To a Place Called Home:
The Arts Pow Wow and Redesign of Slocan Park:
Building Community Through Urban Design in
Vancouver’s Renfrew-Collingwood Neighbourhood

Lisa Moffatt
School of Community and Regional Planning
University of British Columbia
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To a Place Called Home:  
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Vancouver’s Renfrew-Collingwood Neighbourhood

by

Lisa M. Moffatt

Diploma, Environmental Studies, Langara College, 1997
B.A. (Hon.), Environmental Studies, Carleton University, 2002

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Please see back pocket for accompanying film.

Cover photos and images CNH Archives.

All photos by L. Moffatt unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter title pages depict the carving of the Guardian Spirit Totem and final celebration for its erection watching over Duchess Walkway. Photos CNH Archives.
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Lisa Moffatt
September, 2005
Chapter One: Introduction

Since at least 1972, planning scholars have critiqued the many weaknesses of the expert based, top-down model of practice and instead advocate models of mutual learning, drawing on local knowledge, dialogue, more participatory techniques, etc. From Forester’s deliberative planner to Healey’s collaborative planning to Sandercock’s radical planning and other alternative ways of knowing, the profession has been challenged. In some subfields (social planning and community development planning for example), participatory and community based approaches have become the new conventional wisdom. But in the urban design field, the dominant paradigm has remained an expert-based model, notwithstanding the handful of authors and practitioners (Christopher Alexander, Jane Jacobs, Clare Cooper Marcus, William H. Whyte,) who have adopted and advocate more participatory and community-based approaches to design.

My project inhabits a veritable no-man’s land between urban design and community development planning. I am persuaded by the more collaborative and participatory approaches to planning in general and wanted to explore whether and how more participatory approaches to urban design might not only create better public places but also contribute to community building. Further, I am specifically interested in the challenges of community building and of creating inclusive public spaces in multicultural, multiethnic cities as such cities are becoming the norm in the 21st Century.

Thus I have chosen to study a community-driven process for the design of a neighbourhood park in Collingwood, one of the most culturally diverse neighbourhoods within the City of Vancouver, which is itself one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world with 51% of its population from non-English speaking backgrounds. Slocan Park has apparently been transformed since the late 1990s from a place many local residents avoided to a place many people now see as an extension of home. My study traces and dissects this transformation, exploring two main questions. The first is a process question: Did the community-driven design process contribute to community-building in this neighbourhood, and if so how? The second is an outcome question: How successful was the community-driven design process in producing an inclusive, popular, well-used public space?

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public place? That is, was this a good placemaking exercise? A subsidiary to both of these questions concerns the role of the arts and artists in both process and outcome.

The goal of the research project is to inform practice debates in the urban design field as well as in community development planning. Designers might learn something about the importance of becoming involved in and encouraging community-driven process. And community development planners might learn something about the importance of design and how it relates to a community’s needs. At least that is my ambition for this project.

The next chapter (chapter 2) will introduce both the neighbourhood and the Collingwood Neighbourhood House (CNH) as a local institution that played a critical role in this park’s redesign and reclamation. Chapter three briefly summarizes the story of the reclaiming of Slocan Park, which is also depicted in my accompanying film for this project. Chapter four discusses the community building dimension of the park project. Chapter five evaluates the success of Slocan as an exercise in placemaking in a multicultural city and neighbourhood. Chapter six draws out the significance of this case for community development and urban design planners.
Chapter Two: Renfrew-Collingwood and the Neighbourhood House

2.1 Demographic Profile of Renfrew-Collingwood

Renfrew-Collingwood is a family-oriented neighbourhood in Vancouver’s east end. It is bounded by main arterials including Broadway Avenue to the North, 41st Avenue to the South, Boundary Road to the East (the border with Burnaby), and Nanaimo Street on the West (see map Figure 2.1). Renfrew-Collingwood is characterized as one of Vancouver’s most multicultural neighbourhoods, which is part of the reason it was chosen for this study.

2.1.1 Population

The neighbourhood (pop. 45,290) is one of Vancouver’s most ethno-culturally diverse with large numbers of Asian, Southeast Asian and European residents. It is also home to a high proportion of low income families and has a large population of young children and older residents when compared with the rest of the City. The neighbourhood is also home to families, with a steady 81% family population compared with a slightly increasing city family population of 57% (up 1.5% from 1991).

“Vital cities have marvelous innate abilities for understanding, communicating, contriving, and inventing what is required to combat their difficulties... Lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration, with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves.”

-Jane Jacobs

Figure 2.1 Map of the Renfrew-Collingwood Neighbourhood


2.1.2 Ethnicity and Language
In 2001 English represented only 26% of the languages spoken. English use dropped by almost 20% from 1991 to 2001 while Asian languages (Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese and Tagalog) grew. Chinese (up 10% to almost 50% in 2001) and Filipino (up 5% to almost 9% in 2001) ethnicities are the largest growing in the neighbourhood, while English ethnicity has declined (down 7% from 1991 to 2001 to just over 2%) (Table 2.1). Compared with the rest of the city, where Chinese residents also grew 10% over the same period to 40% in 2001, Filipino residents increased by just over 1% to 5% and, people of English background dropped by almost 10% to just below 6% in 2001 (Table 2.1, 2.2). 6

2.1.3 Age
The Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood has a high proportion of youth (24%) and a comparable population of adults and seniors as the City of Vancouver, though the senior population is growing in the neighbourhood (from 10.2% in 1991 to 12.7% in 2001), while it is dropping in the city (from 13.9% in 1991 to 12.9% in 2001) (Table 2.3).

6 Changes to ethnic origin data collection for Statistics Canada occurred between 1991 and 2001 so ethnicities are grouped in 1991 categories for analysis. As a result, the most common ethnicities that appear in both years are used for analysis.
2.1.4 Immigration
A significant percentage of the neighbourhood’s population is from immigration when compared with the City of Vancouver. The immigrant population rose 12% between 1991 and 2001 to 55% compared with a 5% increase in Vancouver to 46% over the same period.

