

# DUNCAN PUBLIC SPACE DESIGNS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

## 85 STATION STREET AND WHISTLER STREET

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When the city of Duncan made the decision to invest in improving 85 Station Street and Whistler Street, the leadership realized that both sites had potential to take a variety of forms. Either site could be transformed in to something new that had never before been seen in Duncan and was not prescribed by any existing guidelines. They knew that if they were to transform a public place, the best way to ensure its success would be to first listen to the community. The design process for both sites had to be centered around the people, and the history, culture, and aspirations that they represent.

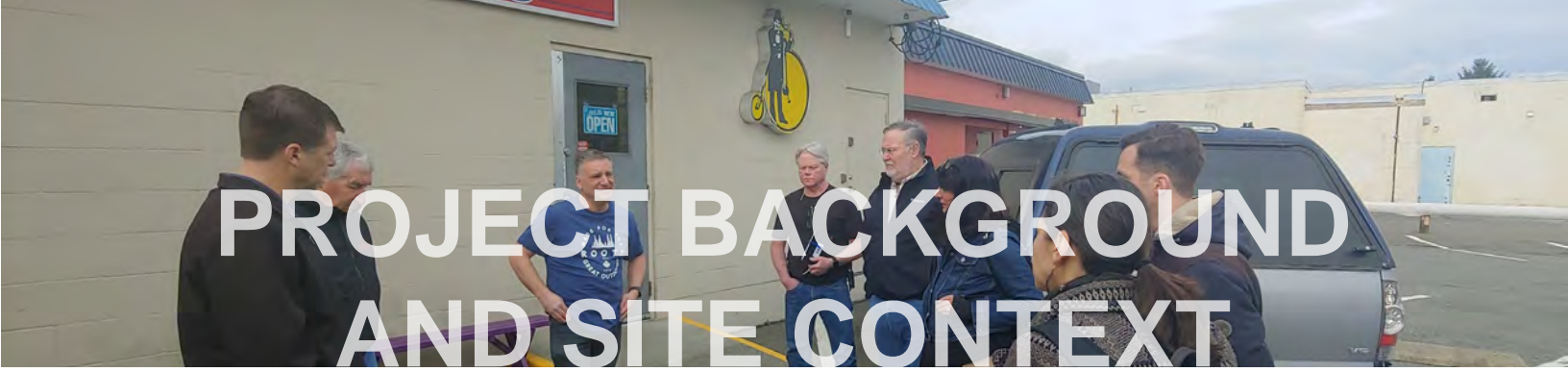
Communitecture was called in from Portland, Oregon, after having been involved in other public space projects and design workshops on Vancouver Island. We arrived with workshop tools and open minds about the best solutions for these two sites. We facilitated discussions with dozens of citizens who shared openly about challenges the community faces, the things they appreciate most about the city, and their hopes for its future. We are honored and grateful to get to work with a group of people that cares for their neighbours, strives to improve their environmental impact, and gets involved to shape the future. Participants thought creatively and compassionately about some of the biggest challenges the city faces, like houselessness, drug addiction, and public safety. They thought about immediate needs and sustainable solutions. They enthusiastically imagined places they would enjoy spending time and connecting with neighbours. A wealth of diverse ideas poured forth from the group.

After seeking two rounds of input from the community, we have synthesized and edited the ideas in to designs for two spectacular public spaces that any city should be proud to have. In the center of downtown, 85 Station Street will be transformed in to a public square that represents the community's love for nature, which makes it a park-town square hybrid. On less-central Whistler Street, a space traditionally reserved for cars will become a welcoming urban place to gather and celebrate art and music.

Implementing both projects can involve a variety of community members and groups and we hope to be involved as they take shape. We are honored to be on the team.

--Communitecture Team

Mark Lakeman, Robin Koch, Dylan Thomas, Dante Montebianco



# PROJECT BACKGROUND AND SITE CONTEXT

The two sites in Duncan that are the focus of this report are quite different from one another in their context, their scale, and their challenges and opportunities. Mayor Michelle Staples and city staff chose to invest in public space improvements at these two sites for different reasons. Both sites called for new community-led designs for public space and therefore they were the subjects of parallel but separate design processes from February to August, 2020. The city hired Communitecture of Portland, Oregon to facilitate community input and synthesize ideas into the public space design concepts presented later in this report.

