

HVRA – Brunswick-College Parkette Design Competition

Judge's Comments

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GENERAL COMMENTS

I found it interesting--and a bit disappointing--that almost none of the entries offered us much in terms of how their respective designs would function in Winter. This is Canada, and we really only end up with 3-5 good months in which we can be outside, enjoying the park. I thought that the submissions from abroad really missed the boat on this one: local knowledge does matter in a situation like this.

My other comment is that many of the submissions simply tried to jam as much as they could onto the space/site. It felt like...if you give a designer a job of designing, then they figure that 'more is better' so let's 'design the hell out of this place'. This is a small space, and I was amazed at how many of the proposals simply tried to fill it up with stuff...every last single space had to be full. Maybe that's a general problem of design...but...sometimes simple and clean and 'less is more' needs to rule the day.

SOME OF THE ISSUES FROM MY PERSPECTIVE

As I reviewed all of the submissions and put them against my own sense of the Parkette, I felt that there were/are a number of issues that need to be addressed in any final design:

- (i) you've got to open up the west side wall in/out of the Health Centre so that there is access on that side rather than a solid wall;
- (ii) it would be nice to have some kind of shelter/cover;
- (iii) in order to achieve any activity in the area and/or facilitate interaction with the Health Centre, it would be nice to have some kind of retail/mixed-use on the east side of the Parkette;
- (iv) the design must work for twelve months of the year;
- (v) it has to be safe and well-lit;
- (vi) the design has to take maintenance into consideration...and I'm not convinced that grass does all that well in small parkettes like this;
- (vii) it needs some active uses...not just a passive, empty 'space' where one hopes that "...if you build it, they will come just because it's there..."; and
- (viii) it has to be accessible for everyone.

SO...WHO WINS?

In going through my own selection process, I narrowed the field initially to four submissions, in no particular order:

1. Red Tree Parkette
2. Bring Back the Boulevards
3. The Brunswick Bend
4. All the World Is a Stage

RED TREE PARKETTE I liked how they brought the Health Centre into their design. I didn't like the amount of grass and the resultant issues around maintenance.

ALL THE WORLD IS A STAGE did a good job by introducing the Bulletin Board, and I really liked how it offered the cover/sun shade. Having said that, their basic premise that this Parkette would be a place for concerts and therefore they'd build it around a stage...well...I find that a bit of a stretch. I just don't think this Parkette is going to end up being a stage setting for concerts.

THE BRUNSWICK BEND did a good job for pure simplicity, and for providing passive, year-round use of space and for those reasons I ended up ranking this as my **SECOND CHOICE**.

BRING BACK THE BOULEVARDS is my winner

I thought it was simple and cost-efficient. I also appreciated that this submission was in keeping with the Harbord Village Heritage Conservation District ideas. My biggest reason, however, is that I'm not convinced we need to 'force fit' this area to function/work successfully as a Parkette. Everyone seems to be trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear: again...as I wrote above...the good news is that we now have a Parkette...the bad news is that it doesn't work so we better force it to work. I'm not convinced of that, and for that reason I think that we should accept its inadequacies, and the BRING BACK THE BOULEVARDS offers the 'most for the most' in terms of giving something to the entire community.

I'm guessing that this might not sit all that well with some in that...damn it all...we have a park so let's make it work because you never give up park space. I simply think that discretion is the better part of valour here, and let's look at it for what it is...and with that in mind, I very easily reached my conclusion that BRING BACK THE BOULEVARDS worked.