2.1.5 Employment and Education
Increasing unemployment rates over the 10 years are not congruent with unemployment rates for the city. Unemployment increased in Renfrew-Collingwood from 1991 to 2001 to almost 9%, while it dropped in the City from 7% to 5%. This could be the result of more youth moving into the 20-64 age group and not quite in the workforce yet. It could also be attributed to people having educational credentials from other countries that are not recognized in Canada or have yet to be recognized due to particular processes of demonstrating competency. Education levels in the neighbourhood have grown slightly from 1991 to 2001 where the rate of people with post-secondary qualifications is up 5%, to 39%. This could also be attributed to the growing number of 20-64 years olds and problems with accessing education due to language barriers. But these rates are still growing slower than the

City of Vancouver whose rate has grown over the same period from 43% to 56%.

Trends in employment show that historically the neighbourhood has been heavily dependent on manufacturing with a more recent trend of reliance on the sales industry, which is more in line with the rest of the city. This could be a result of the conversion of industrial lands in the area in the 1990s to residential, primarily at the intersection of Joyce Street and Vanness Avenue.
2.1.6 Housing
Renfrew-Collingwood has a lower than average number of occupied rental housing when compared with Vancouver (42% rental in Renfrew-Collingwood in 2001 compared with 56% in the city) suggesting that perhaps housing is more affordable for residents in this neighbourhood than in the rest of the city. However, almost 24% of the households are paying 30% or more of their income in rent in 2001 (up dramatically from 7% in 1991) compared with about 11% in the City (up 5% from 1991). Home ownership has decreased slightly (down 4% to 58% in 2001) in the neighbourhood although it is still higher than home ownership in the city (41% in 1991 up to 44% in 2001). And 17% of homeowners spend 30% or more of their household incomes on mortgages and monthly housing costs (up 11% from 1991) compared with almost 5% in the city (up 1% from 1991).

2.1.7 Demographic Conclusions
With such a diverse population, Renfrew-Collingwood is challenged to meet the needs of its residents. Immigrants moving into the neighbourhood have different social and economic needs. The increasing disparity among age groups means that there are diverse housing, service and recreational needs. Accessing services also becomes an obstacle because in large part it means learning about Canadian culture (i.e. how things are done: finding employment and getting recognition for degrees obtained in other countries, access to medical services, school registration, renting housing, etc.). Services provided must be accessible to the neighbourhood’s population. Information and services should be translated as well as reflect the cultural diversity of the neighbourhood. An additional consideration is in schools where there are a large portion of ESL students who don’t speak English at home. Fortunately, for many residents, the Neighbourhood House plays a major role in addressing these needs (see section 2.2 for more details). However, the attractiveness of the neighbourhood for immigrants is evident in the retail signage in a number of different languages. Stores advertise Halal meats, Filipino foods and Vietnamese cafes as well as numerous other signs in Asian and Arabic languages. Children go home from school walking, talking and joking with their peers, whose ethnicity and home life are likely quite different from each other.
2.2 Collingwood Neighbourhood House

Collingwood Neighbourhood House was established in 1986. The City of Vancouver facilitated a planning process focussed on the impact of the skytrain and it was here that residents identified the need for community services in the area. The CNH has since then developed in-house programs with a major focus on immigrant and multicultural services (where the approach is on integration), as well as providing residents with broad ranging services including multilingual information and referral services, child care, recreational activities and programs for youth and seniors.

The nature of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House is detailed in an unrelated quote from Young, in Fincher and Jacobs, where, “…the ideal of the non-oppressive city, in which individuals from different social groups enjoy experiencing each other’s cultures without the pretense or presumption of belonging to or fully understanding those other cultures.” This enables community to grow in ways that are both inclusive and celebratory. This is the epitome of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House’s mission (Figure 2.2), its values and beliefs (Figure 2.3) and its presence in the community. “Community building is pursued through processes, programs and activities that are rooted in community needs, assets and initiatives.”

In 1995, the directorship of the organization was split into two portfolios. One director would maintain the family, childcare and recreational services while the other director, Paula Carr, began to focus on the community development work that had been part of the original conception, but had been put on the back burner as services expanded in the early years.

CNH’s focus for community development was in the Norquay area of Collingwood where there was a clear need for attention. (CNH has a unique approach to community service development in that it supports residents’ ideas and initiatives, not services per se.) A group of local residents independently came to the CNH with ideas for community development and the Arts Pow Wow, the first

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9 Collingwood Neighbourhood House. http://www.cnh.bc.ca/aboutcnh.htm (last accessed June 1, 2005)
Values and Beliefs
1. Cooperation and mutual respect among people;
2. Self-reliance of individuals and the empowerment of people and the Collingwood community as a whole;
3. Social justice and equitable treatment for all individuals;
4. Accountable to the community and responsive to its changing needs;
5. Full participation of all peoples in the social, cultural and economic life of the Collingwood community;
6. Valuing and recognizing the work and accomplishments of staff and volunteers and providing staff and volunteers with ongoing support, feedback and continuous learning opportunities;
7. Resident involvement in problem-solving and decision-making;
8. Integration, collaboration and cooperation among service providers and within the organization and the Collingwood community;
9. Diversity and multicultural nature of the Collingwood community.

Figure 2.3 Collingwood Neighbourhood House Values and Beliefs

project under the new Community Development director, was initiated. The accompanying film details this project and chapter three describes the history of Slocan Park and the Arts Pow Wow project.

10 Collingwood Neighbourhood House. http://www.cnh.bc.ca/aboutcnh.htm (last accessed June 1, 2005)
Chapter Three: The Story of the Reclamation of Slocan Park

“Culture is about representations, identities and the stories that structure senses of places, senses of belonging and the possibilities of living well. Public art is both cultural expression and political statement, reflections of modes of livelihoods and articulation of political aspiration.”


3.1 Context and History
Slocan Park is located in Vancouver’s east end. It is the gateway to a residential area from the 29th Avenue Skytrain station. Its history is long, somewhat dark and absolutely intriguing, while its future is bright, thanks to the initiative of many local residents who took it upon themselves to take ownership of this jewel in the neighbourhood.

