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VISD-2005-501 Contemporary Design Theories & Practices

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### Grange Park Promenade & Inclusive Co-Design Practices



Fig. 1. Grange Park Sign, photo source author (2023).

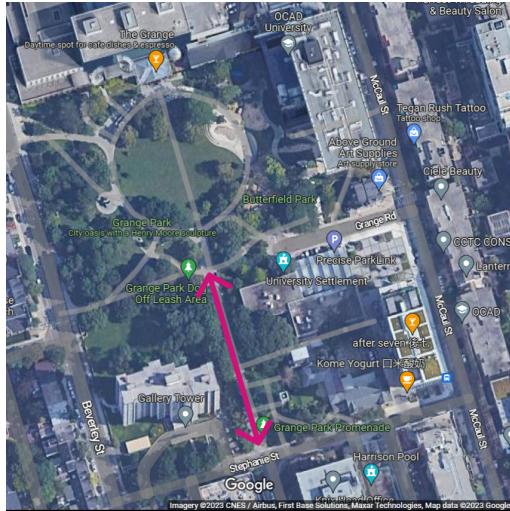


Fig. 2. Google Maps, Grange Park, 12 Mar. 2023.

Grange Park is a two-hectare green space in downtown Toronto (Fig. 1 & Fig. 2.). The park underwent a major transformation following a period of decline, to embody the inclusive and accessible vision of the community and address the depreciating beauty and health of the park. In 2017 the revitalized Grange Park re-opened to the public, after ongoing engagement that focused on restoration and regenerative practices, held between local community members, the City of Toronto, the AGO, and neighbouring organizations (Grange Park Website). According to authors of *Health Design Thinking : Creating Products and Services for Better Health* (2020) “Codesign is a collaborative process that actively seeks knowledge and ideas from end users. Each member of a design team has deep knowledge about their own life experience. Codesign directly injects this expertise into the design process.” (Ku and Lupton 24) The Grange Park revitalization project is an example of successful historical public-private sector partnership, that through its community guided co-design practices continues to thrive and

nurture the park's multiple users. This paper will look more closely at the Grange Park Promenade (Fig. 3.); the path that leads from the southern entrance into Grange Park from Stephanie Street, a prominent feature of the park that includes inscribed paving stones along this walkway. As part of the Grange Park revitalization project, the local community submitted proposed quotations and voted on the final selection of words from Canadian or Canada-based personalities relating to the theme of nature or to the diversity of our community; authors, poets and civic minded activists that reflect the history and diversity within the Grange Park community (Grange Park Website).

Grange Park has a history of public-private partnership. The park was originally the front lawn of The Grange estate; the large manor at the north end of the park, now the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) Grange Cafe. The Grange estate was built in 1817 by the affluent Boulton family, who were influential in developing the city of Toronto. In 1910, Harriet Boulton Smith bequeathed the Grange estate for the purposes of building an art museum. In the 1970's Grange Park expanded by the closure of Grange Road (from Beverley to John) and John Street (from Stephanie to Grange Road), where Grange Park Promenade is located. In 2008, the Grange Park Advisory Committee (GPAC) was formed to provide



Fig. 3. Grange Park Promenade Sign, photo source author (2023).



Fig. 4. Watercolor of the Grange by Henri Perré, (1875) image source Grange Park Website.

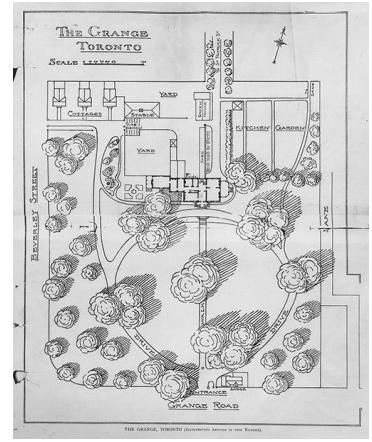


Fig. 5. Plan of the Grange , (1900) image source Grange Park Website.

a forum for area residents and neighbourhood organizations to give input and advice regarding the operational management of the park and its long term sustainability (Grange Park Website).



Fig. 6. Grange Park Promenade Pathway Lighting, photo source author (2023).

