

OCTOBER 2014

# SITELINES

Landscape Architecture in British Columbia



## WHAT'S UP WHISTLER!?

A Landscape Architect's Life in Whistler | A View from Whistler | Just Another Day in Paradise  
Designing our own Adventures | Squamish Planning | Shifting Focus – Public Sector Landscape Architecture



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450–355 Burrard St. Vancouver, BC V6C 2G8

T 604.682.5610

E office@bcsla.org  
admin@bcsla.org

F 604.681.3394

TF 855.682.5610  
(Canada and US)

W www.bcsla.org  
www.sitelines.org

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#### SITELINES GROUP

GUEST CO-EDITOR Laurelin Svisdahl

CO-EDITOR Jessica Tan  
604.682.5610

ADVERTISING Tara Culham  
604.682.5610  
fax: 604.681.3394

GRAPHIC DESIGN Addon Creative  
604.738.2768

PRINTING Initial Printing Inc.  
604.669.2383

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# What's Up Whistler!?

By Laurelin Svisdahl, MBCSLA,  
Whistler/Squamish Chapter Rep.



Construction of Whistler Athlete Commons Park – 2009. Image courtesy of Tom Barratt Ltd.

**Over the past decade I've been working at a landscape architecture office in Whistler, BC.** I have to say that it sure has been an exciting time; after all, with the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games coming to your little town, how could it not have been!

One of the things I have really loved about living and working in Whistler is enjoying a little bit of vacation time, almost everyday. I think most of my colleagues here would agree that working in a high profile, resort setting is a real lifestyle choice! Being able to go for a lunch time mountain bike ride or hop on the gondola for fresh ski tracks, if it pleases you, or to enjoy a world class cross-country ski facility for your morning workout, well, that's not half bad. One thing for sure if you don't mind missing out on the city hustle and bustle is that if you love outdoor wilderness, mountain culture, lots of snow, extreme sports, and of course, bears, it's pretty great here!

Whistler is a special place. This little mountain oasis has grown from a hippy ski bum town to become the famous Whistler Village—a major, four season, multi-million dollar resort/tourism machine—and landscape architects have played a big part of its success. As it has ▶



Cover Image: Work and Play.  
Image courtesy of Tom Barratt.

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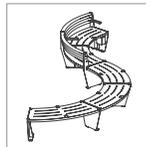
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grown, Whistler has for the most part, kept a natural, wild, unspoiled feel while incorporating amenities and luxuries for urban dwellers to visit, feel safe, comfortable, and entertained. It's cool to see how the early vision and foresight put in motion starting back with Eldon Beck and offices like Don Vaughan, LMBCSLA, FCSLA, FASLA, have shaped the evolution of this place. A big part of Whistler's appeal is undeniably its charming landscape character. It's been the work of so many talented landscape architects over the years who have lead and continue to lead the design of the Village. In moving forward, it will be interesting to see if the Village can continue to grow and stay fresh, popular, and exciting while maintaining its naturalistic roots. Whistler definitely set some trends followed by many other resort communities, but will it continue to be a trend setter or will future developments and renovations just be "re-Whistlerized"? Judging by some of the recent renovations and newer developments such as the Audain Art Museum, Whistler Olympic Plaza, and the Athletes' Village, we seem to be going in a great direction!

So, when I was asked to be guest editor for this October issue of SITELINES with a theme

about practicing as a landscape architect in Whistler, I wanted to do something that would be both entertaining and informative, but nothing too heavy or technical.

We are a pretty small group of LAs up here in Whistler, barely a dozen of us, which makes for a pretty small Christmas party. On the other hand, for one small mountain town, that is actually quite a few; it seems we all stay pretty busy and for the most part, we don't step on each other's toes too much. The wonderful world of technology has afforded us the luxury of working on projects of all sizes, far and wide, while we live and play in our mountain Shangri-La. The dress code in meetings often includes ski gear, hiking boots, or even a splattering of mud from an epic downhill mountain bike ride earlier that morning, but we can still dress up in designer suits, slick urban wear, or heels and feel right at home. The big city, after all, is less than a two hour drive.

Now that the 2010 Games have come and gone, I bet you're all dying to know what those Whistler (ski bum) landscape architects have been up to. I've asked a few of my colleagues both in private practice and with the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) to help give you all a glimpse into

life in Whistler as a landscape architect. It's not all ski vacation / party times up here you know... A typical project comes with challenges and opportunities, both familiar to many of us as well as particular to the community. Tom Barratt, MBCSLA, of Tom Barratt Ltd., a long time LA professional in Whistler, provides a list of many of the kinds of problems we have and continue to face as he describes some interesting projects he has worked on. Crosland Doak, MBCSLA, of Crosland Doak Design has also been helping to shape the Whistler landscape. Crosland describes the kind of exhilarating mix of work and play that is the Whistler condition. Annie Millar, BCSLA Intern at Tom Barratt Ltd. gives us a glimpse into what's up in the little Village of Pemberton and some ideas on greener living. Finally, Kristina Salin, with the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District, Elaine Naisby, MBCSLA at the District of Squamish, and Kevin McFarland, MBCSLA of the Resort Municipality of Whistler, tells us about life in the public sector... What lessons have we learned over the years; what kinds of projects are we working on; and, where is Whistler headed? As Tom Barratt suggests in his closing, you should just visit us and see for yourself. **SL**

