

PEACEMAKING THROUGH COMMUNITY AND ADAPTABLE DESIGN

keywords: adaptability, community, connectivity, continuity, destination, fragmentation, functionality, legibility, network, node, urban acupuncture and urban restitching



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URBS 333: Urban Laboatory: City-making from Interstitial Space
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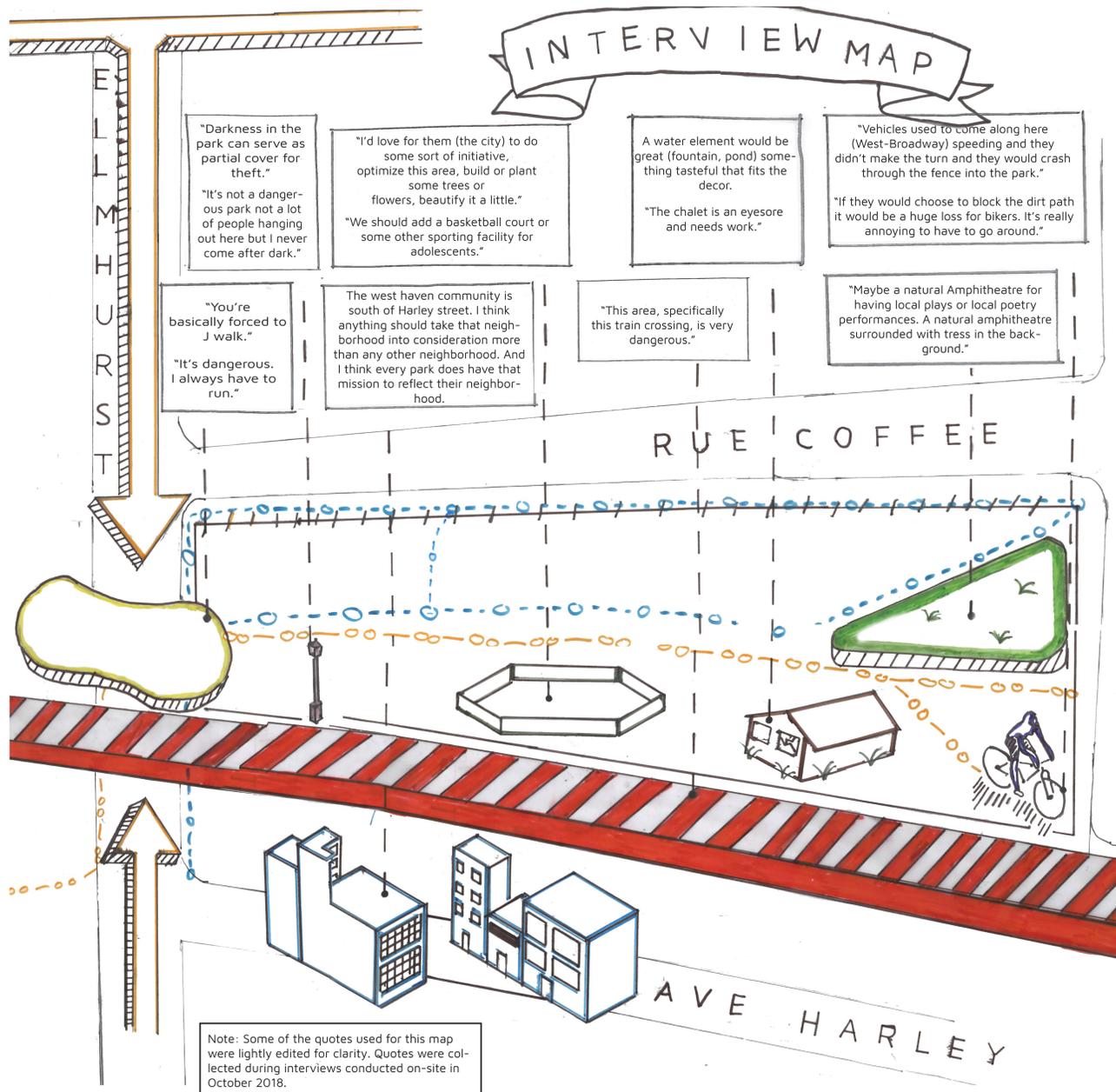
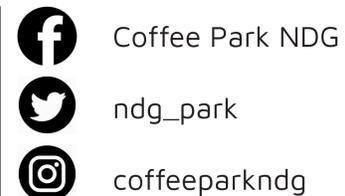
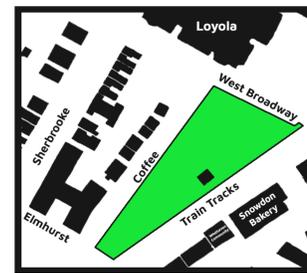
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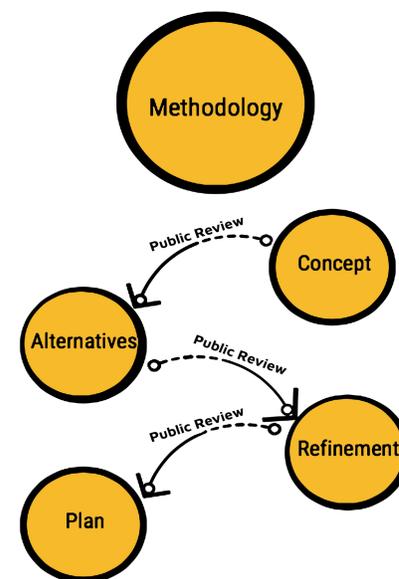


