



PROJECT REPORT
DECEMBER 10, 2013

CityStudio

A communal campfire experience that forges connections,
gathering and warmth in Vancouver

Kaegan Donnelly | Nicolene Mckenzie | Victoria Simansjah | Peter Ullstrom

PROJECT SUMMARY	3
PROJECT DETAILS	4
Executive Summary	4
Team Members	4
Methodology	4
Outcomes and Impacts	5
Cost	5
Current Project Status	6
Stewardship Plan	6
Biggest Lessons and Key Challenges	7
Project Barriers Identification	7
Budget	8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	9
PROOF OF CONCEPT AND REFERENCES	9
FINAL POSTER	10



PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Title Urban Campfire

Project Description A communal campfire experience that forges connections, gathering and warmth in Vancouver

City Staff Advisor Doug Smith, *Assistant Director Sustainability Group, City of Vancouver*
Jenniffer Sheels, *Viva Vancouver*

Project Team Victoria Simansjah, *ECUAD Communication Design*
Nicolene Mckenzie, *ECUAD Industrial Design*
Kaegan Donnelly, *UBC Human Geography*
Peter Ullstrom, *ECUAD Photography*

Project Summary

Urban Campfire is a bid to hold communal campfires in public spaces throughout the city. The belief is that a changing and adaptable city requires strong and resilient networks. The spirit embodied in campfires will help to foster such connectivity in the urban sphere. The cold and wet weather of the winter months may serve as an impediment for Vancouverites to be active outdoors, and a campfire provides a warm and welcoming destination for people to gather. The goal of this project is to create a pop-up campfire scenario that would demonstrate the importance of a warm gathering place in the city. Due to safety and environmental considerations, the project has proven to be a challenge to get on the ground. Nevertheless, working on this project has illuminated the city's need of outdoor warmth and social connection, which has steered the team towards finding partners to help set up a permanent campfire ring in a city park.



PROJECT DETAILS

Executive Summary

Vancouverites need more reasons to get outdoors in the cold, wet winter months. Cities throughout the world have come to embrace the warmth of a campfire as a way to bring people together during the winter. Urban Campfire is made up of a group of students working with community and city partners to bring a campfire to the city of Vancouver.

Team Members



Methodology

The project began with the desire to bring people together in the cold winter months. A number of approaches were considered. Initially, solving the problem of Vancouver's cold and wet months around a temporary outdoor covered space, aptly known as "VanCover". Of the many things considered to host in this space—warm beverages, speakers, performers, and artwork—one item stood out: a heat source. The project quickly refocused around a heat source as a primary draw.

Focus then shifted to finding examples of various public heat sources throughout the world. We found that most examples came in three forms:

1. A wood burning fire pit, typically in a park or public square.
2. A gas burning fire pit, also typically in a park or public space.
3. A gas or electric powered heat lamp in a public space.

Warm beverages and marshmallow roasting was considered as a means to bring people together and add to the overall experience.

Outcomes and Impacts

The outcome is a demonstration of a warm gathering space in the city, manifested as a charcoal powered barbecue pit in a park. It was discovered that obtaining permits and insurance requires more than the budget we are given. Therefore, a decision was made to adhere to, but push the limits of the Vancouver bylaws around park barbecues to demonstrate our project.

Existing bylaws necessitated a number of compromises in order to realize a test project. Firstly, the barbecue must be at least 75cm off the ground. Secondly, no more than 50 people are allowed to attend an event.

Reception from city staff, the public, and friends has been generally positive throughout. Many have expressed a desire for warmth and intimate community engagement in the city. A handful of staff are expressing a desire to see this project taken further, creating momentum towards the realization of a more authentic campfire experience in the future.

Cost



Demonstration Project

The demonstration project consists of a relatively large charcoal powered barbecue. The cost of renting it is a relatively modest **\$100**, and no permits are required to host it in a park so long as the event does not exceed 50 attendees. Thus, the cost is manageable to allow for additional demonstrations.



Temporary Fire pit

The cost of temporary fire pits range from **\$150** to **several thousand dollars**, depending on the size, design and quality.

A propane powered fire pit also requires the following:

- A burn permit from the fire department. Obtaining one requires a detailed site plan.
- An event permit from the city or parks board, depending on the location. These needs to be

filed about 2 months in advance of the event.