85 Station Street is a roughly 80-foot by 60-foot public space at the corner of Station and Craig Streets in the heart of downtown Duncan. The west half of the site was acquired by the City of Duncan in after an aged building was deemed a safety hazard and removed in 2014. After demolition, the site has simply been a flat grass-covered public space for several years. The east half of the site was already a city-owned “pocket park” which provided a small public space between two buildings prior to the demolition. It presently features three totem poles, a few small trees, and a mural on a remaining building. The recent expansion of this public space provides a special opportunity to create gathering space and public amenities, and it calls for a design that is attentive to, and representative of, the community.

Whistler Street is a nearly three block long spur off of Coronation Avenue in the Northeast area of Duncan. It is one block east of the Trans-Canada Highway and has no outlet. Most of the lots on the west side of Whistler span all the way to the TCH, making this minor street serve as a service alley to the backs of the businesses there. The east side of the street hosts a mix of businesses and



residences. Generally, the street and the private lots appear to have more asphalt parking area than necessary, very little landscaping, and no sidewalks, making the street feel vacant and unwelcoming. In part due to these conditions, the street has become a site of illicit drug sales, the public nuisances of drug use, and other criminal or unsafe activity in recent years. Business owners and residents on the street have endured threats to their safety as well as abuse to their property. They have observed that Whistler Street shields criminals from public view while providing an escape route to the north on foot, where a police vehicle would not have access. The City of Duncan has found that their patrols of the site have not solved the growing problems and decided to explore new strategies to improve safety, livability, and property values in this area of town. The hazards and nuisances are not a product of the streetscape alone, and therefore improving the street is only one prong of a broader approach. City policies approach houselessness and drug addiction with efforts to improve lives, rather than push people with needs away. The City decided to invest in improving Whistler Street only after seeking input from a wide variety of community members.



*85 Station Street viewed from across the intersection of Station and Craig Streets*



*Whistler Street's current conditions, viewed from the south end of the street*



# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

On February 28th an insightful public presentation was provided by Mark Lakeman, of Portland-based consultants Communitecture. The presentation raised historic and contemporary issues and opportunities related to community development and public space in North America in general, and western Canada in particular.

The stage was set, and on February 29th and March 1st, a community participation-based workshop was held for each site, to convene the experience, knowledge, and inspiration of local residents, businesses, stakeholders, and interested persons.

Each workshop drew more than 40 participants representing local business owners, area residents, interested visitors, and City officials. Participants presented themselves and their interests, identified issues and strengths at each site, and collaboratively developed strategies, design elements, and a range of activities that they felt would help transform persistent physical, social, economic, and ecological conditions. The range of ideas was inspiring for its creativity and produced a range of concepts for Duncan to move into the future.

In addition to sharing verbal comments in both workshops, participants split in to five groups to place their desired design elements on site plans and begin to turn their ideas in to form. A comprehensive account of the workshops and a collection of comments, opinions, and ideas has been compiled by the City [here](https://www.placespeak.com/uploads/6330/Whistler-Station-Streets-Workshop-Follow.pdf) [https://www.placespeak.com/uploads/6330/Whistler-Station-Streets-Workshop-Follow.pdf]



*Collaborative representations of design ideas for 85 Station Street from the public workshop*



*Collaborative representations of design ideas for Whistler Street from the public workshop*

Communitecture analyzed the five designs that resulted from both workshops to find where they overlapped, what elements were most popular, and how the major or controversial elements should distinguish design options from one another. The five collaborative compositions for each site were combined and edited into three design options for 85 Station Street and two options for Whistler Street.

Design options were presented to the public online via PlaceSpeak from May 11th to June 7th, 2020. (A second round of live public workshops had been planned, but the COVID-19 emergency required that they be moved to online platforms.) This website allowed participants to provide public comments on each design option as well as answer surveys and rank their most preferred design attributes.

The design options presented and summaries of the feedback are included in following sections on Station Street and Whistler Street, respectively.

Communitecture and City planning staff analyzed the public comments and survey results to determine a design direction for each site. After several meetings and iterations of carefully considered site plans, final designs were developed to present to City Council on September 8th, 2020.



