

DECEMBER 7, 2020

Proposal for the redesigning of
the UBC Flagpole plaza.



DIGITAL PLACEMAKING

*How can we use digital placemaking to
reimagine and activate the Flagpole plaza site
in the Arts & Culture District on the UBC
campus in the face of the COVID-19
pandemic?*

**Proposed by:
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We would like to acknowledge that this project will be taken place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm) people. We appreciate that the Musqueam People allow us to manage this beautiful place.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

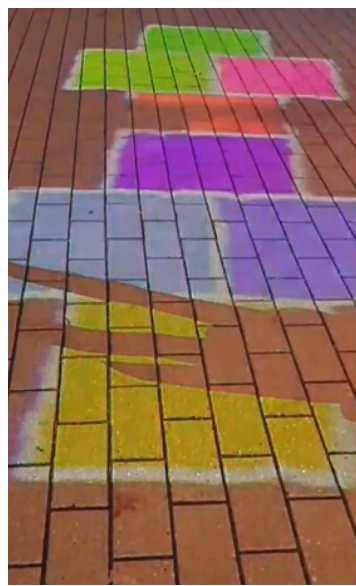
Our two main goals are **to transform the flagpole plaza into an all-inclusive digital space with the focus on Indigenous realization and reconciliation**, and **to reconnect people in the pandemic and post-pandemic era**. The current flagpole plaza is already a great spot, but we want to include more Indigenous elements and foster social connection through technologies to make the plaza a meaningful, fun, and inclusive place. Our design is intended to be permanent, so that visitors can enjoy the renewed plaza at anytime.

IMPLEMENTATION

Our reimagination of the plaza contains four elements: Indigenous art, moveable street furniture, outdoor sanitation, and "virtual couch". All these four elements will work together to re-envision the flagpole plaza, making it an inclusive, clean place that welcomes everyone physically and virtually. We want to activate the plaza in the daytime and at nighttime through creative and artistic lighting design.



(i) Blue streetlights in downtown Glasgow, Scotland (Web Urbanist)



(ii) Hopscotch layout by LED near the NEST (Edriane Maglinte)

1 | CREATING A SAFER SPACE AND INDIGENOUS ART THROUGH LIGHTS

The national flag will not be permanent. We propose to regularly change the flag on the flagpole to celebrate the Indigenous people as well as our diverse values. Examples of flags include the Musqueam flag and the Pride flag. We also propose to paint our land acknowledgement on the floor of the Main Mall entrance to show our strong commitment to reconciliation.

LED strip lights or lamp (depending on which works better) are suggested on the flagpole next to the flag to illuminate it so that the flag will also be visible at night. The street lamps surrounding the flagpole will also be added with projectors. These will project Indigenous art on the ground, using glass gobos or slides that can be customized similar to (ii). We will also add film transparencies to the street lamps, which will also project light art but the themes can be changed regularly. In this way, it creates a stunning Indigenous light 'art show' and other temporary additions that reflect important/seasonal events. Another strong suggestion is that the streetlights be changed to blue light, which has been found to correlate with decline in crime rates (i). This change can perhaps make people feel safer when walking at night around campus.

2 | STREET FURNITURES: FLEXIBLE SEATING 'PLAN'

We also propose to replace the benches around the plaza with moveable chairs and tables. This option allows people to be free in choosing where to face (e.g., towards the mountains). The addition of tables can also increase the *use of the space*. Currently, the benches are facing away from each other, making it difficult for others to interact if they choose to. Outdoor chairs and tables are already found in some areas on the UBC campus, such as outside of the bookstore and the IKB Library. Other similar examples that promote social interactions are: (iii) 2012 *Pop Rocks* designed by Matthew Soules Architecture and AFJD Studio (Joe Dahmen & Amber Frid-Jimenez) and (iv) more recent use of space in Robson Square Plaza.

In terms of digital placemaking, the flexibility to move allows users to easily interact with other digital design. Thus, this change is preferably implemented in conjunction with our proposed designs. However, although it is more ideal than the current benches, issues with it may include blocking entry or exit points to the Rose Garden and other pathways. In this case, painted markings, stickers, lamps, or (digital) signs can be useful in indicating where one should avoid placing their seats and tables to make way for others to pass. This is a good opportunity to decorate the grey paving.



