



May 20, 2016

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: New Downtown Park at Smithe and Richards - Final Design Plan

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Vancouver Park Board approve the final design plan for the new downtown park located at Smithe and Richards Streets as illustrated and described in this report.

POLICY

The Board approves major changes in Vancouver parks including the design and development of parks.

BACKGROUND

In the early 1990s, Vancouver City Council adopted goals and policies for Downtown South including the Public Benefits Strategy aimed at creating a new high-density, livable, safe, and environmentally conscious community. The goal was to develop the area with appropriate supportive services and amenities to ensure inclusiveness for a diverse range of individuals and households. The creation of a park at the Smithe and Richards site in the Central Business District (CBD) has been pursued to further these goals.



Figure 1: Context

The site, as noted in Figure 1, is approximately 0.8 acres in size and bounded by Richards Street to the northwest, Smithe Street to the southwest, and a laneway with mixed use buildings including residential uses to the southeast and an adjacent commercial building to the northeast. A building remaining on the park site was removed in the winter of 2016 and until park development takes place, the land is leased to Easy Park and utilized as a parking lot, with parking revenues benefitting the Park Board.

This is a rare opportunity to introduce a new urban park in downtown Vancouver. Prior to this process, the most recent addition to Vancouver's downtown park inventory was Emery Barnes Park (completed in 2012). Emery Barnes Park is one of Vancouver's hardest working parks due to the residential density of the neighbourhood as well as the millions of annual visitors to Vancouver. The new park at Smithe and Richards will relieve pressure from Emery Barnes Park and add a much needed piece of green capital to serve Vancouver residents into the future.

The development of this new park is underpinned by progressive principles outlined within the following guiding documents and strategies:

- Park Board Strategic Plan
- Greenest City Action Plan
- Biodiversity Strategy
- Bird Strategy
- Urban Forest Strategy (in progress)

DISCUSSION

In March of 2015, following a competitive procurement process, the Park Board contracted DIALOG BC Architecture Engineering Interior Design Planning Inc. to undertake the public engagement, design, and construction services for the project. This firm was selected as they exhibit qualities that best reflect the Park Board's aspirations to create a dynamic and iconic park in the downtown core that is atypical to the palette of parks already in the inventory. DIALOG was also chosen for their unique multidisciplinary approach that seamlessly unites landscape architecture, engineering and architecture.

Since commencing, DIALOG has worked with Park Board staff to carry out this multi-phase project as follows:

- Phase 1. Context Analysis and Open Space Needs Assessment
- Phase 2. Public Engagement and Conceptual Design
- Phase 3. Plan Revisions
- Phase 4. Board Approvals
- Phase 5. Detailed and Technical Design
- Phase 6. Tendering and Contract Award
- Phase 7. Construction

Phase 1 - Context Analysis and Open Space Needs Assessment

The first phase of work allowed the project team develop a deep understanding of the site and context via a context analysis and open space needs assessment, as well as a precedent study of park design aspirations. The full [Richards and Smithe Phase 1 report](#) is available [online](#).

This study informed the public engagement strategy and the majority of the content was used to make strategic design decisions throughout the conceptual design stages of the process.

Phase 2 - Public Engagement

The design process is informed by static and dynamic characteristics of the site as well as larger Park Board and City-wide initiatives and the community involvement. This involvement is a key factor in determining the final design direction. Much of the involvement has drawn on the input of community and stakeholder representatives from this diverse community of 11,000 residents and nearly 18,000 employees that live and work within a 5-minute walk to the park. Immediately after the project commenced, DIALOG and the Park Board developed a public engagement strategy that focuses on allowing inspiring opportunities for the public to contribute to the design process. The engagement strategy has three main stages.

The first stage was focused on “blue sky” thinking and emphasized the need to dream of what could be possible for the site while the second stage of the public engagement process allowed the design team to present concepts informed by community input received in the first phase. The final stage of the engagement process was an opportunity to present a preferred design based on the input received in the earlier stages of community outreach.

The engagement process involved four (4) meetings with a Park Design Focus Group (PDFG) and three (3) public open house events. The specific dates of engagement events are as follows:

- PDFG Meeting #1: June 16th, 2015
- Open House #1: June 27th, 2015
- Pop-Up City Hall: July 9th, 2015
- PDFG Meeting #2: October 8th, 2015
- Open House #2: October 22nd, 2015
- PDFG Meeting #3: April 6th, 2016
- Open House #3: April 19th, 2016
- PDFG Meeting #4: May 25th, 2016

Details of the public engagement events, the [open house materials and the detailed community feedback](#) received can be reviewed [online](#).

All public events were advertised online via social media and the project web page, as well as through email distribution lists, advertisements in the Vancouver Courier, on-site signs and physical mail-outs to over 8,000 mailboxes within the land area bounded by Granville Street, Cambie Street, Helmcken Street and Georgia Street.

Park Design Focus Group (PDFG): Understanding that the park not only serves individual citizens, but also stakeholders at large, the Park Board formed a PDFG composed of 12

members representing various interests and organizations. The role of the Focus Group was to provide input, review and commentary on the design development and public engagement components of the Smithe and Richards Park. Additionally, it was expected that a singular representative of each stakeholder group would disseminate information to their respective networks and encourage attendance at public open house events.

