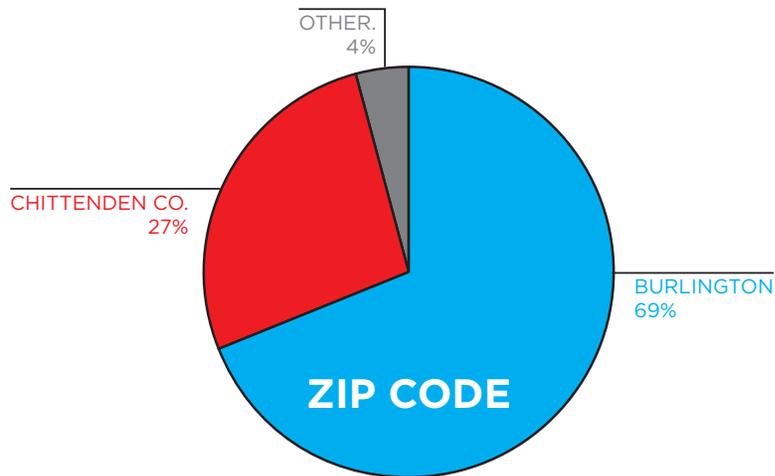
Storm water treatment must be addressed.

Design should take public engagement into account but also be imaginative and not weighed down by our current experience.

# SURVEY RESULTS

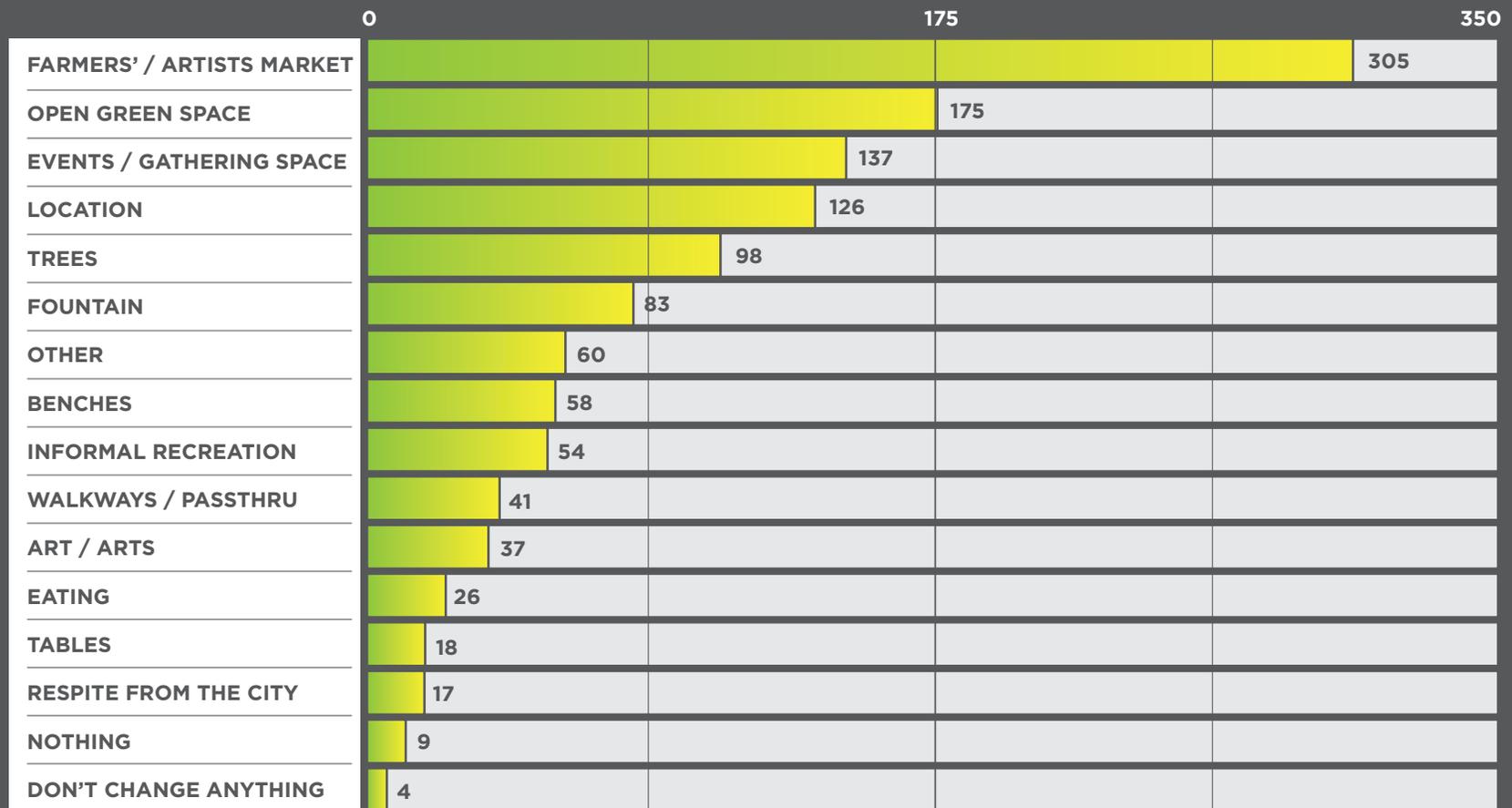
550 surveys were completed.

