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**TF** 855.682.5610      **W** www.bcsla.org  
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**SITELINES GROUP**

**GUEST CO-EDITOR** Michael Gordon  
**CO-EDITOR &** Jessica Tan 604.682.5610  
**ADVERTISING** Tara Culham 604.682.5610  
 fax 604.681.3394  
**GRAPHIC DESIGN** Gravity Inc. 604.738.2768  
**PRINTING** Initial Printing Inc. 604.669.2383

The purpose of Sitelines is to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to the profession of landscape architecture. Individual opinions expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily of those of the BCCLA.



# Introduction

By Michael Gordon, M.Sc., MCIP, Senior  
Central Area Planner, City of Vancouver

**Several years ago I lived for a few months in the summer in a high-rise apartment building. One Saturday morning, I awoke to the sound of a child playing. I stepped out into the courtyard just outside my apartment and found a young woman from the apartment down the hall sunning on a chaise lounge, a dad and his son from next door playing together, and an older woman from upstairs doing some gardening.**

I found several things about this remarkable. Here we were ten storeys up just a block off the Granville Street Entertainment District surrounded by condo and office towers and busy traffic below. While shared common spaces in medium and high density residential buildings are many times scarcely used, here we were – a lovely June morning with residents from four homes in my building sharing a large terrace.

Management of common spaces and signage can be issues. The cover photo of this issue is a sign that was posted in a family housing building in downtown Vancouver that illustrates quite bluntly the attitude towards fun and activity of many who manage shared spaces. Also, the demographics of a building’s residents will impact the level of socializing and use of shared common spaces.



I think we could do a better job in the design of these spaces and that they could be better used. The livability and neighbourliness of medium and high density housing is very dependent on the design ▶

A courtyard in Vancouver’s Olympic Village. Images courtesy of Jane Durante.



Cover Image: Playground Rules. Image courtesy of Michael Gordon.

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of shared outdoor spaces. For this reason, I prepared a typology of these spaces to explore what elements and types of spaces encourage more use. For example, I noticed that one of the reasons there were children playing on the deck outside my apartment was that there was a large flat open space where chaise lounges, toys, and mats could be laid down and fun could be had and there was ample space for socializing.

I trust that you as professionals who design shared common spaces agree that we would like our work to result in inviting, well-designed shared spaces that are welcome to people of all ages and offer opportunities for conviviality, play, gardening, and memorable times with neighbours.

In this issue, Jane Durante, MBCSLA, FCSLA, ASLA, RCA describes the need for and the design of shared common spaces as places for activity, socializing, and “retreat”. The historic use of common spaces in Vancouver’s Chinatown, particularly corridors, court-

yard, and breezeways is explored by Kelty McKinnon, MBCSLA. Jay Lazzarin, MBCSLA provides us with insights into the design of shared common spaces in multi-unit residential developments in Northern BC.

Also, Jennifer Stamp, MBCSLA shares her insights into the design of shared common spaces used for urban agriculture. I welcome feedback on this issue. You can reach me at [michael.gordon@vancouver.ca](mailto:michael.gordon@vancouver.ca). **SL**



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# MORE SECRET GARDENS

## Hidden Rooftops

By Jane Durante, MBCSLA, FCSLA, ASLA, RCA

**Usable or beautiful,  
they should be both...**

**Smelling the roses, growing carrots, reading a book, riding a tricycle, rolling on the grass, playing chess, cooking for friends, or looking out the window to observe birds, kids playing, the texture of grasses, flowers, walkways, fountains – any or all and more of these diversions from the bustle and chaos of urban street life should be possible in the semi-private outdoor spaces provided in apartment and townhouse complexes. Urban street life may be one of the reasons for choosing to live in a high-density environment, but retreat is essential. It does not matter whether the building is at the high end of the market or housing for the hard to house, the basic human need for a place for enjoyment, interaction, or solitude is the same for all ages.**

How this is achieved depends on the premise that the outdoor spaces, the secret gardens (hidden from the street) on podiums and rooftops are usable not just decorative. They are part of housing complex communities and as such add value to life and livability. Accommodating sometimes-conflicting activities is both a challenge and an opportunity. The best examples of secret garden spaces integrate the various needs of all residents into a flexible and beautiful whole.

Terraces at various levels of the building are the places where urban kids and adults can get to know their neighbours and can entertain their friends. Kids can play together under the watchful eye of a parent and adults can be solitary with a book or can create an environment for conversation and various forms of engagement. Many residents of multi-family complexes say they don't know their neighbours. The opportunity for interaction exists if not in the corridors, then on the common podium / roof terraces.