## Project Description

Located at the intersection of Craig and Station Streets in the core of downtown Duncan, 85 Station has been used as a public green space since the demolition of the former Red Balloon commercial building in 2014. As a lawn-area, the site has functioned as an extension of the Station Street Park, recognized by visitors for its three totems, and known by locals for its remarkable “Fake Forest” mural.

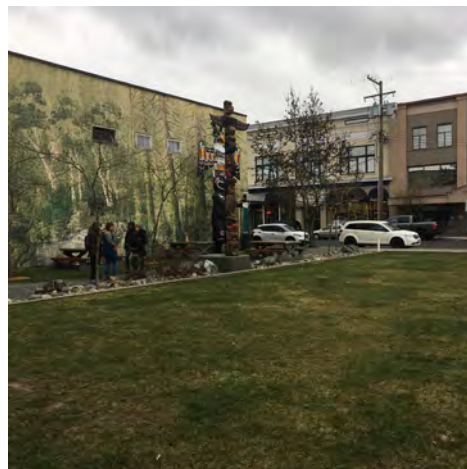
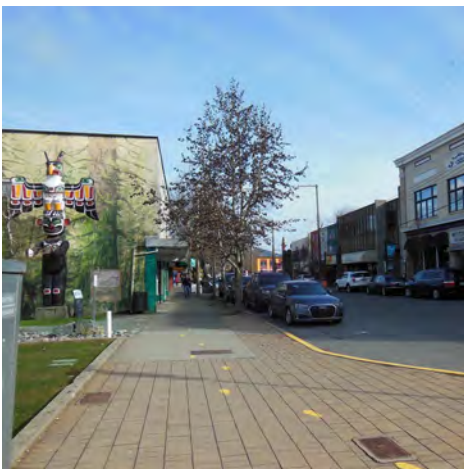
Workshop participants expressed a fondness for this site and named many strengths including:

- Central location in urban core
- Totems, mural, and open space
- Diversity of area businesses
- Annual public celebrations, frequent free concerts nearby and weekly farmers market

Participants also named a long wish-list of amenities and public space improvements, with some of the most popular being:

- Tree canopy, green space, and native plants
- Seating and shade
- Gathering areas for community events and performance space
- More public art

Based on the ideas and observations offered by workshop participants, three design schemes were developed for the next round of public engagement. The schemes provided different sets of amenities arranged in different ways and exhibiting different aesthetic themes to stimulate public conversation and feedback. Site plans and more 3D drawings of these schemes are presented in an online video [here](https://vimeo.com/411238273). [ <https://vimeo.com/411238273> ]



*The existing space and surroundings at 85 Station Street*

# Design Options

## Scheme A



**STATION STREET SCHEME A**

This design scheme features numerous “big moves”, including enhanced bike and pedestrian lanes and sidewalks. Scheme A would transition Craig Street into a walking and biking-only space, and proposes overhead fabric architecture that swirls out of the parking lot from the northeast and along the eastern edge until it rises toward the southwest.

Other ideas include:

- A multi-use open space in the centre,
- Many trees and plants with places to sit,
- Totem poles maintained within the park,
- Gathering areas with rocks and a water feature,
- Stage for performances,
- Road mural installation, and more.

The existing eastern wall mural is retained and another is added on the northern wall. All options include a movie screen on the north wall.



## Scheme B



**STATION STREET SCHEME B**

This design option has a pollinator theme, featuring a sculptural stage, hexagon patterns on pathways, playful footprint patterns on pedestrian walking surfaces, and an intersection road mural.

Other ideas include:

- Sculptural benches that create inviting edges,
- A south facing multi-level sun porch,
- Pavilion topped by a green roof,
- A playful water feature,
- Sun porch, and
- Totem poles retained within the park.

There is also a food cart located in an adjacent parking spot. The existing eastern wall mural is retained and another is added on the northern wall. Passage through to the parking lot to the northeast is celebrated with a trellis.

## Scheme C



**STATION STREET SCHEME C**

This design option is organized around a below-grade amphitheatre, with a stone path that winds around and down to it. There is interesting and sculptural seating along the west and south edges, with some of it covered by transparent roofs.

There is a raised water feature along the eastern edge, with a two-storey waterfall fed from the adjacent roof. There is a small tea house located in a south edge parking spot, and two bulletin boards along the west and south edges.

