



The Vancouver Skate Plaza site is located in downtown Vancouver's Chinatown area between Fisher Creek (to the south), Andy Livingstone Park (to the north), Pacific Boulevard (to the west) and an impoundment lot (to the east).

**TRANSFORMING UNDER UTILIZED SPACES:
'URBAN SCRAPS' RE-CLAIMED**

Scraps of under-utilized land in urban areas tend to become one of three things: parking lots, vacant lots, or a lot of urban decay. Such places, depending on their composition and location, have the potential of becoming important urban spaces that reflect the evolving cultural tastes of the greater community.

One such urban scrap in Vancouver is a small triangular site that is located under the Georgia Street Viaduct along Pacific Boulevard (next to Chinatown and Science World). Once a parking lot, the site was neither successful in this role, nor was it attractive to any potential developers, due to its location directly beneath a busy elevated roadway. Industrial development was not possible due to the large neighbourhood residential tower developments that were being constructed in the immediate vicinity. Commercial development seemed implausible due to contamination, lack of infrastructure and location problems. Recreational development seemed the only viable option (considering the site's location right next to one of the city's largest artificial sports fields).

One decision put forth as to the future use of the site (with the help of city of Vancouver Senior Urban Planner Michael Gordon, and the Vancouver Parks Board) was to turn it into an urban plaza that welcomes youth and active sports enthusiasts. Thus, the VANCOUVER SKATEPLAZA was born.

Support for a youth oriented plaza gained support from a variety of sources. Young people were both organized and vocal in their support for a plaza. Ironically, the business community was also supportive in spite of many years of conflict with young people in the downtown core. Increasing intolerance to skateboarders using public spaces/plazas had caused many of the city's premier public spaces to be "skate proofed". Physical barriers (such as bollards and skatestops) were now a common site in most public spaces.

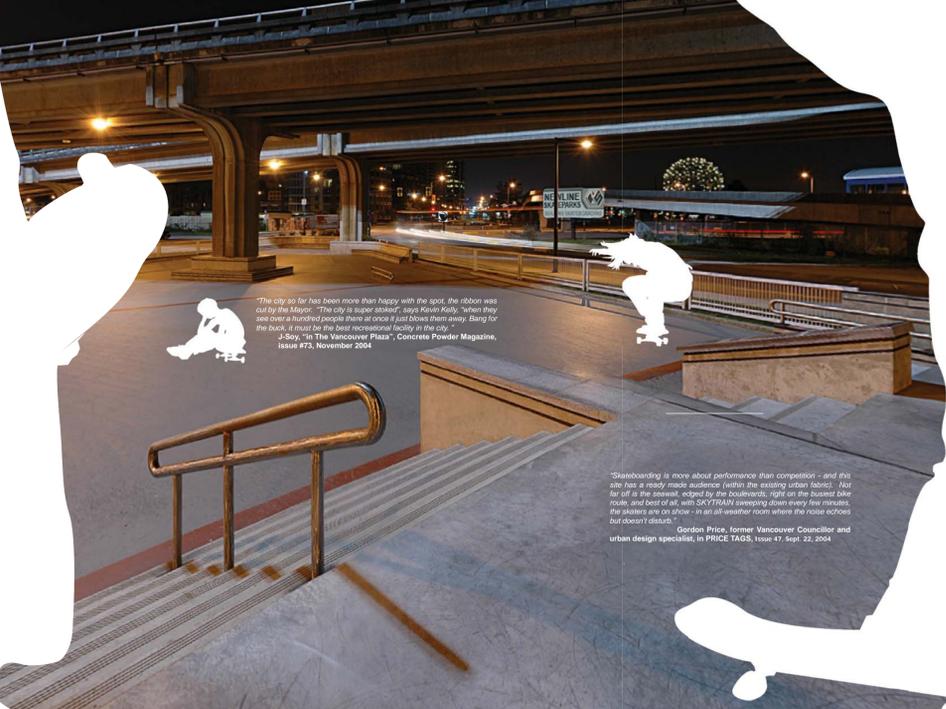
Unintentionally, as former Vancouver City councillor and current urban design guru, Gordon Price has noted, the loss of skaters and other young people at certain plazas and parks has helped encourage drug users and dealers to move into the vacated areas. Places such as nearby Andy Livingstone Park have had to undo skateproofing of the hedges to encourage skaters to return. (Gordon Price, *Postage*, Issue 47, Sept. 22, 2004). The addition of the VANCOUVER SKATEPLAZA, it was thought, would add life to a run down part of the downtown core and help promote youth oriented facilities in the city.

In 2003/2004, the Vancouver Parks Board, the City of Vancouver, and local activists worked together with the landscape architectural team to create a youth plaza that mirrored the successful local urban plazas and parks that skateboarders loved so much. The challenge in this endeavour was to integrate this facility with the surrounding context. Some degree of construction was felt by concerned residents who feared that the presence of teenagers would further contribute to the existing decay of the area. Great care was taken to inform the community of the project intentions. Successful neighbouring projects (such as the award winning Andy Livingstone Park and sportsfields, and the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden) demonstrated that it was possible to have unique, recreational facilities that could co-exist within the existing residential and commercial fabric without causing conflict.

