

Sherbourne Common

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Part of Toronto's new waterfront, Sherbourne Commons is both park and stormwater treatment plant. The 3.6 acre, \$30 million project is the first Canadian park to integrate an Ultraviolet (UV) water purification facility for neighborhood-scale stormwater treatment.

Designed by the Vancouver-based firm Phillips Farevaag Smallenberg, the park was transformed from a brownfield into the Toronto Waterfront's main green space in 2011. The park is divided into three distinct urban rooms inspired by Toronto's historic shoreline. In each of these spaces, Sherbourne Common provides a tranquil space to escape from the chaos of urban living, as well as an engaging, civic space for social interaction. The north end of the park features play equipment and light sculptures, while the southern half near Lake Ontario features larger gathering spaces.

Stormwater management is integral to the park's organization and aesthetic. Stormwater drives the organization of the park. Underneath the public bathrooms, there's a series of disinfecting machines that use ultraviolet light – rather than chlorine – to clean water from the lake and stormwater runoff from surrounding roads, highways, and buildings.

Once collected and UV-treated, purified water gently cascades down three 9-meter-tall art sculptures, called "Light Showers," which gracefully rise from the ground. These sculptures, created by artist Jill Anholt, are made from large fiberglass molds filled with concrete, stainless steel, and glass.

The water then passes through a bio-filtration bed planted with aquatic grasses and is directed into a 240-meter long water channel. As the water travels down the channel and reaches the center of the park, it passes through a zinc-clad, jewel-like pavilion, and, ultimately, is discharged into Lake Ontario. During

winter, the pavilion area turns into a skating rink framed by frozen fountains.

As the first park in Canada to receive LEED gold certification, Sherbourne Common also incorporates several other environmentally sustainable features apart from stormwater management. The park contains about 182 native or regionally adapted trees: 108 Pacific Sunset Maple, 45 Red Oak, and 29 American Beech. The use of these trees strongly contributes to Toronto's tree coverage goals.

Water-efficient plants were used to reduce the need for irrigation. The design for the park also incorporates a high percentage of locally available materials, light coloured permeable paving surfaces to reduce the urban heat island effect, and special light fixtures to reduce light pollution.

The park is a true innovation, showing how cities can seamlessly integrate natural systems and civic infrastructure. It has become a well-used destination for city residents and visitors all year-round.

Project Resources

DESIGN LEAD / LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Phillips Farevaag Smallenberg

LOCAL LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
The Planning Partnership

PUBLIC ART
Jill Anholt Studio

PAVILION ARCHITECT
Teeple Architects

CLIENT
Waterfront Toronto