Slocan Park was originally First Nations land and was hunting ground for Coast Salish peoples. In the mid-1800s, as colonization headed westward, Colonel Richard Moody from the British Military acquired a vast piece of land in the vicinity of a lake. In 1905, Ambrose Gothard bought property where Slocan Park now stands. The land was described as ‘a wild forest of tall timbers.’ He cleared these and planted fruit trees (an Orchard) and strawberries. In 1913, Gothard died (Norquay Elementary School was also built) and that same year, the Gothard family lost the land. In 1955 the City named the park Slocan Park, after the Slocan area (and Provincial Park) in Northern British Columbia. In the late 1960s one of the City’s first ‘adventure’ playgrounds was installed in the park. The Adventure playgrounds were seen as the latest in encouraging creative play for children and Collingwood was identified as a neighbourhood in need of recreational facilities. Expansions of the park took place in 1959-60, with the city buying lots where the tennis courts are currently located. Today the park contains a recreational area with a playground for children, a water park, playing field, open area, tennis courts and a field house. In addition to good motor vehicle access, there is a Skytrain stop at the park allowing access to a number of visitors. The park is also easily accessed by the Mid-town bicycle route along 29th Avenue and the Sunrise route along Slocan Street.

3.2 Recent History – Rough Times
In the mid-1970s, there were numerous complaints from neighbours about youth-gang activities in the park. Police are documented as being too afraid to handle the situation; neighbours were reported to have purchased guns to protect themselves. There were reports of vandalism to automobiles, houses and the park.

With the arrival of the Skytrain in the mid-80s, the park took another downturn as crime, petty theft, assaults,

11 Much of this story is captured in the accompanying film.
13 It is unclear exactly when the land was turned over to the City. The history between 1913 and 1955 is not well documented.
15 City Council minutes from archives.
prostitution and, intravenous drug use became prevalent. There were also reports of child molestations. It has been suggested that the field house, with its accompanying public washroom facilities, encouraged drug use as it was a place where intravenous drugs could be prepared for later use.17

3.3 The Arts Pow Wow Evolves

In the late 1990s residents began a movement to reclaim the park. The challenge was to get as many people involved from this ethnically varied neighbourhood and the answer was to engage people through the arts. Environmental artist January Wolodarsky spearheaded the efforts in what was to transform the park. She frequented the park with her then preschool daughter and was concerned for her daughter’s safety in the water park, which was built of rough concrete. She began talking to other parents about what they could do to improve the park. She was introduced to Carr, now in her new role as Director of Community Development. At the same time, Carr recognized the area around Slocan Park (the Norquay area) as being in need of attention.18

A safety audit was conducted in the park (1998) which revealed that lighting was the major issue. The Duchess Street walkway, which extended through the park from the Skytrain station to the residential area beyond the park, was not lit. The Parks Board agreed that this issue was one that should be addressed.19 It is at this time that the Parks Board also mentions support through the Neighbourhood Matching Fund Programme for a landscape architect.20

Other items in the safety audit include:
- Clearing bushes near the playground (intravenous needles were found there)
- Trimming back bushes around the Skytrain Station
- Formally constructing the Duchess Walkway (it was a dirt path at the time)
- Signage for the park (none existed at the time)21

The vision for Slocan Park (which was later referred to as “The Slocan Park Revitalization Project”) started as a campaign called ‘A place called home’ and encouraged people to think of the park as an extension of their homes, a place where neighbours could meet and enjoy each other’s company, where everyone could feel welcome.22 This evolved into a project called “Art in the Park”. Wolodarsky’s vision of building community through art

22 Cheng, Julie. Personal Interview. March 18, 2005
was based on her own experience of working in Japan to create vibrant and beautiful public places.\textsuperscript{24}

The group applied for grant money\textsuperscript{25} and received funding from various sources including the federal and provincial governments, the city of Vancouver (Office of Cultural Affairs), the Bronfman Foundation, the Hamber Foundation, the Vancity Foundation and, the Vancouver Foundation. The project grew into the three year long, $600, 000\textsuperscript{26} project now called the Arts Pow Wow, which operated a number of projects throughout the community (Slocan Park being one of them), employed a number of people to help vision, develop, consult and implement a landscape architecture plan for the park.

The group conducted their own public consultations for the park and after poor attendance at the onset, they decided the best way to consult with their neighbours was to go to the community themselves. They went to meetings with Families Branching Out (a First Nations dinner night), did workshops with the youth projects, daycares, and the Vancouver Christian School in addition to workshops they ran in the park (working with the CNH and the Coordinator of the Renfrew Community Centre) and at the Neighbourhood House, where people could make mosaics, flags, costumes and learn to walk on stilts.\textsuperscript{27} The atmosphere in the park while all of this was taking place was one of community, ownership and liveliness. In order to encourage people to comment on park designs, the group would hold regular barbeques in the park where free meals were offered in exchange for consultation on the park plans.\textsuperscript{28}

3.4 Making Connections
There was some difficulty, due to language and cultural differences, in connecting with the Tai Chi group – a large group that shared in using the park on a daily basis. One woman, Julie Cheng, from the original Community Development group, made a connection with the group and although her spoken Chinese was poor, Cheng used this connection to approach the group and began discussing options with them for what they would like to see in the park. She reported that they were very organized and specific about their expectations. Namely, they wanted a covered area to practice Tai Chi in any weather conditions. With this connection to the Tai chi group, the project gained a huge supporter. The Tai Chi group showed up for consultations with spreads of Chinese food to share with everyone and

\textsuperscript{24} Wolodarsky, January.  Personal Interview. March 4, 2005.
\textsuperscript{25} It was difficult for the group to receive grant money for an ‘art’ project so often it was framed as a community development project. This is not entirely misrepresentative as the project was developing community through art.
\textsuperscript{27} Rosen, Carmen.  Personal Interview. March 16, 2005.
\textsuperscript{28} Illegal activities dropped (this is observation, not yet confirmed with community police) while people were actively creating art in the park. January Wolodarsky describes it as having “eyes on the park”. She says people who would normally be up to no good knew they were being watched and took their activities elsewhere.
became adamant supporters of the plan. The group now has a key to the field house where they store a coffee maker and a stereo. Currently, they are in negotiations with the City for their covered area.

