

The most storied district in a seaside town is its waterfront, and Vancouver is no exception. In the SEFC former industrial zone, the waterfront teemed with thousands of workers, as well as ship and rail traffic converging to exchange goods.

The transition from abandoned industrial site to vibrant sustainable community would depend heavily on successfully revising this waterfront. Scot Hein says drawing on history was part of the answer.

“What you see with the completed first phase is a design approach

that’s kind of gritty; it reflects a working place. It has a naturalistic edge to it – it hasn’t been sanitized, it’s not pristine, it has historic materials like the boardwalk, and native plantings. It’s heavy and substantial; it has an authentic identity.”

PWL Partnership Landscape Architects were the lead design firm for the waterfront, parks and most public realm areas throughout Olympic Village. Principal Margot Long says the City asked for innovation.

“They asked us to look around the city, especially at the seawall, and push what was done there, to make it more animated,” she says. “So we wanted to have the development engage the foreshore – have people be able to get to the water wherever, and whenever, they wanted.”

“The City also asked us to make this waterfront – 650 metres in length – one continuous park, rather than a wall punctuated by parks. That was a new idea. And the seawall itself is different. It’s got 4.5 metres of width for pedestrians and 4.5 metres for cycling, wider than most of our streets.”

“In Southeast False Creek there’s a lot happening between the edge of the pedestrian path and the water,” says Tilo Driessen, Vancouver Park Planner. “There are benches, rip-rap, big granite blocks tumbling down to the water. Plus we did the things the Department of Fisheries required to create productive fish habitat. I think it will be appreciated by people. The water side of the path offers so much reason to go there and inhabit the area.”



“It’s artful, capricious, fun to the senses, beautiful. The landscape architecture of the Olympic Village waterfront is a thousand times more progressive than other waterfronts we’ve done.”

Larry Beasley, former Director of Planning, City of Vancouver

Parks

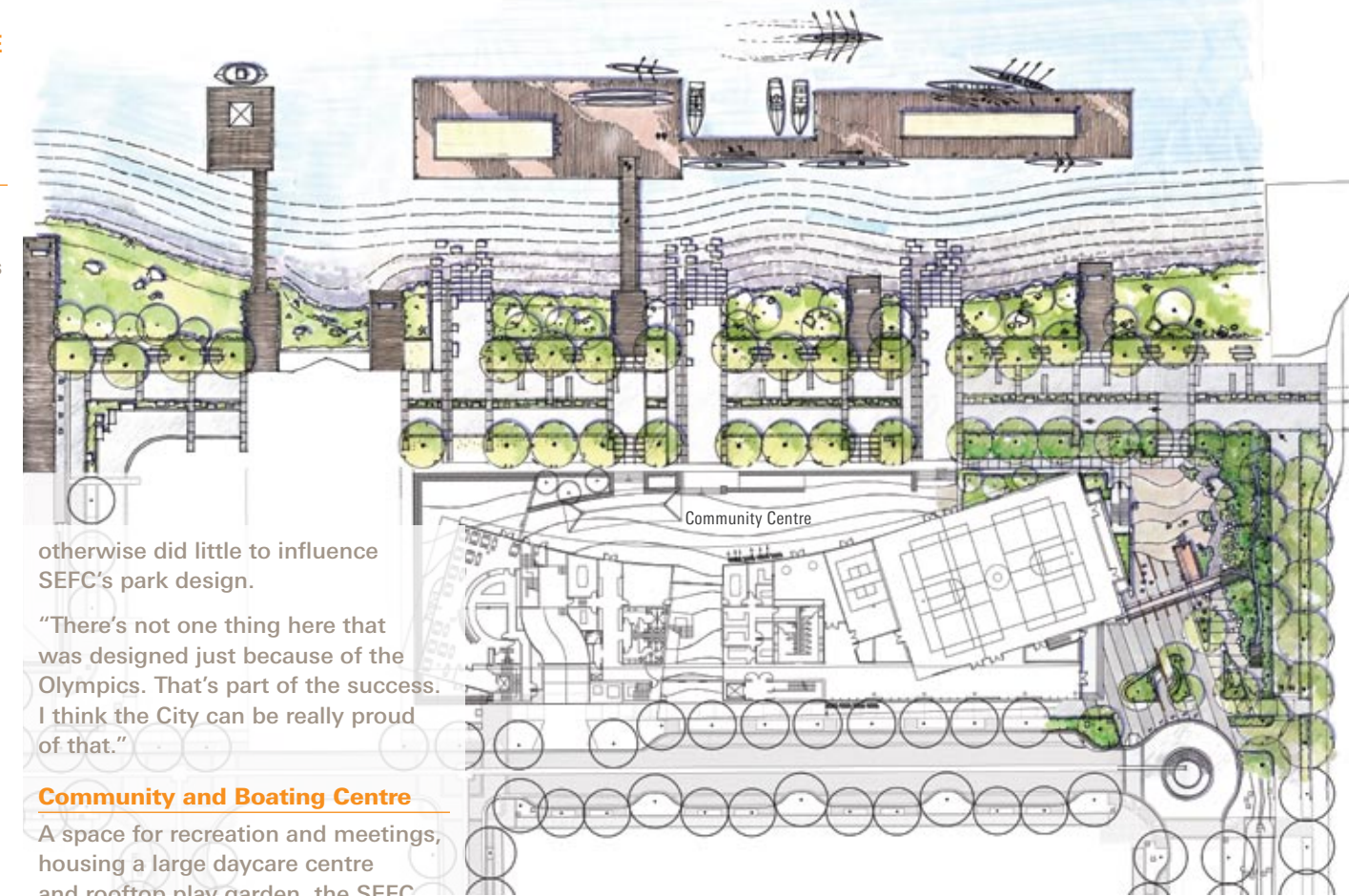
“I think parks are incredibly important, especially for people who live in cities,” says Driessen. “There’s a fundamental connection between the natural environment and people. It’s where we belong. Parks in the city allow urban residents to partake in that connection.”

Vancouver’s standard for neighbourhood park space is 2.75 acres per 1,000 residents. Regional parks such as Stanley Park, which serve populations beyond their immediate district, occur at a rate of 6 acres per 1,000 residents. Beyond that, park design is anything but standard.

Margot Long says the City’s approach to parks and public spaces in Olympic Village was focused on quality.

“This was a completely different model from others in the city. The City developed these public spaces, as opposed to working with a developer to develop them and then turning them over to the City,” she says. “This proved to me that the City has stepped up to the plate to develop public spaces as they want to see them done. They set the bar.”

Long says hosting the Olympic Games forced a quick timeline, but



otherwise did little to influence SEFC’s park design.

“There’s not one thing here that was designed just because of the Olympics. That’s part of the success. I think the City can be really proud of that.”

Community and Boating Centre

A space for recreation and meetings, housing a large daycare centre and rooftop play garden, the SEFC Community Centre lies at the waterfront on the east side of the Olympic Village site. A non-motorized boating centre will extend onto the water with piers for dragonboats, sailboats, canoes and kayaks. (Read more about Community Centre design in Chapter 4.) These amenities will help draw people to the waterfront, and encourage an active lifestyle for residents.

An illustrative plan of the Community Centre highlighting access to the waterfront and the non-motorized boating facility. The west end of the centre will house a waterfront restaurant. The daycare facility will include a play area on the roof, overlooking False Creek.