

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

SENSE OF PLACE

Vancouver's network of parks and recreation opportunities showcases its unique cultural and ecological character, and celebrates the cultural diversity of our rapidly growing, thriving city.

What makes Vancouver, Vancouver for you? Is it being able to see the North Shore Mountains? Smelling the salty sea air? Cruising around the seawall? Is it seeing the crows fly over East Vancouver? Or seeing a friend and stopping to talk?

The character of Vancouver, beyond its dramatic natural setting, is characterized by its parks and beaches, accented with big trees, lush vegetation and daily encounters with wildlife. The urban forest connects the city's streets, parks and neighbourhoods, creating coherent patterns and comfortable spaces for people to enjoy.

Sense of place is determined by personal experiences, social interactions and identities. In a 2016 North American Association for Environmental Education study, researchers found that people with a heightened sense of place appreciate natural and ecological aspects of cities more.¹ Nurturing a positive sense of place takes collaboration, co-creation, thoughtful design and excellent ongoing cultivation.

The network will reflect key themes and First Nations principles, such as a strong sense of belonging on the land, relationship to the water and orientation to the waterfront, and the importance of gathering spaces and places to heal. Keeping "place" at the centre of design and management of the network is an opportunity for the City to listen and learn from First Nations, whose land management and adaptive practices have allowed them to effectively care for this land since time immemorial.

Parks and recreation spaces can be seen as inaccessible because they feel unsafe, unwelcoming, exclusive or otherwise threatening on a variety of scales, which make them ineffective as "places." We will reduce barriers to access at a local, city and regional scale by problem-solving with the community.

Connecting people with open space, nature and each other on a day-to-day basis is dependent on those spaces being easily accessible and integrated into everyday routine. Getting outside everyday connects you to the world and your community. The pace of observing the world while walking or cycling allows you time to see your neighbours, the seasons changing, flowers, birds, bees and trees.

In the case of an emergency or disaster, social and physical connectivity supports resilience. Socially connected communities where people know their neighbours are more than just beneficial to daily health and wellbeing; connection between people and groups is also one of the most significant predictors of fast and effective disaster recovery. Ensuring the city is easy to navigate with integrated open spaces increases access to community facilities which supports fast and efficient emergency response.

¹ Adams, J., Greenwood, D., Thomashow, M., and Russ, A. "Sense of Place." *The Nature of Cities*. North American Association for Environmental Education. 2016.

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SENSE OF PLACE (CONTINUED)

The more you are connected to a place physically, the more you are connected to it mentally. Being in a place you care for and about, contributing to collective art-making, restoring local natural areas, or planting a community garden, contributes to a collective sense of place that can build on existing local neighbourhood character and develop values surrounding green space and ecological aspects of the place.

Strengthening connections between people and shared places is a collaborative process. This is why it is so important that communities are fully involved in the implementation of connectivity in their neighbourhood. We will work together to integrate parks and recreation in a way that is grounded in place, is conscious of equity, and makes sense for you and your community.



WHAT IS SENSE OF PLACE?

“Different people perceive the same city or neighborhood in different ways. While one person may appreciate the ecological and social aspects, another may experience environmental and racialized injustice.

A place may also conjure contradicting emotions—the warmth of community and home juxtaposed with the stress of dense urban living. Sense of place—the way we perceive places such as streets, communities, cities or ecoregions—influences our wellbeing, how we describe and interact with a place, what we value in a place, our respect for ecosystems and other species, how we perceive the affordances of a place, our desire to build more sustainable and just urban communities, and how we choose to improve cities.

Our sense of place also reflects our historical and experiential knowledge of a place, and helps us imagine its more sustainable future.”

Excerpt from: Adams, Greenwood, Thomashow and Russ, 2016, Urban EE Essays – Sense of Place, North American Association for Environmental Education.