Results are as follows:



# WHAT I LOVE ABOUT CITY HALL PARK TODAY

## RESPONSES BY CATEGORY AND QUANTITY

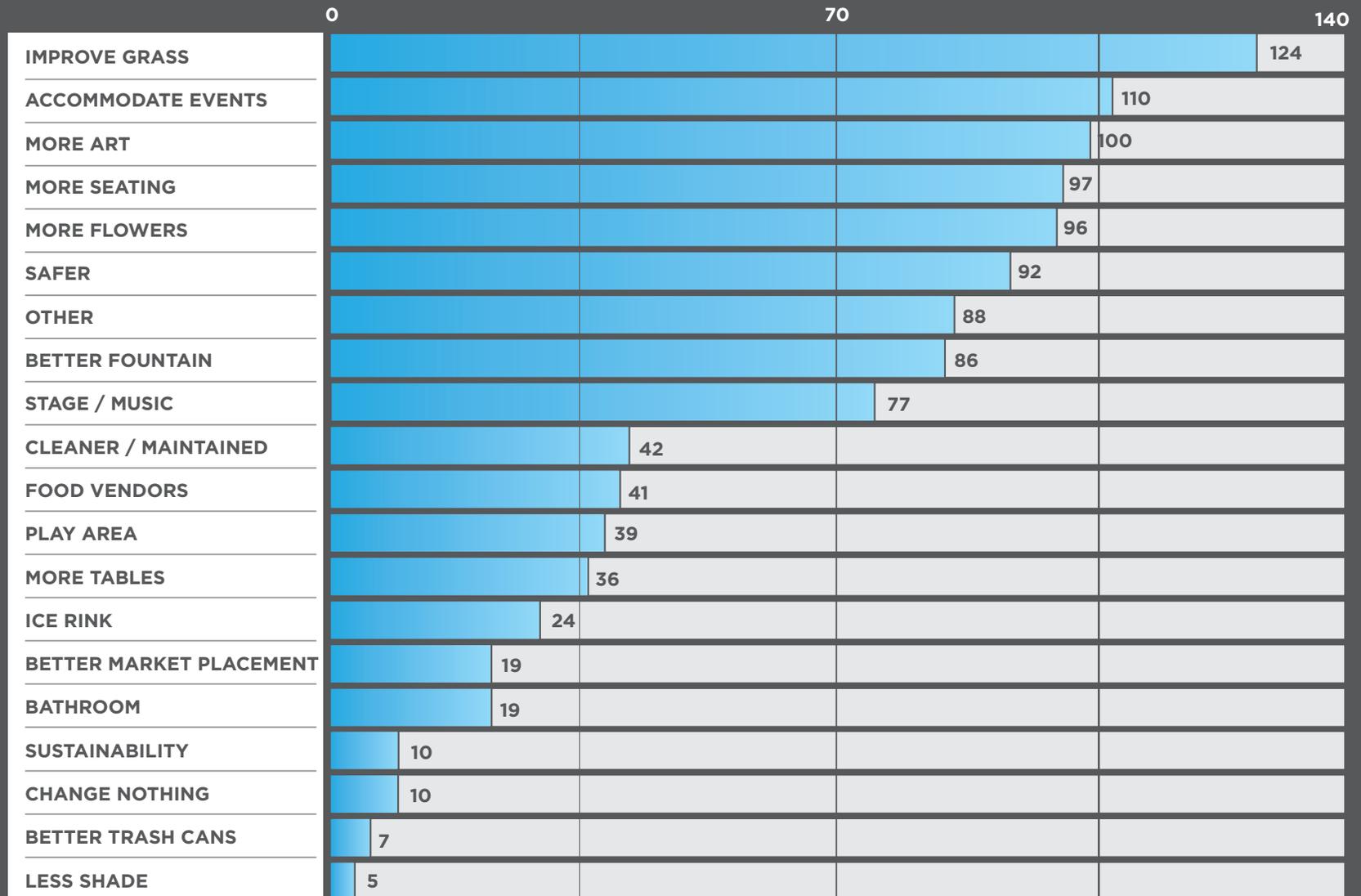


*“I love the shade and the trees, the fact that there is a Farmers’ Market, Art Mart, and that the BCA Center and City Hall are accessible. I love sitting on benches to read. I love that it’s a place for folks to relax and meet. On the downside, sometimes I don’t feel respected by all others using the park—loud or rude behavior, leaving trash, especially mid-week and evenings. I usually feel safe, but not sure I would if I were a woman alone or had kids. More benches, maybe a bandstand for quiet evening shows would be nice. **Glad** we’re planning and that I got this chance!”*

Anonymous, Survey Response

# WHAT I IMAGINE FOR THE FUTURE OF CITY HALL PARK

## RESPONSES BY CATEGORY AND QUANTITY



# ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS SUMMARY

Facilitated engagement sessions were held with the groups listed below. In addition, interviews were conducted and recorded with Jesse Beck from the Rotary Club, members of the Farmers' Market, and Police department personnel. Projects with children and seniors were facilitated by teaching artists in mediums of photography, drawing and clay. Adult sessions were facilitated by Andrea Grayson and artist Matt Heywood, who illustrated comments on the spot. All images and creations will be exhibited together publically in June along with designs developed by H. Keith Wagner Partnership based on this community feedback.

	ARTS ENGAGEMENT	FACILITATED DISCUSSION WITH ILLUSTRATOR
- VSA Vermont	X	
- BHS Alternative Program	X	
- UVM Design Students	X	
- BCA Staff		X
- King Street	X	
- Businesses		X
- Heineberg Senior Center	X	
- Musicians & Technicians		X
- Parks and Rec., Police, Social Svcs.		X
- IAA Elementary school class	X	
- Walden High School Students	X	
- VNA family room	X	
- IAA families	X	
- Councilors, Commissioners		X
- Champlain Sr. Center	X	