# A Landscape Architect's Life in Whistler It ain't all skiing

By Tom Barratt, MBCSLA

**At the heart of it all, landscape architecture is interesting in all places that each have their own quirks, but in Whistler with all the skiing and riding aside, we do have challenges.** It is not an easy place with all of the freeze thaw happening, the drought and rain—it is tough. Can you imagine life without Rhododendrons, Laurels, cherry trees, and not even evergreen ivy? Then having snow plows blasting out everything you plant? Sometimes you can't even screen things and after a while you forget all those great plants you learned at school.

With barely any plants to use, along comes the bear group saying you can't use things like kinnickinnick and any other berries except for, like, maybe juniper... which looks great in Kamloops or Cache Creek but not here in Whistler, and the fire chief doesn't like them anyway. We just can't win.

Like I say, we got it tough in Whistler.

With harsh conditions and an aging Village, parts of Whistler are not looking real great these days. Back in Whistler's early years it was a major win to make sure we had real stone on all the planters that caught the snow



Busy winter crowds fill Skier's Plaza and patios at the base of Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains.

dump. It seems now all we do is fix up and re-do what was done years before. The place is not as new and unique as it was. ►

Now we have so much of the same thing, visitors get lost in the repetition. In Venice you can marvel that around every corner is a surprise, something different. In Whistler, it is all the same around every corner and so people get lost.

Whistler opened with a lot of fanfare and marvelling over resort quality, a walkable village, and the important role the landscape architects played. We still talk about it and rest on our laurels.

It is easy to be facetious now, but in the eighties when Whistler was coming out of bankruptcy, there was tremendous economic and political pressure (“we need to do something!”) to compromise on Village Phase 1 Guidelines quality—such as using real rock over “faux rock”. It was the efforts of a handful of planners and staff landscape architects that held the line under difficult circumstance and managed to retain quality and consistency in Whistler.

But hey, hands up everyone who is tired of hearing “mountain landscape” and “bringing

the mountain down to the Village”? With that we ended up with a ton of conifer trees filling up projects and no one can see out of the trees that are overwhelming the buildings. We have a tiny hydro kiosk hidden among towering cedars and you start to feel sorry for the person living in the dark unit behind.

Sometimes you walk around and wonder “OMG, who did that”? Then you realize: “Oh I think that was me”.

When your work load becomes 30% to 50% fixing up and re-doing projects, it forces you to take a close look at all the problems. Everybody else can walk by, trampling plants under ski boots and jamming skis and snowboards into your new planter without a care, but we have to scrutinize, examine, and try to fix the disasters and issues of a worn out old Village.

It is all the deteriorating concrete, rusting rebar, uncared for planters, overgrown trees, broken stair lights, decrepit building edges, and flaking pavers—normal things everywhere, but particularly prevalent with our harsh conditions. It seems overwhelming at times.

What causes it besides harsh conditions? Yes the harsh conditions, but not really. The bigger issue becomes one of lack of maintenance. Who is supposed to be doing all that maintenance? We know what the Municipality does maintain—it is clear as day what they work on.

The problem seems to be all the private properties. You know all those “condo hotels” and all the strata set-ups in Whistler? They really don’t do much else except complain. If a hotel operator wants to take out some over grown trees, make some improvements, they will take five years to get resident owners to actually agree to spend money on the landscape areas and common property outside their personal unit. I am sure anyone who has had the pleasure to work with a strata understands this frustration. With so many separate unit owners involved in a project, even a name-brand hotel operator gets nothing done. So you tend to get ongoing general deterioration over time that gets worse and worse in some areas. It is a model that seems



**Far Left:** Snapshot of Whistler Village in its very early days.  
**Left:** Tom Barratt while working for Don Vaughan’s office, helps layout the model of Whistler Village.  
**Below Left:** Rendering of the new Athletes’ Village landscape — Core commercial area and commons, Legacy Park. **Below Right:** Visitors enjoying the public art piece at Black’s patio — *The Source* by Robert Studer.





**Top Left:** Marketplace Whistler Stroll. **Top Centre:** View from construction this summer at the Audain Art Museum in Whistler. **Above:** Black's patio at the edge to Skier's Plaza in Whistler Village. **Above Left:** A look from inside the Audain Art Museum during construction. All images courtesy of Tom Barratt Ltd.

to have some real drawbacks. The problem is the whole of Whistler Village is made up of these properties.

