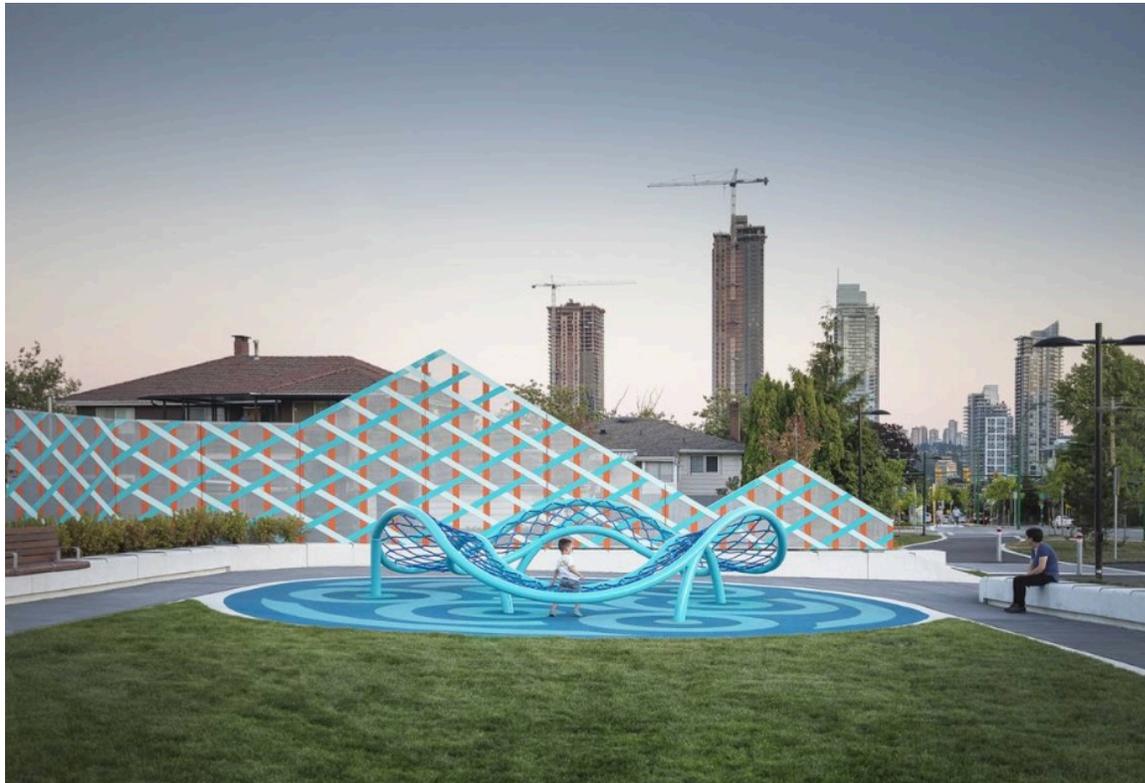




## Willingdon Linear Park brings new life to a Burnaby in transition

by Gail Johnson on October 17th, 2018



Willingdon Linear Park, which runs between Brentwood Town Centre and Burnaby Heights, includes a collection of public-art elements titled Rite of Passage. JON ROSS

*Just 13 blocks separate **Brentwood Town Centre** from Hastings Street in Burnaby Heights, yet this time last year, the idea of walking or biking the stretch between them along Willingdon Avenue would hardly have been inspiring. All that was next to the busy thoroughfare was a narrow sidewalk, wide patches of gravel, and in some places, a dirt path cutting through weeds and overgrown grass.*

Today, that entire 1.3-kilometre swath has been transformed. The City of Burnaby recently **opened** Willingdon Linear Park, a greenway with a meandering multi-use path, play structures, art installations, and mini pocket parks. It's an example of how greenspace and public art can do much more than beautify a place; they also bring residents together.

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“People are out with their kids or walking their dogs and starting up conversations,” says Paul McDonell, City of Burnaby councillor and chair for its parks, recreation and culture commission. “It’s building a community.

“We’re very conscious that a city is more than concrete and steel, it’s a place where people are living,” he adds. “With the population growth and more and more people living in condos, what can we do so they can enjoy the natural beauty of Burnaby and get out and meet their neighbours? We’re seeing more and more people starting to use it. The side effect is a healthier community, a livable community.”

With more and more people moving out of Vancouver and into Burnaby, the notion of livability has never been more vital. With massive new and forthcoming developments in the Brentwood community, including condo towers, residents will now have more amenity space in what was previously a nondescript area.

Willingdon Linear Park came about as a result of the City of Burnaby assembling land along Willingdon Avenue over a 30-year period. The city had initially planned to use the patch of land adjacent to Willingdon for an additional lane of traffic, McDonell explains. However, research and discussions found that this wouldn’t really solve existing traffic problems and would just put more pressure on Burnaby Heights, a vibrant, walkable neighbourhood. The idea of a linear park resulted from consultation with city planners, landscape architects, civil engineers, the public, and others.

Artists Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins and architect James Khamsi are the collaborative team behind Willingdon Linear Park’s Rite of Passage, a collection of 19 distinct public-art elements. The trio was selected through a national open-call competition in 2016, with jury members from the local visual arts and design communities, Burnaby’s parks and planning departments, ISL Engineering and Land Services, and the Burnaby Art Gallery public-art committee.

Rite of Passage includes six wayfinding “beacons”—tall, linear sculptures with fins—11 privacy “art screens” adjacent to homes, and integrated sculptures in the two pocket parks.

Drawing on the landscape architecture of the park, the installations celebrate braiding and weaving, inspired by Burnaby’s setting within a watershed and river delta and as a city in transition, Borins explains. The goal of the project was to introduce narrative through public art and to create a meaningful place for a growing community.

“In our practice, we believe that public art can play a major role in sharing narratives, adding place-hood to a site, and encouraging social interaction that encourages community values,” Borins tells the *Straight*. “Cities are in a friendly competition to provide quality of life in the urban setting, and designed spaces that encourage public art are a pathway toward that goal.

“Rite of Passage represents a sea change in thinking: the choice not to expand a roadway and the choice to favour the human scale instead,” he says. “In many ways,

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our title for the project stands as a testament to what we think is a greater trend in how municipalities are thinking about public space.”

To provide privacy to neighbouring residents and form a visual backdrop to the greenway, Marman, Borins, and Khamsi designed 400 metres of art screens. Some have a wave motif (made with CNC-cut fins, alluding to the Fraser River watershed’s fluvial topography). Others have a woven motif made of overlapping coloured aluminum strips, speaking to urban dynamics and to the islands and tributaries that weave through Metro Vancouver, Borins notes.

The Parker Street pocket park is home to the Eddy, an undulating, netted blue steel structure inspired by river eddies that is at once a hammock, play structure, and social hub. At the Charles Street pocket park is a sculptural water feature called the Delta. From tall white tubes evoking river tributaries, water flows onto rocklike forms made of stainless steel, all helping to obscure the sights and sounds of traffic on Willingdon.

“The Willingdon Linear Park has the potential to encourage quality of life...through walkability, casual biking, and the reinforcement of environmental symbols and narratives about locale,” Borins says.