Specific concerns emerged from sessions with the Parks Department, Safety, and Business community participants as follows:

## **PARKS AND SAFETY**

Soil compaction is a problem for tree and turf maintenance largely as a result of foot traffic during the Farmers' Market and the timing of the market making it difficult to allow maintenance and healing to occur. Parks is looking at other models of Farmers' Markets to apply here. Defining an entrance to the park (perimeter fence/walls, ie Central Park, Roger Williams Park) may also help limit compaction.

Existing placement of trashcans requires maintenance vehicles in the park; changing placement could reduce need for maintenance access.

The park needs more than a facelift—it needs all new utilities underground. It is not currently meeting basic needs that people expect of a center city common.

Current plant beds have lost protection from foot and bike traffic and should not be at grade level to help mitigate damage. Flowers and plantings are an important and beloved part of the park atmosphere.

It's important to consider secondary unintended usage of all design elements-- ie, crime prevention through environmental design.

A variety of lighting—uplit, downlit, across walkways—helps people feel more comfortable and safe.

There is a conflict between the number of trees and their limb level and police/safety concerns.

Current fountain requires a lot of upkeep. Leaves and seeds are a maintenance problem. The water service to it is leaking.

Shade is what makes the park desirable, but it requires more protection of the turf.

Signage is another point of contention between parks and safety: parks prefers less signage because it clutters space and provides a surface to deface; police prefers more to back up enforcement. Parks feels that signage does not help enforce park rules. Some signage will be necessary to keep, such as the historical sign, signage about public art/monuments. Is there a more creative way to provide information that does not require more “things”?