Don't get me wrong though, there are some rays of light and progress and some property owners who do "get it". Take the building where Black's Pub & Restaurant is located. The owners of the building completely revamped their patio on a whole end of the building facing Skier's Plaza. It had an element of public art done by Robert Studer and even won a CSLA award—all of this because one owner who saw the value of it. Currently, the patios at Carleton Lodge, Longhorn Saloon & Grill, and Whistler Blackcomb Skier's Plaza are undergoing an upgrade (or complete remake). That one was a long time coming and it took a lot of convincing to get the strata group to agree. Construction was going great...until Longhorn and the Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains disagreed on a 42" of patio expansion and shut the job down until the forms were moved back.

Whistler and Blackcomb were adamant about no public art expense. Interestingly though, when Black Pub's patio opened, waiting staff counted 200 people who approached the patio and art piece with over 60 of them taking pictures of it. Now that is 200 people who are not approaching the other patios in the main Village area. Not that they aren't busy.

Longhorn's patio was open during construction. I don't think I've ever seen a patio open in the middle of construction on the gravel surface and rough concrete wall without stone—but at \$1,000.00 a table per day during the popular Whistler Tough Mudder event, you would open too. It certainly did not make for the fastest construction schedule, moving paver piles in and out each day and working around crowded tables, but they were smart enough to give beer to the workers at end of day. I missed out on that one. Yep, our life is tough here. You learn it pays to visit some sites right at the end of the day.

The Resort Municipality of Whistler has some good leadership from their LAs and they are doing some things that are actually pretty good. They are working on signs to help everyone see where they are going—it is called "wayfinding".

Of course the new Audain Art Museum is cool, with a quality building and a fresh style. This is a good thing. There seems to be some actual cultural progression in this party town.

And yes, the 2010 Games brought some renewal and some real cool things too, but if you think VANOC was not cheap on landscape, think again. Down at the Athletes' Center, the landscape budget for town houses, the High Performance Centre, and

the Lodge was cut by two thirds. They did not have to live with it afterwards; the Municipality doesn't either—a lost child with no client at the time.

After the Games, a sports legacy person asked, "What happened, why isn't the path paved to the Paralympic storage area?"... and you begin to realize again that the "we'll do it later" approach does not happen.

I suppose the other frustrating thing up here and I'm sure many other places see this too, is the same mistakes keep getting made again and again. They do not allow the budgets to install better, sturdier landscape like the quality of New York City parks and streets with granite curbs with their outstanding craftsmanship. It is like New York City learned the hard way to do it right the first time. That lesson has not quite sunk in around here.

At the upcoming 2015 BCSLA Conference in Whistler, I'm sure you'll hear all about the strides Whistler has made—and they are significant. But take a closer look as you walk around; sometimes the most interesting story is what is being done under difficult conditions. We hope to tell you interesting stories when you come and definitely check out some of our favourite new patios. **sl**

# A View from Whistler

By Crosland Doak, MBCSLA, ASLA, BLA, BARCH

**Working as a landscape architect and building designer in Whistler for the past 10 years has been an incredibly rewarding professional and personal experience.**

I found myself on a one year sabbatical from my Victoria practice in 2004 and now 10 years later, Whistler is the tether point for a rather diverse and sometimes random professional practice. Oddly enough, this is a common theme for many Whistler professionals as the lure to Whistler comes with a hook. Perhaps there is a professional sacrifice to working away from an urban and economic centre but the personal lifestyle benefits are that hook, the envy of many. As a University of Oregon grad 30 years ago, my professional practice began in the tropical resorts of Hawaii and the Pacific Basin. The exotic character of resort communities has led my practice and my family on to Victoria and now Whistler.

A typical day begins with the morning commute where a group of riders meet at Mountain Square at 6:15 am for a grueling

ride up to the mountain's mid-station, followed by an adrenaline-filled descent through the bike park, long before its opening. By 8:00am we are coffee'd, showered, and at our desks for a more typical day. The winter version, on days with more than 20cms of new snow, start pretty much the same.

Over the past 10 years I have worked on a variety of landscape architecture and building designs, including:

- Athletes' Village - the now thriving resident community of Cheakamus.
- Tyax Wilderness Resort & Spa — a summer and winter heli-ski resort.
- The Hill Academy Private School — new campus plan.
- Many private gardens and homes from Ontario to Maui.

With degrees in Architecture and Landscape Architecture I find myself working a serpentine line between the two professions. The hazard of being a generalist is, you never become a specialist; however, the benefit of being a generalist is you never have to specialize. **SL**



**Top to Bottom:** Alpine Residence in Whistler, BC, 2009. House and landscape design — A modern approach to the mountain dwelling. Alpine Residence in Whistler, BC, 2009. / Hill Academy Proposed Campus Plan, Pemberton, BC, 2014. Campus Planning and programming for a new residential private school. / Whistler Residence, 2014. Landscape Design — A Vectorworks study model of a cliff top terrace design. / Athlete's Village Townhouses, Whistler, BC, 2009. Architecture and Landscape — Project Manager with Murdoch & Company Architecture. / Tyax Wilderness Resort, 2012. Site planning and pool design. Architectural Renovation 2009 — Project Manager with Murdoch & Company Architecture. All images courtesy of Crosland Doak.