There are recipes for the success of the social construct (how users behave in the space)



A Courtyard in Vancouver's Olympic Village. Image courtesy of Durante Kreuk Ltd.

that brings value to the lives of users. Looking at Vancouver's recent urban development driven by the guidelines and bylaws of our Planning Department and City Council there are standard practical design moves that give our city its identifiable green typology.

That typology, in very simple terms for this discussion, is made up of street frontage, midlevel podium open space and rooftops. Private land at street level is more public than private and therefore acts primarily as the forecourt to the front door. As well, there will be an access to the garage for residents, visitors, delivery, and garbage collection, etc. However, neither of these places are gathering, "meet your neighbour" kind of places.

It is common practice in Vancouver that groups of apartment buildings and or townhouses are designed to create a semi-private space (shared by all residents but closed to the public) for the residents sometimes at grade, more often on a second or third storey podium or on a rooftop. This is a good idea to a point. It is generally safe and protected. It provides good CPTED sight lines. But other than on

rooftops, usually with some access to the sun, this approach often puts the space in the shade. Regardless, it is usually the largest accessible outdoor space which therefore provides the most opportunity for social engagement.

The podium and rooftop gardens at one end of the spectrum should provide an outdoor realm useful, pragmatic, and functional, at the other end be beautiful, a romantic recreation of nature.

Young children with "elevator legs" who live in multi-family buildings need to have grass, dirt, birds, bugs, carrots, and all manner of ways to explore, investigate, and express. Provision of a hut, a sand box, and log rounds or a play structure from a catalogue is not a very good environment for imaginative play and expression. The design for the whole space should provide such elements as lawn for rolling on, running and lying on; quiet places for being read to; hard surface for games, areas for planting beans or nasturtiums, water for making mud pies or whatever comes to mind... In other words, all the opportunities available

in a private back yard – places for individual pursuits and active group play.

For the rest of the residents, young to old, the needs may be different but not incompatible. There is ample evidence that the integration of all ages some of the time is both a pleasure and a valuable construct for livability and engagement. On the other hand, recognizing that not all adults are willing to share their space with kids all of the time suggests that there be quiet areas suited for conversation or contemplation, singular, and group activity. Adults and kids can participate and enjoy growing beans for dinner, playing a game, or painting a picture by choice.

Flexibility and, importantly, unpredictability can be provided with the introduction of strata owned moveable furniture – chairs, tables, umbrellas, stools, etc. that can be arranged to suit group or individual whim. Use then becomes a matter of choice for anyone... an imperative ingredient for a satisfactory social construct.

All this presupposes that a developer is willing to take more risk and that there is a strong strata council will to take a positive role in maintaining the sense of flexible shared space, and that the plants are given due care and attention in the long term. Sadly this is not always the case.

I put forward three projects that demonstrate three different approaches to the design of these shared gardens. Each project had a different design / social construct brief to satisfy.

**The Performing Arts Lodge (PAL) Vancouver** is the affordable housing component of Bayshore in the Coal Harbour neighbourhood. The Lodge provides safe homes for a vibrant community of creative professionals who work or have worked in the performing arts, many of whom have an average annual income less than half that of other Canadians over the age of 65. The design brief for the roof garden was to provide a space that would foster interaction, engagement, and friendship for PAL members. The client group for the project included future members of the PAL organization who would eventually inhabit the space – these future residents were an invaluable asset to the generating of the wish list that drove the brief.

The result is more inspirational than one could have hoped for. Today the seventh floor garden with spectacular views and sun exposure is an



Rooftop Terrace at the Performing Arts Lodge, Coal Harbour, Vancouver. Image courtesy of Durante Kreuk Ltd.

outdoor extension of the common social spaces – the lounge and black box theatre immediately adjacent – and is cared for by the residents with passion. There is no commercial maintenance help. There are vegetables and herbs along with perennials, shrubs, and trees; seedlings, tomatoes, and kiwis and more in the donated green house; and fixed and moveable furniture.

Members of PAL have taken ownership of the garden. It serves as a catalyst for creativity, friendship, physical activity, healing, entertainment, and beauty – the pragmatic and the romantic for the residents and all family and friends whatever their ages.

The second example is the **Village on False Creek (Vancouver's Olympic Village)** that is a much bigger and more comprehensive project with many components and a different demographic. After a bumpy start, the successful marketing campaign and finally the addition of the promised retail component has filled the streets with people.

There is now a sense that “it could just be the hottest new neighbourhood in the city”. The podium gardens and the rooftops of Kayak, one of the mid-rise condominiums, though designed without the input of a future user group, has many of the attributes described that make for choice and good social interaction.

