

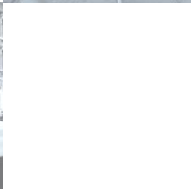


Comparing the Design of Two Yaletown Open Spaces:

An Evaluation of Design Elements and the Physical Environment



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A report submitted to the School of Urban and Regional Planning in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Urban and Regional Planning



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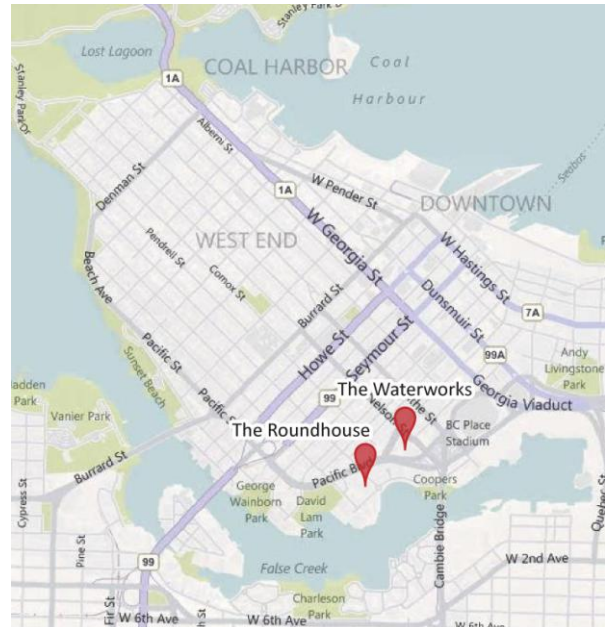
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

This report compares two open spaces in downtown Vancouver through an evaluation of their design elements based upon literature pertaining to the design of parks and plazas. The intent of this study is to understand the factors that make successful open spaces through an investigation of social indicators, and design elements. This project also aims to examine design elements of open space in Vancouver and how alterations can be made to improve their use. The research questions addressed in this report are:

- What planning and design characteristics are present or missing from the two case study open spaces, The Roundhouse and the Waterworks? And,
- How can these two open space case studies in Vancouver become better places through planning and design initiatives?

While both of these open spaces are considered to be well designed by Vancouver's Urban Design Panel, the Roundhouse is generally considered to be a more successful open space due to its higher levels of use throughout the year.



Location of two open spaces in downtown Vancouver

Research Methodology & Evaluation Criteria

In order to compare the case studies, nineteen evaluative criteria for the design of open spaces were used to assess the design elements present. These criteria, shown in the table below, were derived from the City of Vancouver's Plaza Design Guidelines, are grouped into four major categories: context, safety, environment, and user attractions. To ensure data collection was comprehensive, four methods were utilized: a literature review, direct observations, a user survey, and mapping & photographs.

Data Analysis

Both open spaces were evaluated and then assigned a point-scale rank based on how well the square met the criteria as outlined in this report. The overall comparative evaluation of the two open spaces is as follows:

Evaluation Criteria	The Roundhouse	The Waterworks
Context		
Use & Concept	●	◐
Visibility & Views	◐	◐
Linkages	◐	○
Safety		
Design	●	●
Accessibility	●	◐
Defensible Space	○	○
Lighting & Public Features	◐	○
Environment		
Sunlight	◐	◐
Wind	○	○
Noise	◐	◐
Weather Protection	◐	○
Environmentally Sensitive Design	◐	●
User Attractions		
Seating	◐	●
Activity Generators	●	◐
Amenities	◐	◐
Natural Elements	◐	◐
Detailing & Materials	◐	○
Spatial Variety	●	○
Good Management	◐	◐

Legend:

●	Excellent	◐	Fair
◐	Very Good	●	Poor
○	Good		

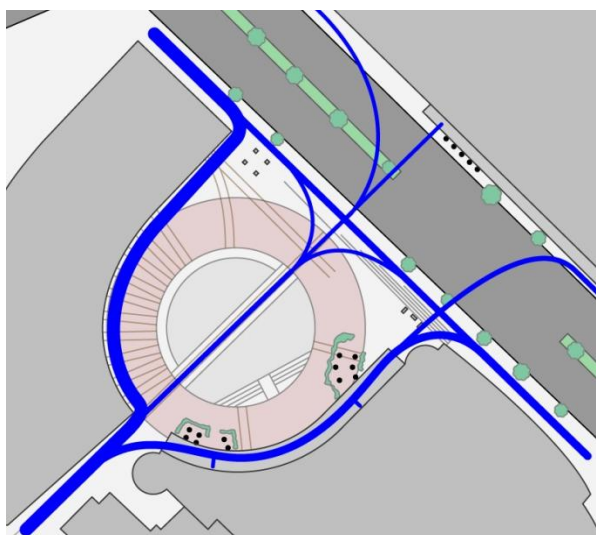
Conclusions & Recommendations

The Roundhouse



Historic portion of the Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre

As the data collected for the Roundhouse suggests, it is an extremely well-designed open space, ranking generally higher in most regards compared to the Waterworks. With strong local history to draw upon, this open space creates a strong character for itself that other design elements found here build on. The cafe, restaurant, grocery store as well as other retail businesses in the site or nearby create a constant flow of pedestrian traffic through the open space during a wide range of hours. Further to this, the presence of the local community centre nearby manages to supplement this pedestrian traffic during all weather conditions which strengthens the overall use of the site.



