

Oakridge Urban Design Vision:

The architecture of Oakridge is a response to a myriad of functional, poetic and visionary aspirations set in motion by this unique opportunity to build Vancouver's only municipal town centre outside of the downtown core.

The architectural expression is both urban and topographical, combining multiple positive attributes found in the history of cities. Fundamental principals were distilled from disparate planning movements from Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement of the late 19th century to Le Corbusier's Radiant City. Poetic inspirations range from Italian hilltop towns to the urban street walls of Europe. Each of these precedents addressed the relationship between nature and the urban fabric.

The resulting concept is a modern street-oriented urban experience that reconnects the site to the surrounding urban context while integrating nature and topography to create an organic expression of architecture emerging from the landscape. The genesis of the design narrative begins by reintroducing the lost forest displaced by the original mall and then sculpts new retail street walls to define the perimeter of the site and the High Street within, knitting together the surrounding urban fabric. Into this new landscape are sculpted retail galleries and public rooms which emerge and define the edges of the park above. From this foundation of parks and plazas, office and residential buildings terrace upward out of the landscape and are capped by iconic towers marking gateways capturing views in all directions.

Oakridge visitors will be citizens in a new organic micro-city connected to both downtown to the north and the airport to the south by rapid transit; inhabiting one of the most meaningful sustainable models of suburban mall redevelopments in the world.

DP5 Design Rationale

The preparation and sharing of food is the primary means through which cultures are defined and communities connect. At Oakridge, food is located at its physical and metaphorical heart, interconnecting and activating the project as a whole.

The scope of this development permit encompasses the public core of Oakridge. Taking the metaphor of the home, it contains the 'Living Room' – the primary intersection and interior gathering space, the 'Kitchen' – the multi-level Food Hall, and the 'Garden' – the Community Learning Garden and Wildflower Meadows. These spaces bind the rooftop park areas and retail into a unified whole. The large interior communal spaces emerge from below the draped landscape of the roof and connect to the exterior communal park spaces, blurring the boundary with an operable glass facade. Skylights and clerestory glazing bring light into the interior and provide views out to the lush landscape.

Community Benefits

- A City-owned Community Learning Garden and support spaces which form a portion of the 9-acre Public Park.
- A portion of the City Right-of-Way allowing after-hours public access through the interior of the mall during transit hours of operation.
- A length of the Running Loop that circles the site.
- Completion of the below grade access to the mall from the Transit Station.

Program

DP-5 consists of the east mall run, the Food Hall and the Living Room, the main circulation node and gathering space in the mall as well as a Community Garden and associated support spaces located on the roof above.

Building as Landscape

An organic terraced topography envelops and conceals the interior spaces of the mall, Food Hall and service spaces below. The landscape slopes up over the volumes in a unified expression of hills and ridges.

The architectural expression reflects an organic and topographical approach that shapes the design of both the site and the buildings. The landscaped roof of the Food Hall is cut and lifted to reveal the interior spaces to the Commons and at the same time create a sloping topography for the Community Gardens to the east. Here the sloping landscape is gently terraced similar to a rice paddy, addressing the pragmatics of providing level plots for agriculture and maintenance while poetically expressing the symbiotic integration of nature and architecture. A Tea House at the summit is a meditative multi-use space cradled within this topography and will serve as an extension of the Restaurant below.

Permeability

Blurring the boundary between interior and exterior, the façade along the western edge is proposed to dematerialize to maximize the visual and physical connection between diners and the active public park spaces. The Food Hall, Restaurant and Tea House façades have expansive overhead doors and operable glass walls that open up to the exterior facing the Commons. The dining area floor finishes and tables will extend outdoors, animating the surrounding park spaces. Slab projections and the Restaurant balcony deck provide weather protection along the edge of the Commons for year-round use.

Skylights

Skylights have been located to provide natural light into the mall and to mark the primary mixing chamber vertical circulation nodes. The Living Room is the primary public gathering space inside the mall and extends all the way down to the vehicular drop-off areas below grade. Two large steel and glass skylights over the space will bring natural light into the main floor area of the Living Room on Level 1 as well as down to the drop-off lobbies on P1 and P2 through floor openings around the escalators. Long linear skylights over the length of the Food Hall on Level 2 will light both the double-height space and the mall run below through a series of large openings in the floor.

Access & Interconnectivity

The Living Room is located on the primary east-west route through the site, connecting the Transit Plaza to the mall and extending to High Street, Civic Centre and the neighborhood beyond.

The primary pedestrian access into the site will be from the Transit Plaza, where visitors arriving from the Canada Line Station and bus routes along West 41st Avenue and Cambie Street will enter through the Main Mall Entry and into the Living Room mixing chamber. The internal path through the mall along this route is designated as a right-of-way that will be publicly accessible during the hours that transit is in operation.

Connections to the Park

The rooftop Park covering the site consists of a variety of spaces interconnected by a hierarchy of paths and the Running Loop. The scope of DP-5, located at the center of the site, encompasses several key access points and intersections. The park access from the Transit Plaza leads along the Main Mall Entry through an exterior stairway concourse and a pair of elevators up to the Park on Level 3, landing at the key intersection of the Running Loop, the paths to the Civic Park and the Upper Green, and the Meadows Walkway, which leads up to the rooftop lookout. To the south, the Community Garden patio is at the intersection of the Cambie Street staircase, the Running Loop and the pathway connecting to the Restaurant balcony and the Commons beyond.

Materiality

Reinforcing the two key architectural themes of “Building as Landscape” and “Inside-Outside Connection”, the palette of exterior materials consists primarily of a terracing landscaped roof and glazed facades, and skylights that connect the interior spaces to the Park and bring light into the building.

Precast concrete clad eyebrows and fascias define the edges of the floorplates and landscaping allowing a seamless transition into the concrete paving and planting, further blurring the traditional division between building and landscape.

Landscape

Meadow Gardens

The Meadow Gardens are situated along the northern edge of the podium of the Oakridge site, where a southern slope with generous access to sunlight and expansive views provide an ideal location for these public gardens.

A key component of the landscape at Oakridge, the Meadow Gardens offer opportunities for the public to experience nature and gardening in the heart of the city. Community Learning Gardens will engage residents and neighbours in cultivating a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. This area will include gardens, orchards and wildflower meadows that support habitats for birds and other pollinators.

Community Gardens

The Community Gardens include flat garden terraces suitable for urban farming and retained by concrete walls with wood seating and surfaces that can be used for gardening activities. These terraced edges are accessed by concrete apron walkways, which form the main circulations routes across the gardens. The flat, stepped terraces of the Community Gardens set the overall expression of Meadows Gardens and form the basis for the iconic stepped terrace expression across the larger Wildflower Pollinator Meadows. These meadows overlook both the Community Gardens to the east and the Commons to the west.

Community Garden Rooms

The Community Garden Rooms, consisting of indoor spaces that provide important support facilities for community-based gardening and urban agriculture, are centrally located to offer an expansive view of the entire gardens.

Tea House

The Tea House and the landscape gardens that surround it are designed as a contemporary interpretation of the traditional Japanese garden style and provide a contemplative space protected from its busy urban surroundings.

The gardens are minimalist in character and primarily consist of mosses, while groupings of specimen shrubs, small trees and bamboo ensure privacy and tranquility. The garden hardscape consists of raked gravel surfaces, stepping stones, stone groupings and small water features or tsukubai.