JUST  
ANOTHER  
DAY IN

# Paradise

By Kristina Salin, RPP, MCIP, BLA, MTA



**Top to Bottom:** Open House banner for the SLRD Area B Agricultural Plan. / Photos and sketches from the 2014 Pemberton Music Festival. / "Build Out" for 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. All images courtesy of Kristina Salin.

I have had the opportunity to work in a wide variety of landscape architecture and planning capacities while living in Whistler. When I first arrived in town in 1997, I worked in mountain resort planning for a leading international resort planning company and being an avid skier this was a dream come true! It's not easy living in a mountain resort town where growing seasons are so short and at the height of the ski season, locals represent only 10% of the population, but it has its obvious rewards and benefits as well. Over the years I have taken full advantage of the 30cm rule (you will have to ask a local about that one!) and have been known to sneak out for a bike ride or yoga class at lunch. This is partly why we live here, to achieve that elusive "work-life balance".

I was momentarily pulled away from this mountain playground for an exciting work and life opportunity that I thought would last a year or so, (which ended up lasting five years!) during which time I was able to work with some leading landscape architects in Boston, Massachusetts on award winning designs and take part in many events at the Harvard School of Design. In hindsight, this urban stint was a life changing interlude where I not only had the privilege of working with some incredible mentors but also met my soul mate who I eventually lured back to Whistler and married.

On my return to Whistler in 2004, I began a career in public service with the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) and became a Registered Professional Planner (RPP). I have focussed my career in planning since 2005 and worked as a RPP for both the RMOW and Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD) in many varied capacities. Some projects include development and

rezoning applications like the Cheakamus Crossing neighbourhood, Scandinave Spa Whistler, and Riverside Campground expansion at RMOW, and managing the Regional Growth Strategy, Integrated Sustainability Plan, and Agricultural Planning for the SLRD.

When the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games came to town I was determined to have a front row seat and presented a portfolio of skills and experience that lent myself particularly well to project management for VANOC. As Mountain Overlay Manager, I managed the design, implementation, and tear down of multiple mountain venues for the Games including the transformation of the Whistler Conference Centre in the heart of Whistler Village into the Mountain Media Centre.

Most recently I have been doing some fun private landscape design projects and consulting to individuals, local and regional governments and other organizations for development planning, policy planning, and strategic planning. This past summer I did some landscape/art installations with the Pemberton Music Festival and am currently working on a local residence, an innovative and Canadian-made "green" modular design hobby farm in Pemberton, BC.

In closing, I am still working very hard at that "work-life balance" I originally moved to Whistler to enjoy. It took the birth of my twin boys (now three and a half) to make me slow down enough to smell the roses (not that any will grow up here), so it would be more apt to say we are jumping in mud puddles, hitting the pump track on our run bikes, marveling over alpine cloud formations, or climbing to the highest rung of the jungle gym to hang out... and wait for snow. You should see them skiing already! **SL**

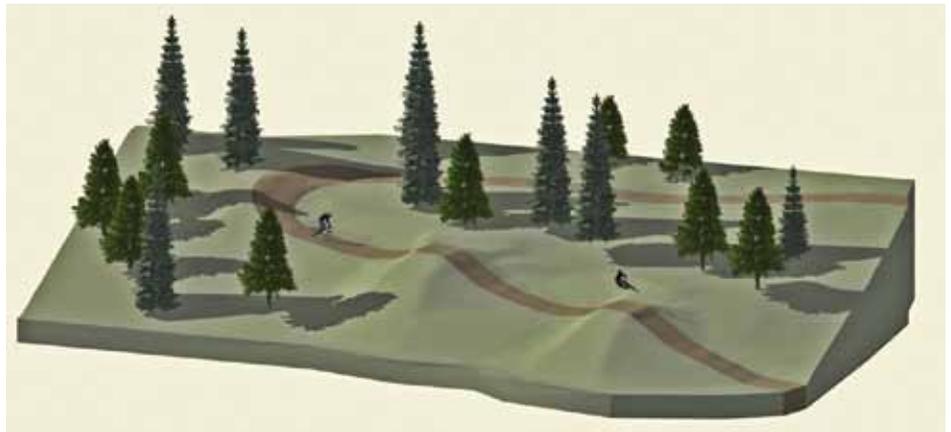
# Designing our own ADVENTURES

By Annie Millar, BCSLA Intern

**Just like almost every Ontario native, my love for the great outdoors led me to the West Coast. I've been living here for seven years now and have had some of the most amazing adventures.**

I got the opportunity to work in downtown Vancouver for a leading landscape architectural firm where I learned the designer ropes and had the opportunity to work with a great team. I returned to school and got a diploma in Outdoor Recreation Management. This course taught me everything from being a great leader in the backcountry, to how to run a small company. Recreation management and my handsome partner in crime led me deeper into the mountains and to Pemberton, BC, where I became a trail designer working for a bike park design/build company. While working there I had the opportunity to work on more than 20 bike parks all across North America. Not only was this job exciting, it was FUN! I got to share my passion for outdoor recreation and wellness with others by creating fun, useable spaces that engage all members of the community and promote a healthy lifestyle. Recently I've been working in Whistler for a small, very talented LA firm that I worked for as a student and am feeling right at home.