The third floor garden beautifully integrates

kids (simple play elements that allow for imagination) and adults (on the patio with moveable furniture) outside the amenity room. The design of the garden is elegant and spare.

At the same time there are choices that can be made by all users of the space. There is a sense that kids can explore the secret paths through the planting, and wonder, and learn. They can sit on the grass with a grandparent to read or have a snack or perhaps learn about the birds that are coming back to the Village. The long water feature and the urban agriculture plots together are central to the elegance of the design. So far the agriculture plots have not been used to maximum advantage.

Unlike PAL, Kayak has private patios surrounding the semi-private garden. Some are elevated above, some at the same grade. The elevated patios that are accessed by stepped bridges are a brilliant move – giving views both into the garden and out to the views beyond.

**Shannon Estate** on Granville Street, the third example, is a very different construct again. Site coverage by buildings is about one third of the ten acre site. There are therefore approximately six acres of garden and most of the roofs of the buildings are intensive or extensive green roofs. There are many choices of experience for residents and their friends to enjoy.

First discussions by the design/developer team to generate guiding principles included the



A courtyard in Vancouver's Olympic Village. Image courtesy of Jane Durante.

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notion that there be a series of contemporary garden rooms each with its own character and ambience. The idea was a reflection on and extension of the two remaining original gardens from the early 20th Century.

Now the heritage buildings – Mansion, Coach House, and Gatehouse – are being restored as luxury apartments and the placement of new

buildings is planned to retain as many of the site's many garden assets as possible, from a rose pavilion to 80 foot tall trees to heritage plantings and garden elements. The location of buildings, heritage and new together, form a series of garden rooms. Taking the cue from the heritage gardens these new spaces have their own character, each an individual

experience. All these nine garden rooms, all intensive green rooftops, and Shannon Green are designed with enough variety to promote flexible use by all ages and all residents.

There is access for the public to some of the garden rooms through a series of walkways. The added element of public access creates three distinct kinds of space each serving a different constituency, firstly semi-private space for the residents of a given building, secondly gardens to be shared by all residents, and thirdly to be shared by residents and the public alike.

In summary, the success of the social construct of designed nature to promote engagement and enjoyment as part of living in high-density housing in the city is dependent upon the willingness of many. Providing the long-term circumstance that promotes flexibility and buy-in by the residents and their governance model is critical. City bylaws and guidelines determine the form of development that promotes green space in new development but in the end it is up to the people who inhabit the buildings to make the decisions for their own social construct for engagement and enjoyment of the spaces they have to use. **SL**



The Site Plan for the Shannon Wall Centre in Vancouver. Image courtesy of Durante Kreuk Ltd.





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# Chinatown's Historic Emergent Social Spaces

By Keltly McKinnon, MBCSLA

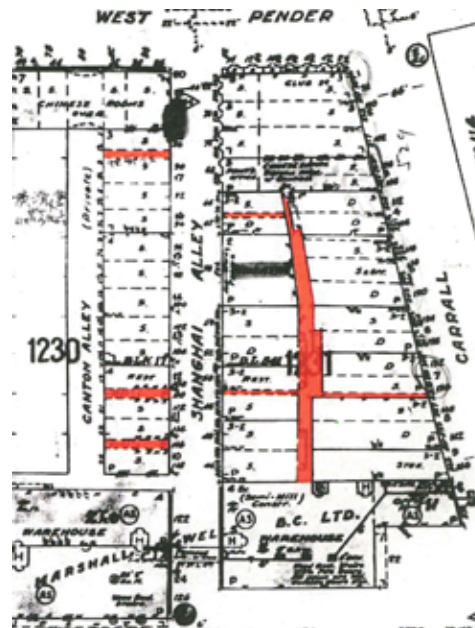


Yue Shan Courtyard.  
Image courtesy of Codrin Tabala.

Because of its ghettoized existence, space in Chinatown was at a premium. Society buildings and other residences densely housed a large number of people in very small rooms. Some reports hold that 10-20 men could be housed within one 5' x 10' room. Living in congested quarters required access to fresh air, sunlight, and spatial relief in both interior and exterior open spaces.

Chinatown's lots were long and narrow. Within these linear buildings, solar chimneys, lightwells, balconies, stairwells, and breezeways provided both environmental relief and spaces for socializing and for refuge. The environmental controls of the building were intricately tied to the social workings of the building. These interior social and environmental networks also spanned to the exterior of buildings too, forming a multi-tiered intra-block hierarchy of private to semi-public and public spaces that included courtyards, lateral and perpendicular breezeways, alleyways, and streets. The networks of communal space in Chinatown historically served to increase a sense of security, identity, and community for local residents, helping to recreate a sense of home in Canada, while maximizing real estate and frontage. Urban activity in Chinatown was intensified by the permeability between street, building, courtyard, and alley.

