

Rain Garden Square

Concept

All Vancouverites can relate to rain. The abundance of rain is a fact of life for urban rainforest dwellers throughout the year. We work in it, we play in it; rain is part of our lives, yet we don't truly recognize it. Quebec celebrates its winter. Tucson celebrates its sun. So why don't we celebrate Vancouver's rain?

The intent of this proposal is to:

- create an outdoor public gathering space for year-round use, with design features that support a wide range of civic, cultural, and leisure activities
- reprogram a piece of urban infrastructure intended for the car and transform it into a public space
- celebrate rain as a valuable and precious resource

Location and Context

Granville Street in downtown Vancouver is characterized by a mix of uses including office, retail, entertainment, and tourism. Without an anchor destination, the vibrancy of the so-called "entertainment district" along Granville Street dissipates at the south end towards the bridge.

Rain Garden Square is located at the base of the Granville Street Bridge, encompassing the area between Drake Street and the point where the bridge parts to become Seymour and Howe streets. This section of the bridge is closed off to vehicular traffic and re-designed to become an open public space which consists of five major elements:

- 1) THE SQUARE - a hard surface plaza for large and small scale gatherings.
- 2) THE RAIN GARDEN- a soft landscaped urban park for small informal gatherings and quiet contemplation.
- 3) THE STEPS – curving amphitheatre-like stone steps and ramps that link the plaza to the adjacent neighbourhoods.
- 4) THE WATERLINK – spans over Pacific Boulevard and provides a safe pedestrian friendly means to connect Rain Garden Square and downtown Granville Street to the False Creek waterfront.
- 5) THE DECK – a raised viewing platform at the south end of the Rain Garden which also shelters the site storage facilities and the emergency and service vehicle access areas.

Rain Garden Square builds upon the City of Vancouver's plans to redevelop the Granville Loops area. The removal of the loops and the reconfiguration of Rolston Street is figured into the design of Rain Garden Square to ensure that existing and future residential development in this area will benefit from the open space provided. Furthermore, opportunities for retail space, cafes, and food establishments would ensure a high level of activity year round.

The proposal also explores the scenario where the stretch of Granville Street from Rain Garden Square to Waterfront Station functions as a pedestrian promenade, with a public tram route that connects these two anchor points. In this scenario, traffic flow perpendicular to Granville Street will be maintained, while north and south bound vehicular traffic will be diverted to Seymour and Howe streets. The intent is to encourage the development of Vancouver's downtown into a pedestrian and public transportation oriented area.

Response to Design Brief

The size of the proposed square is 130 FT x 130 FT (17,000 SQ FT) and will accommodate about 11,000 people based on 1 person per 1.5 SQ FT.

In addition to the proposed tram along Granville Street, the site is well served by bus routes along Howe and Seymour Streets. As well, there is a Canada Line Station at the intersection of Davie Street and Pacific Boulevard.

The reconfigured Rolston Street running in the east-west direction will provide areas for large scale events staging.

Emergency and service vehicles can access the site via Seymour and Howe streets.

Hard surfaces and ramps to traverse different elevations are provided for wheel chair accessibility.

Rain Garden Square is designed for activity year round. A sensitively illuminated environment permits safe day and evening use. A series of connected spaces of various scales are loosely programmed to support a wide variety of activities.

Design Features

Many of the design features proposed for Rain Garden Square relate to the capture, storage, conservation, and celebration of rain. These features include:

RAIN HARVESTING - The existing slope of the bridge is utilized as a surface to collect rain water, which is stored in cisterns below the bridge to be used for irrigation of site landscaping and to supplement the site's water features.

RAIN CATCHER UMBRELLAS – Kinetic umbrella structures designed not only to collect rain, but to also function as rain and sun shelters and armatures that provide power, data, and water service for exhibition kiosks. Sensors activated umbrella canopies expand and contract based on rain and sun levels to collect rainwater or provide shading.

LIGHT POOLS - Solar powered site lighting illuminate water pools at night. Benches and Rain Catchers clustered around these pools allow for small group gatherings and informal seating.

WATERWALL – Provides white noise to dampen traffic sounds and acts as a screening element for site storage below the deck.

Programming and Social Use

The two presentation boards accompanying this proposal are designed as a visitor's guide to an imagined event that would take place at Rain Garden Square. The "Rain Festival" is envisioned as an annual event that brings together Vancouverites to celebrate their natural environment. The "Rain Festival" shows how this proposal and its many features work to support a large scale public gathering that takes place over the course of a day. Annual events such as this, as well as informal and impromptu activities are accommodated by a network of spaces of different scales and functions. Casual activities are also supported, from hanging out with friends at the Rain Garden, or having lunch on the Steps on a sunny day. Other possible events that can take place include outdoor movie screenings, music festivals, artisan markets, dance festivals, and heritage food festivals.