



VANCOUVER
BOARD OF
PARKS AND
RECREATION

November 1, 2019

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : Malcolm Bromley
General Manager, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT : **“Doing Good Work” Article: Learning About Truth & Reconciliation Through Northeast False Creek Park - Board Briefing Memo**

Dear Commissioners,

I would like to share an article from [Landscapes | Paysages](#) that showcases the work of the Vancouver Park Board at a national level, specifically on Reconciliation, Park Planning and Design.

The [Fall 2019 Reconciliation issue](#) of Landscapes | Paysages, a publication of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects, includes the article “*Doing Good Work: Learning About Truth and Reconciliation through Northeast False Creek Park*” (attached). Written by Jordan Lypkie in conversation with Rena Soutar and Catarina Gomes, staff from the Planning and Park Development group, the article highlights the fundamental shift taken by the Northeast False Creek Park project team to incorporate a more culturally sensitive approach to park design.

Written as a narrative and an interview, it shares the team’s journey of understanding Indigenous engagement through deep listening, cultural translation, and reflecting on different ways of being and knowing. By looking to the land and the people while humbly examining assumptions, staff describe how they are finding a sense of place in the design process for Northeast False Creek Park.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Malcolm Bromley'.

Malcolm Bromley
General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

/dh/cg/clc

Copy to: PB Senior Leadership Team
NEFC Park Project Team
PB Communications

JORDAN LYPKIE
IN CONVERSATION WITH CATARINA GOMES & RENA SOUTAR

DOING GOOD WORK

Learning truth and reconciliation through Northeast False Creek Park

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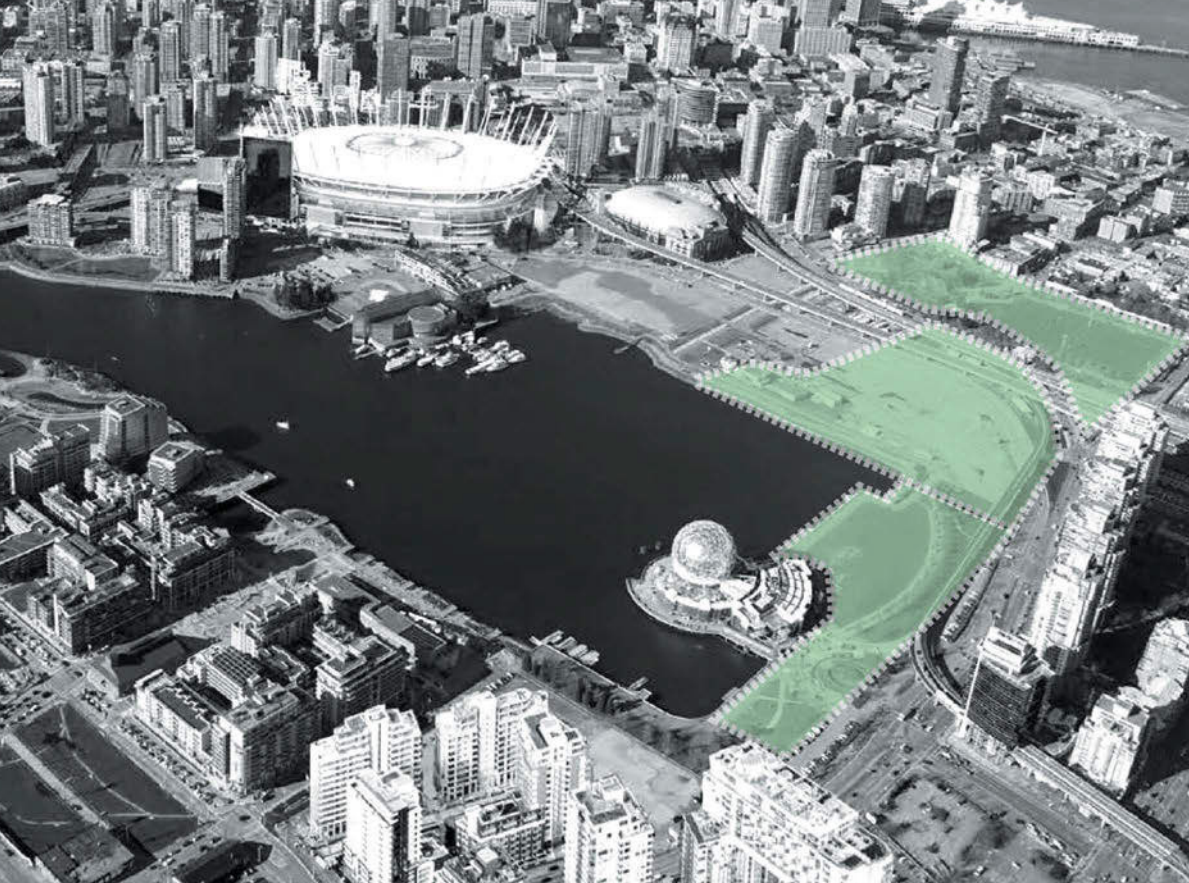
>FR_LP+ FAIRE DU BON TRAVAIL
APPRENDRE LA VÉRITÉ ET LA RÉCONCILIATION À
TRAVERS LE PARC DE NORTHEAST FALSE CREEK

THE VANCOUVER PARK BOARD'S mission is to provide, preserve and advocate for parks and recreation services to benefit all people, communities and the environment. The Board oversees more than 230 parks on the unceded, ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Formed in 1888 to manage Stanley Park, the Vancouver Park Board is the only elected board of its kind in Canada. Among the Board's first actions upon its establishment was to request the removal of Indigenous residents living on lands that had only recently come under their jurisdiction. Over the next 100 years, the network of parks would grow through the expropriation of Indigenous lands for the benefit of settlers while Indigenous peoples were moved to reserves along the City's periphery.