The Grange Park Promenade design has many features that seek to embody the shared community vision to be a beautiful, welcoming and accessible park and is designed with numerous features intended to enable a more inclusive space (Grange Park Website). All walkways in the park are intended to provide obstacle-free routes with non-slip surfaces and tactile/colour signals at the edges, slopes and steps (Grange Park Website).

Lighting (Fig. 6.) has been designed along the boulevard to offer spotlights at multiple vertical levels; lamps on the top of poles to light up the wider area, and directional torches located lower aimed at the ground to identify the edge of the path when it is dark (Grange Park Website). When approaching the Grange Park Promenade entrance, one faces north and sees the original facade of the Grange Estate at the farthest end of the park (Fig. 7.). Beyond and attached to the historic building is the backside of the modern additions to the AGO building, including a protruding and covered spiral staircase (Fig. 8.), set against a

wall of blue shiny material and clear glass windows. The surface design reflects the surrounding sky and unobstructed corridor south down John Street going to the lakeshore. This creates a sense of an open space, camouflaging the reality of



Fig. 8. AGO Rear Windows, photo source author (2023).



Fig. 9. Grange Park Promenade Entrance Bollards, photo source author (2023).

the city highrise skyline in the northern distance. A row of street bollards (Fig. 9.), sturdy short vertical posts, made from a cast steel material, line the entrance to control traffic accessing the Grange Park Promenade. The bollards are mounted near enough to each other that they block ordinary cars/trucks, while spaced widely enough to permit bicycles and pedestrians to pass through. Just beyond the entranceway bollards, to the right hand side of the Grange Park Promenade, is a bike locking area. A row of five metal looped bars (Fig. 10.) are designed and positioned to allow various types of locks to be affixed to different sections of the rings and to a range of bike sizes (or any other items that might need to be locked up). The rings are spaced widely enough apart to allow for a bike to be locked on each side. Along the Grange Park Promenade close to the bike rack, is the Queen Elizabeth Jubilee Rose Garden (Fig. 11.). This includes a boulder plaque on a boulder and a bench beside a large rose bush. Multiple tree species line the boulevard (Fig. 12.), many of which were planted along the path in the 2016 revitalization to offer and ensure a continued mature canopy for future generations, as well as plants have been plotted intentionally to include vegetation that stimulates the senses of touch, scent and sight (Grange Park Website).

The path has numerous benches along it to provide rest areas and is designed to be accessible; benches with backs and armrests for support (Fig. 13), a number of benches are open at one end to allow visitors to



Fig. 10. Grange Park Promenade Bike Rack, photo source author (2023).



Fig. 11. Grange Park Promenade Jubilee Rose Garden, photo source author (2023).

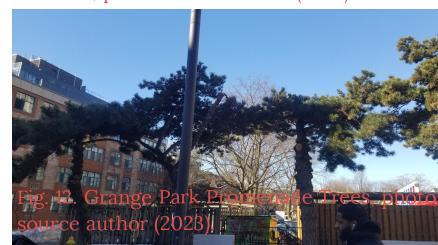


Fig. 12. Grange Park Promenade Trees, photo source author (2023).

transfer from a mobility aid, concrete pads provide a stable base for a visitor using a mobility aid to sit beside a bench, and a change in textures alerts visitors who are blind or have vision loss that they are approaching a seating area (Grange Park Website).

Bench design is a contested urban issue in Canadian cities and has further become exasperated since the COVID-19 social distancing measures, with a spectrum of opinions on how the chosen bench design may contribute or detract from accessible urban spaces. Public space researcher Cara Chellew analyzes the differences between inclusive design and hostile architecture in their Azure Magazine article, *Accessibility Measure or Exclusive Architecture?* (2020). Chellew defines defensive or hostile design practice as using the built environment in an urban space to guide or restrict behaviour, and as a tool to prevent crime and maintain order, and that it affects people who rely on public space the most (those experiencing homelessness and youth), by employing design strategies to restrict “undesired” behaviours, like sleeping in public or gathering in groups (Azure Magazine 2020). After a critical social media post including an image of a public bench (styled in the same fashion as the Grange Park benches) went viral over social media, Chellew cites Montreal mayor Valérie Plante who said that, “This bench has no place in the vicinity of Cabot Square because it contributes to the stigmatization of people experiencing homelessness.” (Azure Magazine 2020), but regardless, Chellew points out that a city spokesperson has also said there are no plans to do away with similarly designed benches around Cabot Square and elsewhere in Montreal, stating that this type of bench design (with multiple arm rests) is also intended for universal accessibility purposes, saying that the benches accommodate people with reduced mobility, such as elderly people who require an armrest to sit