(iii) *Pop Rocks* at Robson Square (City of Vancouver)



(iv) Seats at Robson Square (Jesse Johnston/CBC)

3 | IMPLEMENTING OUTDOOR SANITATION

The open space of the plaza enables great air ventilation, which helps disperse germs and viruses in the air, and we want to keep this design. In order to create an even safer, germ-free environment, we propose to install at least one hand sanitation station, depending on the resources we have. We will locate the station next to the Rose Garden Parkade staircase, so that visitors and drivers can use it before entering or leaving the plaza and the campus. We think that it is important to have access to sanitation whether there is a pandemic or not.

4 | VIRTUAL HUB FOR THE FLAGPOLE PLAZA

We would also like to create an virtual space where everyone can share their lives and experiences regardless of who they are. This virtual couch will be created through WordPress, on which we will establish a site specifically for the Flagpole Plaza users. They can write about why they enjoy the plaza, and commenting on other posts. This is also a virtual tree hole where people can share their lives, anonymously or not. On the space, we encourage users to share why they are proud of their identities. We invite women, LGBTQIA2S+, Indigenous people, visible minorities, and people with disabilities to share their stories to let readers understand their world. In addition, we will use this space to provide up-to-date news about UBC. During the pandemic, we will share information about what is happening on the campus and tips about how to keep ourselves safe. We will also connect users with useful resources such as mental health support and academic resources produced by UBC. They are extremely useful for assisting people to cope with their challenges.

QR codes will allow to access a website and post the codes on our street furniture and map information booths. This will allow most people to notice this virtual space and go to the website easily through their phones.



scan me!



BUDGET & ALTERNATIVES

The LED projectors have varying prices, depending on the brand and quality:

- \$150-300 gobo (glass) projectors for Indigenous art (2)
- \$30-65 projectors with film transparencies/gobo alternatives for temporary applications (3)

The furniture change can be expensive, depending on how many and the type of sets that will be placed. We tried to determine the price of the outdoor furniture set akin to the ones at UBC.

- \$60-100 per set (two chairs) TÄRNÖ from Ikea, similar to what we envisioned (4)
- Ideally, there would be three to four chairs per set

Hand sanitizers can be pricey as well and we thought there should be at least one, but ideally two (2) in total (one for each map info board area):

- \$130-200 automatic dispenser

Costs of custom design for lights and paint, blue light replacement, and installation were undetermined. QR code stickers are likely the least expensive. Light on flag is around \$25-50.

If chosen, the budget given is \$1000, possibly with add. \$1000 grant from UTown@UBC. The total, excluding undetermined costs, would be around \$1055-1410. An alternative would be: around \$995-1050 excluding the proposed furniture change.

We do not expect all our recommendations to be fully realized due to financial constraints, but any of our proposed changes can be broken up in sections. Nevertheless, we hope our proposal can at least spark other designer minds who have more opportunities and have enough funding to realize or improve on these ideas.

WHY DOES OUR DESIGN MATTER?

Our reimagination of the plaza involves light technologies and QR codes, as well as the "physical" placemaking methods such as adding street furniture, redefine how we can enjoy the plaza. The art we can make through creative use of lights can express our appreciation for Indigenous culture and art. Using technology to represent Indigenous art will let people realize that it can be shown in different forms. We want the visitors to have a stunning visual experience and establish a cultural connection.

The 'virtual couch' is also an innovative way for people to meet and greet, especially when the pandemic does not allow physical contacts. In this online space, everyone is equal and has the freedom to express themselves. They are encouraged to celebrate who they are and our common proud as Canadians under the Canadian flag. The social connections facilitated by this virtual space will extend beyond the plaza as the online space can also be accessed to everywhere.

Finally, adding more street furniture will foster physical connection of people after the pandemic by providing quality space for people to rest and chat. People can also sit in the plaza and use the virtual space we provide. At the same time, the hand sanitizer station will keep maintaining public hygiene, even after the pandemic has passed. As we promote extensive use in the space, other activities like eating would work well with the placement of hand sanitization.

Our vision and design extend beyond the pandemic and the plaza. Our re-envisioning of the place will advance the digital placemaking progress on campus, and our redesigned flagpole plaza will be a very important first step toward this goal.