A Social Space

Community Visions for Coffee Park

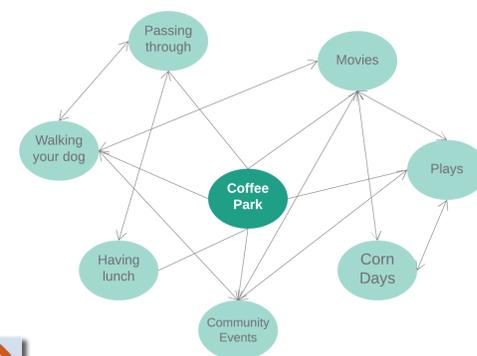


On October 22nd 2018 a community interview process was hosted by Concordia in Coffee Park to garner opinions about possible interventions for the park. Coffee Park is situated between Elmhurst and West Broadway on Coffee Street and is a neighbourhood staple dating back over fifty years. More than 100 people were interviewed for their opinions on the park, what works and what could use improvement or additions. During the following weeks students of the URBS 333 class, under the supervision of Dr. Silvano De La Llata and Sahar Alinezhad, worked to come up with possible design patterns to be implemented and incorporated into the space. Each of these patterns, based on the notion coined by Christopher Alexander in the 1970s, is imagined in such a way that it can either stand alone or synergize with the others. The goal of the pattern philosophy is not to be prescriptive, but to come up with general design principles that will direct possible fixes and additions to the park.



Central to the success of any space is a well-established identity in the mind of its users. Identity is difficult to ascribe and create, it's an ephemeral quality that cannot be imposed. Since the current primary vocation for the park is as a shortcut to the train station, bus station, and West Haven, the park already sees a lot of use. An impressive redesigning of the chalet would attract users to stay in the park as they pass through. A new physical installation apart from the chalet to connect Coffee Park with the West Haven community centre across the train tracks could also serve to better establish an identity. Ultimately, the fate of the identity is in the minds of the users, but there are ways through which their opinions of the park may be influenced.

To heal the fragmentation around Coffee Park, we envision a multitude of informal uses for the park. These planned and unplanned activities in the space will build a feeling of community ownership and involvement.



One of the detriments to the Coffee Park's identity is its lack of warmth. The focal point of the park being a dysfunctional chalet, manholes, and a portable bathroom. The notion of a living space is a holistic vision for the park that could include such additions as a living wall of foliage and benches made of sustainably sourced wood.

Freedom of movement through a space is about people's ability to move in and out of it. This is a major problem on Elmhurst where a crossing is needed. A raised crossing prevents pedestrians from having to step into the street to cross. Instead, the cars are forced to slow down.

Visibility makes a park more accessible and more of an icon in a neighbourhood. Improving the lighting of the space would inspire more confidence in its users and invite more people to use the park at all hours. Another suggested improvement for the visibility of the park is a consistently textured path.

CONVIVIAL COFFEE PARK



District Unrestricted



LOCATION: Coffee Park, Westhaven NDG

PROBLEM: The park has unfulfilled potential to become a “hub” of activity and flows; however this nodal park exists within a larger problem. Metropolitan-wide network structures converge at this spot, generating the conceptual and physical fragmentation of the Westhaven NDG neighborhood, associated with observed issues of safety, accessibility, and mobility for residents and visitors.

OUR CONCEPT: Turning Coffee Park from a knot to a node - a space that restitches the Westhaven neighborhood by enhancing and developing concepts of cohesion, inclusivity, and safety as a means of alleviating issues of accessibility and mobility.



