

Placemaking Proposal for the 'plaza', Russell island & Skinner median February 2012

Placemaking is the process of building community by transforming public space into an engaging Place.

'**plaza**' is a working title only, and refers to the area of pavement in front of the businesses at Craigflower and Raynor. Construction is estimated to begin in late March, early April.

Russell island refers to the planted island currently under construction at the intersection of Russell, Craigflower and Skinner.

Skinner median refers to the treed central median on Skinner Street between Mary and Russell. Construction is scheduled for March.

(Placemakers welcome) Where ever you see this phrase, we need community participation/ownership/stewardship to make this happen.

This written report is intended to accompany the two map plan drawings of the 'plaza' and island, and the Placemaking Recommendations document that will be sent to the City.

PROCESS:

It's been a long one - starting with a few years of Transportation Plan sessions which have resulted in the City's Craigflower Road Improvements. We held a Placemaking Workshop (supported by the VWCA) in October 2010 (with 50 participants, City staff, consultants and City Councillors). Our next Placemaking Workshop was held on February 12, 2012 (with 35 participants, one City Councillor) with a follow-up on February 22 (with 14 representatives from the February 12 workshop) to refine our ideas and prepare our Placemaking recommendations to the community, VWCA and City. Since February 22, small task groups have worked on the pavement design, researched elements (lamps, bike racks) and compiled a plant list.

The current Placemaking proposal will be emailed to workshop participants, posted on the VWCA website, displayed at the Centre, and will be presented and discussed at the Feb 28 VWCA public meeting. A motion to endorse the Placemaking recommendations will be made at that meeting.

In preparing these plans we have attempted to integrate ideas from a broad spectrum of participants. At our February 22 session we reviewed the diverse range of Placemaking ideas from previous workshops, and reached a consensus of which elements to include. This is our attempt to blend a plethora of excellent ideas into a coherent whole.

PAVEMENT:

‘plaza’ - The overall structure of rectangular shapes of exposed aggregate pavement reflects the architectural elements and proportion of the building. The curved flow through those blocks represents the flow of people and refers to the water that surrounds us. (This solution is intended to mesh the two divergent design approaches that emerged in our workshops.) The flow avoids existing structures such as the two hydro poles and the phone booth. This design is intended to mesh with existing concrete sidewalks at either end, and to permit easy continuation of the design in any future sidewalk improvements.

Participants preferred varied greys and exposed aggregate to stamped earth-coloured concrete, therefore our design is primarily based on shapes of textured (exposed aggregate) and smooth (brushed) concrete and a darker exposed aggregate area. Larger pieces of glass would be ‘seeded’ in the lighter flow, concentrated in the central spiral and in other areas to represent water sparkle or foam.

This is a concept drawing and will be modified as necessary by City staff (and their concrete specialist). When the concrete forms are built the building’s architecture will determine the final placement of elements, likely in early April.

Russell island - We agreed it is important to visually link areas within our ‘Village’ so the exposed aggregate and broom-finished concrete flow of the ‘plaza’ is adapted for the sidewalk of the island.

ENCLOSURE:

‘plaza’ - After considering ideas for complex overhead, bollard and railing structures to create a sense of enclosure, we settled on a series of 6 lamp posts (three with lamps) which would create an implied enclosure, but minimize any impact on sunlight and warmth, and retain connection to the surroundings including our amazing view across the park to the water.

The lamp posts would be of pedestrian scale (12’ -14’) with a downward facing lamp (goose-neck) designed to light the sidewalk and to avoid light spill into the apartments above. The posts could also support banners. Although we only need 3 posts with actual lamps, the 3 others are important to complete the sense of enclosure and would be useful for banners and seasonal or festive lights, etc.

Although we recommend that the City install the footings, anchors and electrical conduit during this construction phase, we (through the VWCA) would need to raise funds for the actual lamp posts, lighting fixtures and installation. That could include a Greenways Grant, or other sources. (Placemakers welcome)

An ‘artful’ bike rack for 8 in the bulb beside the crosswalk would also contribute to the sense of enclosure. (Placemakers welcome) The City will likely install bike racks for use until the ‘artful’ one is installed.

Russell island - Again, to visually link our Village areas, we asked City to investigate the possibility of including a lamp at Russell island. If that proves difficult, then we could explore an arbour project, perhaps stylistically reflecting the lamp posts. (Placemakers welcome)

Some sort of signage or public art was suggested on the Craigflower side of Russell island, to link with potential public art in the 'plaza' area. (Placemakers welcome)

SEATING:

'plaza' - Due to time and space restraints we decided to rely on movable seating that would be voluntarily stored by adjacent businesses. (Placemakers welcome)

Permanent seating must be a metre in from the curb to accommodate car doors. Since the main area of the 'plaza' is only 4m wide, and has existing poles etc, we decided that movable furniture would create a more flexible spacious Place. Watching how people arrange seating could inform future permanent furniture.

Placemaking participants prefer community created benches which require considerable time. The adjacent wide green boulevard along Raynor could be a good location for a future bench - perhaps a cob bench reflecting the one in the Commons? (Placemakers welcome)

Russell island - Participants suggested a community created bench beside the sidewalk. When we confirm the location, the City will pour a bench pad. It would be good to confirm this location as soon as possible. (Placemakers welcome)

PLANTERS for the 'plaza':

Although the plans the City provided for our 2010 Placemaking Workshop included planted areas in the 'plaza', the City has determined that in-ground plantings are not possible because of underground utilities. Therefore we plan to acquire and tend our own planters, hopefully working with our local concrete planter maker. (Placemakers welcome)

As mentioned throughout this Placemaking process, maintenance is even more important than installation. To that end we recommend the City install a suitable hose bib so we can water our planters.

