

Vancouver, Canda

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Lively and Diverse by
Nature



Vancouver's Downtown Central Area (left) includes extensive waterfront greenways and parks at False Creek North and South as well as Coal Harbor and Stanley Park in background. Stanley Park is the first park created in Vancouver. Its close downtown proximity and multitude of activities make it a beloved place to visit. (photo: www.seevancouverbc.com)

Dr. Sun Yat Sen Garden (below) is an urban oasis in Vancouver's Chinatown. It is a classical Chinese garden run by the Dr. Sun Yat Sen Garden Society of Vancouver. (Photo: Nathan Brightbill).

Vancouver is a city of an estimated 560,000 with a robust parks system particularly noted for its large urban open spaces, like Stanley Park, and its attention to greenways and other pedestrian amenities. The total land area is 106.7 square kilometers, excluding Stanley Park which covers 3.9 square kilometers. Other parks, golf courses and open space total 11.9 square kilometers. The city's Parks Board is unique in Canada because it is an autonomous and separately elected committee, rather than appointed by council. The board was formed during the creation of Stanley Park in 1886 (see *Stanley Park: Vancouver's First Park*). Vancouver contains over 200 parks. The Parks Board mission is to "Provide, preserve and advocate for parks and recreation services to benefit people, communities and the environment." Parks principals are based on integrity, responsiveness, learning, leadership, inclusiveness, and accountability.

Some say Vancouver is a "setting in search of a city." The parks strategy plays a significant role in maintaining integration between the city and its environment. Much attention is not only paid to park quality and mobility between them, but also to views out of the city to capitalize on its rich natural setting. The city is currently engaged in encouraging families to move to the center city, by adopting a "living first" strategy. The city has recognized that providing housing is not sufficient, but rather a whole array of services including open space, pedestrian connectivity, schools and community centers is vital. A large part of this strategy has been to dedicate waterfront areas to the public and use developer fees to fund parks.

Since 1986 with the World Exposition and timing of Hong Kong investors seeking land elsewhere, Vancouver has experienced a building boom and urban design renaissance. Its methods have been coined the "Vancouver Style" and influence design worldwide for better or worse. Open space is seen as an integral piece in Vancouver's strategy.



Few cities' possess such a combination of nearby natural resources, a splendid harbor, a terrain ideally suited for urban use, an equable climate, and a setting of great natural beauty. -Harland Bartholomew, 1928

City Statistics

City Population: 560,000

City Area: 27,293 acres

Density Level: 20 people per acre

Park Acreage: 3,904 acres

Park acreage per 1000 residents: 6.97

Including Pacific Spirit Regional Park: 10.33

Governing bodies: City Council, Parks Board, School Board

Expenditure per person: \$150

Context

Located on the southwest corner of the mainland of British Columbia, Vancouver is bounded on three sides by water. To the city's north, the Burrard Inlet separates Vancouver from North Vancouver and West Vancouver. On its western boundary is the Pacific Ocean's Strait of Georgia. To the south, the Fraser River separates Vancouver from its smaller satellite communities. This area is Canada's primary Pacific port and the economic hub of British Columbia.

30 historical streams have been diverted or buried. Spanish Banks creek is a recently restored salmon run. Urban habitat includes 4 creeks, a lake and lagoon in Stanley Park and another lake. Native vegetation includes western hemlock, amabilis fir, doug-fir western red cedar and sitka spruce.

Vancouver is governed by the ten-member Vancouver City Council, a nine-member School Board, and a seven-member Parks Board, all elected for three-year terms through an at-large system. The last elections were held in November 2002. The leftist Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) swept the elections.

Vancouver also benefits from a large regional park system, one of which lies between the city and the University of British Columbia campus to the west. These parks are run by the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), a regional governmental body of 21 municipalities dealing with services of air, water, recycling, garbage, sewerage, regional parks, housing, regional development and labor relations.



Major Components

Vancouver has over 200 parks, 400 playing fields and sport courts, and 11 miles of beaches. 58% of the waterfront is currently public.