Whistler's development has slowed in the recent years and it's becoming a bit of old news. Pemberton, its neighbouring farm-town to the north is finally beginning to flourish, largely due to Whistler's success. Pemberton is the new outdoor recreational go-to. This luscious, fertile valley is home to



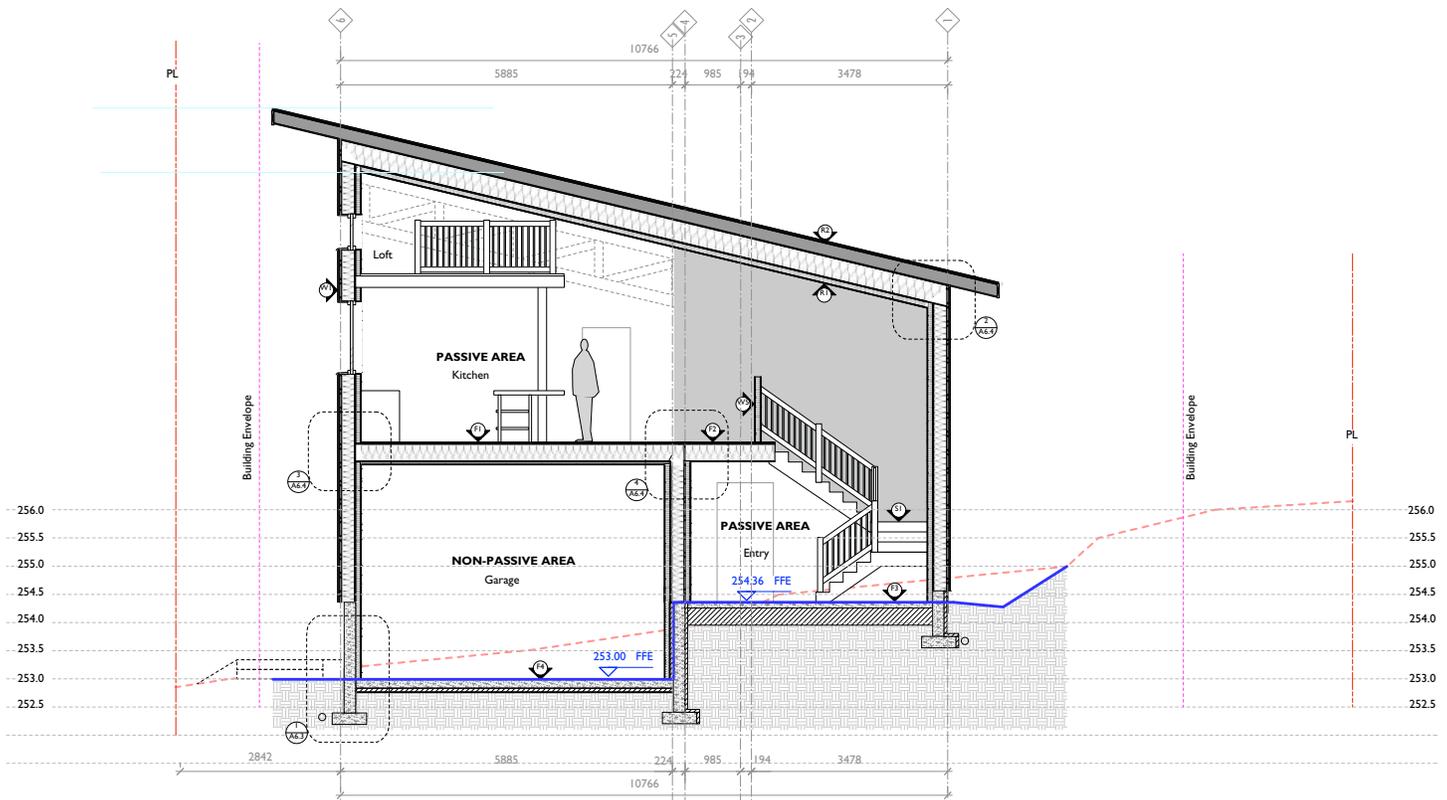
dozens of organic farms growing everything from fruits and vegetables, to hops, to different tea varieties. We have an organic distillery that uses produce from our valley to create some award winning spirits. There are endless trail networks and backcountry cabins—no need to stand in mammoth Whistler line-ups on powder days, just skin up one of the skidder roads with a couple close friends into the quiet mountains.