Vancouver's Chinatown demonstrates a historic approach to urban patterning that resulted in a rich hierarchy of interconnected public spaces unusual to Vancouver's more contemporary city fabric. After the completion of the CPR railroad, Chinese people initially living throughout Vancouver were forced, largely by racist policies, to live in one circumscribed ethnic enclave, which became known as Chinatown. After 1887, further growth in Chinatown was held in check by national legislation that limited and then denied Chinese immigration until 1947. By 1901 the population of Chinatown was approximately 2840, with most people (predominantly male workers) packed along Dupont Street (now Pender Street).



Fire insurance map showing breezeways prior to 1940. Image from the BC Fire Insurance Underwriters' Association, courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives Library.

1920, many Chinese immigrants settled into the thriving commercial and social corridors of Shanghai, Market, and Canton Alleys. These alleys were part of the efficient functioning and economic exploitation of retail investments. For example, local merchant Yip Sang invested in the development of Market Alley, which became a short cut for those going from Gastown to Vancouver's Public Market, City Hall, Public Library, and major banks along Main Street. By developing Market Alley, Yip Sang brought potential customers past Chinatown's barbers, bakeries, and laundries.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, many buildings in Chinatown, including the Society Buildings, had double frontage opening onto both Pender Street and Market Alley, or both Carrall Street and Shanghai Alley.

## ALLEYWAYS

Alleys were part of the city grid, intended for secondary services. In Chinatown they were appropriated and intensively used, creating a fine grain of vibrant nightlife, restaurants, Chinese opera and other cultural activities, stores, and tenements. Between 1890 and

## BREEZEWAYS

Occasional narrow passages between buildings in Chinatown connected internal courtyards to street and alley. These breezeways brought much-needed light into Chinatown's long linear buildings and aided in the ventilation of the courtyards. Breezeways also ran parallel to the street, creating a kind of interstitial alley between the street and the alleyway. This lateral breezeway intensified the grain of activity within the typical city block, and



Illuminated Daylighted Yue Shan Breezeway. Image courtesy of ASIR Studio.



Yue Shan Activated Courtyard. Image courtesy of ASIR Studio.

created multiple connections between indoor and outdoor spaces.

## COURTYARDS AND LIGHTWELLS

From a practical perspective, courtyards offered sensory relief from urban congestion and tight living quarters; provided an outdoor room for work, leisure, and communal gathering; and mitigated the interior microclimate by catching passing breezes, evacuating interior heat, and collecting and draining rainwater into cisterns or drainage pipes. The courtyard and lightwell create a stack effect, drawing fresh air in and evacuating moisture and warm air before it could condense on interior surfaces.

In Vancouver, Society Buildings occupying one 25' x 122' lot tended to use narrow lightwells along the sides of the building as usable space was at a premium. Some buildings give evidence of an original courtyard between two separate buildings on one lot, which was eventually filled in to join the two buildings into one. The Yue Shan Building shares one courtyard between three different buildings. This meant an increase in outdoor space for each building, but it also meant that the courtyard was no longer completely private. Uniting the interior and exterior spaces of the buildings, this intermediate space allowed

residents to mingle in a more intimate, semi-private space than out in the street or alleyway.

Technological advances, changing tastes, and social need often resulted in the disappearance or mutation of traditional forms. Since Vancouver was neither hot nor humid, courtyards were seen as expendable. Bathrooms, kitchens, or more living quarters filled some existing courtyards.

While much of Chinatown's historic urban patterning remains intact, many courtyards and breezeways have been filled in with new development. Chinatown's last remaining courtyard at the Yue Shan Society was recently opened to the public for a series of temporary events and installations. The breezeway connecting the Yue Shan Courtyard to Pender Street had been sealed off for years, but has been reopened as an outdoor gallery, while a lateral breezeway was unfortunately truncated and sealed off by the redevelopment of the Wing Sang Building.