Connective corridors

Vancouver has an extensive city greenway system that continues to be expanded. Because Vancouver has actively preserved its seawalls for public use, 30% of the network was in place before the greenways program was established. Street right-of-ways will make up 50% of the network. The intent of the program is to ensure that no home is more than a 25 minute walk or 10 minute bike ride from a greenway. Neighborhood greenways are smaller and established as links within communities rather than between them. They are locally initiated and enacted through city/community partnerships.

Goals of a City Greenway are:

- Make walking more interesting
- Make cycling safer and more convenient
- Reduce the impact of the car
- Make the Greenway 'greener'
- Use public art to make the Greenway more interesting

Anchors

Stanley Park is Vancouver's most notable and primary park. There are several other anchors. **Queen Elizabeth Park** and **Van Dusen Botanical Garden** are located toward the south of the city. Queen Elizabeth Park contains the highest point in the city as well as the Bloedel Floral Conservatory. The site is on a former stone quarry redeveloped in the 1950s. Van Dusen Botanical Garden was once a golf course and has been home to thousands of rare and exotic plants since the 1960s. **Hastings Park** is a 162 acre area currently being redeveloped as a multi-use park. It will become the second largest park in Vancouver and provide an eastern anchor to the city's park system. **Pacific Spirit Regional Park** borders Vancouver but is not actually part of the city. It is part of the University of British Columbia's endowment lands, but provides a myriad of outdoor activities to Vancouver residents. The park covers 1,885 acres and significantly increases the amount of open space immediately available to Vancouver residents.

Civic, Downtown and Social Spaces

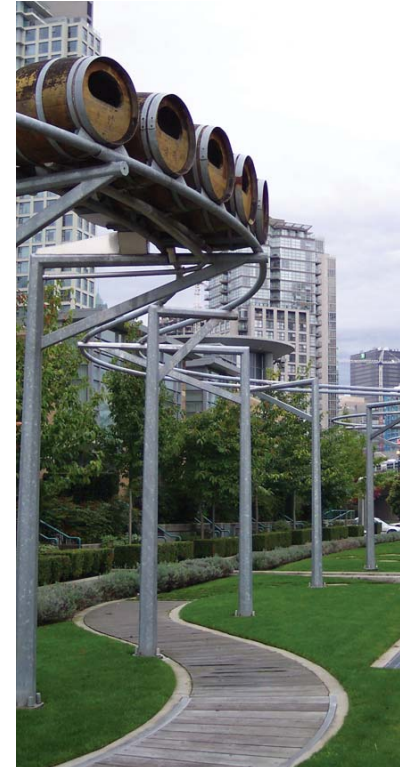
Vancouver is exceptional in its model of linking community centers with schools and parks. There are three of these downtown either existing or in development. A notable example is the Roundhouse community center, which was redeveloped from a roundhouse once used by the railroad. This has played a significant role in helping attract families into the downtown area.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are often attached to community centers and schools. There are 23 community centers, 3 of which are downtown. Of late, much attention has been paid to the development of downtown parks leaving some neighborhood parks unprogrammed and in need of maintenance.

Community Gardens

There are 10 community gardens. They are located on parkland but are organized by neighborhood groups. Strathcona Community Garden is a notable example.



Many new developments feature mews combined with public art. Roundhouse Community Center below. (photo: Nathan Brightbill)



The Changing City: False Creek North, 1978



Community Amenities Contributions Through Rezoning

Community Amenities Contributions (CAC) policies were enacted by Vancouver in 1999. They apply to projects that receive an increase in density when the land is rezoned. Fees apply only to the additional square footage allowed by the zoning increase. The fee amount can vary depending on the circumstance, but is usually \$3 per square foot.

CAC funds can be used in many ways, depending on what the city desires from a particular project. They have been applied to many new downtown projects and have paid for many amenities such as the waterfront at Coal Harbour pictured below. (photo: Nathan Brightbill)



Funding and Planning Mechanisms

The parks operating budget comes primarily from the City of Vancouver through taxes (61% in 2004). User fees for golf courses, community centers, pools, rinks, fitness centers, marinas, Stanley Park, Van Dusen Gardens, and Bloedel Conservatory, parking fees, and concessions make up the rest of revenue. In 2004, Parks revenue was \$83.9 million (Canadian). The capital budget is mostly funded through the City's three year Capital Plan approved by the Council and residents split between park and recreation needs. For 2003-2005 the Capital Plan total is \$45.5 million (Canadian).