The PDFG was comprised of the following stakeholders:

- Downtown Vancouver BIA (Business)
- Downtown Vancouver Association (Civic Works)
- Vancouver Public Space Network (Public Realm)
- ArtStarts (Art and Youth)
- Vancouver Police Department (Community Safety)
- Family Services Greater Vancouver (Children and Youth)
- Contemporary Art Gallery (Arts)
- Vancouver Second Mile Society (Seniors)
- Roundhouse Society Board Member (Recreation)
- The Gathering Place (Vulnerable Communities)
- Strata (889 Homer Street)
- Strata (989 Richards St "The Mondrian")

Park Board, Dialog and City of Vancouver staff from Cultural Services and Downtown-West Planning attended PDFG meetings. These meetings were held in advance of each open house to share the open house materials that were planned to be shared. The PDFG provided critical feedback and allowed the project team to obtain insight to specific community needs and aspirations in advance of each open house.

In addition, the content of the open house information display panels was edited in advance of the public open houses to reflect the early input from the PDFG. This was a valuable aspect of the PDFG meetings as it gave the design team the opportunity to acquire early impressions from the community and allowed the team to tailor the design and the communication materials to clearly and effectively convey the intended messages.

Subsequent to the final open house, and prior to presenting the final concept to the Park Board for approval, the design team hosted a final meeting with the PDFG in order to present the a revised design that reflected the input from the PDFG and the open houses.

Open House #1: The first open house was held in the plaza outside the downtown branch of the Vancouver Public Library. This first major public event sought input from the broad community. The open house was coined as a "Public Ideas Fair" and was a Saturday drop-in event from 10am to 3pm. The event provided detailed information about the process and the site as well as several interactive activities designed to generate input from participants, including: interactive panels, an "imagine" chalkboard, and a "park design sandbox". Walking tours to the site were also offered. The design team also shared precedent images of other noteworthy and inspirational parks from around the world and participants were asked to provide feedback on the "grab-bag" of ideas presented.

There was a hard-copy questionnaire available for participants as well as an online questionnaire which was live for 3-weeks after the event. In total, 208 respondents participated in the questionnaire process and generally the responses emphasized the need for more green-space and open park land in the downtown. This was not a surprise as everyone that attended the event was excited that the process of designing a new park for the area had “finally begun”.

Open House #2: The second open house was hosted in the gallery space at the ArtStarts headquarters conveniently located adjacent to the park site. The weeknight open house was held as a drop-in event from 4:30pm to 8:30pm. The event focused on presenting four concepts that were based on the feedback obtained in the first open house. The four unique concepts each possessed attributes that served various community aspirations and design functions. Some placed more emphasis on urban greening and natural systems while others focused on the built form (i.e. underground parkade).

A hard-copy questionnaire was available for participants as well as an online questionnaire which was live for 3.5-weeks after the event. 291 respondents participated in the questionnaire process and generally the responses emphasized the need for more natural landscapes and robust plantings to provide respite from the built downtown environment.

Option A received approximately 40% of the vote, while Option B, C and D each retained 20% of the preferential vote. The key ingredients that were preferred from each option, as well as some of the main themes from Option A, informed the preferred concept that was created and shared at Open House #3. Interestingly, the notion of including a parking lot beneath the park created a stark dichotomy of responses with half being strongly opposed and half in support. As such, parking beneath the park was not pursued in the preferred concept. Parking beneath the park was also not pursued to ensure longevity of a healthy and long lived urban forest canopy (the roof of a parking structure requires renovation in a 40-50 year term: the time it takes to grow a large tree).

Open House #3: The third and final open house was an opportunity to share the preferred design with the community. The event was again held at ArtStarts due to the success of the previous open house event hosted there. The weeknight drop-in event took place from 4:30pm to 8:30pm and was well attended by nearly 200 community members.

A hard-copy questionnaire was available for participants and an online questionnaire was live for 2-weeks after the event. The open house questionnaire associated with this final open house had the largest response rate with 1032 participants. Interestingly, the online questionnaire received over 800 responses within the first three days of the open house event.

Citizens were asked six questions pertaining to the design materials presented in the final open house. These questions were designed to allow the project team to develop a robust understanding of the community's likes and dislikes as well as attempting to glean specific approaches that could be taken to rectify any perceived short-comings of the design. The questions and associated responses are as follows:

1. How do you feel about the preferred design concept?
 - 77% liked the design of the new park;
 - 10% disliked the design of the new park;

