

## **Where's the Square Design Competition**

Vancouver Public Space Network

### **(a) Name of Design Idea :**

**ROBSON REINVENTED –VANCOUVER'S PUBLIC SPACE ON A WHOLE NEW LEVEL**

### **(b) Brief Description of Design / Concept :**

The Design seeks to pedestrianize Robson Street between Hornby and Howe Street and raise the current sub-grade plaza up to street level. These 2 changes will provide the platform from which a great urban focal point, a civic gathering place can be created. The current below grade plaza areas not only fragment the flow and legibility of Robson Square but they also suffer from a lack of light and connectivity to the street. The focus of the design proposal is the “great outdoor room” : a large glass covered pedestrian plaza that occupies the reclaimed portion of Robson Street.

### **(c) The Location and Context for the Design Proposal.**

The location for the square was determined by asking: where does the square **WANT** to be? For a city's main square to be successful it needs to be located in an area to which people are naturally drawn, to which they gravitate, almost accidentally even with no prior plans of doing so. The best squares in the world have these qualities. The area between the Law Courts and the Art Gallery, two of Vancouver's important civic buildings, is already Vancouver's natural gathering space. The proposal totally re-works this space in a way that maximizes this area's potential to become a modern and grand civic gathering place.

### **(d, e, f) Response to Design Criteria, Features and Programming.**

The design vision presented is one that maximizes, without contrivance, the possibilities of a mixture of uses that cater towards different people of all ages. Coffee, casual dining, quick food, formal occasions, art, law, shopping, children activities, a gymnasium and other uses will contribute to the year-round life and character of the square. (See detailed descriptions on the plan and section.) Visual freedom, legibility, permeability and openness, active space and passive space are key ideas of the design proposal. The current space suffers from a lack of these elements and is too “chopped up” and lacking in amenity for it to work successfully.

The main unifying element / focus of the square is the “great outdoor room”: a 1300 Sq Meter glass covered pedestrian plaza. On an ordinary day this area would contain market ‘pods’ selling items such as art, jewelry, flowers and magazines. The market ‘pods’ can be moved so the plaza can accommodate staged events such as concerts, fashion shows, performances. The stage is flexible in use (see plan) and has a permanent digital screen showing anything from silent movies to sport events. This year-round plaza is an open, flowing and casual space.

The more formal multifunction flex space also accommodates a variety of uses that differ during the year. In December and January it is an ice rink. In the summer there is an interactive water feature and open space that can be left empty or contain installations such as rock climbing, a maze or skateboarding. In the fall/spring the space can accommodate outdoor art or science exhibits/installations. Having a range of dedicated uses throughout the year will contribute positively to the vitality of the square as a whole.

The site’s storage, servicing, back of house and loading needs are accommodated in the existing reclaimed below grade plaza spaces (see section drawing). Emergency access and loading can also occur from Howe and Hornby streets. The proposal offers maximum accessibility to all people because of its natural connection to the street level.

Extending the existing Art Gallery into a new building creates much needed space for the current Art Gallery which is undersized and seeking a new location. The Art Gallery is an important civic element and needs to remain at its current location. Creating a new extension will add to the significance of the square’s civic identity as the main public nodal point in the city. The open space lost to the footprint of the proposed Art Gallery extension is compensated for by reclaiming the existing sub-grade space south of the Art Gallery and Robson Street between Hornby and Howe Street.

The proposal creates a sense of place reflective of what it means to be ‘Vancouver’. Rhythmic vertical elements of modern indigenous totem art link the square to the new Art Gallery entrance. The forms and articulation of new buildings are inspired by First Nations architecture and are welcoming open glazed elements that incorporate use of vernacular materials. Vancouver is a city that ‘looks out’. The proposal provides a focus for the city that is currently lacking. It creates positive public space and its edges connect with and reinvigorate the surrounding context. The square ‘reaches out’ and ‘looks inward’ simultaneously.

By naturally congregating in this area people already want this to be the grand gathering space and civic focal point that Vancouver needs. Requisition Robson Street and bring the sub-grade plaza to the street : this is Vancouver’s public space on a whole new level.