As Vancouver's imperative for residential density continues to threaten Chinatown's fabric with the further proliferation of Vancouverism's high rise podium point tower

– we stand to lose the last remnants of a historic pattern that intricately and wondrously connected private worlds to a myriad of multifunctioning public spaces. The social infrastructure of the city should, like any effective ecology, build a stronger set of relationships and dynamics than previously planned for. Chinatown holds a model that we could do well to learn from. [SL](#)

*\*This essay is adapted from a much longer study available through CMHC:*

*Kelty McKinnon and Inge Roecker, "URBAN ACUPUNCTURE: A Methodology for the Sustainable Rehabilitation of 'Society Buildings' in Vancouver's Chinatown into Contemporary Housing". Ottawa: CMHC, 2008.*

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# Multi-Unit Residential Common Shared Spaces

## A Northern Perspective

By Jay Lazzarin, MBCSLA

**With the growth of an aging population there has been an increased demand for multi-unit residential developments in Northern BC, with higher expectations for quality common space and site amenities that will nurture the physical and mental health of residents.**

### OVERVIEW

Generally the quantity and quality of most multi-unit residential developments in Northern BC lags behind more populated areas in the Okanagan and Lower Mainland. This can be attributed to several factors: firstly, the cost of land is cheaper, making it financially viable for most families to purchase or rent single detached houses; secondly, up to the last ten years, most multi-unit residential developments have catered to lower income groups and social housing. Accordingly, limited funds and space have been allocated for the development of outdoor spaces and amenities.

It has been unusual for developers to provide adult oriented spaces and features such as outdoor barbeques, recreational walkways, areas for retreat, or even well landscaped areas for seasonal colour. Most developers' mandates have been to construct as many units as a site will permit. On the other hand, BC Housing, a major public sector developer of multi-unit residents, has a mandate to provide basic common spaces in their residential developments. This includes children's playgrounds, handicap accessible pedestrian circulation throughout the sites, site furniture such as benches, waste receptacles, and possibly picnic tables.

In a few complexes, fenced garden plots are provided and well used by tenants. Although simple in character, the fenced garden provides security with maintenance being the responsibility of each tenant. A third contributing factor to lower quality multi-unit residential outdoor spaces is the lack of municipal development bylaws and standards. In most northern communities there are few or no guidelines relating to sustainable residential development, land-

scape standards, and space development. For example, the City of Prince George, (which has more stringent multi-residential requirements than most northern Residential Garden communities) provides context to landscaping and minimum total area devoted to open space, but provides no guidelines as to the development and enhancement of the open space.

The City of Vancouver, on the other hand, provides design guidelines for high density residential open space development relating to green space safety and security, types of open space for children, teenagers and adults alike, as well as pedestrian circulation route guidelines and common indoor amenity space.

A fourth contributing factor is the "lower" standard of existing multi-residential development and thus expectations of prospective tenants and property owners. In addition, the close proximity of northern communities to the rural environment and open spaces such as municipal regional and provincial parks,

and Crown land entice residents and families to spend more recreational time in these locations rather than common shared open space within their housing development.

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Within the past ten years the greatest demand for multi-unit residential units in the north has been from our increased, aging population. With this age sector there are higher expectations as to indoor and outdoor space design.

In several unassisted housing complexes, common shared outdoor spaces have included walking trails, shared patio for group activities, landscape lighting, a higher standard of landscaping, private patios, and contracted grounds maintenance. The unassisted multi-unit residential projects that have been most popular and successful are those located adjacent to a significant land / water feature such as a river, lake, municipal nature park, or desirable view. As seniors' mobility diminishes, "private" outdoor space becomes just as valuable and coveted as private indoor space and common shared space, as the private space provides the opportunity to enjoy many activities such as container planting, meditation, reading, hosting visitors, bird feeding, and watching outdoor activities. To extend the length of seasonal use of outdoor spaces, northerners are known to enclose their private outdoor spaces with mosquito netting or glass. Some go so far as installing a heating system to develop a solarium type environment.

Several "assisted" senior housing projects are being developed in most northern communities. Like other communities, the



Westwood Court residential garden, BC Housing – Prince George, BC. All images courtesy of Jay Lazzarin.



'Gateway' Assisted Living - Prince George, BC. Features: fenced outdoor spaces provide a sense of ownership and security for tenants; opportunity for shade with installation of gazebo; accessible walking route; and raised planting beds.



'Del Haven' Unassisted Seniors Complex - Prince George, BC. Features: large private patios; well maintained landscaped grounds; walking trail; shared patio and barbecue pit on the riverbank; spectacular view of the Nechako River; and generous lawn areas.

demand exceeds the supply. We have seen the development of both private and public funded projects, with a varying degree of services, amenities, and outdoor spaces, depending on one's budget.

With extended darkness and snow covering the ground for five to six months of the year,

few multi-unit residential developments have capitalized on the opportunities to enhance winter related activities and associated spaces for tobogganing, skating rinks, clearing of recreational walkways for pedestrian circulation, and installation of ornamental landscape lighting for night viewing.