3.5 Momentum
Norquay School, which overlooks Slocan Park, also got in on the action as part of the mural on the field house. Pow Wow organizers started holding art workshops at the school. The art that students produced had such an impact that the school and the Arts Pow Wow also decided to paint a mural on the wall of the cafeteria which was a dismal room in the basement of the school. Parents were so impressed that they enthusiastically supported the field house mural project. In addition to this, the school surveyed the neighbourhood to determine what people remembered about the park, its history and, their uses of the park throughout their lives in the neighbourhood. Currently there are two other mural projects in the works for the park.

Windermere High school students also participated in the Arts Pow Wow through one of their teachers, Bill Jackson, who has several classes of leadership students. His philosophy is that if you are going to be a leader in your community, you serve your community. (One student later volunteered to translate to the Tai Chi group.) The majority of these teens came from non-English speaking households and through their participation in the project, brought their parents on board.

As an extension of the Arts Pow Wow, and because of its success, the Renfrew Ravine (Figure 2.1) project took shape and momentum and similar art projects engaged people: mosaics, steps down to the ravine, native plantings and an overall clean up of the ravine. This too discouraged illegal activities as people were often getting off the Skytrain and using the washrooms at the park to prepare their drugs and then head to the ravine to do them; as well as stash drugs and stolen goods. The ravine was also home to many homeless people. The community held a festival celebrating the project as well as the neighbourhood, with the expressed goal of demonstrating ownership of Slocan Park and the ravine. The procession traveled, at night, from Slocan Park where people lit homemade lanterns, to the ravine and paraded around a pathway near the bushes, something many would not have otherwise dared to do.

30 Collingwood Neighbourhood House. Arts Pow Wow Archives.
32 Renfrew Ravine is located north of Slocan Park.
3.6 Key Elements of the Plan

Key elements in the landscape architecture plan for the park included a lighted walkway along Duchess Street, called Duchess Walkway, with mosaics at the base of the lights designed and made by people from the neighbourhood. (The redesign of Duchess Walkway is meant to respect Still Creek, which runs through a culvert underneath the park.) Stenciled designs were laser cut from metal as decorations on light standards called Community Constellation Lanterns. The Guardian Spirit Totem was carved by a local Native carver and youth apprentices. A native vegetation garden was also established and is maintained by Windermere High School students.

The artistic design of the park is described below.

[Guardian Spirit] totem’s crowning Eagle, wings outstretched, guards the passage of people and nature. It is both protector and messenger. Concrete Wings framing the plaza’s surface suggest the shorelines of a river delta, waves lapping the Artifacts [mosaics] left along its edges. The structural base of the Guardian Spirit provides a place to sit and watch the Spawning Salmon swimming perpetually below four figures that evoke the cardinal directions. A native plant garden, the Nursery Triangle was planted and is stewarded by many youth and neighbours. The garden will nurture plants for transplanting to other areas of the park and Ravine in the future...Glowing story lanterns, the Community Constellations, will twinkle above oval pebble mosaic surfaces (the Islands) like a starry night sky...The oval Islands below the lanterns contain our spectacular community pebble mosaic pieces. Each oval depicts both an element, a season and celebrates the wealth of our natural environment. Images of flora and fauna, oceans, mountains, wind and rain remind us of our natural environment and pay homage to Still Creek below and Renfrew Ravine which flanks the park...At the end of the walkway, the ‘River’ fans out into splashing waves of the ‘Delta’ where the Guardian Spirit soars and the Spawning Salmon struggle on to fulfill their legacy...[At] the terminus of the walkway is the magnificent Heritage Cottonwood Tree, a ‘Tree of life’, that will be embraced by a root friendly path that branches out to the sidewalk. Just beyond the Tree emerging below mosaic mountains, swirls the Young Salmon, emerging from the heart of the circular spiral Source, signifying the eternal cycles of life and the seasons.33

3.7 Parks Board Involvement
The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation became involved when CNH applied for funding under the Neighbourhood Matching Funds. The Parks Board recognized all the valuable work the community had done and funded a landscape architect to help develop the plans. Susan Gordon, Coordinator of Arts and Culture for the Parks Board, said that although the entire plan was not adopted (the $1.5 million plan exceeded the Board’s total capital budget for park infrastructure), she commends the community for their work over the three years of the project, saying that the Parks Board does not have the resources to do what the neighbourhood has done at Slocan Park. ³⁴

3.8 Today
Some locals report that crime rates are on the rise again in the park. ³⁵ Wolodarsky suggested that if funding were available for the project to continue, the positive activity in the park would prevent a lot of illegal and negative activity from taking place because of ‘eyes on the park,’ also furthering the community building efforts.

The parts of the design that have been completed are a welcoming delight for both residents and visitors. People comment on their work, proudly pointing it out to other park users.³⁶ Looking at the mosaics, I feel as though I am looking at faces of people in the community. There is a great sense of pride and ownership that emanates from the park. Different elements of the design reflect the different cultures in the neighbourhood: mosaics written in Chinese characters, the Guardian Spirit Totem carved by First Nations, as well as the attention to the seasons and elements. This place is home. And it came to be this way through the dedicated efforts of the organizers of the Arts Pow Wow, engaging a diverse neighbourhood to enthusiastically work together to create a new identity for themselves and make their park a better place.

The next chapter examines the Arts Pow Wow in terms of the success of its community building goals, using my own research of the project as well as incorporating the project evaluation completed by the Neighbourhood House.

³⁵ Crime statistics are only available for the entire City and are not released for individual areas of the city, so this can’t be statistically confirmed.
Chapter Four: The Arts Pow Wow as a Community Building Tool

“No community on the face of the earth has ever been built except on the skills and resources and contributions of the gifts of the people who live there.”
- Jody Kretzmann, ABCD Institute

Globalization has brought people together in ways that could not have been possible otherwise. This has resulted in different cultures being thrown together in new places, producing new challenges for creating identity and community. Castells, in Hayden, argues that it is the meaning in places that is missing. “… [T]he key to acquiring an audience is making meaning for people in resonant and original ways.”  