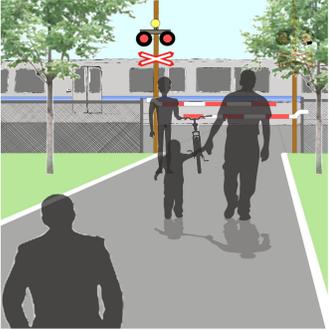
CONNECTIVITY

Making smarter connections

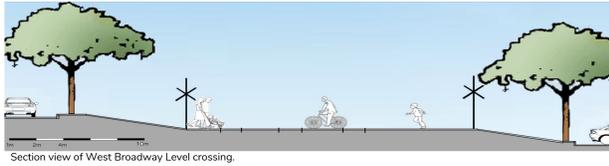
Accessibility to the park is limited due to the issue of dangerous crossings, the most dangerous one being at Elmhurst Avenue near the train tracks. Cars do not slow down or even stop unless the level crossing comes down when a train is passing through to the Montreal West Station, making the area uncondusive to pedestrian activity. Some residents in the area had expressed that these factors tend to deter them from engaging with the park. To accommodate pedestrians and create a safe and connective space, we propose the implementation of traffic calming devices in surrounding areas of the park; one of them being the establishment of raised crosswalks. Raised crosswalks are speed humps with flat tops that bring the road up to the pedestrian level as opposed to having pedestrians step into the street when crossing, increasing visibility for pedestrians and alerting drivers to be more diligent (Steiner et al, 2006).

Elmhurst Avenue: Two raised crosswalks would be established, one on each side of the train tracks on Elmhurst Avenue. These raised crosswalks would be paired with flashing red traffic lights for good measure, indicating drivers to slow down.

West Broadway: A raised crosswalk would be established on West Broadway, near the entrance of the park and the Loyola High School parking lot. **Pedestrian and cyclist level crossing:** The fragmentation of the neighborhood of Westhaven poses a large challenge for pedestrians and cyclists, therefore we also propose the implementation of a pedestrian level crossing or railroad crossing at the corner where de Maisonneuve becomes West Broadway, connecting both sides of the neighborhood. This level crossing would be located roughly 200m away from the one on Elmhurst Avenue, and would come down whenever a train sets off the sensor located further ahead on the tracks. The creation of this crossing would help bridge the disconnect between the north and south side of the tracks, and offer individuals more options for safer access to the park.



View of the level crossing from West Broadway and de Maisonneuve



Section view of West Broadway Level crossing



Raised crosswalks on Elmhurst Avenue



View of level crossing from Harley and West Broadway St.



CONTINUITY

Restitching the urban landscape

Coffee Park seems dissociated from its surrounding environment, as there is a lack of aesthetic consistency tying the different areas together. Therefore, the expansion of the park's aesthetics beyond the borders of the park (i.e., to the south side of the tracks where the community centre and bakery are, as well as to the train and bus station) will not only foster stronger urban cohesion, but this continuation will also play a part in strengthening the neighbourhood's identity. Additionally, the outpouring of materials and aesthetics applied in the park into its surrounding areas will be a psychological indicator to drivers that these areas are not only connected, but that they are an extension of the park, a space for pedestrians, therefore inducing slower driving.

We propose the use of the train aesthetic; therefore brick paths, wrought iron trim, black metal lamp posts, etc.



View of West Broadway and Coffee St. raised crosswalk (continuous textures, lights...)



View of inside of Elmhurst entrance, mixed-use path and main path, lamp posts (large and small)



RESPONSIVENESS

Innovation through collective desire

In the spirit of responsiveness, we want to establish a bike path in order to ensure everyone's safety and ease of mobility through the park. The bike path along the park is bumpy, cracked, and uneven, making one's commute unpleasant so it would be removed entirely and turned into a promenade. The desire path would be turned into a mixed-use path, both pedestrian and biker friendly, connecting West Broadway street and Elmhurst Avenue directly. The official bike path would be moved to Harley Avenue instead, passing in front of the community centre and bakery.

The park lacks adequate bike racks, therefore cyclists are currently locking their bikes on fences and on the batting cage. We propose that two bike racks are placed in the park; one at the Elmhurst entrance and one at the Coffee street entrance as a means of effectively accommodating cyclists as well as encouraging them to stay in the park.



Bird's eye view of Coffee Park (pedestrian and cyclist level crossing on West Broadway, mixed-use path through the park and continued bike path along Harley Avenue).



