

The Spark In The Park

The Kermits ["It's Not Easy Being Green"]

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OVERVIEW

We present to you our project "The Spark in the Park", where our main objective is to make the entrance to Quilchena Park along the Arbutus Greenway a destination node by creating a space to stop and rest at our communal campfire. We envision drawing the community together in a safe space for all users through the warmth of our campfire, community events that will occur daily and nightly, and providing supporting elements to enable an environment for the community to interact.

SITE ANALYSIS

Quilchena Park has gone through a transition from private to public space, in which the land transformed from a golf course to a park, and a rail line into a pedestrian walkway. Our goal is to further this shift from the private to public realm. On our site visit, we took note of our site characteristics, which included: steep topography, vegetation, a gravel pathway, stairs, car park, disk golf, and the Greenway itself.

The users of our site consist of a diverse group. The most dominant users are the dog walker; the disk golf player; those that briefly enjoy the view; and families. The Greenway allows outsiders from neighbouring communities that are situated along the Greenway to have easy access to the park; however, we felt that the site was underused as most Greenway users passed by without incentive to stop. Therefore, we have identified the park's main problem to be that it is underused and unwelcoming to visitors. Other problems include lack of spots to lock up bikes, lack of safety for children and dogs between the road and park, lack of seating, and an overall lack of communal space for users to utilize.

CASE STUDIES

We propose to have a campfire in our site because fire has been noted as a sign of human gathering, common across all cultures, throughout history. It has been used as a point for community meetings, a place for storytelling and sharing, a means of making food, an area to share music, and a way to provide warmth. A campfire in a park in this day and age is an unusual sight, which we hope will make strangers and passersby curious enough to draw them closer to the fire to join the group. We believe a campfire is a great way for the community to bond, and its success has been

demonstrated in other park settings globally. We considered three case studies to support our project, including the successes, failures, and sustainable aspects on implementing a campfire into a park setting.

Our first case study was 'The Campfire Project' located in Dufferin Grove Park, Toronto. The project was so successful in bringing community members together that more campfires were then implemented in other parks around Toronto (Park Commons, 2015). Community members were able to organize events such as fundraisers, birthday parties, and cooking potlucks around the campfires, and after realizing its potential, event capabilities were extended to host events such as theatre festivals and heritage get-togethers. It was reported that the campfire increased the night time liveliness of the park, made the neighbourhood safer by bringing in more users at night, and no accidents involving the campfire have been reported (Park Commons, 2015). Dufferin Park had strict campfire safety rules, which included having two buckets of water, a bucket of sand, and a shovel close by in case of a fire emergency (Park Commons, 2015). Participants were also required to go through a fire safety orientation before each event (Park Commons, 2015).

Our second case study was located on top of a hill in the St. Patrick Island Park in the city of Calgary, allowing users to enjoy a beautiful view of the city (St. Patrick's Island, 2016). Users of the campfire could enjoy roasting marshmallows and hotdogs in the summer, and thawing frozen fingers while drinking hot cocoa in the winter. The site provided vast areas for large community gatherings; however, the campfire was often underused as seating was not provided and users had to bring their own firewood (St. Patrick's Island, 2016). Learning from this case study, we wish to provide seating for users and a campfire which does not require users to bring their own fuel

Our third case study was 'The DUMBO Firepit', located in Pearl Street Triangle, New York, where Biolite, a clean energy company, created a sustainable communal campfire in the public square (Upadhye J, 2013). The fire pit produced clean energy which was harnessed to produce electricity, powering Christmas lights on a nearby Christmas tree. It also doubled as a charging station for smartphones for the users of the square (Upadhye J, 2013). We believe the sustainability of the campfire made by Biolite was a great innovation to help further Vancouver's sustainability goals in the long run.

IDEA PROPOSAL

Public spaces are becoming increasingly important in modern society, as they are coming to represent democracy, openness, and publicity of debate (Hou, 2010). Since events like 9/11, freedom of public space has decreased and has become greatly limited through activities and meanings of contemporary public space (Hou, 2010). Waal argues that “the success of cities partially lies in the fact that they are open platforms”, and by reactivating public space, community members can take ownership (Waal, et. al. 2017). Through our project, we aim to provide a platform to connect individual community members to collective practices and experiences.

For our vision, we saw the potential of the park and concluded that providing an engaging, accessible and safe space for users of all ages was the top priority. We wish to improve the connection between the Greenway and the park by making the entrance more inviting and adding a space to stop and relax along the Greenway. Due to the location of the entrance on 33rd street and the steady stream of traffic provided, we also wish to create an incentive for drivers to pull over and visit the site as well. We also hope to create a communal spot for users to enjoy the scenic view from the top of the hill.