- 12% are neutral; and
 - 1% are unsure or don't know.
2. How often do you anticipate visiting this park after it is built?
- 25% will visit the park once a week or more;
 - 29% will visit the park 1-3 times per month;
 - 31% will visit the park less than once per month; and
 - 15% are unsure or don't know.
3. How likely are you to purchase food or beverage from the facility shown in this design?
- 57% are likely to purchase food/beverage from the kiosk; and
 - 43% are not likely to purchase food/beverage from the kiosk.
4. Are there any aspects of the design you don't like and you believe should be excluded?
- Only 44% of respondents answered this question and many of the responses were not specifically related to ingredients that were desired to be excluded. Most of the aspirations to exclude proposed elements were related directly to a respondent's like or dislike of the park concept. Themes that did emerge included a desire to reduce the number of "sky-frames" from eleven (11), as originally proposed, to a lesser number that achieves the design intent. Additionally, some felt the "sky-frames" were too linear and that they could be softened in appearance. Finally, some respondents were concerned about the inclusion of a food/beverage amenity in the park, but mainly these concerns centred on the notion that there were other coffee shops nearby.
5. Is there anything that was not included in the design that you believe would make the park better?
- Only 39% of respondents answered this question. The general themes that emerged from respondents were as follows:
 - Ensure that there is an additional midway connection for ingress/egress to the overhead walkway;
 - Ensure that there is porosity to the overhead walkway to prevent sleeping and loitering beneath the structure;
 - Ensuring that there is an expanded landing for lingering and hanging out at the midway point of the overhead walkway to encourage stopping and tranquility;
 - Include weather protection on the site so the park can be used year-round - if possible, in a way that doesn't promote loitering;
 - Ensure that the park has splashes of colour to play off of the natural greens of landscape material; and
 - Provide an area of open grass lawn for lying on a blanket and relaxing.
6. Do you have any additional comments you would like to provide?
- Only 37% of respondents answered this question. Generally the respondents felt that engagement process has been meaningful and they are excited for the addition of this new open space in their dense neighbourhood. Many responses emphasized the need for the park to be maintained to a high level to reflect the level of use that will be experienced on the site. Finally, most were pleased that this new park would stand-out as different and iconic relative to many of the parks in the City of Vancouver.

Throughout each stage of the public engagement, the design has evolved for the better. Input from the public is critical to “truth” proposed solutions aimed to achieve various purposes. When these solutions were reviewed by the community, the design team received critical feedback that led to revelations regarding the manner in which people actually use this particular site. This essential lens has resulted in what the team believes to be the best solution for this unique site.

Phase 3 - Plan Revisions

After an extensive engagement process, it became evident that a few tweaks needed to be made to the preferred concept based on the insightful community feedback. The preferred design drawings presented at the third PDFG meeting and the third open house have been updated to reflect the changes that will improve the aesthetics, safety and social functionality of the park.

The final design will provide a key entrance point to the downtown as pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles traverse the Cambie Bridge and observe the bright red bridge viewing deck extending over Smithe Street. The park will serve as a green anchor within a 5-minute walk of multiple downtown destinations including Granville Street, Robson Street, and the Downtown Library, Yaletown, and BC Place stadium. The park is inspired by the layered history of uses previously occupying the site, including the Recreation Park that was sited nearby at Smithe and Homer in the early 1900's. Surrounded by a dense tapestry of urban residential units and healthy businesses, the park will offer daily respite to thousands of downtown dwellers. The specific attributes of the design include three terrace levels serving as vibrant and dynamic spaces to provide unique experiences for all users including:

- A large public plaza that is a multi-use space and that contains a feature water fountain that uses recirculated water;
- A food and beverage amenity to anchor the corner of Smithe and Richards, to activate the public space and to provide passive policing of the site contained in a building that also provides public washrooms and storage for the park;
- An exciting playground area for multiple ages from toddlers to adults;
- A creative corner with a community harvest table and opportunities for various programs;
- An overhead walkway that weaves through the site and allows for a bird's-eye perspective on the entire park below. This feature will also assist in policing of the site;
- Large seating terraces to capitalize on sunny periods and support community events in the plaza;
- Robust planted areas dominated by a variety of trees and horticultural specimens that green the site and buffer the park from nearby buildings and traffic and that are mindful of sightlines for safety;
- A rainwater infiltration channel acting as a buffer between the park and the laneway;
- Fully accessible path networks that connect the site for all ages and abilities; and
- Large overhead “sky-frames” that provide overhead enclosure and a sense of vertical scale relative to adjacent buildings. These structures are inspired by several historical references, but also serve as support mechanisms for specialty overhead lighting and ephemeral art installations or community events (such as Canucks banners when they make the playoffs next).

Figure 2 below illustrate the modifications made to the final design that reflect community requests to improve safety, aesthetics and social vibrancy.

The juxtaposition of the preferred and the final revised design reveals changes that the design team consider important for inclusion prior to seeking Board approval.

The additional path connecting to the overhead walkway as well as the additional landing and gathering area on the overhead walkway are important changes that improve safety, and that improve the leisurely nature of the walking path. The rounded geometry of the “sky-frames” creates a more tranquil setting by eliminating hard edges and moves away from echoing the built form surrounding the park. Finally, the inclusion of a retractable awning on the food/beverage amenity will allow for respite from rain and sun, but will be drawn in during off-hours to discourage loitering. Lastly, the northeast corner of the site was initially planned for perennial plantings, but the final design will acknowledge community input that suggests a grass lawn best suits this location.

Detailed images of the final design can be reviewed in Appendix A.