The 2005-2010 Strategic Plan focuses on strengthening fiscal responsibility and pursuing alternative sources of funding. The Vancouver Parks Board plans to provide more access to data and involve the public more in allocation of funds, develop a comprehensive fundraising program with more community partners, and seek creative solutions for long-term fiscal stability.

Vancouver also has a system of discretionary zoning with design review that allows the creation of bylaws to allow density bonuses in exchange for community amenities. Recently large development projects such as False Creek North and Coal Harbour have funded many new parks and waterfront greenways.

Initiatives

The 2050-2010 Strategic Plan focuses on five areas, development of sustainable policies and practices, integrating wellness and recreations services, public involvement, strengthen fiscal responsibility and pursuing alternative funding, and addressing expected population growth and the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

1. The Parks sustainability initiatives focus on sustainable parks operations and maintenance practices, green building, policy development, and a healthy urban environment.
2. To support wellness of city residents, Vancouver Parks is developing ways to reduce barriers to participation in parks and recreation services, increasing universal accessibility, promoting and developing programs for wellness, and making arts part all activities.
3. Public involvement strategies include developing a formal involvement strategy, building partnerships to provide services and involve communities, and more collaboration with City departments.
4. Vancouver Parks financial resources seem to be in good shape. The financial goal focuses on maintaining that fiscal responsibility, increasing transparency, developing a comprehensive fundraising program to broaden their financial base, and looking for creative ideas for the future.
5. To address expected population growth the Parks is pursuing a long-term strategy for facility renewal, assessing growing recreational needs, expanding services, and developing a long-term acquisitions strategy. The 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games are seen as an opportunity for new facilities.

The largest upcoming project is the Southeast False Creek Olympic Village which will be a showcase of green building and provide new housing and open space close to downtown (See SEFC Story).

Partnership for Parks is a three year old initiative to "develop and enhance park stewardship." There are 50 community groups involved in some form or another.

Lessons Learned

- Keeping waterfront space public vastly improves neighborhoods and is crucial to connectivity.
- Combine parks, community centers and schools to increase the value of each.
- Within an overall vision consider zoning of projects case by case in order to capitalize upon the unique aspects of particular sites for the public benefit.
- Density requires pedestrian connectivity and scale and downtown amenities. Increasing these, in conjunction with seeing congestion as an ally promotes downtown living.
- Regulate new development to pay for the cost of public amenities rather than burdening the existing tax payer.
- An independent parks board increases the significance of parks and improves systemwide coordination, but limits ability to integrate with other city initiatives.
- Connectivity is well-established in Vancouver but opportunities to establish urban ecology could be better exploited.



The Cambie Bridge becomes a shelter for play space. (photo: Nathan Brightbill)

Stanley Park: Vancouver's First Park

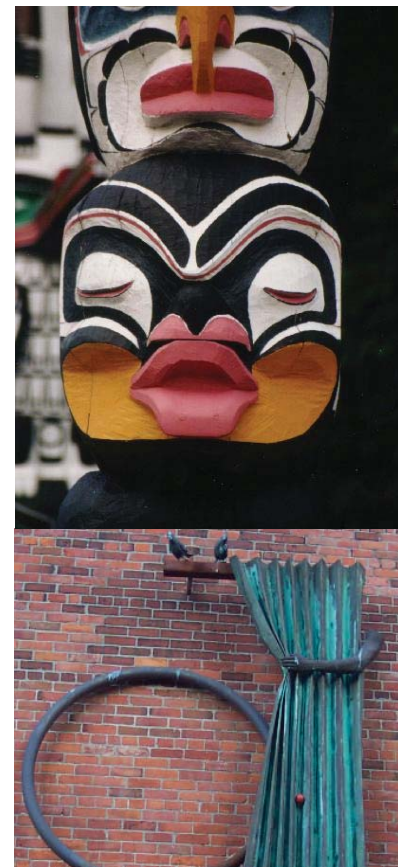
"To the use and enjoyment of people of all colours, creeds and customs for all time." - Lord Stanley, Governor General of Canada, in 1889, at the dedication of Stanley Park