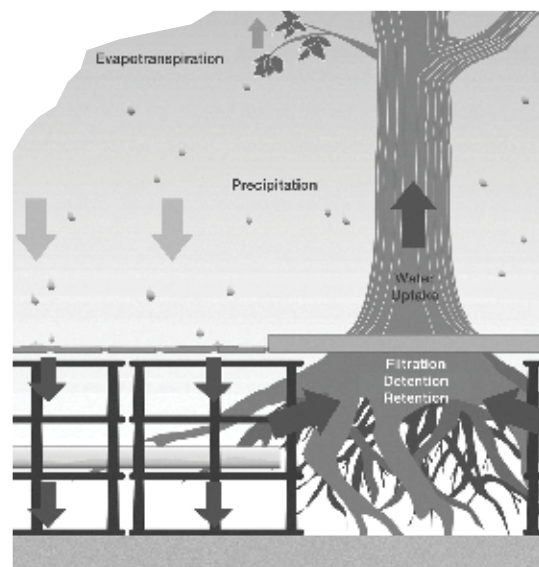
With the higher quality, senior oriented residential developments, it is anticipated that this standard will be reflected in a greater number of future multi-unit residential projects and common space development. The next challenge is to develop appealing, functional winter-oriented common spaces. **SL**



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# A Typology of Common Spaces Associated with Apartment Buildings and Townhouses

By Michael Gordon, M.Sc., MCIP

The purpose of this typology is to provide designers with insight into how the design of common spaces associated with apartment buildings and townhouses could be improved to encourage residents to know one another better by providing opportunities for socializing as well as pursuing a wider array of activities in these common spaces.

The typology is organized around three types of spaces:

1) **Corridors:** A hallway, passageway, or arcade that is providing access to homes and work spaces.

2) **Open Shared Common Spaces – At-Grade:** Shared spaces at-grade, where sometimes the ground plane is paved, landscaped or grassed, or includes water features, most of it is open to the sky, and it is completely or partially enclosed by walls or buildings. It can also include yards, display and vegetable gardens.

3) **Open Shared Common Spaces – Above-Grade:** A similar quality and type of common space can be provided “above-grade” and can include terraces or in cases where it is enclosed by one or more walls, courtyards. These spaces often provide the same array of activities/elements as at-grade spaces.

## Illustrations



Townhouses - An at-grade access corridor becomes a usable courtyard. This courtyard (building face to building face) is approximately 7 metres wide, the walkway is approximately 2.4 metres wide, and the remaining areas are used for patios for each adjoining home. The walkway was well used for children’s play and the neighbours were often socializing and sharing spaces.



High rise apartment building and townhouses: Common Space – above-grade – courtyard. This is a good example of a space that is primarily a visual amenity, offering very limited areas for gatherings of residents and a narrow variety of activities possible in the courtyard. This is a relatively large courtyard with dimensions of approximately 33m x 67m.



Yaletown high rise buildings with townhouses. (1) This is the above-grade terrace described in the introduction of this issue. Notice the large open area and the landscaping on the periphery of the space. (2) An example of an above-grade space that is solely a visual amenity and providing access between buildings. (3) This is a larger open space, with some landscaping, well positioned to receive sun for most of the day. (4) Large roof-top terraced areas with opportunities for shared use and lots of sunshine.

All images courtesy of City of Vancouver.