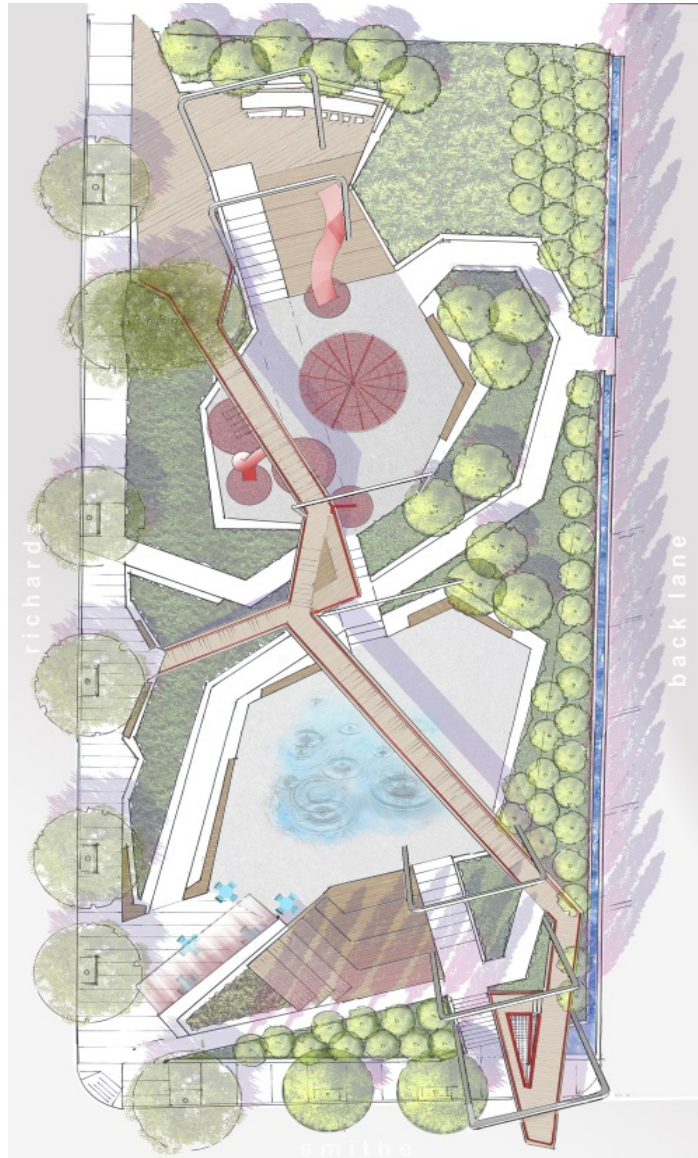


Figure 2: Revised Final Design

NEXT STEPS

Phase 4 - Board Approvals

Since the final open house, the design team have been working closely to finalize the park design and prepare documents necessary to seek approval from the Park Board. If the final design is approved, the team will move forward to the next phases of the project and resolve the details and technical design with the intention of developing drawings and specifications that will be tendered for construction in early 2017. The aspirational goal is to begin construction by the spring of 2017 and open the park in the fall of 2018.

In order to achieve this goal, the design team will need to rapidly advance the design and coordinate with other initiatives taking place adjacent to the site.

Firstly, BC Hydro and Telus are planning to remove the large H-frame hydro poles that line the laneway flanking the site. The timeline for this work is anticipated concurrently with the park development process, and coordination with park development work is essential to optimize timelines and budgets.

Additionally, the City of Vancouver Active Transportation branch is moving forward with the installation of a bike lane along Smithe Street beside the park. This work will take place in 2016 and will be coordinated to ensure the interface with the park accommodates safe movement of people through and around the site in a manner that is in keeping with the project goals.

Park Board staff and the consultant team acknowledge that there are other key coordination aspects that need to take place in order to realize the construction. City departments that are key players in terms of coordination necessary to deliver this project include the City of Vancouver Engineering Branch, City of Vancouver Planning and Cultural Services, and Real Estate and Facilities Management.

Internally, Park Board staff are working together develop a strategy to identify vendors to occupy the food and beverage amenity in this new downtown park. The inclusion of a food/beverage amenity in the park necessitates issuing an RFP to potential vendors in the near term as the detailed design of the building that will house the business will be developed with input from the future business operator. The RFP will outline the expectation that the future vendor will cost share in the building construction and operation. The Park Board will bear certain building costs as the building is integrated with park features. The Park Board will provide the vendor with key design criteria (square footage, footprint, ceiling heights etc.) as they relate to the site design, but the vendor will provide input on spatial layout, entrances and utility services and mechanical systems.

The preliminary cost estimate for the contract administration and construction of this new downtown destination park is estimated at \$6M. It is assumed that \$1M of this total budget relates to the cost of the new building planned for the site and coordination with the City's Real Estate and Facilities Department for this aspect is required. Budget approvals for the construction phase will be sought through the 2017 capital budget process. Additional ongoing maintenance costs of \$50-70K annually are estimated based on the proposed park amenities and will need to be considered as part of the Parks Board future operating budgets.

SUMMARY

The new park designed for Smithe and Richards presents a rare opportunity to forge a bold direction for park design and public realm in downtown Vancouver. Smithe and Richards will be a counter-point to the traditional design approaches that inform Emery Barnes Park, but the result will be equally compelling and provide multi-layered experiences that change with the seasons and years. The new park will highlight the Park Board's commitment to inclusiveness, recreation, ecological functionality, and fiscal responsibility and reflect the four sections of the Park Board Strategic Plan.

