

HVRA – Brunswick-College Parkette Design Competition

Judge's Comments

***Jane Hutton, Lecturer in Landscape Architecture
Harvard Graduate School of Design***

General comments:

The most successful schemes try to engage the whole site with one major element, while the least successful try to do too many things, given the scale of the site, and the foot traffic. Simplicity, shade, generous seating, and robust surfaces and planting seem to be non-negotiables. Many of the schemes depend on major modifications to the concrete vent on College Street by sinking the grate to grade. This would have a great impact on the space but, I believe that may not be feasible.

Highest Recommendations

1. All the World Is a Stage.

The canopy at College Street draws people into the parkette and provides much needed shade and an interesting frame to see the park from College Street. It also deals with the concrete vent in a creative way. I would think densely planting the court with limbed up trees would extend the shade throughout the parkette – in the plan the existing street trees appear very sparse. I would question the heavy stage backdrop, as it might be more interesting to be able to see up Brunswick Avenue – leaving the stage more as a plinth. I think both grass and pea gravel would be difficult at this site, and could imagine either compacted screenings or some kind of hard surfacing that differed from the concrete sidewalk. More thought would need to be given to the table and rock elements; more seating under the shade canopy would be good.

2. Canopy Park.

I like the use of planted landforms to reconcile grade change, the sloped ramp to the lower area, the linear canopy, and the channelling of sidewalk traffic through the park. The expansion of the lower area to make more of a useable courtyard seems to work very well. The wall/sign along Brunswick is over-scaled for the size of the park – I don't think there should be a prominent sign – the parkette itself should be the sign. This scheme requires the sinking of College street concrete vent, and won't be as successful if this isn't possible.

3. Urban Constellation.

The strength of this scheme is the scattered clusters of lighting elements that would really change the environment of the site in the evening. There is quite a lot of light at that corner, so it would be a trick to fine tune the lights to have an effect, while still allowing them to be quite low light. The plan keeps the existing concrete vents (which may be a necessary criteria). More development of the plan, and lighting materials would be necessary – as proposed they seem very breakable.

4. **Ingrained Brunswick.**

This is a well-drawn, clear proposal. The pixellated plan has a lot of potential – but as drawn has some difficulties. I can imagine how an edited version of this plan would allow for irregular, informal seating, but could do away with scattered groundcover blocks, which I think would just get trampled. I also think the containerized trees are unnecessary, and that they could be planted in the ground.

5. **Magic Carpet.**

This scheme engages the entire site, with a simple, playful surface that could allow for seating and different types of occupation – with much more development. A strategy like this could be employed with much more subtle topography than as drawn. It would have to be designed to allow for accessibility with at grade access. I think the scheme would be strengthened if it extended as far as possible to the sidewalks on all sides. Rather than planting trees around the perimeter, incorporation of trees in the magic carpet would add another layer of interest and shade. It is still quite a rough proposal – but I think it has potential, given the small scale of the site. I would compare this scheme with Trillium corner, which uses box forms to create a single topography. Both invent a language that could operate as seating and activity space.

6. **Campo dei Ricordi.**

This scheme subdivides the space in to a series of smaller seating areas. It looks convincing in the renderings, but I think that the actual tree canopy would be much sparser than as drawn, so in order to get that kind of shaded effect, more trees would be needed. The diagonal walkway provide a good short cut through the parkette, and the sloped surface provides a clever grade transition – although the sloped area isn't particularly useable. The grass strips are also potentially difficult to maintain with questionable effect – I'd think that a more robust, lower maintenance planting would be better. It is quite a formal strategy that relies on banded pavement, and involves the siting and acquisition of a sculpture.

7. **Red Tree Parkette.**

While the drawings are hard to read, the expansion of the sunken area into a simple larger courtyard, is a good strategy for making it more usable. Turf probably not the best idea. I don't understand how the terrace works, would that mean covering up access at grade?

Medium Recommendations

8. Trillium corner

This is a very schematic proposal, but similar to the magic carpet in engaging the whole site with a single gesture, which is a strong strategy.

9. Kensington Common

The water strategy is terrific – and should be incorporated into whichever scheme is selected. The plan reads as unnecessarily complicated. The art panels could be interesting, but as drawn really block the building.

10. Three steps to a new one parkette

Opens up to lower area with a ramp; geometry needs some tweaking.

11. Brunswick Bend

Well considered and drawn, but a bit underwhelming in terms of spatial effects.

12. Flow

Clean layout, simple circulation, but subdivides space into a sidewalk with pockets. Underwhelming as a location.

13. Intersections: College, Brunswick, Ecology

Interesting planting; this seems like a potential for a community-run garden – which would be great to explore. The fern wall would need more development.

14. Kensington Square

Well-drawn scheme, but the effect is quite spare, and it reads as very maintenance heavy; perhaps more shade would improve it.

15. Flow: People, Light, Air

Wouldn't pavilion block access to existing windows? Interesting forms, space between them could be sculpted in an interesting way.

16. Four Leaf Clovers

Too many things going on. Fountain wall seems extraneous. Patterned area of plan interesting, but needs to be edited a lot.

Lower Recommendations

17. Sunken garden

Strategy has potential, but would need more resolution.

18. For Your Life

Similar plan to Flow: People, Light, Air. Subdivides space without much hierarchy; Large wood bench platform is interesting, but other use of materials is kind of random

19. Bricks

Landform is sculpturally interesting, but makes occupation difficult.

20. Bring back the boulevards

Fenced in area doesn't take advantage of the available public space.

21. Games room

Like the idea of incorporating more active use in the site, but a bit gimmicky; scales seem off - the space allotted for basketball, for example, is too small.

22. Portugal influences Brunswick

Expansion of the sunken area is a good strategy for making it more usable. Kiosk on college interesting, but connectivity above and below is lacking.

23. Slow motion

Corten walls, over constructed, fussy.

24. Green weaver

Solar tree is a one-liner.

25. I Cuori di Brunswick

Heart shaped seats amongst planters.

26. Circle of Leaf

Distracting pavement

27. Laetitia Urbis

Over constructed; thick concrete walls, wall is distracting – making a space is more important than naming the park with a sign.