Pemberton also has some exciting new developments. There's a beautiful new timber-framed barn that's become a focal point for the community. Built entirely through grants, volunteers, and donations, this new BMX bike track has become the recreational hub of the town where on a Wednesday night, tons of families flock to participate in the races. The Village has also recently purchased some agricultural land downtown with opportunities ranging from community orchards, bee apiaries, a community kitchen, and even permaculture for all to enjoy. Pemberton is also home to the new BC Passive House factory, which

has become the focal point of my latest adventure: designing and building Pemberton's first passive house (or passivhaus in German). Of course this adventure isn't happening by myself, but with the help of my trusty life-partner-builder-timber-framer extraordinaire (who happens to work for BC Passive House).

The principles of passivhaus design are not new technology. They are based on simple, proven concepts that have been established in Europe for quite some time now and are standard building code practice in many German and Austrian cities. Of course it's relatively new to North America, but I believe it's the future here too.

Passivhauses are ultra-low energy buildings that are super-insulated and discourage reliance on mechanical systems for heating and cooling. They instead utilize site inventory/ analysis and naturally occurring phenomenon such as the sun, wind, and orientation to create an ideal microclimate that improves the comfort and quality of



the interior environment while helping to reduce or eliminate utility bills. Building siting and site optimization is where I think landscape architects have a lot to contribute—being able to work with what you have to create an ideal microclimate leading to improved comfort and quality of the outdoor environment.

The building envelope is typically made of pre-fabricated panels that are built in the factory to ensure quality control and avoid battling inclement weather. The process is heavier on the front-end of design as every panel needs its own individual shop drawing but leads to a much quicker assembly (you can go from a foundation to an erected house in literally two days). Panels are built and framed on a hydraulic framing table and wood is cut with some of the slickest looking saws you’ve ever seen, imported straight from Germany. The panels are about 300mm thick and are pre-insulated with cellulose fibre that is blown into each cavity at a perfect consistency. Panels are sheathed with a “Goretex®-like” ▶

**Page left:** 3D Trail Communication for Gravity Logic. **Top:** East section of our future Passivhaus.

**Right:** BC Passive House’s factory in the Pemberton Industrial Park.

**Below:** Pemberton’s new community barn. **Below right:** Rough grading of our lot in the Pemberton Benchlands. All images courtesy of Annie Millar.



Continued from page 11.

layer that's totally breathable so moisture is wicked away on the outside but can escape from the inside. Panels are labelled and head to the site on a big truck where a crane picks them up and places them in their final resting place like giant Lego® blocks. Mechanical systems for our house include an air-to-water heat pump that uses solar radiation to heat water that is circulated through the house and emitted. A heat recovery ventilator constantly circulates fresh air throughout the house for nearly perfect climate control. A "cold roof" that is separate from the envelope protects the exterior walls and minimizes solar gain in the hot months and maximizes it in the cooler months.

Many of the existing passivhauses in Whistler are all on a very non-affordable scale—giant, second-homes for most people. It's important to me to show people that you can build a small, pre-fabricated, super energy efficient home—affordably. I recently completed the "My Ecological Footprint Quiz" online and found out that if everyone in the world lived the same lifestyle as me, we would need 4.32 Earths to sustain ourselves (the global average of 5.68). That's including buying local produce and growing some of my own food, biking most places, composting, and all those "eco-green" things that make us feel good on a daily basis. Every Canadian lives outside of his or her needs and it's important to remind ourselves everyday that less, really is more. The more space you have in your house, the more "stuff" you will acquire; the fewer bathrooms you have, the less you have to clean on a Saturday morning, and the more time you have to go on that epic bike ride. As designers of the environment we should be setting the bar and leading the trend towards a more responsible, energy conscious future.

We've just recently got a building permit and are starting our foundation in October. If you're ever in Pemberton, feel free to stop in at the BC Passive House shop, they'd be more than thrilled to give you a tour! **SL**



# Squamish PLANNING

By Elaine Naisby, MBCSLA,  
Candidate RPP MCIP, Planner,  
District of Squamish

**A 2014 SNAPSHOT**

**I made a move to Squamish and the public sector with the Squamish Planning department in 2010 after ten years working in the private sector as a landscape architect in California and Vancouver.**

Squamish is an exciting place to work as a planner and landscape architect. On a day-to-day basis we're dealing with floodplain planning, industrial vs. tourism values, an unprecedented baby boom, and trying to grow the economy for a working population that is split between entrepreneurs making their way at home vs. commuters driving to the city or Whistler.

Squamish is largely located in a hazard floodplain, with five rivers in the area and the ocean on our doorstep. River flooding and sea level rise risk means we are looking again at our dike and flood construction level planning with an updated Flood Hazard Management Plan project. Flood-

plain risk coupled with a high water table means there's no underground parking or habitable space on the ground floor, with implications for the streetscape and public realm.