Fig. 13. Grange Park Promenade Bench, photo source author (2023).

down or to get up (Azure Magazine 2020). Chellew asserts that “the bench expresses what is implicit in the design of defensive amenities”; seating that looks inviting, but that discourages one from lingering longer than 15 minutes. The article shares accessibility specialist Jennifer Hisler’s perspectives on the bench design issue, saying that additional armrests may stop people from lying down but may also help people with mobility impairments to sit down, balance and maneuver on and off a bench, and that having an armrest mid-way, not at the extreme end of the bench, means that somebody can use it from either side (Azure Magazine 2020). Hiseler is critical about designer’s genuine commitment to accessibility as observed through design choices in the built environment, and that ultimately, intention is a driving force in design (Azure Magazine 2020). Hiseler says that indicator of authentic accessibility design, would be whether the bench (within the context of its larger space and other built design features), meets other requirements for accessibility, such as the being installed on a firm, stable base, that the bench can be reached through a barrier-free path, that colour contrast is provided between the bench and the armrest, and that extra space is included around the bench to accommodate mobility devices and service animals (Azure Magazine 2020).

Using these as evaluating measures, it can be argued that the benches along the Grange Park Boulevard meet this criteria. What authors of *The 99% Invisible City : a Field Guide to the Hidden World of Everyday Design* (2020) point out reflects the bench design debate accurately, stating, “There is a constant dialogue between cities and their citizen. Master plans and big designs aside, cities can employ a wide array of targeted, top-down strategies in public spaces, using objects, lights, and sounds to shape the behavior of residents. These are embraced by some and criticized by others. Bottom-up citizen interventionists reshape the city by taking matters into their own hands to solve the problems they feel officials have neglected. These can be

controversial at times and have unintended side effects. The conversation goes back and forth, with each side stealing and adapting design strategies from each other.” (Mars & Kohlstedt 309).

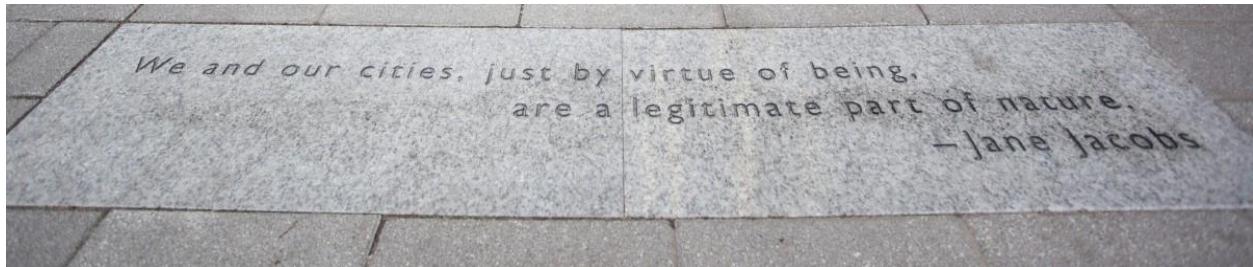


Fig. 14. Grange Park Promenade Jacobs Quote,  
photo source author (2023).

When I was making my observations of the Grange Park Boulevard site, I was with a person who was not familiar with the quote feature of the park nor the people quoted, although I am, and it was interesting to move through the space accompanied by my friend, who offered a fresh perspective and renewed interest in exploring the quotes together as we explored the environment along the Grange Park Boulevard. The experience of us walking along the path and talking about the quotes, enabled us to discover each other in a way that had us engage deeper with each other, the community and the environment. Through these granite conversation starters we found many ideas and values we aligned on from our own unique cultural contexts. We meandered the whole path not driven to get from Point A to Point B, but led by our own curiosity and interest in learning each other’s perspectives on whatever the quotes brought up for us, making connections between us, and propelling us to move along the walkway, to read and share. Like the co-design process, our walk was a collaborative activity that sought out knowledge and ideas from us, the end users, and we both held knowledge that related to the Grange Park Boulevard experience reflected through our own life experience.

### Works Cited

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