In essence that is what the Arts Pow Wow did, it created a unique reason for people to come to the park (it gave them meaning) and interact with each other. As described above, issues of safety were a major concern in Slocan Park and when the Arts Pow Wow project was launched, it was a response similar to those in communities around the world, a collective action by people who realized they shared an identity as a community of concerned citizens making a common claim to the park. The products of the Arts Pow Wow are small works of art that represent the people who use the park. As Doubleday, Mackenzie and Dalby describe, “in its production, art reflects identity, but to emphasize its production, art constitutes identity by retaining and making the connection between life…and place.”  

Clearly the Art Pow Wow’s focus on process has resulted in a newfound identity for residents in the Collingwood neighbourhood.

4.1 The Arts Pow Wow

The Arts Pow Wow, originally called the ‘Building Community through Cultural Expression Project’, started to promote cultural activities and community development in the Collingwood neighbourhood. When the directorship split at CNH, Carr wanted to explore community development, working on identified issues (drugs, alcohol and community safety). There was also a desire to use a more geographically based community development approach and school catchment areas were seen as the logical solution. The Norquay area, that includes Slocan Park, had grown in previous years with little or no community development work to accompany the growth. Because of this, the area was identified as having priority for a community development project. A week after Carr started her new portfolio three members of the community (Wolodarsky, Cheng and Boisier, an artist and recent immigrant from Chile) approached her with ideas for community development. From here the group, now

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41 ‘Building Community through Cultural Expression Project’ was the handle used to apply for funding for the project. The project later became known as the Arts Pow Wow which was the title developed by the artists working on the project.
including two additional members, fleshed out a proposal to pursue funding.\textsuperscript{44} The Arts Pow Wow was born.

One of my interests in researching this project was to evaluate its success in building community because of the importance of public places in neighbourhoods, “[p]ublic places...can become nexuses around which communities can come together and around which they can mobilize.”\textsuperscript{45} The Collingwood Neighbourhood House has an established history in the neighbourhood as a successful community building institution\textsuperscript{46} and I was curious how these skills for community building could be applied and promoted through a community-driven design project. The goals of the Arts Pow Wow (Figure 4.1) weren’t confined to the redesign of the park. However, the Arts Pow Wow was focused on developing a sense of ownership of place and building community through engaging activities that spanned cultural and language barriers and, as a result, produced a design that was reflective of the needs and makeup of the diverse residents.

4.2 Benefits of Parks
My decision to look at a project that focused on a public park is rooted in knowing the benefits public parks can have for encouraging human interactions and the potential for building community, and also because of my interest in site-specific design. “The new view of urban parks calls attention to the broader contributions they can make to the vitality of communities and their residents... Policymakers, practitioners, and the public can begin to think about parks as valuable contributors to larger urban policy objectives [including] community building.”\textsuperscript{48}

Goals of the Arts Pow Wow
• Provide an opportunity for residents to work together to create community public art, cultural education and sharing, local communication networks, and public venues for cultural expression and mutual support,
• Identify the artists that live and work in the community to promote their skills and abilities and facilitate their contribution, learning and employment in Renfrew-Collingwood,
• Create an expression and value for artistic and creative qualities within individuals and the local community as a whole,
• Increase the number of residents involved in community decision-making and help to develop their self-esteem, and leadership skills, and
• Improve the physical, social, economic, and environmental components of the Renfrew-Collingwood community.

Figure 4.1 Goals of the Arts Pow Wow\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{itemize}
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\textsuperscript{44} Carr, Paula. Personal Interview. June 21, 2005.
\textsuperscript{45} Project for Public Spaces. 2000. How to Turn A Place Around. Project for Public Spaces: New York.
\textsuperscript{46} Various programs including the Leadership Institute, skills inventory, immigrant services, child care services, etc. support the various needs of neighbourhood residents.
Participants in the Arts Pow Wow made reference to the value of the project in building community. Community was expressed as: “Multicultural, diversity, everyone working together, building and rebuilding community, get[ting] people out to celebrate, energy and, friendship.”

4.3 Arts Pow Wow - Building Community
Although this initiative was clearly a community development exercise, where a learning exchange happened (the leadership institute, artists sharing skills, learning about other cultures), it was, for the purposes of this paper, a community building exercise, that is, it brought people together and forged relationships that most likely would not have happened otherwise and that continue to benefit the neighbourhood. Admittedly this is a fine line, so to clarify, community development implies some type of training for community problem solving or quality of life improvement although it can also lead to strengthened relationships, whereas community building is seen as the “practice of building connections among residents, and establishing positive patterns of individual and community behavior based on mutual responsibility and ownership.”

Community building then is based more in relationships, and community development more in skills development.

To analyze this project in terms of community building, I will use the characteristics of the community building process as outlined by Mattessich and Monsey. These characteristics are outlined as representative, communicative and technical aspects of designing a process for community building. While not all of their characteristics are relevant for this evaluation, I have chosen the majority of them to explain how the Arts Pow Wow, through the support and resources of the CNH, was successful in addressing the characteristics.

Characteristics of the community building process:
A. Widespread participation
There was involvement from numerous ethnic groups in the neighbourhood, most notably the First Nations and Chinese Seniors, but also artists, musicians, children, schools, residents and, neighbourhood house staff and volunteers. At the height of the Pow Wow, there were over 5500 residents involved in the project and by the end over 9000 volunteer hours had been logged.

B. Good system of communication
It was discovered early on in the process that just announcing a public meeting wouldn't suffice to garner

53 Aboriginal development was one of the four main components of the project including Aboriginal carving and a canoe club.
feedback on the plans. The organizing committee re-evaluated their strategy and started going to specific groups to introduce the project to them. This resulted in reaching many more groups than would have happened with a traditional planning public consultation and also resulted in many more people learning about and participating in the process. Involvement in the project began with, but wasn’t limited to, contact with a Pow Wow member, contact with CNH staff, involvement with First Nations cultural initiatives, and the CNH Newsletter.  

