Open Space Programming & Use:

A comparison of two Vancouver neighbourhood parks

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Open Space Programming & Use: 
a comparison of two Vancouver neighbourhood parks

DOCUMENT FOR SUBMISSION

LARC 543-001: Environment and Urban Form

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Project Definition

Agenda

- Social sustainability based on how open space programming influences intensity and quality of use

Framework

- The relationship between open space programming and use as an indicator of the quality of urban space form and function

Indicators

- Spatial analysis and observation of neighbourhood parks

GOAL: Interactions

- Open space programs that promote interaction and neighbourhood building?
Public Open Space in Vancouver (*west side*)

- consistent urban open spaces across Vancouver’s west side
- significant ‘natural’ open space - Pacific Spirit Park
- major regional parks - Pacific Spirit Park, Queen Elizabeth Park
- urban open space - sports fields, neighbourhood parks, schools, golf courses, beaches
The Role of Neighbourhood Parks

“serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood.”
(National Recreation & Park Association 1995)

Location: within 800m of service population (+/- 5,000 people)
Size: 2-4 ha (0.5 to 1ha/1,000 population)

Programming:
- both active and passive recreation activities
- geared for a variety of age and user groups
- create a sense of place using unique characteristics of site and neighbourhood
- typically includes multipurpose sports fields, playground, circulation system for walking with seating, and general open space
Neighbourhood Urban Form - Kitsilano

- 6700 residents
- 90 hectares / 56 blocks (~73 people/ha)
- 3 hectares of public park (3.3% of area)
- low density, family-oriented
- ‘traditional’ Vancouver grid premised upon 400m walking circles
Neighbourhood Urban Form - Hawthorn Place

- 1500 residents
- ~15 hectares / ~9 blocks (~100 people/ha)
- 4.12 hectares of public park (27.5% of area)
- medium density, family-oriented
- University Neighbourhood Association
- responds to the formal structure of the campus (Beaux Arts + Forest + Contemporary landscape typologies)
Private vs. Public Open Space - Kitsilano and Hawthorn Place

**Kitsilano**
- extensive private space
- neighbourhood parks provide significant public open space
- some blocks have minimal public realm
- alleys are under-used open space

**Hawthorn Place**
- private space largely patios or heavily landscaped buffers
- extensive public space
- quasi or questionably public space creates ambiguity throughout the open space realm

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Quasi-public</th>
<th>Private</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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</table>
McBride Park - Kitsilano - a ‘traditional’ neighbourhood park

1.71 ha (0.26ha/1,000 people)

Origins
- 1911 donation from Provincial Government, named for premier Richard McBride
- WWI war garden (vegetables)

Description
- two blocks on either side of Waterloo Street
- one large open sports field and the other with a playground and tennis courts surrounded by mature trees; established street trees border the entire park
- failed 2006 bid to close Waterloo to cars
Jim Taylor Park - *Hawthorn Place - a new neighbourhood park*

0.5 hectares (+ approx. 1.0 additional pocket park hectares)(~1ha/1,000 people)

**Origins**
- part of Hawthorn Place neighbourhood development (2001-2007)

**Description**
- intersected by main north-south axis of the UBC campus
- public open space adjacent to local community centre and coffee shop
- centrally located within the neighbourhood
Programming

McBride Park

- field house - washrooms, caretaker’s cottage
- soccer fields (x1) / softball fields (x2)
- playground (x1)
- tennis courts (x4)
Jim Taylor Park
- active and passive spaces
- strong connection to coffee shop and community centre, with welcoming plaza
- playgrounds and checkerboard gathering space for play
- opportunities for community events
- seating encourages social gathering and/or personal reflection
Circulation

McBride Park

- peripheral circulation
- minimal defined circulation within
Jim Taylor Park

- responds to the campus grid with paths that connect to the campus main axis
- curvy secondary paths allow experiential interest for the user
- paths contrast grid, have places for rest and allow for views into the park
- circulation routes feel very public; rest areas feel more private
- pedestrian oriented routes support biking, bike racks provided
- adjacent collector street (Thunderbird Blvd) medium intensity slow traffic equals safety for children and people
Landscaping & Maintenance

