

## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

The Rideau Canal Shorelines Initiative, identified as one of the National Capital Commission's (NCC) corporate priorities, was developed with the goal of animating the shorelines of the Rideau Canal and enhancing and promoting the "Capital Experience". In December 2011, the NCC initiated a Request for Expressions of Interest for pilot projects to animate the Rideau Canal shorelines. As a result, eight projects were selected to proceed working towards the 2012 implementation of pilot projects for up to three years along the Rideau Canal shorelines, four of which were launched this year.

The Rideau Beach & 8 Locks' Flat ("the Beach") is located on the east side of the Rideau Canal, just north of the Corktown Footbridge. It is a temporary, contained beach area, bistro and patio inspired by the temporary urban beach set up each summer along the Seine River in Paris. The Pop Up Patios ("PUPs") is an outdoor patio located on the Rideau Canal Esplanade, on the east side of the Rideau Canal, next to Colonel By Drive, the Ottawa Convention Center and the Rideau Centre. The PUPs showcase Ottawa gourmet food trucks, craft beer & wines. The Capital Reading Garden ("the Reading Garden") is located south of the Corktown Footbridge on the east side of the Rideau Canal. It is a not-for-profit, volunteer-run space offering chairs and tables where people can enjoy free wi-fi access and reading materials. A fourth pilot project consisted of three ice cream push carts managed by Iceco Ltd. The carts operated on weekends until mid-June and then daily for the rest of the summer in popular locations along the Rideau Canal between Laurier Avenue and Dows Lake. The ice cream carts were not included in this study since it was not feasible to conduct intercept surveys where they were located.

### **Survey Objectives, Scope and Methodology**

At the request of the Vice President's office of the Real Estate Management, Design and Construction Branch, a public opinion survey was undertaken for which the objectives included:

- Evaluating the extent to which the Rideau Canal Shorelines Initiative accomplished its objective to animate the shorelines of the Rideau Canal and enhance and promote the "Capital Experience";
- Gathering participants' suggestions for changes and improvements; and
- Informing the NCC as to whether these pilot projects should continue into years 2 and 3 of the initiative and thereafter on a more permanent basis.

Between July 24<sup>th</sup> and September 28, 2012, Harris/Decima consultants conducted onsite interviews among 574 participants, aged 18 years and older, at three sites of this year's Rideau Canal Shorelines Initiative.

The data collection for this study was based on an intercept sampling approach (“convenience” sample), whereby subjects were selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the interviewer. Therefore, the survey sample cannot be considered truly random (with all potential participants having an equal probability of being included) and as a result, a margin of error based on standard probability sampling cannot be calculated.

Given only 14 interviews were conducted for the Reading Garden portion of the Rideau Canal Shorelines survey, these findings cannot be considered as representative of the Reading Garden’s visitor population and must therefore be interpreted as anecdotal in nature. As a result, findings for the Reading Garden are presented in terms of frequencies (number of responses) rather than proportions (percentages) and are mostly excluded from the section on all three pilots.

## **Survey Results**

### **General Overview**

On-site staff observations at the Beach indicate that attendance was high throughout the summer months but that visitor traffic dropped significantly in September as the weather cooled. Attendance at the PUPs was also generally high, however operating hours were adjusted to late afternoons and evenings since it was found that daytime traffic was somewhat low. Attendance at the Reading Garden was particularly high on Labour Day weekend but overall attendance levels were hindered by a lack of operating days.

An overall glance at the survey results suggests that most visitors to the three Rideau Canal Shoreline sites were residents of the National Capital Region (NCR). The small sample size of respondents from the Reading Garden portion of the survey suggest low attendance levels at this site, which could point to a need for more effective means of attracting visitors. Along with the fact that most respondents became aware of the three sites as a result of simply walking by or by word of mouth, the NCC is presented with an opportunity to attract more people to future Rideau Canal Shorelines animated sites via its website and other popular channels such as social media. Those surveyed at the Beach indicated that they would visit the site again in the future and overall satisfaction levels at all three sites was high. The majority of those surveyed agree that the sites serve a need in the Capital and that the initiative as a whole helps make the downtown core more vibrant and inviting.

### **Respondent Profile**

- The majority of respondents at all three sites are residents of the NCR (82%), most of whom reside in Ontario (76%) and considerably fewer in the Quebec portion of the NCR (6%).
- Visitors to all sites included slightly more women (54%) than men (45%) with the largest group between the ages of 18 and 34 (42%).

- Three-quarters of the respondents at all sites indicated that English was the first language they had learned (75%) and that the majority had attained a level of education beyond high school (89%).

### **Source of Awareness for the Rideau Canal Shorelines Initiative**

- Between 50% and 56% of respondents at all three sites became aware of the sites as a result of simply passing by.

### **Mode of Transportation**

- On average for all three sites, the largest group of respondents got to the sites by foot (44%).

### **Time Spent**

- Respondents at the Beach stayed on site for the longest amount of time compared to the other sites (60 to 90 minutes: 36%), whereas PUPs respondents stayed anywhere from less than 30 minutes (22%) to 60 to 90 minutes (25%). Seven of 14 respondents stayed from 30 to 60 minutes at the Reading Garden.

### **Repeat Visits**

- The majority of those surveyed at all three sites (70% to 79%) were visiting the respective sites for the first time during the season.

### **Overall Satisfaction by Site**

- Of those surveyed at the Beach, 93% were satisfied with their experience, compared to 98% of those surveyed at the PUPs and 12 out of 14 respondents at the Reading Garden.

### **Ways the Sites Serve a Need in the Capital**

- The majority of respondents from the Beach (82%) and PUPs (84%) agree / strongly agree that the sites encourage people to visit the Canal more often and that they encourage people to stay longer at the canal (Beach 87% and PUPs 88%). The sites also provided basic amenities such as food and beverages (Beach 82% and PUPs 89%).

### **NCC Awareness**

- Unprompted, one-third (33%) of those surveyed at the Beach and the PUPs were able to successfully name the NCC as the organization responsible for the Rideau Canal Shorelines Initiative, whereas 58% did not know.

### **Impact of the Initiative**

- Ninety-six percent (96%) of respondents surveyed for both the Beach and the PUPs agree (20%) or strongly agree (76%) that the Rideau Canal Shorelines Initiative helps make the downtown core more vibrant and inviting.