For seating, steel is a preferred material. Granite is too brittle.

Hydraulic bollards could be useful if bollards are used—snow removal needs to accounted for.

A level spot would be ideal for performances. Ideally it should be a flexible space that uses the natural terrain. The current southern space works well as a performance site.

Storm water from the marketplace is currently causing a lot of damage. Drainage flows right through the park and erosion occurs.

European style public bathrooms could be an asset—coin operated self-cleaning.

Can the park be the surface of a two story parking structure?

The Howard Center felt that their constituency was not well represented in the issues that were presented in the opening film. It's important not to push anybody out—remain sensitive to the needs of existing users.

# SURROUNDING BUSINESSES

The businesses surrounding the park session was relatively small. The group emphasized using the park to create a greater connection to the waterfront and to the marketplace.

The Farmers' Market should be moved off of the turf. Would it be possible to close St. Paul Street and/or College Street for the market? Traffic is already hindered by the Farmers' Market activity.

Vendors would be a good addition to promote more activity, but carefully selected so as not to unnecessarily compete with existing stores who are paying expensive overhead.

This group discussed a need for coordinated marketing among business, arts and culture for all of Burlington. City Hall Park could be the epicenter or motivation for such an effort.

The design of the park should emphasize use during all four seasons.

Almost all participants objected to the existing fountain.

# MUSICIANS AND TECHNICIANS

This group has the strongest desire for a “turn-key” package for events, ie, a performance space that is equipped with sound, upgraded electrical and covered to reduce per event costs. However, the desire for modular staging and flexibility for use of the overall park based on varied scale of events was also discussed, as well as a permanent information kiosk.

# CITY COUNCILORS AND PARK COMMISSIONERS

Safety, lighting and the scale of the park in relationship with the type and number of events was of concern.

A predictable schedule of events would be nice.

Different uses can be nice but activities should remain distinct from Church Street.

Water as play space and an aesthetic element is essential. One park commissioner loves the existing fountain and emphasized its role as a historic element. (This is incorrect, the fountain is not original, it was brought from Battery Park in the last renovation).

What can be done to improve the alley between BCA and City Hall?

Can the Church Street Marketplace buskers program extend into City Hall Park?

Needs more police presence and more maintenance.

## INTERVIEW NOTES

# FARMERS' MARKET

### **CHRIS WAGNER: MANAGER.**

Farmers' Market loves having the venue between Church Street and waterfront. Cons are that the park needs a lot of work. The Farmers' Market wants a big say in what happens to the park. The Market needs a place where it can grow. It's maxed out with the contract it has now. More people are interested in participating. They would like to use more of the park. The Market doesn't feel that they have a lot of control over how the park is used. They would like to help with improvements.

### **DAN BOUCHER: VENDOR.**

State of the park has deteriorated. City doesn't put effort into seeding and getting grass to grow. Parking is an issue. It would be ideal to have a structure to house the market, but it's not likely to happen in this park. Other venues have been looked at, but general membership doesn't want to change locations.

### **DAVID ROOK: ROOKIES ROOTBEER.**

No cons at all with the park. It's a great location for business. Fulfills all needs as a vendor. Would like to see the park offer more space to start up business and take over whole park on Saturday. Great opportunity overall.

### **GRAHAM AND CAYENNE MCCARG: SHELBURNE ORCHARDS.**

5 year vendor. Most well-attended market in the state. Good proximity to downtown, beautiful location, sunshine. Easy for pedestrians. Cons, unloading when booth is in the middle of the park.

### **HAROLD CAPLAN: ROOFTOP POTTERY.**

Thirteen year vendor. Great place for the Market. Celebrates the growing season. Nice to have mix of food and crafts, uses the park in a healthy way. Spend money locally. Would like coverage on sidewalks so it could continue in bad weather. Bathrooms. Great open space, should stay open to the public. Don't allow privatization of the space. Like the fountain where it is. Enhancements to sidewalks and grounds. Love Festival of Fools, benefits, but everything happens on Saturday. Better to have activities on a daily basis and in the evenings.

