

## **Civic Squares Animation - Seating and Activation Next Steps**

**Date:** June 23, 2026

**To:** City Council

**From:** Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management

**Wards:** Ward 10 - Spadina-Fort York; Ward 18 - Willowdale; Ward 23 - Scarborough North

### **SUMMARY**

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This report responds to a letter received by the General Government Committee ([GG30.25, Animate Nathan Phillips Square](#)), regarding the feasibility and associated costs of procuring and installing benches at Nathan Phillips (NPS) Square, Mel Lastman Square, and Albert Campbell Square for the 2026 summer season.

Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM) supports Council's vision of vibrant, welcoming, and engaging civic squares that encourage people to gather and connect. NPS, Mel Lastman Square, and Albert Campbell Square serve as focal points for civic life supporting everyday use, cultural expression, civic gatherings, and major public events. Enhancing these spaces through thoughtful seating and public realm improvements represents a valuable opportunity to further animate and enrich the public experience.

Additional seating is an important component of this vision and will be delivered in a coordinated manner that supports diverse programming, ensures long-term sustainability, can be effectively maintained, and is aligned with broader civic centre planning work and existing Council direction to improve civic squares.

Delivering permanent or semi-permanent benches by Summer 2026 is not feasible given procurement and implementation timelines, as well as the operational demands associated with the FIFA World Cup activities and other programming at NPS. Currently, between June 2026 and September 2026, there are 20 non-FIFA related events scheduled spanning approximately 60 days, many of which are multi-day activations (e.g. weekend-long food or cultural festivals), in addition to 28 FIFA-related events planned between June 17 and July 19. Over the same period, Mel Lastman Square and Albert Campbell Square are also hosting a significant number of events, contributing to an already robust and intensive city-wide programming schedule. Additional dates for existing events, or additional events are also continually added.

CREM is advancing a coordinated approach to flexible furniture solutions and enhanced public space activation in collaboration with Economic Development and Culture (EDC), Parks and Recreation, City Planning, and other City divisions. This cross-divisional approach is intended to strengthen long-term placemaking outcomes, improve user experience, and align with broader city-building objectives. This work is intended to be tested at NPS, with the intent to learn from implementation in this high-activity environment before expanding to Mel Lastman and Albert Campbell Squares. Further details will be brought forward in a report back to the General Government Committee in the first quarter of 2027.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management recommends that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report in 2026. The capital funding required to implement the additional seating will be requested through the 2027 capital budget process for Council's consideration. Any additional future capital and operating funding requirements associated with activation of flexible seating and ongoing maintenance and repairs will be considered through future operating budget processes. CREM will clearly outline the financial impacts in the report back to Council.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed the report and agrees with the financial impact information.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its meeting on June 2, 2026, the General Government Committee considered GG30.25, Animate Nathan Phillips Square, and requested the Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management, to review the feasibility and associated costs of procuring and deploying benches at Nathan Phillips Square for the 2026 summer season and report directly to the June 24, 25 and 26, 2026 meeting of City Council with recommendations.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.GG30.25>

At its meeting on October 16, 2024, the General Government Committee considered item GG17.16, which provided an update from Corporate Services and Corporate Real Estate Management on the state of amenities at Nathan Phillips Square, ongoing repairs, and planned funded and unfunded capital work as part of the broader State-of-Good-Repair program.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.GG17.16>

At its meeting on September 17, 2024, the General Government Committee requested staff to develop a plan for refurbishing and improving public spaces in and around in and around Nathan Phillips Square and Toronto City Hall through GG16.15, Improving the Public Spaces around Nathan Phillips Square and Toronto City Hall.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.GG16.15>

At its meeting on June 19, 2007, City Council adopted GM5.17, Outcome of Nathan Phillips Square Revitalization Design Competition and Award of Contract to Winner, endorsing the design for the revitalization of Nathan Phillips Square submitted by the winning design team.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2007.GM5.17>

## COMMENTS

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### Background

Civic squares play a central role in Toronto's public realm and support both everyday use and a wide range of civic, cultural and community functions. As high-profile, heavily used spaces, they must remain adaptable to accommodate large events, public gatherings, and seasonal programming, while continuing to serve as accessible, safe, and welcoming places for residents and visitors.

