

Urban design and planning features of urban open spaces: An evaluation of three case studies in downtown Richmond, BC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Amidst the recent rapid change of a growing population, the community of Richmond has placed importance on open space and amenity in their developing downtown. Public places form an essential part of the urban landscape. This study critically assesses three urban open spaces based on their urban design and planning features.

This report will identify which planning and design characteristics contribute to how well used a public space is overall as well as the satisfaction of the needs of the users of the space. Three parks from Richmond, BC were examined, two of which were considered to be healthy and well used, while the third was not as well used, or not well planned. The parks chosen for this report were Lang Park, Minoru Plaza, and City Hall Plaza.



METHOD

This report evaluated the case studies using the methodology developed by the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation Department and tested in previous studies of Vancouver parks. Five analytic tools will be employed in this study including: Direct Observation, Ranking on a Point Scale, Activity Mapping, a Park User Questionnaire Survey and, Maps and Photos. The evaluation criteria are grouped into three categories including Contextual Support, Design Framework, and Social Milieu.

Contextual Support	Design Framework	Social Milieu
Surrounding Land Uses Travel Time Microclimate Enclosure	Legibility Identity & Focus Intricacy Vegetation Seating Street Views Accessibility	100% Location Animation, Programming & Amenities Food Facilities Territories & Turf Maintenance & Management Public Accessibility

LANG PARK CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Lang Park has complimentary surrounding land uses that provide users to the space. In particular, the Richmond Public Market is a major draw to the area. Users will visit the park

because it provides the space with numerous weekly events that are a major draw to the plaza. Survey respondents commented on how these events encourage them to visit

Architecture in 2002. Unfortunately, the public space itself lacks an inviting identity and focus, creating an empty and diffuse feeling. It limits accessibility with an awkward pathway leading from the sidewalk to the space, limited parking, and minimal views in and out of the plaza. The inability to see in or out of the space is a major drawback. This lack of street views affects the plaza's legibility for users. In addition, the vegetation provided is lacking in variety, access to food facilities is limited, and the plaza does not encompass many features encouraging use to make it a publicly accessible space.

Positive elements that the plaza provides are plenty of seating for potential users, a well maintained and quiet space and some planned programming. While the grassy area is only accessible by stairs the diversity of surfaces contributes to the intricacy of the space. The positive elements that