Since July 2004, the Vancouver Skate Plaza has proven to all that a public space for young people can become a positive force within a marginalized area of downtown. Like Andy Livingstone park, the skate plaza has re-activated a once isolated piece of cityscape and turned it into a dynamic outdoor stage for those wishing to partake in one of youth culture's most innovative sports.

VANCOUVER SKATEPLAZA
urban scraps re-claimed

"This youth facility works very well with the existing urban fabric. The site brings a sense of excitement, activity and mobility to an area that has a reputation for drug users and neglect. These kids don't want any problems, they just want to skate with those passionate about their sport. How they have a place to call their own." Email sent to VOZ about the opening of the facility



"The city so far has been more than happy with the spot, the ribbon was cut by me Mayor. The city is super stoked, and from today, when they see over a hundred people there at once it just blows them away. Bang for the buck, it must be the best recreational facility in the city." -Boyz, "In The Vancouver Plaza", Concrete Powder Magazine, Issue #73, November 2004

"Skateboarding is more about performance than competition - and this site has a ready made audience (within the existing urban fabric). Just far off in the seawall, edged by the boulevards, right on the busier side (north) and level of it, with SKYTRAM sweeping down every few minutes, the skaters are on show - in an all-weather room where the noise echoes but doesn't disturb." Gordon Price, former Vancouver Councillor and urban design specialist, in PRICE TAGS, Issue 47, Sept. 22, 2004

THE PHYSICAL SPACE

Points of Interest

1. Park Design:
 - The intention was that this plaza should fit with the urban context and not appear to be a park facility.
 - The city and the user group stressed the importance of this plaza looking and feeling like any other public space within the downtown core. The difference is that skateboarding is promoted and enhanced in this location.
 - The design process began with an analysis of opportunities and constraints for this site including: traffic, access, safety, noise.
 - The form for the park was a response to the safest location for a major entry and the configuration of the existing parking lot itself.
 - Form was also determined by the most cost effective way to develop the site including attention to existing infrastructure, drainage, and pedestrian circulation.

Aesthetics:

- The existing parking lot offers no public opportunities for socializing or recreation. The plaza is meant to provide both of these functions in an under-utilized, high value site within the downtown core.
- Skate plaza obstacles and features mimic traditional street features and detailing associated with an urban plaza.
- Materials and detailing have been developed to complement other urban public spaces and to be youth-friendly. This is accomplished through modification of paving patterns, edge detailing, benches and ledges, as well as location and dimensions for handrails and stairs.
- The plaza is meant to be an appealing location for youth but also for area residents to observe and use as a meeting place.
- Elevation changes are included to create variety and interest in the terrain, as well as to provide safe locations for meeting or resting between skateboarding sessions. These elevated portions of the park are located at the far west corner and at the furthest point from residential dwellings.
- Further buffering of the plaza to residential homes is enhanced with dense planting at the corner of Expo Blvd. and Quebec St., as well as a dense planting along the Expo Blvd. edge of the park. For CPRED reasons the plantings along Expo will be trimmed as well as trees.
- A public art process is currently underway to provide integrated metal work and banners on the existing viaduct pillars. This artwork will be developed in association with youth organizations and the Vancouver skateboard coalition.

Safety and Access:

- Park users are encouraged to access the park through Andy Livingstone Park at the Union St. Cross walk.
- Fencing and dense planting along Expo Blvd. and Quebec Street will reinforce the pedestrian flow to the main entry.
- A vehicle drop-off location along Union St. is provided for parents who wish to drop off their children and not park on side streets.
- Ambulance and emergency response vehicles will be able to access the site through a vehicle lift down and removable fence section along Union St.
- Signs are being taken to include skateable features through Andy Livingstone Park to encourage park users to access the site from the Stadium Sky train station.
- Fencing, grouted buffers, and concrete walls are integrated into the plaza design to help ensure that errant boards do not fly out of the park and contact with pedestrians. These fences will also become active edges for spectators to lean and watch the action without feeling as if they are in the way.

Noise:

- Precautions have been taken in the design of the park to reduce noise of skateboarding through:
 - i. Use of smooth concrete
 - ii. Additional plantings
 - iii. Use of acrylic re-surfacing materials on existing asphalt areas
 - iv. Location of entries and socializing spaces.

Graffiti:

- Graffiti is always an issue in urban and suburban areas. There is an existing graffiti problem in the surrounding neighbourhood and we can expect some levels of graffiti at the new plaza.
- Efforts have been made to reduce the level of high profile paintless for graffiti artists or taggers:
 - i. Exterior walls are low and obscured with plantings
 - ii. Graffiti coat protection will be applied to viaduct pillars
 - iii. Regular maintenance of this area is expected under the city of Vancouver's existing graffiti removal contract.

<p>Project Name: Vancouver Skate Plaza</p> <p>Client: City of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada</p>	<p>Prime Consultants: van der Zalm + associates, Inc. (Landscape Architects) Surrey, British Columbia 604-882-0024 www.vdz.ca</p> <p>Contractor: New Line Skateparks, Inc.</p>
<p>Project Description: The Vancouver Skate Plaza project is a temporary (metal) skate plaza (with 100% of the plaza area created out of a pre-cast, regularly shaped piece of concrete).</p>	