C. Minimal competition in pursuit of goals
As with any project involving a large number of participants and an organizing committee of people with varied motivations, there will be conflict. However, because of the Neighbourhood House being so established in working with different cultures, conflict was embraced. Safe places for dialogue were always a part of the process as were respect and conflict management.

D. Develop self-understanding
The coordinator of the Pow Wow has told me that she learned a lot about planning process and community development “I didn’t know anything about community development until I worked on this project.” In addition to this, groups of people began to see their role in the neighbourhood and community as becoming more clearly defined. It also promoted awareness of different cultures in the community as well as promoting the development of Aboriginal culture, which can also be seen as developing self-understanding as it allows people to learn about where they come from and about the traditions of their culture.

E. Benefits to many residents
What the park now offers to residents is a safe route to walk to homes from the skytrain station, a children’s playground (which is slated for upgrading through the Parks Board), a water park for children, a field house (with a covered area in negotiation), sports fields, heritage vegetation, a natural vegetation garden, public art mosaics, a spiritual Guardian Spirit totem pole, guiding people as they walk along Duchess Walkway, public celebration space and most importantly a new sense of pride and ownership of a public place that, for those who participated at whatever level in the Arts Pow Wow, can see their work and point to it and recall the warm memories it created, promote self-esteem, celebrate, as well as enjoy the newly established relationships it sustains.

F. Focus on product and process concurrently
It is unclear whether or not this was the case. Documents suggest that there was some confusion about what the Pow Wow was, “it took a long time to get a handle on the “beast” of what the Pow Wow actually was, thus creating uncertainty…”62 My research suggests that, despite the Pow Wow organizer’s comments that she views product and process equally,63 CNH’s main goal was the process. Since community building was the goal,64 the process became increasingly important. It was the process of organizing the Arts Pow Wow and creating art that brought people together and through which most of the relationships in the neighbourhood were built, resulting in a good base for community building.

G. Linkage to organizations outside the community
The Arts Pow Wow made connections with a number of organizations outside the Collingwood Neighbourhood House. These included the Evergreen Foundation, an organization dedicated to creating, “greener, healthier schools, communities and homes”;65 the City of Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation; Public Dreams Society, whose mission is to “promote community participation in the arts by providing interactive and accessible public art programming”;66 and even Translink, the local public transit provider.67 In addition to this, partnerships were developed with Synala Housing Coop, Renfrew School and Grenfell School.68

H. Training to gain community building skills
The Collingwood Neighbourhood House has a program called the Leadership Institute which trains identified leaders in the neighbourhood in community development skills and techniques. Some members of the organizing committee of the Arts Pow Wow were trained through the leadership institute.69 The Institute continues to provide leadership training in the neighbourhood. In addition to this, two groups were established to help promote arts in the community, the Multicultural Artists Gathering and the Collingwood Music Club.70

I. Early involvement and support from existing indigenous organizations
The process was initiated and driven by the CNH, which is the predominant organization in the community. As previously mentioned, the project also gained early support from the City of Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation. The Renfrew Community Centre was also involved at an early

stage as well as various other local groups. In addition to this, the Arts Pow Wow also established new groups in the neighbourhood.

J. Use of technical assistance
Two landscape architects worked on the project at different times, consulting with the community and presenting design ideas based on those consultations for feedback. A master plan and detailed designs were developed by the landscape architects.

K. Continual emergence of leaders as needed
It is important for community leaders to be anchored by a local community centre (in this case the Renfrew Community Centre) or a similar organization (e.g. the CNH). This is to ensure that if a leader leaves the community, there is someone to step in and take over the work while a new champion is found in the community. This was the case for the Arts Pow Wow and people who were involved in the Arts Pow Wow are still involved in the community. And yet, this is also where criticism has come out of the process of the project. Ross, one of the landscape architects who worked on the master plan for the park, suggested that having one person driving the whole project resulted in some conflicts. Although Wolodarsky, as the driving force throughout the process, produced excellent design ideas (her strong point), it left funding issues neglected and possibly resulted in some personal conflicts of vision. This opinion is supported by Wolodarsky herself who admitted to having difficulty in relinquishing control of certain aspects of the project to the residents and volunteers. The result is a master plan that has yet to be completely implemented. Also, in CNH’s evaluation of the Arts Pow Wow, it is mentioned that the drains on personal lives was an issue that needed to be improved. This might be the result of there not being enough leaders to call upon when other members were starting to feel the drain of the project on their personal lives or also the dedication of people not realizing when it is time to pass over responsibilities to someone else.

However, the people who were dedicated to the Arts Pow Wow have gone on to do other influential work in the community including Carmen Rosen who coordinated the Renfrew Ravine Project. Two key membes of the Arts Pow Wow, Carmen Rosen and Emaneula Sheena also sit as members of the Renfrew Park Community Association Board to advocate for items initiated through the Arts

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Pow Wow.

L. Community control over decision making
Susan Gordon, Coordinator, Arts and Culture, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (who, among other things, are responsible for park maintenance and programming), values the community-driven process at Slocan Park. It was, “quite an exceptional broad-ranging consultation process… getting people to understand what they value about the space… and getting people to understand what others value about the space too, which is a really important part of the process.”

She admitted that the parks board does not have the resources to conduct a process like this one and that the Parks Board encourages such processes throughout the city.

The Renfrew Community Centre has also incorporated the Slocan Park Master Plan into its work plan to ensure the plan stays on the agenda for completion. (As a community centre, the RCC is under the jurisdiction of the Parks Board and so it makes more sense for them to now be the advocate of Slocan Park.)

4.4 Community Building Conclusions
With the exception of the lack of change-over in leadership as needed, I think that the Arts Pow Wow was very successful in community building. It is my opinion that successful planning results in no one person having ownership over the process or the product. My interest in community building also means that the community participates at different levels in a project and that it is a collective voice that drives process and product. Casual conversations with people in the neighbourhood about the park and the changes that occurred are met with responses of pride and a feeling of closeness with other members of the community. Respect and understanding of different cultures is reflected in the art that has been erected in the park including the Guardian Spirit Totem, the mosaics that detail cultural perspectives including Chinese characters and the Community Constellation Lanterns that represent a collective community’s interpretation of the four seasons.