The diversity of program opportunities in this new park will ensure that users are inspired to return and explore the diversity of spaces repeatedly. This park will be transformative and will grow and evolve over time. As large stature trees mature, adding a new green island to the urban forest, they will contrast with the built elements on the site and create a much

needed place of respite downtown. Opportunities for informal gatherings, community events, passive and active recreation and year-round use coupled with a design that is mindful of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design “CPTED” principles will ensure that the new park at Smithe and Richards becomes a hub of activity in the downtown and a much-valued asset contributing to the legacy of the Park Board.

General Manager's Office
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

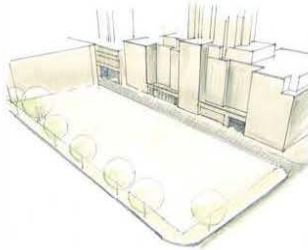
Prepared by:
Joe McLeod/Tiina Mack - Park development

JM/TM/clc

New Downtown Park - Final Design

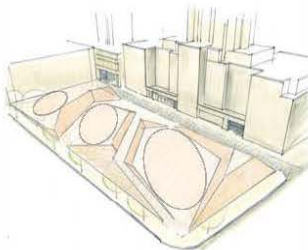
The Layers of Design:

PUTTING IT TOGETHER



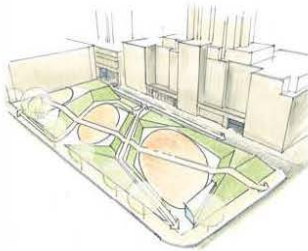
existing site

- Empty site, with a **5 meter slope** from the north to the south (Smithe Street)
- Existing **trees** are maintained



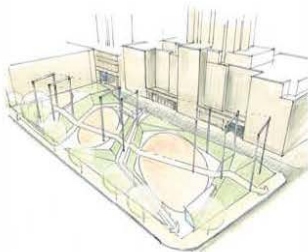
terraced landform

- Creation of **usable flat areas** due to the sloped site
- Berms and earthworks **create definition** for the site, and **buffer noise** from buildings and traffic



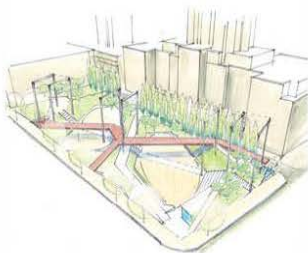
green and connected

- Plenty of **lush greenery**, with plantings making up **over half of the site**
- Plantings strategically situated in raised areas - away from foot traffic and pet waste - to promote a **durability**
- Three **distinctive terraces** create spaces for diverse park activities
- A path connects the top (north) to the bottom (south), creating a new, **direct route** from Richards to Smithe
- Meandering, universally accessible pathways link all the areas in the proposed **'barrier-free'** park design



scale and transformation

- **"Skyframes"** - which are inspired by the iconic utility H-frames that are disappearing from Vancouver's laneways - create a more **comfortable human scale** against tall neighbouring buildings
- They can be curated with **diverse types of art**, as well as suspended lighting and more, to create a **dynamic** park experience that changes over time
- Skyframes contain **historic references** to the location of historic property lines and the archway entrance to former nearby Recreation Park
- These are intended to be **memorable**, creating a **unique sense of place** and putting this park on map **internationally**