TYPES	LANDSCAPING AND GARDEN ELEMENTS	GATHERING AREAS FOR SOCIALIZING	FACILITIES FOR CHILDREN'S PLAY	LOCATION	ROLE OF PATHWAYS	SUGGESTED DESIGN ELEMENTS TO ENCOURAGED GREATER USE OF A SPACE
Corridor: completely enclosed	N/A	Generally not provided	Possible, but generally not provided	In the interior of a building	Primarily access and movement	Provide wider areas with seating allowing for socializing ■ Access to sun
Corridor: promenade, open to the air on at least on side	Landscaping possible, due to access to natural light	Generally not provided ■ Opportunities to speak to those outside or below the corridor	Generally not provided	Extends along the wall of a building and supported by arches or columns on the outer side	Primarily access and movement	Wider areas with seating allowing for socializing ■ Access to sun
Open Shared Common Spaces at/or above-grade: primarily a Visual Amenity	Primarily landscaped and/or grass ■ Can include a water feature	Not encouraged ■ Seating designed for one or two people; seating areas usually not organized to encourage groups of people to gather	Possible and if provided, small and of limited appeal to children	Front yards are the most common example ■ Could be an above-grade courtyard	Role of paths is for access to and from space or adjacent homes and to view visual amenity	Seating provided in some areas for a gathering of more than two people ■ Front set of steps to a home can be used for seating ■ Access to sun
Open Shared Common Spaces at/or above-grade: Visual Amenity plus some facilities for activities	Significant landscaped areas ■ Can include water features	Seating provided in some areas for a gathering of more than two people ■ Can include such elements as tables and chairs, a barbeque ■ Can include an adjacent amenity room with kitchen facilities, entertainment centre and other facilities	Larger play areas for children area possible as well as adjacent area for parents to watch and/or socialize ■ Key element that can discourage children's play is the fencing of yards into small spaces i.e. children like to run across a larger area than a small space	At-grade or above-grade	Role of paths is for access to and from space or adjacent homes, to gathering areas and in some locations for socializing	Seating provided in some areas for a gathering of more than two people ■ Movable seating and tables enhances and encourages use; Curved benches and groupings of fixed seats can achieve the same purpose ■ Access to sun
Open Shared Common Spaces at/or above-grade: Visual Amenity plus facilities for a significant variety of activities	Some landscape areas; the larger the space the more opportunities for landscaping	Seating provided in some areas for a gathering of more than two people ■ Can include such elements as tables and chairs, a barbeque ■ Can include an adjacent amenity room with kitchen facilities, entertainment centre and other facilities ■ Can include space for dog runs	Larger children's play area plus an open area that can be informally programmed by children and parents	At-grade or above-grade	Pathways often not designated providing more opportunities for those in the space to walk where they want to	Open areas large enough for a variety of informally programmed activities ■ Seating provided in some areas for a gathering of more than two people ■ A barbeque ■ An area adjacent to the dog area for socializing ■ Access to sun
Open Shared Common Spaces at/or above-grade: Very well-used space; limited landscaping	Primarily hardscape or grassed; the larger the space the more opportunities for landscaping ■ Landscaping best located on the fringes of the space to maximize the areas for use	Opportunities for gathering spaces ■ Common kitchens or outdoor barbeque and eating areas encourages greater use	Larger children's play area plus an open area that can be informally programmed by children and parents	At-grade or above-grade	Pathways often not designated providing more opportunities for those in the space to walk where they want to	Open areas large enough for a variety of informally programmed activities ■ Seating provided in some areas for a gathering of more than two people ■ A barbeque ■ An area adjacent to the dog area for socializing ■ Access to sun
Open Shared Common Spaces at/or above-grade: Functionally-focused — urban agriculture	Usually raised a number of garden beds ■ Good sunlight access a must	Opportunities for gathering spaces adjacent to the gardens ■ Common kitchens or outdoor barbeque and eating areas encourages greater use	Adjacent play area worthwhile for parents who are gardeners	At-grade or above-grade	Pathways provided between garden plots	Seating provided in some areas for a gathering of more than two people ■ A barbeque

## Continuums and a Typology of Common Spaces

The following continuums for the attributes of shared common spaces assisted me in preparing the typology. For example, I considered those spaces that were at one end of the continuum being: (1) spaces primarily providing for movement, access, and/or a visual amenity or spaces that are highly segmented or “divided up” and thus

limiting the array of activity; to at other end of the continuum being (2) those spaces that emphasize opportunities for people gathering and accommodating a broader variety of activities. Spaces sometimes can be identified as being at either ends of a continuum or somewhere in the middle. <sup>51</sup>



# Urban Agriculture

## IN MID TO HIGH DENSITY HOUSING

By Jennifer Stamp, MBCSLA

**In a trend where cities are becoming increasingly dense they are also becoming more livable. Contributing to that livability, rooftop gardens are being integrated into mid to high-density housing to create places for residents to get to know their neighbours and help form the building blocks of community. Charged with the design of these rooftop gardens, landscape architects play a key role in the creation and success of these spaces.**

Good programming affords residents living in mid to high-density developments outdoor spaces to get outside and enjoy, similar to those spaces found in the back yards of single-family homes. Using a simple palette of shade trees, lush colorful planting beds, lawn areas, places for children to play, urban agriculture, and gathering spaces with places for people to sit, these spaces come to life. Whether individual plots or mass planting for common harvest, urban agriculture is successfully being integrated into an increasing number of rooftop gardens.

### GUIDELINE HISTORY

In 2009 the City of Vancouver adopted the “Urban Agriculture Guidelines for the Private Realm” as a means to encourage social interaction on roof gardens, while promoting local food production and reducing the “distance to plate.” The Guidelines outline best practices and provide direction on design considerations when incorporating garden plots into common open spaces. They provide advice on siting and access, garden plots and associated support facilities, co-locating with other amenities, as well as direction on the number and size of garden plots. The installation of each new project with urban agriculture integrated into a rooftop garden brings the opportunity to continue the ongoing evaluation process and further refine best practices.