The CNH completed their own evaluation of the Arts Pow Wow in 2001, which included focus groups. “Members expressed the view that arts and culture contributes to strengthening the feeling of community in Renfrew-Collingwood because people come together in a positive
way, not based on a problem. It also unites the community by creating opportunities for contact and bridges cultures by promoting understanding.

Focus group members also noted that Pow Wow events contribute to a positive community image and build community pride. They noted that a community working in harmony will [also] promote economic development and more opportunities for artists.”

It is clear from this evaluation that the neighbourhood has recognized and embraced the community building efforts of the CNH and that the result is a community that identifies with and embraces its multicultural makeup. It seems that a bonus to this whole project is the redesign of the park.

Although the product of placemaking was second to that of the process of community building, it is still important to evaluate the placemaking exercise as it was part of the goals of engaging a neighbourhood in the Arts Pow Wow (through increased numbers of residents involved in decision-making and improving the physical and, social… sustainability of the community – see Figure 4.1). The next chapter evaluates the results of the park redesign in terms of its placemaking function.

Chapter Five: Placemaking - Evaluating the Outcomes

“In our view, a designer [...] must consider both the larger societal changes and the creation of better, more supportive environments from people’s daily lives. We believe that thoughtful design takes into account existing knowledge and provides a chance for people to express themselves, be effective, and feel empowered.”

- Clare Cooper Marcus

Throughout the process of the Arts Pow Wow, the organizing committee was committed to determining what the residents in the neighbourhood would like to see Slocan Park become. They were embarking on a redesign of the park, a placemaking exercise. Placemaking is fundamental to the practice of urban designers. Designers create places that encourage a certain activity at a certain place and time. However, urban designers are not the only people making places. Anyone who participates in creating a place that is more comfortable for them is a placemaker. Communities that are successful in using their own skills can self-regenerate. This means that within communities there are people with skills to complete placemaking exercises, who also have the ability to engage others in placemaking, passing on skills, thereby furthering community and placemaking activities.

Working with definitions of placemaking from Schneekloth, Shibley and Hayden, placemaking then, as referred to in this paper, is defined as the way all of us as human beings transform the places in which we find ourselves into places in which we live. It is the way we make our communities and connect with other people and the ways in which we bring meaning to our places.

5.1 Evaluating Place
The Project for Public Spaces has developed a framework for evaluating what makes a great place (Figure 5.1). Using this as a tool to evaluate placemaking at Slocan Park it becomes obvious that the park meets many of the criteria outlined in the framework. There are key attributes (inner circle), intangibles (middle ring) and measurements (outer section). Concentrating on the intangibles (i.e. a qualitative assessment) I will evaluate the park by dissecting the framework into its four key attributes:

5.1.1 Uses and Activities:
The park features several sports fields, a children’s playground and water park, a field house, a paved walkway that has been re-designed to improve safety and, a native vegetation garden. The park, especially during the Arts Pow Wow, was alive with activity. Artists were running workshops, musicians were drumming in the park, a group of First Nations Elders and youth apprentices were carving, Chinese Seniors were practicing Tai Chi and, children were

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83 Project for Public Spaces is a “nonprofit organization dedicated to creating and sustaining public places that build communities.” For more information: www.pps.org
building make-believe cities from large appliance boxes. Every major step along the way of the park’s redesign featured a community-wide celebration: a community parade for the completion of the field house mural, a traditional First Nations ceremony for the erection of the totem pole, a moon festival and a celebration for the Renfrew Ravine project. The celebrations initiated during the Arts Pow Wow continue today (most notable of which is the Moon Festival held in the Autumn).

5.1.2 Comfort and Image:
Safety had been mentioned several times during consultations with users of the park. With the development of Duchess Walkway, the park is now more welcoming and accessible for people and, with a place for the practice of Tai Chi and the Guardian Spirit Totem watching over visitors, the park also allows opportunities for spiritual development. In addition to this, there is a field house with a public washroom. The field house is used to store equipment from the different groups using the park (though when I visited, it was mainly used as a personal storage of the park’s caretaker). It also has showers, a small counter with a sink and fridge and a small space for meetings.

Figure 5.1. What makes a great place.84

5.1.3 Access and Linkages:
The park is well-serviced by public transit - with a skytrain station and bus stop at the periphery, as well as being on a major arterial and along two bicycle routes. In addition to this, the aforementioned Duchess Walkway provides a direct and well-lit route through the park to the residential area to the south. The park is also located close to

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Renfrew Ravine which provides a natural oasis in the urban environment. Preliminary discussions have begun with Translink looking at operating retail businesses at the 29th Avenue Skytrain station so as to have “more eyes and ears at the Skytrain station” and the park. This would also encourage additional access and social life to the park as people frequenting the shops would potentially spend time in the park.

5.1.4 Sociability: The park offers a diversity of experiences, from sports fields, tennis courts, a water park, playground, native vegetation garden (maintained by local school students), to the more formal walkway lit by Community Constellation Lanterns. What is noticeably different from other parks throughout the city is the focus on the arts. The lanterns aren’t regular street light standards. They are reflections of a neighbourhood’s take on the four seasons. The Guardian Spirit Totem pole with its four faces representing the cardinal directions is so powerful that one could not pass by without taking a moment to reflect. The mosaics, made by members of the community, at the base of the lanterns and along the walkway are demonstrative of how social, personal and home-like the park is. All these artworks and the stewardship taken by the community, detail to a visitor (i.e. someone not living in the neighbourhood), the strength of sociability of the place. However, the location of the park in a mainly residential area limits the draw that it might have for an audience if it were closer to more active land uses such as retail or mixed-use developments.