identity and program

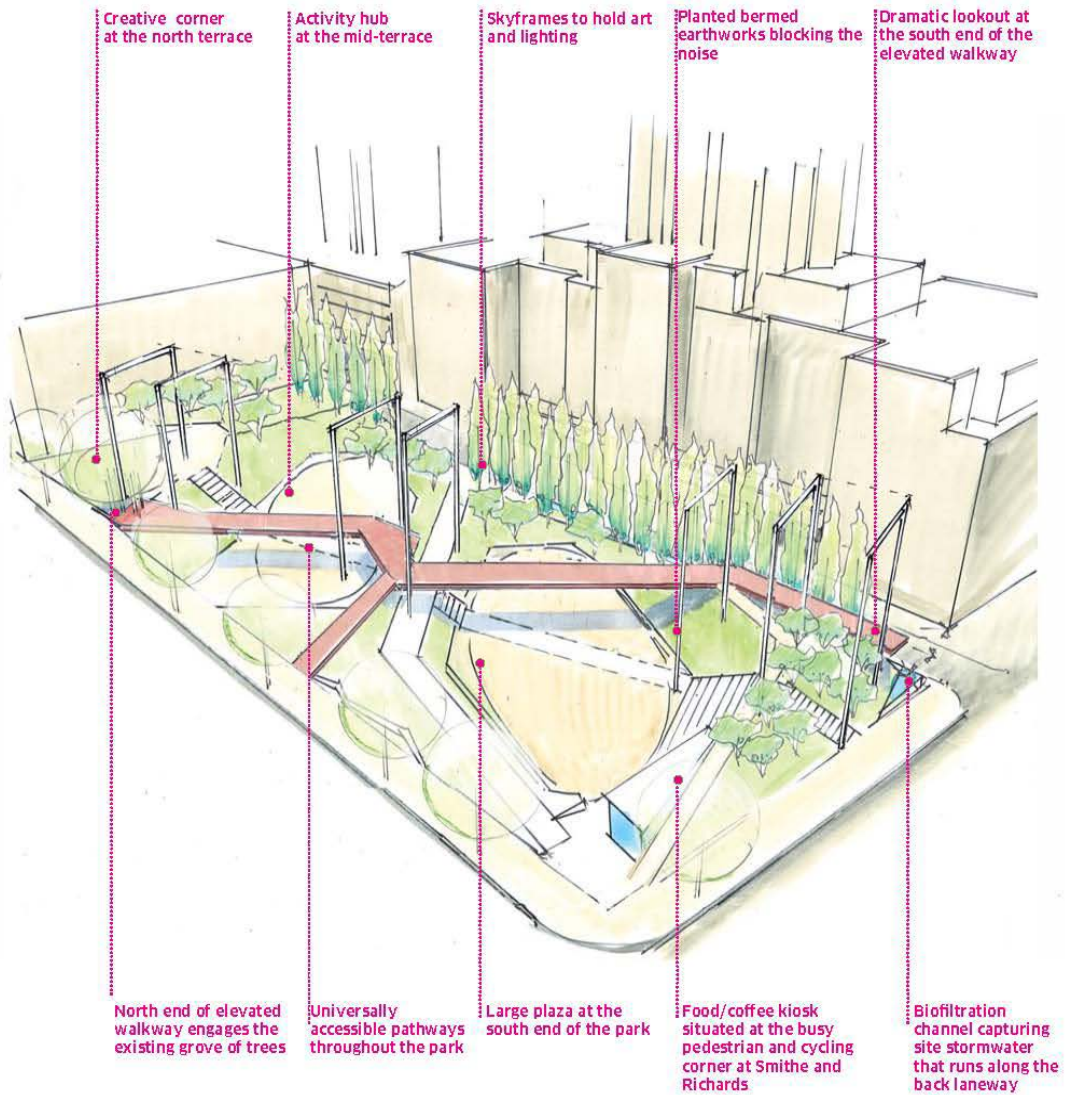
- An **elevated walkway** creates a bold feature that weaves through the park, providing a unique and barrier-free journey across the entire park
- The elevated walkway acts as a **playful armature**, from which swings, hammocks, and slides can be hung
- With downward views, it encourages **"eyes on the park"** and **sense of safety**
- It ends in a cantilevered lookout over Smithe Street, which creates a **strong visual impression** for people traveling along that street, announcing the park and creating a **gateway experience**

