



At the northwest corner of Olympic Village, where the shoreline bends southward, is a new park with the working name of Hinge Park. A wetland winds through it, with songbird houses and places where kids can clamber on rocks and poke in the mud. Several bridges cross the water, including one made of a large section of storm sewer pipe. Follow the meandering paths and you arrive at the waterfront, gazing at Habitat Island with the downtown skyline beyond.

What you may not realize as you watch ducks forage in the reeds is that the wetland is a treatment pond handling stormwater runoff from the entire west side of Olympic Village.

“We’ve taken the infrastructure out of the ground and opened it up,” says Margot Long of PWL Partnership, the landscape architects who designed the park. “A lot of what makes the Village sustainable is subliminal. If you didn’t know about sustainability you’d just think it was playful.”

Park Board Planner Tilo Driessen says combining the engineering function of the rainwater remediation area with a children’s play park “was a big step for us.”

“Whenever you put water near children, they want to play with it. And wherever you have water, you have mud; some people have issues with that,” he says. “But it’s important for us to make the exposure to natural elements a part of children’s play. Perhaps too many of our playgrounds are one-sided. We may start to include more sand and sticks and all that stuff.”

Driessen says the park must respond to the needs of the residents in this new type of community.

“People who will move into Southeast False Creek won’t have access to backyards, so it’s important to offer this opportunity. In higher density cities, communal gardens take on some of the functions of backyards. We have to allow for that.”

Long says many aspects of Hinge Park serve more than one purpose. A water play feature at the south end uses potable water (not re-circulated chlorinated water) to feed the wetland during dry summer months. Bridges and stepping stones are placed to stimulate creative play even while they satisfy visual and functional values. A structured play area is designed for both disabled and able-bodied people. Wildlife habitat, natural play and aesthetic values merge. The sewer pipe bridge and homes for birds subtly educate visitors about infrastructure, interconnectedness and sustainability.

“The whole storm system is visible. It’s a landscape feature, it’s an amenity,” she says. “You don’t need the pipes, so we’ve brought them up and used them for something else. There’s the idea of reuse, that you don’t have to throw things away, ideas away. For me it’s ultimately a real sense of discovery.”



On the east side of Olympic Village, East Park also mixes an outdoor space for residents with stormwater treatment. The park uses bioswales – wide shallow ditches planted with greenery – to remove silt and pollution from surface runoff water.

“We want any landscape to serve multiple purposes,” says Margot Long. “Open spaces have less chance of being infilled if they’re serving a good purpose.”

“The entire Olympic Village project offers such great animating richness, with shipyards, the history of place, First Nations,” she continues. “We had to push the edges, and yet we don’t know how the places we’ve designed will ultimately be used – there are probably a lot of opportunities we haven’t envisioned yet.”

“A lot of placemaking is about having places flexible enough so that they can serve many activities and uses over time, and become the residents’ own.”

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At left, Hinge Park becomes a reality, from sketches to illustrative plans to construction photos. The wetland will remediate stormwater with its winding channels and plantlife. An elementary school and community demonstration garden will be built adjacent to the park.

At right, East Park in sketches and plans, including bioswales that will also treat stormwater.