Today, the Park Board is examining this colonial history through engagement with the Indigenous peoples it has historically displaced and ignored. Part of this process has been informed by a colonial audit to understand the extent of harm that has been done. Other lines of inquiry are forward looking, including:

- explorations of ways that Indigenous history and presence on Park Board lands that had previously been subverted be made visible,
- opportunities for settler society to learn from local Indigenous relationships to land, and
- ways that the Park Board can undergo a process of decolonization.

1 NORTHEAST FALSE CREEK FROM THE WATER 2 A SITE DAMAGED BY INDUSTRY AND INFRASTRUCTURE 3 OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT WITH THE LAND ARE MISSING FROM THE CITY
PHOTOS 1,3 JORDAN LYPKIE 2 VANCOUVER PARK BOARD/JAMES CORNER FIELD OPERATIONS



To many, the park did not feel particular to Vancouver and absent from the design was an acknowledgement of local First Nations or members of the surrounding communities.

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Land acknowledgements have become common practice in Vancouver. It is included here not as a matter of course but as an opportunity to thread the implications of this acknowledgement throughout this article. While I have learned of the importance of acknowledging land in local Indigenous protocol, I am a second generation white settler living and working within these territories. I strive to make public the process of learning, beginning with the challenge of reckoning with my place here.

For these examinations and reflections to be meaningful they must take form through action, both at the organizational level through the park board but also on a personal level. The planning and development of a new major urban park in Northeast False Creek, the last remaining undeveloped waterfront in the downtown peninsula, is a damaged ground that offers opportunity for remediating past wrong doings.

In 2017, I attended presentations given by James Corner, principal of the park design consultant Field Operations. I was familiar with aspects of the project through my work as a consultant at a private landscape architecture firm working on the streetscape and urban design of the area and had participated in some meetings with both the design team and Park staff.

The presentation of the draft concept raised concerns for many in attendance; the park did not feel particular to Vancouver and absent from the design was an acknowledgement of local First Nations or members of the surrounding communities. Following the public response, the park design process was reconsidered. The engagement process was extended to allow for greater opportunities to hear further from the local Nations and community groups. Simultaneous to these developments, I began to reflect and question the practice of predominantly Eurocentric landscape architecture on Indigenous lands. Which perspectives were being privileged by landscape architects in placemaking, and for whose benefit?



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Around the same time, an opportunity to support the Northeast False Creek Park became available, for which I applied and was hired. Upon joining the team, I quickly discovered that the work around truth-telling and reconciliation had far to go, with many remaining challenges. The shared experiences of my colleagues were essential to understanding how I could best support these efforts. I learned from Rena Soutar, Reconciliation Planner, that it was best to approach the process with humility and to listen more than speak. This idea appeared embedded into the approach when my supervisor and Senior Planner Catarina Gomes spoke of the need for a “paradigm shift,” moving from project timelines driving process to process informing the timeline, giving engagement the space it required. In this way Indigenous perspectives could be privileged by creating room for their voices to reverberate within the design. The first step in this process was for the team to reassess past approaches, as Rena had described.

Rena Soutar, Cha'an Dtut

Figuring out how to work with the Nations, how to consider the Nations, how to see our own colonial processes in all of that – once you start doing that work, what does it look like to plan a “brand new place”? I’ve chosen to take a decolonizing approach because I don’t think that involving Indigenous people as a first step is the way to go. I think that first we need to look at what colonization looks like and how we are enacting that every day.

The team rethought past practices by working with the local Nations through meetings and workshops focused on building relationships to understand experiences and worldviews, rather than on creating designs and program diagrams. Principles were developed that reflected Indigenous connections to land and water, and a statement was crafted by Indigenous staff to communicate the necessity of this space to replenish and to learn from Indigenous cultures, as well as from each other. This approach was open and allowed honest reflection in order to learn from past mistakes.

It had become clear that good intentions were not enough. As an institution working with a consultant within a predominantly white settler society, our motivations needed to be questioned at each step through a different lens. While Canada is often conceived as multicultural, it is important to consider who had established, maintained and celebrated this designation. My supervisor clarified early the necessity of recognizing unconscious biases:

Catarina Gomes

One of the things that we came to understand as part of the Northeast False Creek project is that there is no such thing as a culturally neutral place. Any human activity is a cultural activity. So when it comes to designing a contemporary park, we were, in the first nine months, thinking that we were designing a pretty neutral ground where everyone would be welcome to come and participate. That is false.