New Park at Smithe and Richards



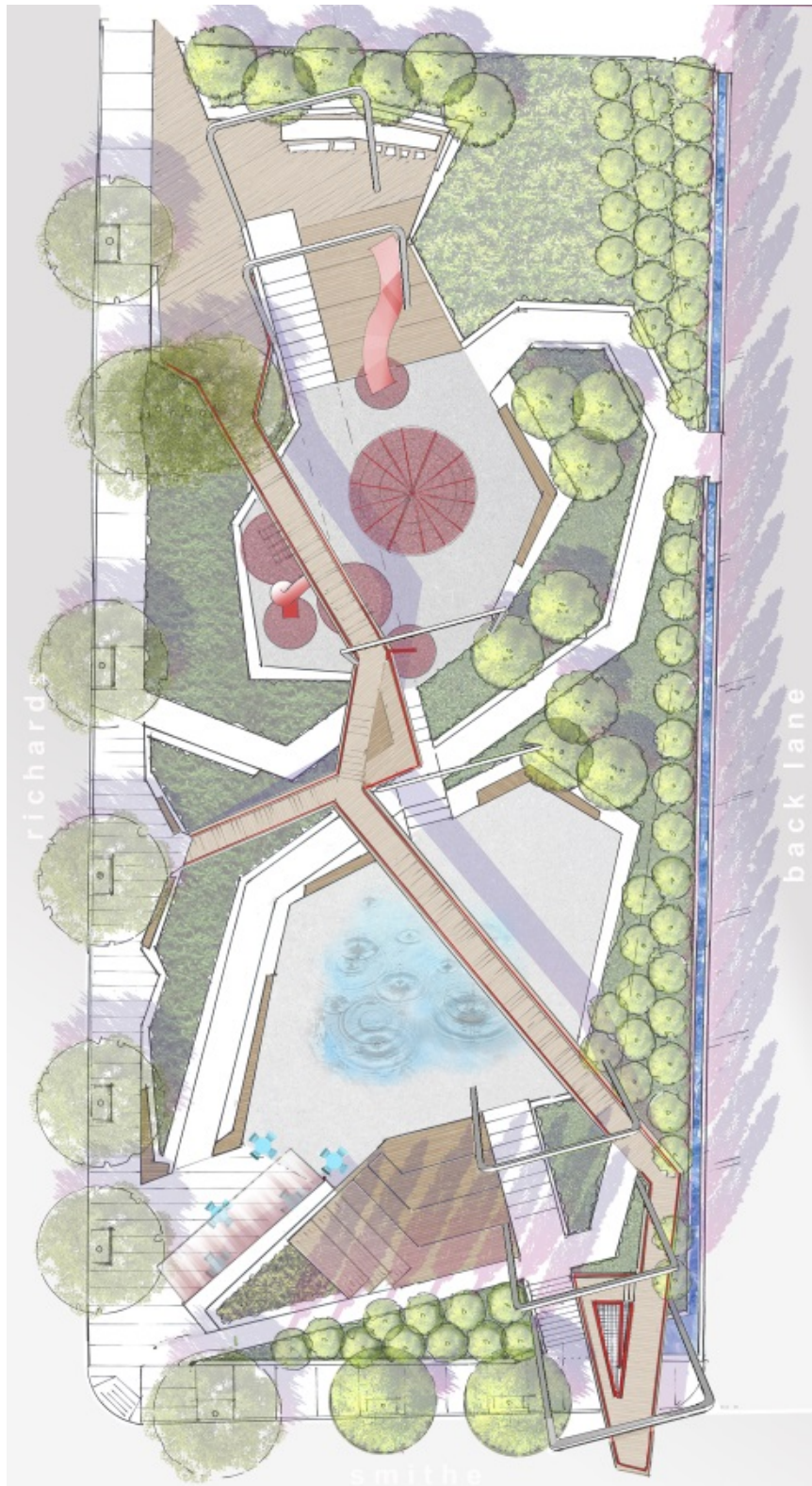
BUILDING THE CONCEPT

The following are the building blocks of the Preferred Concept, which combine the preferred elements of the four concepts.