From a growth management perspective, Squamish with a population of 18,000 is not the epitome of smart growth and compact community planning—yet. The highway cuts the community in half, with neighbourhoods spread out along the highway spine. We're working on bike paths, but the car (and in Squamish this generally means the truck) is still king. Our OCP favours infill development of vacant sites, however many vacant sites have issues related to contamination from past industrial use.

With the number of rivers in the area, sites often need to go through a riparian areas environmental review, with time and expense considerations for the applicant.



**Facing Page:** Downtown Squamish — Looking out over new residential development.

**Left:** Downtown Squamish – Flower displays on main street, Cleveland Avenue. Images courtesy of Elaine Naisby.

In Squamish a riparian area could be the ditch in front of a single family home, and as such can be an onerous process for small projects. However, habitat preservation and mitigation in Squamish is highly valued and based on how many fish are found in ditches—the environment in Squamish is doing pretty good.

Squamish’s downtown is like so many small-town downtowns—struggling. No doubt, many people on the highway to Whistler have no idea Squamish even has a downtown. Residential density and anchor stores are the key focus for growth in the downtown, and some great projects have recently been built. With a tight municipal budget, revitalizing downtown with the District’s own funds is tough, and so we’ve been leveraging our amazing volunteer community groups to help with some “quick wins” such as a pump track in a new park downtown. The new park is a big win in itself, as we now finally have public space on the waterfront downtown. Amazingly, this is a first.

Urban forms that may work in the Lower Mainland don’t always work well in Squamish. Take tandem parking garages and small drive aprons in multi-family developments. In Squamish, nobody will actually park two cars in a tandem garage. Guaranteed that the back of the garage if not the entire garage is used for storage of kayaks, kite boards, skis, bikes, dirt bikes,

sleds, rock climbing gear—you get the picture. So residents park their trucks on the small urban-style driveway aprons and voila, the fire lane is blocked and the sightlines are poor for children playing.

Our fire-fighting department is volunteer, and with our isolated location, we don’t have back-up from other fire departments. This means that while the BC Building Code now allows six-storey wood-frame construction, our fire department simply does not have the capacity to fight a six-storey wood-frame fire during the construction stage.

Squamish is off-the-charts for baby booming stats. We hear about schools in other communities closing, but our schools are growing and fast. Schools are making daycare programs and other programs move out to make room for students. This young population requires wide-ranging considerations, for childcare facilities, playgrounds, recreational amenities, safe routes to school, and forms of housing.

Squamish’s identity in the past was industry. Today, Squamish still identifies with industry, but tourism is coming to the forefront. Squamish is becoming more of an outdoor recreation and event hosting centre. This means planning for event infrastructure, from traffic and parking management, to reducing wildlife attractants (garbage), to providing visitor facilities and other infrastructure that encourage

events. Being a tourist destination also means addressing illegal camping issues with a large summer transient community.

There is something exciting going on every single weekend in the summer. This year the Squamish Valley Music Festival grew to 35,000 people (that is double our population!) and it was hosted on our recreation fields in the very centre of town. Long-time residents stood dumbfounded looking at the size of stage and listening to Eminem in what has historically been a small, sleepy town.

In 2014 in Squamish, the Planning Department is working on solving parking issues from the overly-successful Sea to Sky Gondola project (which is totally world-class by the way), doing community consultation on LNG, and planning for Cheekye Fan debris hazard mitigation. There’s interest in small-lot housing forms. Projects that were put on hold when the economy slowed are finally moving forward. New, interesting projects are being born. We’re dealing with impacts of regional growth from the potential Britannia Beach development and the Garibaldi at Squamish ski and golf resort project. Things are BUSY!

Squamish has been going through a re-branding exercise this year. At a mid-stage reveal, the consultant explained that Squamish felt like the yin to Whistler’s yang—with Whistler having a polished and programmed feel, and Squamish feeling unscripted. I would say that rings true.

I wish I could say like the Whistler landscape architects that life is balanced and I’m going mountain biking before work, trail running at lunch, and rock climbing when I get home. But working in an extremely fast-paced environment and having a young family of my own has been more than I can manage lately. The Municipality has recently grown our Planning department, so maybe that dream lifestyle is just around the corner for me! Looking forward to seeing everyone at the 2015 BCSLA Conference in Whistler. **SL**

# Shifting Focus

By Kevin McFarland, MBCSLA, RMOW Parks Planner

## Public Sector Landscape Architecture in Whistler



Yoga class at Whistler Olympic Plaza during Wanderlust, a one-of-a-kind festival which brings together the world's leading yoga teachers, top musical acts and DJs, renowned speakers, top chefs and winemakers, and much more. Image courtesy of Tourism Whistler/ Mike Crane.

Whistler is turning 40 years old, at least in municipal terms. Whistler's public sector landscape architects think of 40 with some fondness, but we know, 40 is not 30. The town's needs are different now and this is reflected in our current focus and projects. In a growth-capped community, our future is not the somewhat frantic 1975 to 2011. Barring something really unexpected, our development era is over, and the future is more about managing and enhancing what we have. Presumably, that too will be interesting, as Whistler has always been a fascinating challenge and place to learn.