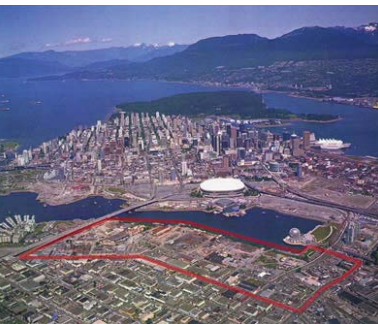
"First resolution of the first City Council in 1886 was to petition the Federal Government for the use as park, a 1,000 acre (404 hectares) peninsula which we now know as Stanley Park. Shortly after this fortuitous request, Council designed an appointed Park Committee to manage its new charge by building trails and gardens. The park had already been logged from the 1860-1880s with only the largest trees left (they were too big to cut down even then). By 1890, the Park Board had become an elected body and remains the only Canadian board of its kind."



Photo: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/parks/parks/stanley/history.htm>

Displacement of native tribes, however, was a result of creating the park. Today nearly 8 million people visit the park annually. It is the third largest city park in North America. Unlike Central Park, it did not arise through one designer's vision but evolved through the visions of many in the early stages of the city.





The development area and plan for Southeast False Creek. <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/southeast/index.htm>.



Southeast False Creek and Olympic Village

Southeast False Creek (SEFC) has been a project long in coming. City Council determined in 1991 that the portion of land highlighted at upper left, south of downtown and near the former Expo '86 lands, "be developed as a residential community that incorporates principles of energy efficient design in its area plan and explore the possibility of using SEFC as a model sustainable community."

In 2010 Vancouver will play host to the Olympic Games. Southeast False Creek lands will be used to develop the Olympic Village, which will be the first phase of this latest mega-neighborhood project. This project will be a departure from some of Vancouver's other recent developments in that the city owns over half of the land allowing more control, and ecology will play a much larger role.

Like Coal Harbour and North False Creek, open space and greenways will be a significant piece of the development, helping extend Vancouver's greenway network, but the city is beginning to see parks as a multi-serving part of the infrastructure. The hinge park seen in the plan at lower left, will play a significant role in stormwater management, for example. Other plans include ambitious energy efficiency and urban agriculture proposals. The development is billed as a sustainable neighborhood, and will likely be one of the most ambitious green building projects ever undertaken.

Resources

Davis, C. 1997. *The Greater Vancouver Book: An Urban Encyclopedia*. Vancouver: Linkman Press. <http://www.discovervancouver.com/GVB/index.asp>

Vancouver's New Neighborhoods: *Achievements in Planning and Urban Design*, City of Vancouver 12/03

Punter, J. 2003. *The Vancouver Achievement*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/parks/>

City of Vancouver: <http://vancouver.ca/>

Greater Vancouver Regional District: www.gvrd.bc.ca

City Greenways: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/engsvcs/streets/greenways/city/index.htm>

Community Services: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/>

City Plan: <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/cityplan/Visions/index.htm>

The Changing City: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/fade/fade.htm>

2010 Olympics: <http://www.vancouver2010.com/En/default.htm>



Lively and Diverse by Nature



Emery Barnes Park in Yaletown, Downtown Vancouver. (photo: Nathan Brightbill)

Southeast False Creek: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/southeast/index.htm>

A Sustainable City: <http://vancouver.ca/sustainability/>

Green Streets Program: <http://vancouver.ca/engsvcs/streets/greestreets/index.htm>

Still Creek Enhancement: <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/cityplans/stillcreek/>

Science World: www.scienceworld.bc.ca/newsite/info

Vancouver maps page: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/maps.htm>

Discover Vancouver: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/southeast/index.htm>

Pictures: <http://www.seevancouverbc.com/>