### **SIRAD DISANTOS: DIGGER'S MIRTH.**

19 year vendor. All pros to being a vendor in the park. Good to know customers, do really well at this Market. Would love to see Market expand. Can have a lot more produce vendors. More customers every year. Would love to take over entire park.

## **CHIEF MIKE SCHIRLING; BRUCE BOVAT: LIEUTENANT IN CHARGE OF DOWNTOWN DISTRICT, ANDY HIGBEE: DEPUTY CHIEF OF OPERATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR UNIFORM DIVISION**

Anytime you have public spaces there is unintended consequences of activities. Accessibility of the park, enjoyment is important, cyclically the park is a gathering spot and aggregate issues, proximity to social services. Always trying to maximize positive things and minimize negative

Special events that draw in families drive down negative behaviors significantly. Limited calls for service during events. When things are sparse, there are disturbances like fights that involve weapons. Congregation of people make it appear that families or others won't want to recreate.

While events help with behavior, nothing helps like police presence. Balance of not infringing on their rights and sending message. It's about behavior, not about how people are dressed, need to be accessible to everyone. Fears begin to mount based on reputation of behaviors.

Crime Prevention through environmental design—lighting is crucial. Behaviors are better if people think they're being seen.

Historic pictures show very high canopy of elm trees 20-30ft instead of 10 or 12—periphery of the park can see all the way through, fewer shadows, can see what people are doing. Low canopy and poor lighting creates opportunity for something to happen, or even just the perception that something is going on even if it isn't.

Long benches provide a place for people to sleep on. Others can't use them. Keeping benches separate instead of congregating in one space—others avoid those areas of the park. With even dispersal, an area can't be controlled by one group.

Fountain is impossible to maintain, creates a feeling of discomfort, like “broken windows”. Things that make the place look unkempt displaces people that want to be there for legitimate reasons and encourages bad behavior.

Park needs to be flexible, portable and changeable. Should be true of all objects—if things need to be rearranged because they are promoting behavior issues, it's hard when they are on a cement pad.

Plantings are an important consideration—plants with thorny bushes are much less likely to encourage hiding.

Elements should not invite skateboarding or bikes unless designed specifically for that purpose.

Evening and early morning hours are problematic in the alley. Decorative gates at each end of alleyways have helped other spaces with similar problems. Space can be closed/open when necessary.

Night time issues wouldn't be solved by public bathrooms. Logical decisions aren't being made at that time.

Work on improving the park can't stop with a new plan, we have a responsibility to keep things clean, patrolled etc, or we will end up in the same place.

Lots of potential to expand the market on St. Paul Street. Police can easily close the street for this purpose as it is done in many other cities.

## **JESSE BECK, ROTARY CLUB**

The Rotary club adopted City Hall Park as an improvement project for three years several years ago. Their goals were to make it a family friendly destination to complement Church Street. Over three years, they raised approximately \$90,000 for enhancing the existing elements of the park. They engaged SE Group to donate time to develop a master plan that would bring back historical elements of the park. This included new sidewalks and a fountain design based on the 1800's fountain. There was not an open public process undertaken in this design project, but conversations were had the Mayor, Parks and Rec and Public Works.

The Rotary is now focused on the green space and crosswalk in front of Edmunds Elementary for the next three years, but wants to continue to support the planting of annuals in the park and want to know what changes would occur to that program. The rotary club likes the park as it is and wants to see more maintenance and more activities to make it more family friendly. The Farmers' Market is great but the heavy use is damaging. They would be better on the streets as it's done in other cities. Events could have vendors, or have permanent vendors. Restaurants and retailers could use the park—there should be a continuous presence to help make families feel comfortable.

Other things to keep in mind:

Keeping the trees limbed up and bringing more daylight into the park.