**You don't have to dig too deep to find the basis for this town's success.** Good site planning set the stage and then the mountain operator, Whistler Blackcomb, evolved to become an industry leader. Less well known is the role of the community that is sustaining Whistler. The volunteerism and engagement here is remarkable.

The public sector landscape architects serve a resort and a community; our work deals with Whistler Village, neighbourhoods, parks, and trails. Our clientele ranges from the permanent residents of this small town to short-term visitors from around the world. Our context may have changed somewhat, but their high expectations have not.

Consider our recent past: while the Resort Municipality designation came in 1975, Village construction didn't really get rolling until the 1980s. In the next 30 years or so, this purpose-built place has sprung from ►

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the ground to become significant to the provincial tourism economy, a home for 10,000 people, and a reason for 2 million skier/snowboarder visits and over 2 million summer visits.

This goal-oriented town tried five times to host the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Co-hosting the 2010 Games was huge for Whistler. Post-Games was bigger for the public sector landscape architects. Since the Games, the focus has been to transform venues into something that suits our future. While Celebration Plaza hosted medal ceremonies and concerts each night, Whistler Olympic Plaza, as the venue is now known, is the most flexible of public spaces, providing a type of large gathering place the town had lacked.

The Whistler Athletes' Village became Cheakamus Crossing, a mostly resident-restricted neighbourhood plus athlete training hub that has helped Whistler to achieve a significant goal in affordable housing, particularly in resort towns. Whistler had a goal to provide local housing for 75% of the workforce by 2020. In fact, 80% of those, who want to stay to build a life, raise a family or even retire here now, have that opportunity.

In those words, you can detect a big change for Whistler. The age and gender demographic for Whistler has been remarkably skewed toward the 20-something guy. Now families grow here and people like me can just grow old, happily.

That sounds so sleepy and normal and nothing like Whistler. This town is an organization and we are constantly being measured. If a hummingbird sneezes, the news media will race up the highway from Vancouver. Tourism Whistler measures performance in exquisite detail and the Province is always checking on their investment. We know the latter point, as one of the landscape architects, Jan Jansen, MBCSLA is the General Manager of the Resort Experience Division at RMOV. Jan is cloaked in the Resort Municipality Initiative, regularly working with the Province and other resort towns in BC to ensure some of the tourism revenue is returned to the

sources to ensure reinvestment. Without it, I would be writing about the tumbleweeds scenario and would be looking for a job.

As park planners, Martin Pardoe, MBCSLA and I also enjoy the benefit of constant feedback. Tourism Whistler lets us know how the town is doing each month (never better, summer and winter) and tells us how the Village, parks, and trails are satisfying people. But, it's all kind of razor's edge. We know that when things go off, the noise gets loud. The last municipal council was completely rejected at election time, even after staging a pretty successful Games experience. In a small town, people stop you in the street to tell you how you are doing (or what you are not doing). The Village and parks crews are front line and they let us know when something we created is not working. Otherwise, people just break it.

So, while I think of the Whistler Wanderlust Festival and breathe, I will admit these words have been a feint. We have no big, shiny, new things to show you. Our biggest, shiny new thing was a gift. While Jan had a hand in sealing the deal, the Audain Art Museum fell from the sky one day. It's something to see, but won't be open until 2015.

Meanwhile, Martin is picking up the pieces from our development era. That is, we intend to help people find their way more effectively around Whistler. Admittedly, that was something that fell off the table in the rush to help create a resort village, some good parks and neighbourhoods, and an excellent trail system. He also led last year's parks and recreation master plan that told us "make it better, but don't screw it up." Martin and I are both trying to implement that master plan.

Recently, there has been a lot of planning going on, getting us ready for the next era. We have made some accessibility and cultural enhancements, built some dog off leash areas, and have launched the design of the next phase of our skateboard park. That's about it. Still, for the moment, at least, there seems to be a lot of happy people in town.

You can't make a statement like that last one without pointing to some other conditions. I tried listing them, but such a list seems trivial. Short-term workers struggle to find housing; homeless people are at risk here, especially in winter; bears sometimes get shot; glaciers shrink; and the clinic deals with trauma, as so many 40-somethings keep dreaming they are 30. **sl**

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**Opposite page:** Audain Art Museum. Image courtesy of Kevin McFarland.

**Bottom:** Clearing snow at Whistler Olympic Plaza rink (L to R: Recreation Manager Roger Weetman, Parks Manager Dave Patterson, and General Manager of Resort Experience Jan Jansen, MBCSLA). Image courtesy of Parks Planning Manager, Martin Pardoe.





Join family, friends, and colleagues to celebrate the holidays with the BC Society of Landscape Architects at the Vancouver Maritime Museum. Children are welcome!

Event guests can explore the Museum and enjoy light hors d'oeuvres while catching up with colleagues and friends at one of our most popular events of the year.

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