Urban agriculture in an above-grade courtyard in Vancouver's Olympic Village. All images courtesy of Jennifer Stamp.

### GENERAL

For urban agriculture to function well, consideration of sunlight, soil depth, access, location, and support facilities are crucial. Garden plots should be located on a rooftop with common, barrier free access in an area that receives a minimum of 6 hours of direct sunlight daily. When locating urban agriculture, consider its visual impact and the proximity of adjacent complimentary or competing uses. For example, locating garden plots next to or within visual range of the children's play area will allow parents to keep an eye on children while they get their hands dirty. While many of us love the character of garden plots there are some that find them messy to look at. Such concerns are easily addressed by installing hedgerows or decorative fences to frame and visually organize the plots.

### EDIBLE LANDSCAPE

Although the natural tendency may be to limit urban agriculture to herb gardens and typical crops in garden plots, the inclusion of fruit trees, mass plantings of raspberry canes, strawberries, blueberries, or other edible plants into a landscape design can create a dynamic courtyard space for all the residents to harvest. Locating these plants next to high traffic areas will allow them to be casually eaten, similar to foraging in one's own backyard garden.





Access to good sunlight is, of course, essential for urban agriculture. Here is a garden in an at-grade courtyard.



An edible landscape – garden plots on a terrace in Vancouver's Olympic Village.

## TECHNICAL

If they exist, start with the guidelines for the region you are considering urban agriculture and understand how many plots should be incorporated. For example, the City of Vancouver requires that 2.2m<sup>2</sup> (24 sq. ft.) of 450mm (18") deep garden plot be provided for 30 percent of the units in a development that do not have a patio over 9.3m<sup>2</sup> (100sq. ft.). A portion of the plots should be universally accessible, which can be easily achieved through the use of raised planters and consideration of circulation routes. Tool storage is a must. As little as a 1.2m x 2.4m (4' x 8') enclosure with double doors will provide ample space and access for shovels, hoses, and a wheelbarrow to prevent dirty tools being taken through the hallways and the associated maintenance. Enclosures can be either free standing or incorporated into the building exterior or exit stair to become an integral part of the design. Hose bibs should be provided at frequent intervals, based on the length of a typical garden hose. Multiple compost bins should be provided, in locations that minimize conflict, along with clear rules of use to prevent contamination. A potting bench should be provided as a free clear area to pot up plants and manage soil. If space allows, inclusion of cold frames will allow avid gardeners to get a head start in the spring.

## SUNLIGHT

While urban agriculture is best located where it can maximize access to the summer sun, the reality is that landscape architects often cannot influence this. In an urban setting, building massing and form is often an exercise driven by context and relationship to adjacent towers and buildings. In projects where the common open space is in shade for most of the day, urban agriculture is less about food production and more about the opportunity for residents to get their hands dirty and encourage social interaction between residents. In an effort to work around some of these challenges, the City has allowed elevators to punch through height restrictions in some cases to provide barrier free access to sunny rooftops for all residents to enjoy.

## CONSIDERATIONS

When designing urban agriculture into a rooftop garden, consideration should be given to the time of year a project is completed. After occupancy, it may take many months for a strata council to form and garden plots adopted. Installing temporary planting prevents the fallow soil from becoming an unsightly weed patch and maintenance burden. Pick plants that are drought tolerant, not self-seeding or invasive, and are easily removed when a plot is adopted. The Guideline provides a list of plants to consider for the Vancouver area.

Also consider compartmentalizing the plots so that temporary planting can be removed with the adoption of each plot.

## CAUTIONS

Although one of the underlying motivations for garden plots in the built environment is sustainability, surprisingly, they can negatively impact a LEED® scorecard. Gardeners like to control the amount of water their plants receive. Because of this, plots are designed to be hand watered in lieu of using a high efficiency automatic irrigation system. Under LEED® NC 2009, the use of potable water makes it challenging to meet the Water Efficiency credit 1, as potable water for garden plot irrigation cannot be excluded from the calculations. Collected stormwater may be used, but the challenges of bringing it up to potable quality as regulated by Health Authorities makes it a non starter.

## SUMMARY

By carefully considering a few key elements, urban agriculture can be successfully integrated into our rooftop gardens, adding a powerful community-building tool to our rapidly urbanizing environments. For further reading see the City of Vancouver's website:

<http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/urban-agriculture> **SL**



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