Our vision for the park is a community fire pit surrounded with colourful picnic tables; planters for community gardening; string lights for a backyard ambiance; and increased accessibility features. We wish to bring the feeling of comfort and warmth that a campfire provides to an urban setting that is flexible and can be used in all seasons, both day and night. With the campfire situated on a slope, the gorgeous mountain views will complement the space perfectly and tie into the natural experience. The main focus that sparked our vision for the project was the campfire itself, and we want this to be the central aspect and drawing point of the park. It will be open and inviting, people can come and go as they please, warm up, roast marshmallows and relax. The circular design of the fire pit will promote sharing and engagement, while the surrounding aspects create cohesiveness and permeability.

The supporting elements of the space - community planters, picnic tables, heaters, bike racks, and string lights - all support the overall feel we are aspiring for. We want the users to feel as if they were hanging out in a backyard setting, and in keeping with this, we chose to put in planters to provide daytime activity for the space, heaters to expand the feeling of warmth throughout, bike

racks by the greenway to invite people to stop in, and twinkle lights because they add a comforting ambiance.

In fixing some issues we found with space, we want to extend the pre-existing wooden barriers to the side of the road to create boundary as well as to provide safety for kids and dogs that may be running around too close to the road. To expand accessibility on the hill, we want to incorporate a smooth wooden walkway that would allow wheelchairs and strollers to be able to safely enter and manoeuvre around our communal campfire.

We are thrilled to bring the community together through weekly programming that is enabled by the campfire. Imagine music nights where community members can bring their guitars and their voices. The Vancouver Library Book Club can host meetings around the campfire, which allows for storytelling and sharing. There is potential for gardening days to plant new seeds or harvest new growth with the community planters. Smaller scale events can occur with making the campfire a place for local meetups and more. There is also room for growth around the campfire by adding community barbeques to have community cookoffs or potlucks. Whether it's a clear sunny day or if you're bundled up in a blanket with hot chocolate, the warmth of a fire will never feel uninviting.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

We decided to situate the campfire on the North West side of our allocated space, away from the tree, to avoid burnable debris. Additionally, a grate or spark cover could be added to cover the fire to prevent leaves from falling in and catching fire, creating safety hazards. Gravel will surround the campfire's immediate proximity to inhibit the growth of grass and reduce the amount of burnable material in the fire's immediate radius. Finally, we decided on using propane for fuel. It provides a convenient alternative to the traditional method of burning firewood, as it can be started easily and does not depend on the user to bring their own source of firewood - a learning point from the campfire in St. Patrick's Park, Calgary. It also make it easier for us to control the fire's strength, the times at which the fire is in operation, and the duration of its operation.

The campfire will be time-limited, operating at specific times of the day, and for specific days of the week. Users will be able to turn on the switch and have the fire burn for an hour at a time, at which point, if they wish to stay longer, they could activate it again for another hour. By limiting use

to specific times of the day and week, the project becomes more viable financially, and the frequency of use is consolidated, aiming to increase social interactions. By making the fire time-limited, it limits the possibility of danger in the event that users leave the fire unattended, as it will automatically deactivate in due time. Signs located near the campfire, however, will inform users about everything they need to know about how to properly operate the campfire and on fire safety measures and procedures.

To implement community engagement with potential community partnerships, we can collaborate with local musicians to host campfire music nights and schedule a plan accordingly. Partnerships with Live Music Vancouver will allow local musicians to perform their work in a communal setting. Partnerships with the Vancouver Public Library will allow us to host small get togethers, such as book club gatherings and storytelling sessions around the campfire during the day. We can also work with gardening enthusiasts to teach children from neighbouring schools about the benefits of growing your own food. Most importantly, we wish to work closely with the Fire Department and the Vancouver Park Board, not only for fire permits and permissions for having open flames, but also to consider their advice and guidance to ensure our campfire is built to the safest it can be.

Our project is implementable within one year, as our design only requires items that are easily movable, and we will ensure our items are properly secured within our site to address the possibility of theft. Landscape grading is an option due to the slight slope of our allocated space, and depending on the scale of grading and our area required, costs would likely range between CAD\$1000 to CAD\$2000 and take up to a week to complete, depending on manpower and equipment. The landscape grading will be the most time consuming part of the project, but it is nevertheless optional due to the temporary nature of our project. On a separate note, the price range for the campfire itself depends on the scale of firepit. At first, a smaller and cheaper firepit could be used, but as the site continues to grow and become more popular within the community, a larger, more expensive firepit can be purchased. Our focus is on a temporary project, so that it can be moved and adjusted as needed, and will have low impact on the nature of the park itself. Furthermore, 'The Spark In The Park' project can be easily replicated for other parks and public spaces to impact even more members of the Vancouver community.

CONCLUSION

Quilchena Park is a beautiful site and has so much potential to become a destination node of community engagement along the Arbutus Greenway. We believe that 'The Spark In The Park' is a great solution to bring social interactions to the park that is not only feasible to implement in a temporary one year time scale, but also has the potential to grow beyond in the long term. Our project will bring new life and community bonding for all ages to the park, as well as make it a place to stop, relax, and interact along the Arbutus Greenway.

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