The road mural is larger and more elaborate. One totem is retained in place while another is relocated to spot across the street which expands the presence of these installations.

# Summary of Public Comments

Duncan area residents had an opportunity to choose their preferred scheme as well as answer a questionnaire about a variety of design features. Feedback was gathered online via PlaceSpeak between May 11th and June 7th, 2020.

## Poll Results

*Which of the proposed design schemes do you prefer?*

Scheme A – 16 votes (55%)

Scheme B – 11 votes (38%)

Scheme C – 2 votes (7%)

## Survey Results

*Rank the schemes in order of your preference:*

Chosen as their first choice:

Scheme A - 51%

Scheme B - 24%

Scheme C – 24%

Chosen as their first or second choice:

Scheme A - 35%

Scheme B - 39%

Scheme C – 26%

*The top priorities for the project are:*

- Neighborhood interaction and gathering – 16 votes
- Cultural celebration, inspiring art, and/or aesthetic appearance – 8 votes

*At least 50% voted for the following elements:*

- Covered picnic tables (strongest in B) – 21 votes
- Decorative plantings: flowers, shrubs, trees (strongest in A & C) – 19 votes
- Public Washrooms (all schemes) – 22 votes
- Lighting (all schemes) – 20 votes
- Close one block of Craig Street to create pedestrian plaza (A) – 20 votes
- Local native plants (strongest in A & C) – 21 votes
- Tree canopy (strongest in A & C) – 23 votes

## Trends in Comments

- Multiple comments point out that a stage already exists one block away and prefer other elements such as picnic seating here.
- Several comments encourage restraint and dislike “clutter”.
- The closure of one block of Craig Street is an especially controversial design idea.

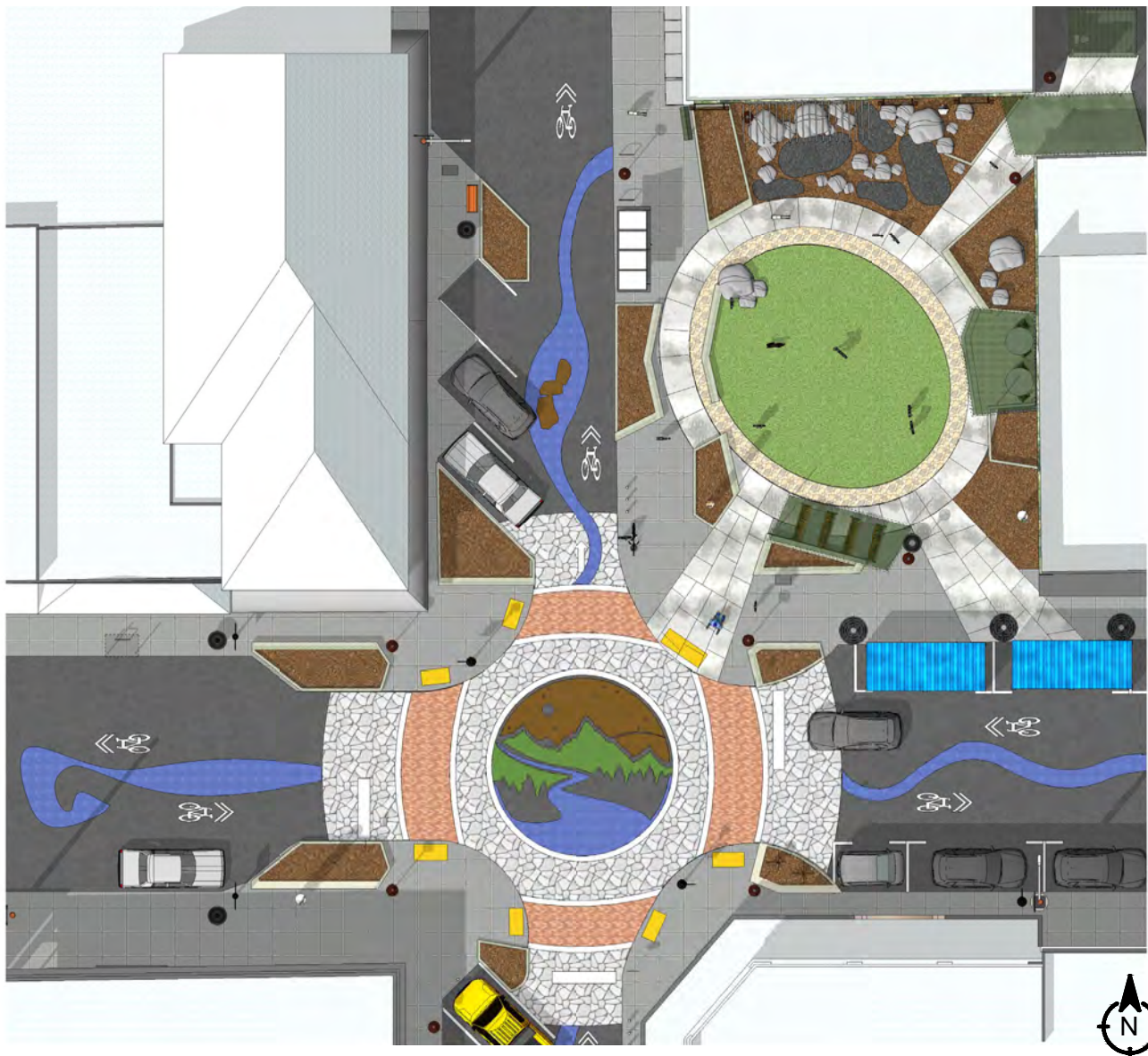
The full public discussion can be viewed at: <https://www.placespeak.com/en/topic/6316-station-street-placemaking-project/#/discussions>