COHESION

Where all the pieces come together

The geographic center of the park is a hub for activity, where all of the paths within the park intersect, where the most concentration of people are and where locals or visitors can get information. The chalet is currently unused, however it has potential to be turned into a small cafe equipped with public washrooms, or somewhere individuals can take shelter and wait.

The incorporation of the train schedule at the entrance of the chalet bridges the gap between the desire for increasing connectivity, legibility, and the need to turn Coffee Park into a hub, making it more than just a transition zone for commuters. The train schedule will link the park to the larger metropolitan scale as well, and the café is complementary to the train schedule, as it provides a space for people to wait.

Free internet service is available in several public spaces, and we propose that when it comes to Coffee Park, this should be no different. Wifi access in the park is important to have in order to fulfill its potential as a hub and connect it not only to the spaces around it, transcending the metropolitan scale.

Finally, symbolic monuments have the ability to double as landmarks, marking neighborhoods as recognizable districts and a specific area as a commonly known center, or node (Lynch, 1960). A monument will be put at the entrance of the new level crossing on West Broadway, that extends to the intersection of West Broadway and Harley.



The geographic center of the park - where all of the paths meet



LEGIBILITY

Read the space

The entrances to the park are presently not well defined, as there is a lack of signage that establishes the area as Coffee Park. From an accessibility/mobility standpoint, having clear, legible signs is important so that individuals are able to situate themselves in an area and use an area as a point of reference. Implementing arches at the park entrances consisting of the name of the park, perhaps even accompanied by small maps as to visually connect the park with its surroundings allows individuals a better understanding of where they are (Steiner et al., 2006).

Taking these measures would further solidify the identity of the park, evoking a stronger sense of place, thus making the area more inviting and fostering a sense of belonging (Alexander, 1977). The park is located in proximity to the train station, in addition to several bus connections, pairing these with benches and a shelter at the main entrance on Elmhurst would create a welcoming waiting place for train or bus commuters while increasing the park's legibility.



Entrance to the level crossing from West Broadway and Harley



Transportation Map



Block and Built Figure Ground



Lynchian Map

Coffee Park – Green and Lively



Adaptable Place for Human and Ecological Communities

Coffee St., Notre-Dame-de-Grace, 10/23-11/27

CONCEPT

Coffee Park will be a durable and adaptable place. It will be an area of activity for human and biotic communities, for the long run. Using the three-pillar approach to sustainable development, the park will facilitate fluid purposes by adapting to the changing nature of the surrounding neighbourhood. This involves enhancing its biodiversity and social engagement in all seasons.

Problem

Coffee Park occupies one block, running along a railway corridor between the Montreal-Ouest train station and Loyola High School. Its pathways connect residential, institutional and commercial and transportation uses within the community. Park amenities include an abandoned chalet, two playgrounds, an open space, diverse trees, and benches. These are under-used and somewhat unsafe. Revitalising the park requires increasing its human and ecological activity.

Approach

This project of planning-in-situ uses suggestions from the people of Notre-Dame-de-Grace, for the people of NDC. Design proposals are formed around issues brought up by people passing through Coffee Park during a public charrette exercise. Ideas were gathered on how the park could improve by adjusting its features and activities. These were developed into patterns that cost-effectively advance a goal of sustainability.

Methodology

Three methods provided information that inspired our sustainability concept. The first was direct observation; we examined park spaces on multiple visits, envisioning potential changes that could appeal to the community. Second, walking interviews were conducted on-site in dialogue with users of the park. This followed a loose questionnaire and offered insights on what people like or dislike about the place. Third, a concept map was derived from their responses. From there, the ideas were developed into five patterns, proposing a greener park that better supports the Westhaven community.



Green Gathering



A cafe at the centre of the park is run by the city year-round. It is a gathering place with communal tables, where the space's identity is defined by its users and activities. It is green inside and out, filled with diverse plant life and capped with a rooftop garden. Energy use is low due to good insulation and building standards, and it is supplemented by solar panels facing south. Large windows enhance natural lighting and visibility. Ethically-sourced coffee is sold at prices affordable to residents and students.



Nature Sits with You



Places to sit are embedded into places of greenery. Seating is placed to encourage people to directly engage with biodiversity. Human visitors enjoy the physical and spiritual benefits of connecting with nature, while the aesthetic value of ecological preservation is rooted into people's minds. A terrace outside the café creates this dialogue, while attracting animals with a water feature. Recycled benches along the garden wall offer more contemplation. Native flowers (Canada Violet, Bloodroot, etc.) fill the planter by the park's west entrance, drawing people in.



