



Plaza Stewardship Strategy

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The Plaza Stewardship Strategy is an operational guide for the City of Vancouver and community partners on the management, maintenance and programming of public plazas across the city. It includes an approach that guides stewardship implementation in different types of spaces.



Granville St & 13th Ave Plaza

Executive Summary

Over the past four years, the City of Vancouver has been working on a citywide Plaza Stewardship Strategy, a plan for how the city will care for and maintain its plazas and public spaces. Good stewardship ensures that public spaces are well managed and maintained, and ensure that plazas remain both physically accessible and socially inclusive, so that all people can experience a sense of belonging in the public realm.

In dense urban environments such as Vancouver, public plazas play a critical role in providing additional outdoor space as living rooms or backyards for many people, including the most vulnerable in our communities. Plazas are neighbourhood focal points as they bring people together and provide a place for where people can mix, and build trust and understanding across economic, social and cultural differences. With high degrees of income disparity, a housing affordability and opioid crisis in the city, education on awareness and tolerance of different people who use plazas helps create inclusive public spaces and supports health equity.

The Plaza Stewardship Strategy is an operational guide for stewardship of City-owned plazas and public spaces. While it's focus is City-owned spaces, this Strategy may also be used to provide guidance for other public and privately owned spaces.

The purpose of the Plaza Stewardship Strategy is to:

- Define how we form partnerships with stewards;
- Highlight roles and responsibilities for the City and stewards;
- Identify City-provided services and programs that support stewardship;
- Share our approach to inclusivity and equity principles of public space; and
- Outline process for creating plaza agreements and stewardship plans.

The key areas of the Strategy include:

- **Partnerships and Management:** the overarching decision-making for a space
- **Maintenance and Operations:** the general upkeep of a plaza, such as day-to-day cleaning
- **Programming and Placemaking:** the uses and activities that take place in a space

Partnerships are central to the City's approach to stewardship and the City collaborates with local individuals or organizations as stewards or plaza partners. Local partners and other forms of community involvement are critical to the success of public spaces, as residents, community organizations and businesses have immediate knowledge of the public space needs in their neighbourhood and can help deliver relevant programming. The City, partners and community confirm their different roles and responsibilities through a plaza agreement and stewardship planning process.

As maintenance and operational needs of plazas and public spaces vary greatly based on their size, design, location, and level of use. The Strategy considers these characteristics to establish a consistent, transparent approach to City-services and opportunities for steward-delivered services. Determining plaza needs helps establish maintenance service levels, staff resources and supportive services for each space.

Placemaking and programming contribute to the animation and enjoyment of plazas and public spaces. The City enables a variety of public space programming, ranging from passive (e.g. moveable seating and interactive art) to active (e.g. performances and festivals). The City is committed to lowering barriers to participation through community-led programming and partnerships, including open calls for public space activations, and no-fee easy to access programs for small community events. Facilitating community participation in public life is a way to create a sense of community ownership and connection to a plaza and neighbourhood more broadly.

The Strategy reflects multi-year engagement with community members, non-profit organizations, business improvement associations, public space interest groups and various city departments. The Strategy also incorporates learnings from the Places for People: Downtown Public Space Strategy, several stewardship pilot projects and on the ground experience in plazas, as well as best practice research from other cities in Canada and select international cities

As the City continues to implement public spaces to meet community need with a focus on underserved areas, our approaches to creating and managing public spaces will evolve and change. The Plaza Stewardship Strategy is a living document and will be updated overtime as we learn and improve our public space processes and supportive programs.