The request from the General Government Committee reflects a shared vision to make Civic Squares more engaging and inviting. Seating will be considered as part of a broader, coordinated activation and public realm strategy, one that balances user comfort with operational requirements, flexibility, and long-term sustainability.

At the same time, installing new seating in Civic Squares this season presents practical challenges. The City is advancing significant planning and operational work to support the delivery of FIFA World Cup 2026 events in Toronto, including readiness and programming at Civic Squares. These activities place additional demands on the squares and on staff resources, contributing to overall constraints in advancing feasibility work and implementing new infrastructure amenities for the square within the requested timeframe.

Between June 2026 and September 2026, NPS is hosting 20 non-FIFA events spanning approximately 60 days, Mel Lastman Square is hosting 47 non-FIFA events spanning 58 days, and Albert Campbell Square is hosting 11 events—many of which are multi-day activations. As a result, the volume and duration of programming across all three civic squares limits the opportunity of adding furniture during the summer months.

Currently, each summer, CREM places picnic tables on NPS that allow for the active public use of the square. These are moved to accommodate operational and events requirements. However, following the completion of summer events, staff will work to advance a coordinated approach for the procurement of new, flexible furniture solutions for enhanced public space activations, in collaboration with other City divisions. This approach will build on lessons learned from previous testing concepts at NPS, such as the installation of mini pitches, which served as a practical example of testing new ideas, observing public use, and refining design and operational considerations based

on real-world feedback. Once an approach has been determined, it will be tested at NPS before expanding to Mel Lastman and Albert Campbell Squares.

## **Procurement and Implementation Considerations**

A key challenge is procurement timelines. Implementing permanent or semi-permanent benches requires a structured procurement process, which includes defining technical and functional requirements, completing operational and security reviews, developing specifications, and undertaking a competitive procurement process.

Following award, manufacturing lead times for the type of seating referenced in the letter received by the General Government Committee ([GG30.25, Animate Nathan Phillips Square](#)) has an estimated 12–16-week production lead time after order. When combined with standard procurement process timelines and installation requirements, this places implementation beyond the Summer 2026 timeframe.

## **Additional Seating**

Introducing additional seating requires a coordinated approach that reflects how these spaces are used and managed. Seating can respond to observed patterns of use, while supporting both daily activity and large-scale events.

In high-profile, continuously accessible spaces, seating must meet operational requirements, including maintenance, cleaning, security considerations, staffing implications (such as dedicated resources for routine maintenance, cleaning, and moving furniture to and from storage), and lifecycle management, while integrating with the physical design of each square. Storage capacity is also a key constraint, as existing space is limited.

The approach will reflect the open and high-activity context by prioritizing durability, ease of maintenance, and clear sightlines, and by mitigating risks such as misuse, vandalism, unauthorized relocation, and extended occupancy. Civic squares must remain flexible to accommodate markets, festivals, and civic gatherings, requiring adaptable and flexible seating that responds to evolving needs. Equity and inclusion are also key considerations to ensure benefits are shared across user groups, and unintended impacts are minimized.

Stakeholder engagement with internal divisions, local Councillors and community partners will inform this work. City staff will include any needed investments for seating at civic squares, as well as other Council directions to enhance civic squares, as part of future budget submissions.

## **Next Steps**

CREM will advance a coordinated approach that includes stakeholder engagement and a market review of seating options to inform planning and ensure alignment across civic squares, including design, operations, programming, and long-term asset management. CREM does not currently have an inventory of furniture available for interim use and would therefore need to undertake a new procurement process. While

permanent benches cannot be delivered by Summer 2026, longer-term seating solutions will be advanced through a comprehensive and sustainable approach and procured through a competitive process, with implementation anticipated in time for Summer 2027.

Staff will report back to the General Government Committee in the first quarter of 2027 with detailed recommendations

## **CONTACT**

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Scott Barrett, Director, Property Management and Key Assets, Corporate Real Estate Management, 416-338-2361, [Scott.Barrett@toronto.ca](mailto:Scott.Barrett@toronto.ca)

## **SIGNATURE**

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Patrick Matozzo  
Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management