McBride Park

Landscaping Elements

- mature street & interior trees - create residential feel, establish a canopy
- Berberis hedge - separates sports field from 4th Avenue traffic
- grass
  - highly maintained sports field - irrigation system, frequently mowed
  - low maintenance grass on west side - no irrigation, rarely mowed
- lack of shrubs increase safety, reduce hiding places & maintenance

Maintenance

- high maintenance sports grass; everything else very low maintenance
Jim Taylor Park

- nice planting palette frames circulation and edges of the park
- sense of enclosure and protection
- shrubs intended to protect the bioswale may need more consideration
- mature trees along central axis give it a strong sense of place and identity
**Use**

**McBride Park**

Saturday October 31st, 2009

*Weather*: clear, cold

*Use*:
- 3 individuals at playground
- dog walkers using open space on west side
- no organized activity on the sports field
- runners and walkers on the sidewalk perimeters
Jim Taylor Park
Saturday October 31st, 2009

Weather: clear, cold

Use:
- 50+ parents and children celebrate Hallowe’en at Community Centre, many dressed in costumes
- gatherings occurred around building entrance and playground
- children play in dry watercourse, fountain and run on grass
Use

McBride Park

Saturday November 14th, 2009

Weather: Overcast but dry

Use:
• frequent organized sport and recreational activities
• children’s soccer games x6 = 100+ parents, children and spectators
• smaller children playing at the park
Jim Taylor Park
Saturday November 14, 2009

Weather: overcast, dry and then spitting

Use:
• ‘typical’ quiet day
• coffee shop closed for renovations reflect lack of intensity and use
• individual parents with children out for a walk, used playground but left due to rain
• 5+ people moving by on the sidewalks and main mall axis
Use Patterns
McBride Park

- The multi-use sports field is an important community feature for organized events to activate the space
- Sports field most active on weekends in the neighbourhood, regardless of the weather
- Informal uses mainly around the edges and variety of programmed spaces
Jim Taylor Park

- community centre and coffee shop programming significant for Hawthorn Place’s open space
- Main Mall axis is an important circulation route and populates the park with passersby
- the secondary pocket parks are not as well used, perhaps because of ambiguity of publicness
- the central grassy area is not as activated as McBride Park’s grass
Key Comparisons

Programming
- organized activities animate space, encourage community involvement and interaction, especially when ritualized and expected
- designation of active and passive play for different age groups
- multiuse grass & programming should provide for a variety of types of recreation, for sport or community based activities

Circulation
- meandering circulation systems define destination rather than grass used for circulation
- open edges help break down barriers to entrance
- strong central axis pulls people through the park
- Jim Taylor park is more interesting, diverse
- highly connective, helps to emphasize pedestrian movement

Landscaping & Maintenance
- high levels of maintenance, landscaping, and irrigated grasses are not directly correlated with high levels of use
- shrubs define edges
- provide aesthetics and visual interest
- importance of trees
- active vs passive
**Conclusions**

**The role of neighbourhood parks?**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>McBride Park</th>
<th>Jim Taylor Park</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size</strong></td>
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<td>A+</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proximity</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Programming</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Landscaping/Maintenance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Use</strong></td>
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- McBride Park currently holds more day-to-day place in the community than Jim Taylor Park based on the ritualized variety of organized activities.

  Jim Taylor Park achieves this in terms of social gathering, but could improve in terms of recreational activities, other than/including sports.

- Old Barn Community Centre hold events that spill out into the park, creating social interaction.

- Jim Taylor Park has much higher levels of landscape maintenance and aesthetic interest than McBride Park, however it is not better used.

- Circulation in Jim Taylor park is more diverse and interesting but remains highly connective and helps to emphasize pedestrian movement.

- Ambiguity between public and private space can lead to under-used open space ‘dead-zones’ where people may feel uncomfortable.

- Hawthorn Place has extensive public open space.

- It is set centrally within the neighbourhood.

- Programming limits organized recreation within the community.

- Extensive circulation and strong connectivity.

- High levels of maintenance... does it improve use? sustainable?

- good informal use; could it be better used evenings/weekends?