A critical step in developing the new direction was the cultural translation of what was heard. In the original concept design process, staff had connected with the local Nations and Urban Indigenous groups, but in being incorporated into the work the gathered input had been misinterpreted.

Catarina

What became interesting at that pivot point of realizing what you were doing is not really reflective of what you have heard, was realizing that the words we have been using had different definitions. For example, water and being connected to water from our perspective back then was to be able to view an expanse of water, to walk or bike along it. And then we realized through conversation with Rena that being close to water means being so close that you can touch it. You can practice your culture. It’s a living shoreline.

Rena

The waterfront piece is really key for me. Conceptually, I got it when they started redesigning the ribbon path. I couldn’t place my finger on why but it bugged me that they had a ribbon at the waterfront as a path. They designed something that would get you through and past. And they redesigned to get you something that would draw you down and let you be still. This to me was just a completely different direction to go in and counter to a lot of what is in Vancouver.

Through the extended engagement, these reflections began to shape a more sensitive approach. With the confirmation of principles and an understanding that staff were doing something different, the team was tested to envision through drawing. In meetings with local Indigenous knowledge holders and experts, the emerging design approaches were shared, laid out on the table. The drawings were considered, but greater importance was given to the cumulative effects of experience, and of community as a way of being and knowing.



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Rena

To actually get on that land and really understand the history that's there and to do that through material culture, and to feel it, have it under your feet and know that you are standing on ancestral territory, is really groundbreaking for me. It helped me understand more fully how far away from my own ancestral territory I am, and also figure out how I can connect to this place.

Staff heard that so often, input was sought, collected, and consumed, but when it came down to construction, lost to the colonial process. The interest in the room was in whether we could carry through with it. Trust had been gained in mutual respect, but “we” (now referred to in collaboration) had to take the difficult step towards ensuring that the work was not lost in the colonial processes of the Park Board as an institution..

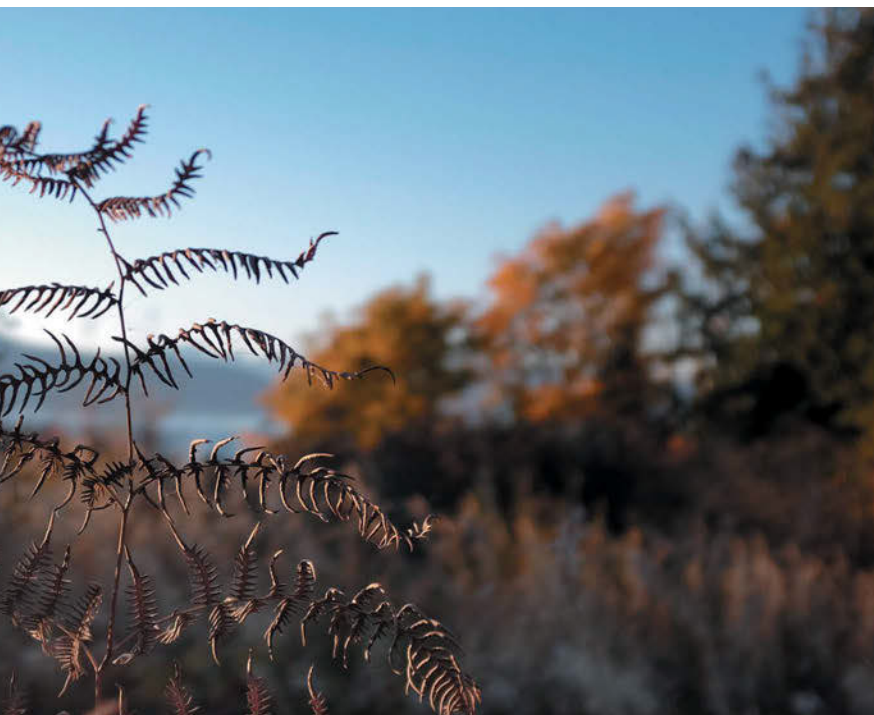
Rena

There is a fundamental problem: how do we connect with history and the local Nations and also carry on functioning in our usual colonial way where we have to deliver on projects? We have budgets and timelines, we have all of these things, and how does that even work? We are grappling with that every day. I don't have any answers except to say that you have to try.

Design had again emerged as a process of questioning, of making mistakes and considering not just the product but the means of making it real. In acknowledging the land, our work continues to engage and look for ways to relate to the experience of Indigenous peoples, but also to create space and opportunity to test out what that actually means. Park Board staff remain committed in this process of “doing good work”: opening ourselves to learn through the problems without presenting solutions, in Northeast False Creek but also in park spaces across Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh territories. By looking to the land and the people, all while examining our assumptions; we are finding our own sense of place.



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4 LEARNING ON THE LAND AT MUSQUEAM **5** CONSIDER ALL LIFE, AND WHO HAS OCCUPIED PLACE SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL **6** BE HUMBLE, AND LISTEN MORE THAN SPEAK
PHOTOS 4,6 CATARINA COMES 5 JORDAN LYPKIE