New Downtown Park - Final Design

Plan View: Final Design

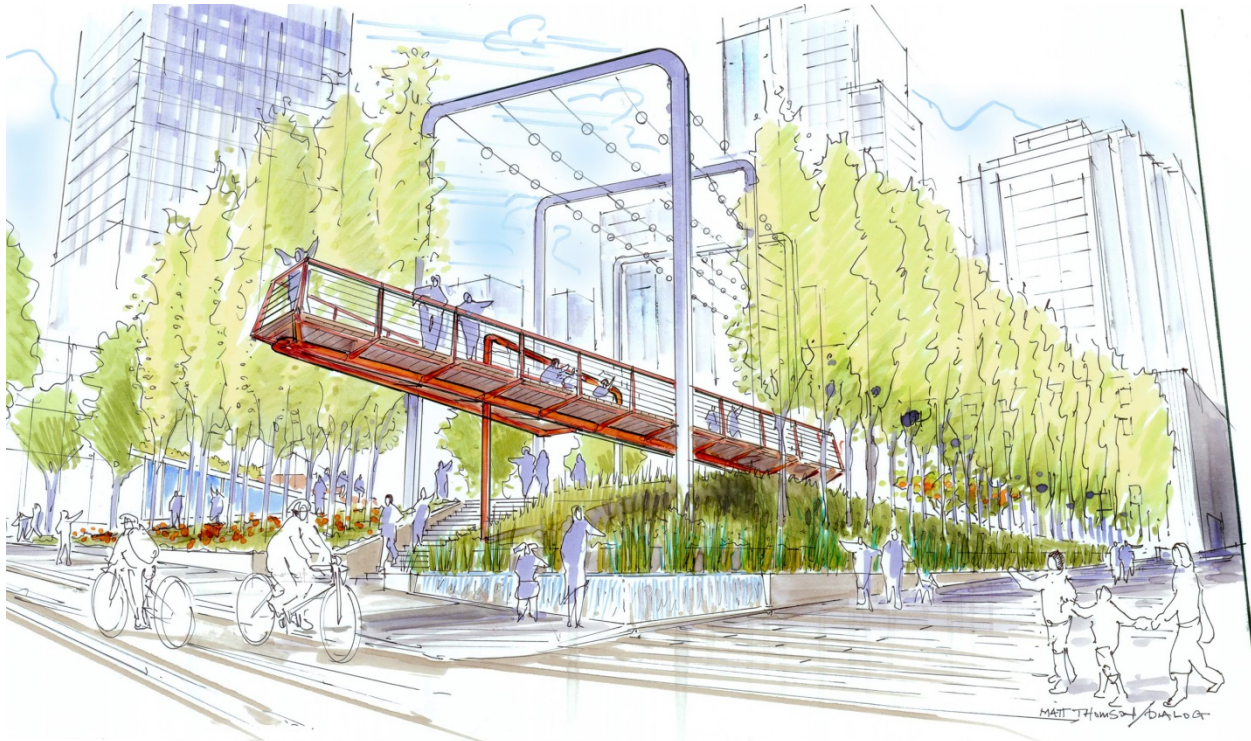


New Downtown Park - Final Design

Bird's Eye View: Final Design

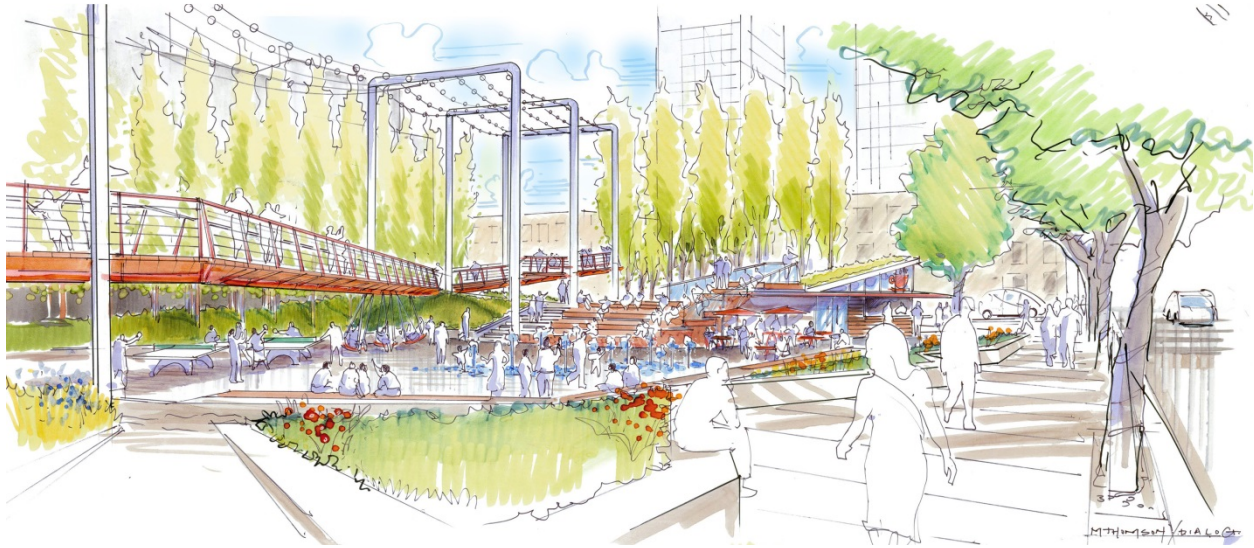


View Northward from Smithe: Final Design

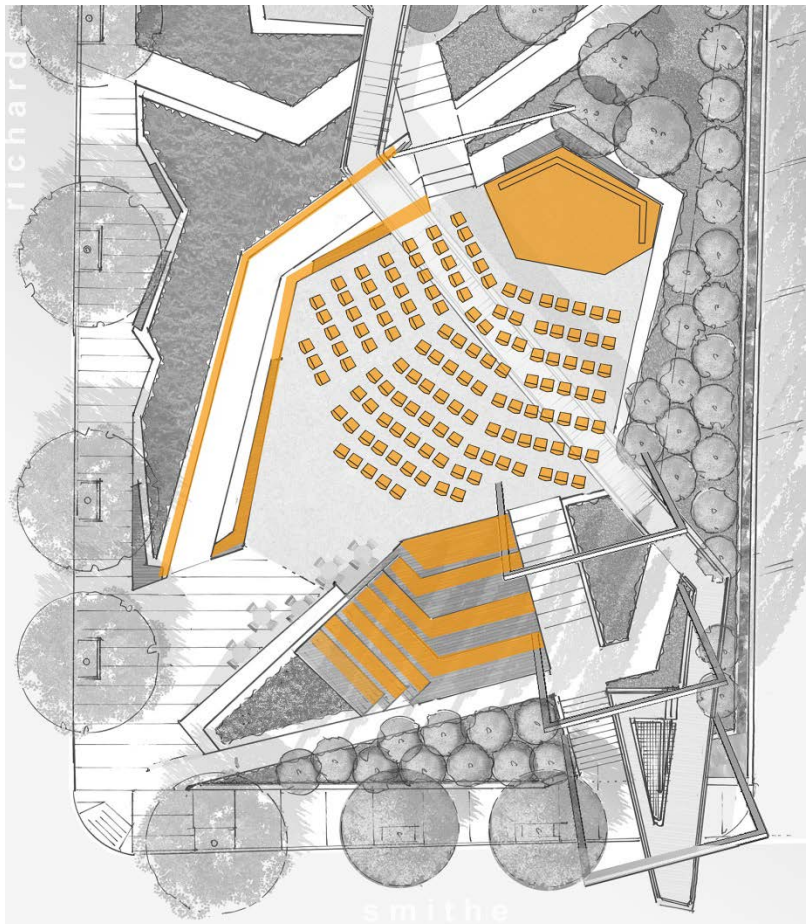
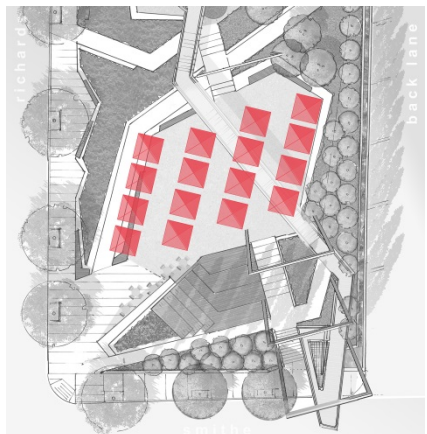
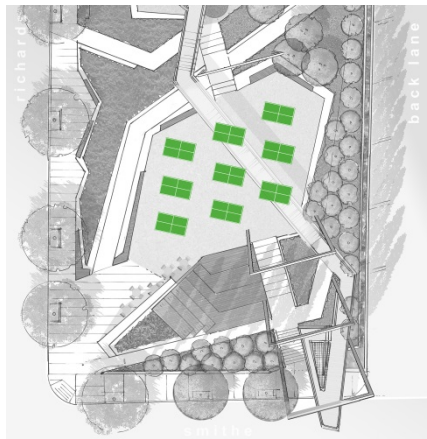


New Downtown Park - Final Design

View Southward from Richards: Final Design



Programming Opportunities: Ping-Pong; Maker's Fair; Live Performance



New Downtown Park - Final Design

Lighting Plan: Final Design