# 85 Station Street Final Design

The final design for this urban park and gathering space brings together the most favored elements from the previous three schemes in to one formal concept. A variety of seating spaces and gathering areas are arranged around a spacious round lawn. Covered tables to the south and east provide space for meals and conversations in most seasons. Berms and boulders to the north invite young people to play and even splash in a seasonal stream in summer. The balance of tree canopy and open space offers choice of shade and sun. Lighting on all sides invites visitors to linger after dark.

The park opens to the intersection with a totem and tree suggesting a gateway between the two spaces. Planters and benches across the street extend the gathering space out in to the urban streetscape. Food trucks parked on Station Street and public washrooms in the alley to the north provide additional amenities that will activate the space with pedestrians.

The design of the new park is unified by a concentric pathway around the central open space. At the same time, through pathway design, a southwest gateway effect, landscape elements and other enhancements, the park also reaches out to link with the adjacent crossroads.





*A raised seating area may serve as a stage visible from the lawn, Craig Street, and a variety of seating areas.*



*The park spills out to the street, incorporating parts of the existing sidewalks in to its form. Food carts and an outdoor movie screen make the park a special destination.*



*A seasonal fountain washes over a year-round nature play area featuring native plants.*



# Station Street Preliminary Design and Engineering Fee Estimates

All figures in CAD\$

## Station Street Project

The Station Street project is a relatively simple site (58' x 80') to design and engineer, including approximately 4,640 square feet of city-owned land. The design site also includes the adjacent Right Of Way (ROW) for 80 feet of Craig Street, 58 feet of Station Street, as well as the adjacent intersection of these two streets. The 4,640 sf site and the ROW dimension of it have been separated here and approached differently, below.

The following fee estimates are based upon a standard rate of 10% of preliminary construction cost estimates. This number has then been reduced by 25% to account for the public process of schematic design which concludes with this report and public presentation of the outcomes.

### 4,640 sf Station Street Site

**Preliminary construction cost estimate** = \$418,189  
(Not including demo and contingency)

**Architecture and engineering services** \$23,528 - (SD)25% = \$17,646

**Landscape architecture and engineering services** \$13,920 - (SD)25% = \$10,440

**Total remaining 4,640sf site design and engineering fee** = \$28,086

### Station Street Site Right Of Way (ROW)

This estimate only provides Design Development services which will confirm scales and materials of elements. The estimate is based upon 3% of the preliminary cost estimate. Once these are confirmed, as well as apportionment of technical work that Duncan may be responsible for, construction documents and administration estimates can be completed.

**Preliminary construction cost estimate** = \$142,434  
(Not including demo and contingency)

**Architecture, landscape design, and engineering services @ 3%** = \$4,273

**Street graphic: Public process for final design, refinement and prep** = \$6,000

**Total design development fee for ROW areas** = \$10,273