Circulation Analysis of the Roundhouse open space shown in red (left) with changes in behaviour during rainy conditions defined in blue (right)

While traffic through the site remains somewhat constant during rainy weather, it was observed that people modified their behaviour within the open space depending upon the weather conditions. A lack of weather protection measures around the site was identified during user interviews at the Roundhouse as well as other concerns such as a lack of natural elements within the site.

Recommendations:

- Provide weather protection on the Roundhouse Building,
- Provide soft landscape features within the Roundhouse open space,
- Provide weather protection measure for stairs on site.

The Waterworks

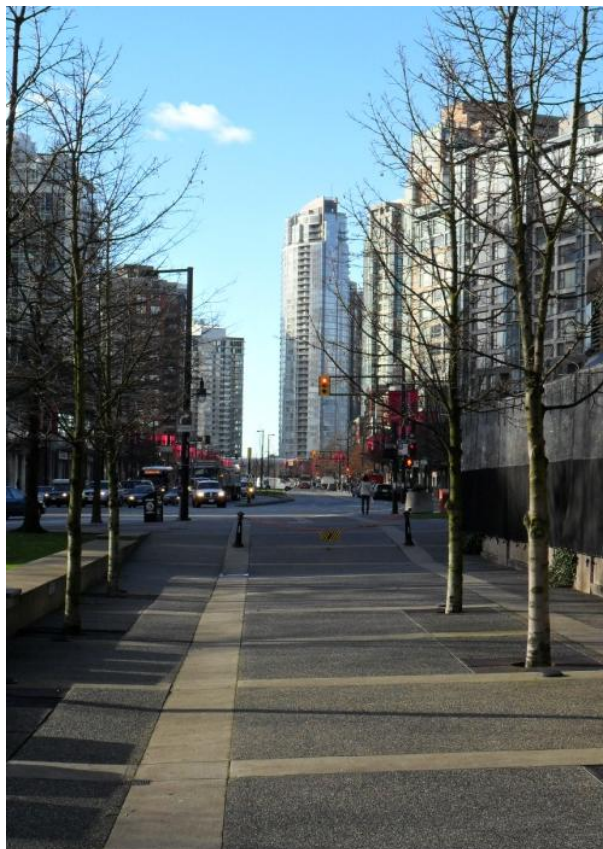
The Waterworks open space has been designed with attention to many of the design elements recommended by the Plaza Design Guidelines for open spaces. With a variety of seating options available as well as a strong attempt to create a local character, this location within the urban fabric is both visually appealing and functional in design.

Leaf-pond and landmark building that terminate the vista from Pacific Boulevard



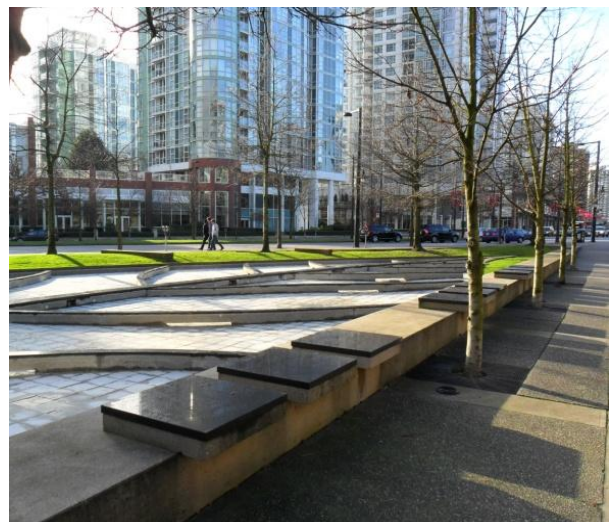
Surrounded by high-density residential towers, the Waterworks should be a strong local park for nearby residents; however, this is not the case. The majority of people surveyed at this location were not from the neighbourhood and used the open space simply as a commuter thoroughfare. With minimal commercial activity in and around the open space, the Waterworks felt desolate during all hours of the day. When comparing this site with the Roundhouse, it is obvious that the impacts of the outdoor cafes and restaurants on open spaces develop a more welcoming atmosphere in the area that the Waterworks is sorely missing.

View out of the Waterworks west down Pacific Boulevard



While usage of this site was small in comparison to the Roundhouse, it was even more pronounced during rainy winter days. While this open space is well designed for the summer months in Vancouver, there are some shortcomings identified within the site for winter months. As this location is very exposed to the elements, the lack of weather protection devices on site was even more pronounced which further discourages use during the rainy half of the year.

Polished concrete pads installed around the Waterworks' pond



Recommendations:

- Improve amenities for cyclists,
- Provide additional seating at perimeter of open space,
- Protect select seating from rain to encourage use year round,
- Open restaurant up to open space,
- Use subtle lighting alternatives to illuminate the main lawn and pond.