Living Wall



A garden wall of native plant species is densely planted, extending a few feet from the park's southern fence. Its vegetation includes dogwood shrubs, berry bushes, moonseed plants climbing up the fence, and local grasses. Species are selected to attract birds and pollinators from across the tracks. Signage is installed to provide information on the ecological community. The dense foliage reduces ambient noise from the train, for those not using seating along the fence.



Always Lively



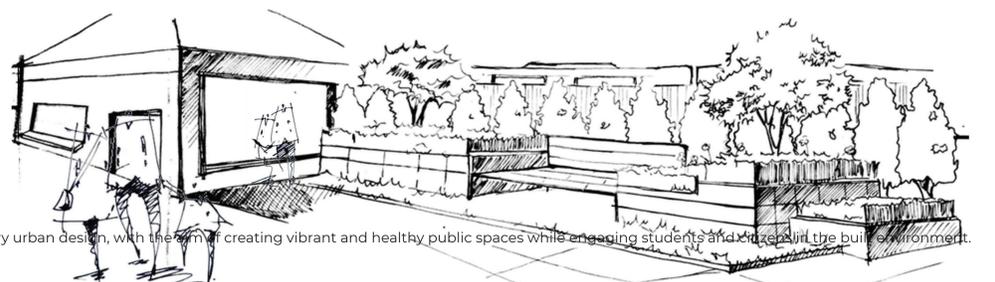
In all seasons, community-oriented activities spread through the park. These are geared toward social equity in access, organized by residents and the Westhaven Community Centre. The green café facilitates them, as a place where people are brought together, and activities may flow outward. Physical exercise and cultural gatherings continue past dusk, lit by solar-powered streetlamps. Additional activities encourage community learning on sustainability, including workshops on composting and the contaminated site.



Harmonious Materials

By design, the park has low environmental impact in its use of materials and plant species. These are acquired locally to lower transportation emissions. Building materials are durable, recycled, reused and/or energy-producing, installed with site-sensitive building techniques. Newly planted vegetation is mainly Quebec native species, placed in strategic locations to attract animals and enhance ecosystem services.

URBS 333 – Urban Laboratory
 Geography, Planning and Environment Department Concordia University
 Produced with the participation of the community of Westhaven, Côte-des-Neiges-Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Montreal
 The course takes a hands-on approach to testing community planning methods in detached urban spaces. It explores the challenges of participatory urban design, with the aim of creating vibrant and healthy public spaces while engaging students and citizens in the built environment.
 URBS 333 uses open planning and planning-in-situ in a transversal and comprehensive studio.
Tyler Boyle, Tate LeJeune, Pauline Libongco, Kening Liu, Lucas Saenz, Jonathan Task - Sustainability Team



Station Coffee

Redesigning Place with a Community-First Approach

Community of Westhaven, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Montreal, Quebec, Canada



Problem

Coffee park is underused, poorly maintained and its design lacks in creativity and function. Currently, the park is used as a means to an end, a path to pass through rather than a place to go to. Pedestrian traffic rushes through the park in an effort to catch the next train, barely noticing the space they are passing through. The need for improvement is widespread throughout the space; better path connectivity, new and improved infrastructure for legibility and utility, and improved connection with the pluralistic voices of the community, encompassed in an attractive, responsive and representative design. Fundamentally, Coffee Park is calling to be a reflection of the community's identity that makes it a destination place rather than a simple space.

Concept

As it stands today, Coffee Park feels both spatially and socially incomplete. Through the use of the various methods of community engagement in the charrette process as well direct observation (Lennertz & Lutzenhiser, 2006), we observed several aspects that could be changed to further enhance the space as a proper reflection of the community's desires and needs. The goal of hard design intervention is not to deny the past and impose a burden of inheritance (Harvey, 1989), but rather to propose small contextual changes, with minimum impact, garnering the highest return in diverse outcomes.