- **\$5,000,000** general liability insurance. This can be provided for a single day event for a cost of around **\$300**.

Permanent Installation

The cost of a permanent installation is undetermined, though it would vary depending on the form. The city could allow an exception for wood fires, thus allowing for the construction of a fire pit made of cinder blocks and gravel, at a modest cost of only a few hundred dollars. A permanent gas powered fixture would be significantly more expensive, due to the need to run a gas line, which requires significantly more investment in terms of engineering personnel hours.

Current Project Status

A barbecue in the park served as a demonstration for the viability of the project. This demonstration was designed to work within existing bylaws to demonstrate the viability and desirability of a more permanent fire pit fixture, which is not realizable under existing bylaws.

The next step is to work with the Parks Board and a local Community Centre to incorporate a temporary or permanent gas powered fire pit. Jill from the Parks Board is helping to facilitate a partnership with the Creekside Community Centre as they work to enliven their outdoor space. Partnering with a community centre provides innumerable benefits, including built in insurance, a steward, and the opportunity to engage with a large and diverse number of citizens.

Stewardship Plan

A concerted effort to work with the city to achieve a campfire has been undertaken. Based on these conversations, as well as further research, the following are the key facts that are known.

- The overwhelming positive response to the project by citizens and city staff alike demonstrates a strong desire for a campfire in the city.
- The bylaw against open burning is a significant impediment. The fire department will not provide wood burning permits in order to comply with its Greenest City 2020 obligations.
- The financial and time costs of insurance and permits reduces the viability of a demonstration project.
- Permit for an open gas fire pit are attainable.
- We are allowed to burn charcoal in a barbecue in the park as long as we follow the city's barbecue regulations and guidelines

Based on the difficulties associated with the project, its fate is currently unknown. However, the group is actively interested in continuing to push the boundaries of what is possible within current bylaws, and encourage the city to open itself to the possibility of a true campfire.

An integral part of alleviating the concerns of a city is securing a reliable and trustworthy steward. Specifically, Jil P. Weaving, coordinator of arts, culture and environment on the parks board, is helping to arrange dialogue with the Creekside Community Center. A community centre is a reliable steward, and would provide built in supervision over the fire pit. Moreover, community centres are looking for ways to draw local community members, and a campfire would be an effective method of achieving this.

The city has expressed concerns with the environmental ramifications of the campfire. Based on preliminary research, even a wood-powered campfire would have a minimal environmental impact compared to an automobile. However, we recommend exploring environmentally friendly alternative as a next step, so as to convey a message inline with Vancouver Greenest City 2020 goals.

Biggest Lessons and Key Challenges

More important than the outcome of the project is the process by which it was accomplished. Learning to work with and within the City Hall was an invaluable experience. The format of the course was unlike any the group had previously taken part in. The opportunity to work in a less structured manner while simultaneously having the power to create something from nothing was exciting. However, there are a handful of specific aspects that the group—if given the opportunity for a do over—agree could have been done differently.

We believe that an earlier emphasis on securing permits and insurance would have been a huge benefit to the project. Given the safety and environmental concerns associated with the process, a head start in this regard would have provided a great opportunity to realize a more ambitious test project. Ultimately, the time and cost of securing permits and insurance resulted in the reduction of the scale of the project.

Communication with city staff at times also proved challenging. Their undoubtedly busy schedules, coupled with the ambitious nature of the project, resulted in long delays when attempting to gain more information. Earlier contact with city staff would also have helped us to understand the need to secure permits and insurance at an earlier date.

The group's ideal outcome was a wood powered campfire in a prominent public space, such as Robson Square. Though a coal powered barbecue provided a similar test case, it is far removed from the initial ambitions of the group. Between these two extremes exists a middle ground—a small scale, propane powered camp fire—that perhaps could have been reached had our ambitions been tempered only slightly.

Our group is extremely proud that we pushed on with the wood camp fire—despite objections from the city—as we believe one of CityStudio's key objectives and opportunities is to push the city to step outside of its comfort zone. Moreover, we strongly believe that the authenticity provided by a wood fire is integral to the project. However, an earlier realization that a middle ground needed to be reached may have resulted in an outcome more inline with the group's initial ambitions. This would have been enabled by an earlier effort to obtain permits and insurance, and more expedient communication with city staff.