OTHER 'plaza' ELEMENTS:

We recommend a water fountain to complement the hose bib.

We recommend the City consider installing whatever might be necessary for possible future signalization of the Raynor/Craigflower pedestrian crossing.

We recommend retaining the phone booth and will request that Telus maintain it more regularly. Perhaps they might be open to community enhancement of the booth? (Placemakers welcome)

We recommend one trash container be re-installed and suggest investigating options for recycling. (Placemakers welcome)

PLANTS for Russell island and Skinner median:

The Parks department will plant Russell island in the next couple of weeks. The Skinner median will be planted soon after construction is finished there - probably the beginning of April, or when the trees arrive. We have requested extra soil depth to support future non-turf plantings where ever possible in the bulbs next to Russell island.

In response to our request for alternatives to turf around the trees in the Skinner median, Parks suggested, "A possible solution is small shrub plantings on the two end points of the median and turf in the middle between the mulched trees." Shrubs require more maintenance - weeding and trimming - than turf, which is why Parks resists non-turf, especially in the middle of a road close to a curve.

Transportation requires plantings be 2' or lower where they are close to street intersections or driveways (where visibility is an issue). Plantings can be up to 3' high further away (9'?) from intersections or driveways.

Participants at Placemaking sessions agreed:

1) We prefer shrubs (and perhaps grasses to add some graceful motion) to accompany the trees in the median (not turf).

2) For Russell island we prefer shrubs, perhaps combined with grasses, and we hope for a tree, or small tree sized shrub.

3) We prefer native plants, beneficials (and edibles) as possible.

4) We prefer evergreen ground covers to turf. (Parks says river rock is not possible in this area due to maintenance weed issues.)

5) We prefer that similar plants be used in Russell island, Skinner median and for potential future plantings in the green bulb areas either side of Russell island and in the Russell Street greenspace across the road.

6) **We suggest Parks use plants from this list compiled by Placemaking group.** It includes plants that are attractive, native, flower or are evergreen, and provide forage for hummingbirds, bees and butterflies. Native plants are drought tolerant, pest resistant, provide beneficial insect habitat, require minimal pruning, are hardy because they are adapted to our local region, and support natural ecosystems.

Tree sized shrub: Philadelphus lewisii - mock orange, fragrant white blossoms

Shrubs:

Gautheria Shallon - salal, leathery glossy dark green leaves, edible berries
Mahonia aquifolium 'compacta' - oregon grape (medicinal), evergreen with yellow flowers in February, attracts hummingbirds (also on Parks dept list)
Ribes sanguineum - red flowering currant, attracts hummingbirds
Rosa rugosa 'alba'- hardy, pest/disease-free, compact, fragrant, does not need pruning, best hips
Rosa nutkana - Nootka rose
Spiraea 'magic carpet' low mounding, colourful foliage and flowers (also on Parks dept list)
Vaccinium ovatum - evergreen huckleberry (edible) (also on Parks dept list)

Ferns:

Blechnum spicant - deer fern (evergreen)
Polystichum munitum - western sword fern (evergreen)

Ground cover:

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi - Kinnikinnick - evergreen ground cover with edible berries

Perennials and bulbs (attract beneficial insects):

Achillea millefolium - yarrow
Allium acuminatum - hooker's onion, mauve florets
Aquilegia Formosa - red columbine
Columbia lewisia
Camassia leichtlini & quamash - large and small camas
Delphinium menziesii - Menzie's larkspur
Erigeron speciosus - showy fleabane
Eriophyllum lanatum - woolly sunflower, yellow daisy with silver foliage, long blooming
Lilium columbiana - native lily (like tiger lily but more delicate)
Penstemon seerulatus - cascade penstemon

Many participants suggested **Lavenders, and herbs** such as Rosemary. Both attract pollinators.

Also, tall **ornamental grasses** such as those along Harbour Road are encouraged.

During our workshops, participants often celebrated the plantings in the medians along Esquimalt Road in Esquimalt, so we contacted **Esquimalt Parks**.

Their **list** includes:

Rosa Meidiland-red, an Explorer hybrid with the benefits of the Rosa rugosa above
Hebe Albicans-red edge, attracts beneficial insects
Lavandula agustifolia-munstead, attracts beneficial insects
Verbena Venosa, attracts beneficial insects

City of Victoria Parks provided this **list of plants** typically used on traffic islands. They are chosen for one or more of the following characteristics: drought tolerance, low growing (visibility) and maintenance. Most of these plants were used for the Esquimalt Rd. medians as well as the Tyee medians.

Mahonia aquifolium 'Compacta'

Yucca filamentosa 'Bright Edge'

Hebe mckeanii

Hebe 'Red Edge'

Olearia nummularifolia

Berberis 'Royal Burgundy'

Spiraea 'Magic Carpet'

Ilex crenata

Chamaecyparis pisifera 'Filifera Aurea'

Vaccinium ovatum

Viburnum davidii