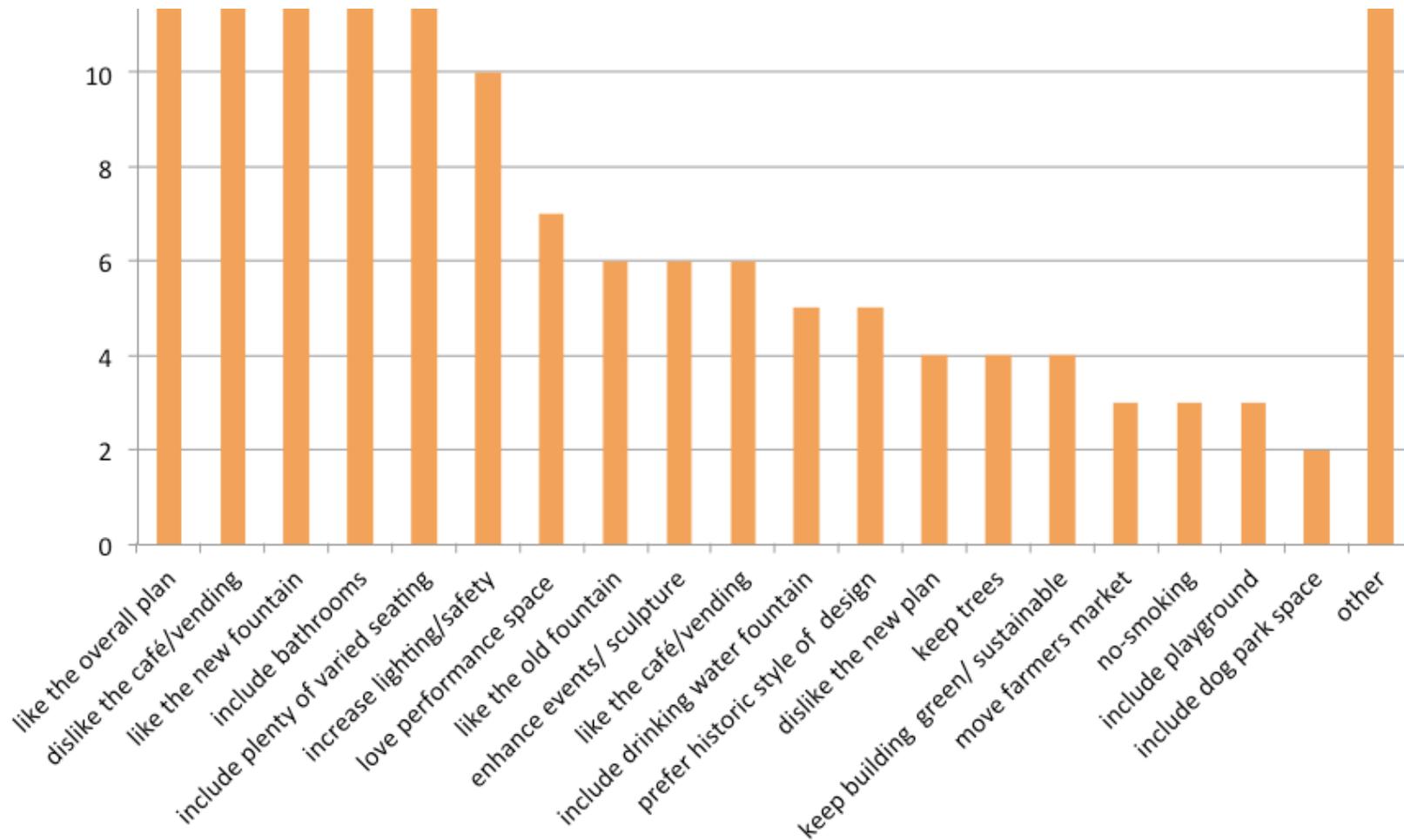
Rotary sponsors and curates a music in the park series on Fridays after work—8 Fridays from 5-7pm. Would like a permanent performance space.

Historical grandeur of fountain would be nice to restore.

Beck believes that the park will rely on public private partnership in the future to make the space successful.

## IMAGINE CITY HALL PARK RESULTS OF EXHIBITION RESPONSES

In June 2012 BCA had an exhibition on the 4th floor of the BCA Center summarizing the project to date, including historic photos, visual results of the engagement sessions, drawings and sculpture from young people and the design work of our landscape architects, H. Keith Wagner Partnership which traces the early drawings to final concept design. Well over a thousand people visited the show. A summary of responses from the exhibition are below. Subjects that received only one response are in the “other” category.



*“These improvements are a tribute to good design and thoughtful city planning—serving a host of activities that benefit the community and the economic growth of Burlington’s town center. This will move Burlington magnificently into the 21st century!”*

Exhibition Response