In short, we learned that in order to make progress, a commitment needed to be made to an idea, so that the energy of each member could be focused upon it. This was an invaluable learning experience—one in which every member of the group will take into future projects.

Project Barriers Identification

A number of safety and logistic concerns were identified with the project. A number of them specifically have needed to be addressed, or still need to be addressed, to fully realize the vision of the project.

- Burn permits are not currently granted for wood burning fires. Permissions may be given for a propane-powered fire; however, this requires a detail site plan and other necessary permits be obtained.
- Commercial general liability insurance is cost prohibitive.
- The cost of the fire pit itself.
- Environmental concerns, both real and perceived.

However, we believe that there are a number of paths to overcoming these obstacles.

- Examples of open burning in other large cities can be brought to the Fire Department. Channels of communication between Vancouver and those cities may be opened.
- Events can be hosted on private property, or city property, where insurance is already present.
- The fire pit can be donated, purchased second hand, or even incorporated in a permanent manner in already planned renovations for a community center, park, or public space.
- The environmental impacts of a wood burning fire can be quantified and compared to other everyday activities. ie. an open burning fire vs. a single automobile.

Budget

As of December 10, 2013

Accountant: Victoria Simansjah

EXPENSES	SUPPLIER	QTY	BUDGET(\$)
OPERATING			
BBQ Pit Rental	AB Party Supplies	1	143.00
Charcoal	Canadian Tire	1	10.00
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES			
MARKETING			
Business Cards	InPrint Graphics	40	10.00
TOTAL MARKETING EXPENSES			10.00
GRAND TOTAL			



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Duane Elverum, Lisa Papania, Lena Soots, and Janet Moore for the constant support on this project during our time in CityStudio. We would also like to thank Doug Smith for his ongoing interest in the project and to City of Vancouver staff for helping us understand the city bylaws. Lastly, we would like to give a big thanks to Jenniffer Sheels from Viva Vancouver for helping us to push our project forward and providing us with valuable information around permits and insurance.



PROOF OF CONCEPT AND REFERENCES

The City of Vancouver website holds valuable information about permits and bylaws regarding open burning.

<http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/outdoor-fire-safety.aspx>

The campfire rings in Dufferin Grove Park in Toronto have been known to make the park safer and friendly by increasing activity and liveliness at night. Their unofficial website claims that a campfire “is a reassuring circle of light and activity” (np).

<http://dufferinpark.ca/campfires/wiki/wiki.php>

This blog on the campfire pits at Dufferin Park demonstrates some of the enthusiasm for gathering around campfires.

http://www.blogto.com/arts/2011/10/static_zine_launches_new_issue_around_a_campfire/



A heated parklet allows people to hang out comfortably on the street which invites community gathering.

<http://uptownalmanac.com/2012/10/giants-parklet>

A personal blog by Joseph Lewis summarizes the importance of gathering around a campfire and captures a bit of the magic we’ve felt through experiencing campfires.

<http://jrlewis.blogspot.ca/2013/05/importance-of-campfire.html>

Heaters installed in a train station in the Netherlands invite strangers to gather around and get to know each other by simply providing heat on a cold day.

<http://popupcity.net/keep-yourself-warm-with-the-public-heater/>



The Urban Campfire group in Seattle hosted an event which used the power of the campfire to bring people together (in this case woman), ignite storytelling and forge connections.

<http://thecravecompany.com/urbancampfire/aboutpage/>



The fire pit planned to be installed in DUMBO plaza in New York was designed with safety and the environment in mind. The fire pit burns clean energy which is harnessed and converted into electricity to light up Christmas lights on a Christmas tree. A great possibility for Vancouver to consider that would be in line with the city's sustainability goals.

<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20131206/dumbo/fire-pit-planned-for-dumbo-plaza-will-generate-power-for-holiday-lights>



CityStudio

A communal campfire experience that
forges connections, gathering and warmth in Vancouver.

Fall 2013

Kaegan Donnelly | Nicolene Mckenzie | Victoria Simansjah | Peter Ullstrom