1 Chalet, 2 Water Feature, 4 Paths



Central Attraction Next Stop: Station Coffee

When asked what their least favourite spot in Coffee Park was, several community members answered via interview with little hesitation that the current chalet was the unrepresentative eye sore of the space (Anonymous citizens, Personal Communication, October 23, 2018). Underused, locked and inaccessible, the current chalet fails in its potential. As the node of the park, the Chalet should be where the energy of the park ties together. Thus, a redesign is needed. As the central hub of the park, Station Coffee aims to better serve the community as a responsive and adaptable space that invokes invitation and gathering. Its station-like design makes reference to its surroundings as it borders the rhythmic passing of the trains. Equipped with a digital display projecting upcoming train departures, community members would be less rushed and more inclined to enjoy the space for longer periods of time. The new Station Coffee would be a weatherized building to be used to its full extent year round; a place for changing your skates while warming up with a coffee in the winter, or a place to cool down and attend a workshop with ice cream in the summer. Station Coffee aims to radiate the connection of community as it anchors a placette outside of its doors. The placette provides an outdoor space for people to gather after having bought some refreshments from the snackbar and café. The revenue is not for profit, as the mission would be to channel the money back into community initiatives and events, further radiating Station Coffee's mission of purpose.



Water You Can Touch A break for the senses

"The need that people have for water is vital and profound" – (Alexander, 1977, p 135). The soft noise of flowing water can have a calming effect in the space amidst the harsh sounds of trains that pass by. As many places make water inaccessible, we find that this feature should be an integral part of the experience. The interactivity of water that you can touch, contributes to a cooling effect, providing a refuge from the summer heat. Additional, the circular shape and low ledge provides an organic shape that is convenient for people to gather around (Whyte, 1981). Lastly, positioning the fountain within close proximity to the chalet further stresses the importance of this space as a focal point of the park and creates a space within a space for all to enjoy.



3 Amphitheatre



Open Stage Seating with a view

"This might not strike you as an intellectual bombshell, but people like to sit where there are places for them to sit" – William H. Whyte (1981). In any good quality public space, one aspect that will always come up, is not necessarily the choice of plants, or the colors of the materials, but the quality of seating. Any given space can be absolutely stunning and have the best of plants and design infrastructures, but if you cannot sit in the space, why would you stay (Peinhardt, 2017)? As an integral part of this intervention, a natural amphitheatre made of wood and grass is proposed for the north-eastern corner of the park. This natural and practical setting could provide an intimate gathering space for the community to sit and relax or be part of various community oriented events and activities. The use of soft and natural elements in the construction would gracefully complement the existing landscape and naturally sloping terrain, without being too imposing or invasive. Our hope is that this interesting seating arrangement become an integral part of the park as well as the community. A place of gathering, for the immediate community as well as extending beyond boundaries.



4 Paths

Connectivity and Accessibility Connecting Paths

Coffee Park suffers from a number of connectivity and accessibility issues as it is spatially segregated by the large barriers of the train as well as rapid automobile traffic. These aspects make the space unsafe to access. Within the park there are a number of informal paths visible through erosion in the lawn, suggesting a design consultation from the users (Kohlstedt, 2016). Acknowledging these paths as the truly desirable ones, we are proposing a more direct route for cyclist straight through the park, freeing up space along the upper parts of the park. As a result of this relocation, we propose using the gained space on Coffee Street to make an appealing pedestrian promenade. Both suggestions work in alliance with the various flows of people within the space all the while being legible by its users (Alexander, 1965). To make the pedestrian crossing safer, we are proposing street corner that bulge out, narrowing the overall crossing for pedestrians, as well as proposing a raised pedestrian crossing to make the Elmhurst Street crossing safer. Each traffic calming measure proposed is to make the space safer for its users as well as more accessible, with the goal of making it more appealing and less hostile.



Destination Place Providing purpose to space

Placemaking with its strong roots in community participation, is an effective process which utilizes the community's full potential to create quality public spaces that genuinely contribute to people's overall health and well-being (PPS, 2018). Creating a space with a multitude of uses allows for a diversity of opportunities which appeal to larger demographics. As it stands, Coffee Park tends to be underused as a result of its inefficient use of its potential. It only appears to serve the commuting students and professionals going to and from the train station. Beyond this peak pedestrian time, the space is only frequented by few users. Fortunately, opportunity for change exists in Coffee Park. When a space has its own identity, people tend to feel a sense of belonging to that particularly place (PPS, 2018). It is a shared collective, meaning that it is predominantly community driven, as this place was made through the desires of the community. The elements presented in this suggested intervention are intended to be functional, coherent, and especially adaptable so as to make Station Coffee an attractive community hub that invites individuals to interact with it in various ways. The interplay of the various elements we have proposed are meant to work in harmonious alliance, transforming this space from the path that people pass through to a truly representative neighbourhood place.

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This collaborative design intervention was created by: Philippe Grant, Alexander Karczewski, Scott McCallum, Antoine Bacle Taillefer, Lily Watts, & Cedric Yargeau.

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