5.2 Placemaking Conclusions In planning there are two important components, the process and the product. Some planners place more emphasis on one or the other. Planners have often been criticized for having the product determined before the beginning of a process. In my investigation of the success of Slocan Park as a placemaking exercise I realize that the process has been more successful than the physical product (without question the community building aspect of the project has been hugely successful). Most elements of the redesign that are detailed in the master plan have yet to be completed. In fact only the top priority, the Duchess St walkway, has been implemented in a list of 8 items (Figure 5.2). The covered area is currently in negotiation, but funding does not currently exist to complete the master plan in its entirety. A successful place-making exercise

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brings the resulting plan to fruition and then evaluates it for its post-occupancy success.

Also, due to the location of the park, in a largely residential area, even though it is easily accessed by transit, road and bicycle route, it is a destination rather than a place that one would discover by being in the vicinity. If the café (priority item number 6) or opportunity for other retail becomes a reality, that may somewhat change the draw to the park. Having said that, the elements in the park that are representative of the community consultation (as well as the incomplete plan itself) are excellent examples of community-driven participatory placemaking, because they are actually pieces of the people in the neighbourhood. People had the opportunity to say what they wanted to see and beyond that, had the experience of implementing the plan. Now, participants can visit the park where they have positive reminders of the involvement they had during the Arts Pow Wow. They can also show off their contributions to the product that are cemented in the mosaics, lanterns and totem and enjoy a place that is safer and therefore more welcoming to them and others.

However it is important to note that the plan does not implement itself. Carr reiterates that a large amount of time was spent by organizers and Arts Pow Wow volunteers and residents engaging the Parks Board and placing political pressure on them to ensure that the plan for Slocan Park remained within the Parks Board’s capital budget. “It was a constant battle...One minute it was in the capital budget and the next moment it was off. Residents spent a lot of time building relations with Parks Board staff.”

This brings to light another issue of facilitating public involvement. Its all good to create opportunities to encourage public involvement but if professionals don’t have the skills to engage the public, nor the priority for community-driven projects, what success is there for participatory planning projects? Working with the public...
should not be seen as a negative aspect of our jobs as planners where we become stumbling blocks in the process. Rather we should feel privledged to work with people who are active in their communities, who have gifts and assests that are beneficial and who feel passionate about projects on which we can collaborate.
African drumming, Slocan Park (CNH Archives).

Park celebrations (CNH Archives).
Chapter Six: Conclusions

The challenges with globalization and the increasingly multicultural nature of cities around the world can seem daunting, but the Collingwood Neighbourhood House, which services a relatively large population, is a wonderful example to neighbourhoods across the world about accessing skills within the community to address issues that arise in ethnically diverse communities. The ability of the CNH to celebrate and embrace all people of the neighbourhood brings pride and confidence to residents, which can then be turned into fuel to address issues that arise in the community. With the strength of leaders like Paula Carr, and the support of other institutions (the Parks Board and the City), the CNH also has the opportunity to develop creative solutions that have a lasting impact in the community.

The Arts Pow Wow was successful because it used different media to engage people. Using art and celebration as tools for community building, the CNH demonstrated that people can share skills, gain recognition for their professional work, learn the traditional skills of their culture, give back to a community and bring people together to learn and celebrate what makes them unique. This brings about an understanding between neighbours that leads to strengthened relationships and pride for a community with a self-defined identity.

By engaging people in a process where they have various opportunities for involvement, not only is civic engagement boosted, but also, relationships are forged that bring a diverse neighbourhood together to become a community. Using an urban design product to attract people to participate, results in a lasting, tangible place where people can reminisce, meet new friends, delight in their contribution to the public realm and demonstrate ownership on levels that previously didn’t exist.

The Arts Pow Wow project at Slocan Park in the Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood in Vancouver’s east end is a project that demonstrates the potential for community involvement in design as a way of community building. As community development practitioners, the lessons here are:

• People can be engaged in creative ways especially through the arts.

— Lynda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley

The arts are perhaps one of the best tools for community building as they bridge language barriers, teach people skills that are easy to interpret and result in a product that is personal to the artist while representative of the residents involved.

- By participating in similar ways with other residents, towards a common goal, lasting relationships are formed. The Slocan Park Arts Pow Wow was intended to make this local park a better place for residents to enjoy. By consulting residents to see what they want and need from their park and engaging residents in the locally driven process, the product is more personal than anything driven by professionals. And perhaps more respected as neighbours worked together to see their vision become a reality as opposed to professionals walking into the neighbourhood and, through a top-down approach trying to meet the same goal.

- Using urban design, along with a strong public participation component, allows people to discuss their needs for public places and then, brings life and ownership back to a park that is now the pride of a community. Not everyone thinks that they have a place in or belong in an urban design process. However, given the opportunity, most urbanites will have an opinion about how they would like their city to look and what they need from their city in return. Even more so at the smaller scale, residents of a neighbourhood are highly aware of what improvements they would like to see in their neighbourhoods and by participating in urban design, they are able to articulate their desires and are therefore, more closely connected to the result.

As urban designers, we learn that our work has far reaching implications beyond making places better. If we are aware of the potential of our craft and have the skills and positive attitude necessary to successfully engage the public, we open ourselves to unlimited possibilities for products beyond the tangible places we help create. The lessons for urban designers are not entirely dissimilar than those for community development planners. As urban designers, we can:
- Support or create opportunities to work with people who are (or will be) primary users of a space. Listening to their ideas and learning what they need from a place, and then offering our skills as tools to bring possibilities to reality can have a positive, lasting impact on neighbourhoods.
• Facilitate the creation of relationships (i.e. build community) that can be furthered and enjoyed. These relationships take on their own life as people continue to interact and potentially continue involvement in a place that has been developed through a vision that was reached amicably, and is more relevant to the community’s needs as the people who live there have driven the process.

• Encourage public-driven urban design processes that result in an enhanced sense of ownership of place. People take pride in their contributions to improve a public place and, because they have been able to establish a relationship with the place, it becomes an extension of them. It becomes a place to call home.

The potential for planning is strengthened when different disciplines within the profession recognize the strengths of the other. When different disciplines collaborate to create or recognize opportunities for the public to become involved in local projects, changes that bring about positive transformations in our neighbourhoods result. In the end, these small, local, positive transformations can have a larger impact in our world of multicultural, global cities.
Duchess Walkway - before (CNH Archives).

Duchess Walkway - after.


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