

TESLIN VILLAGE SQUARE

Concept Plan *and* Design Rationale

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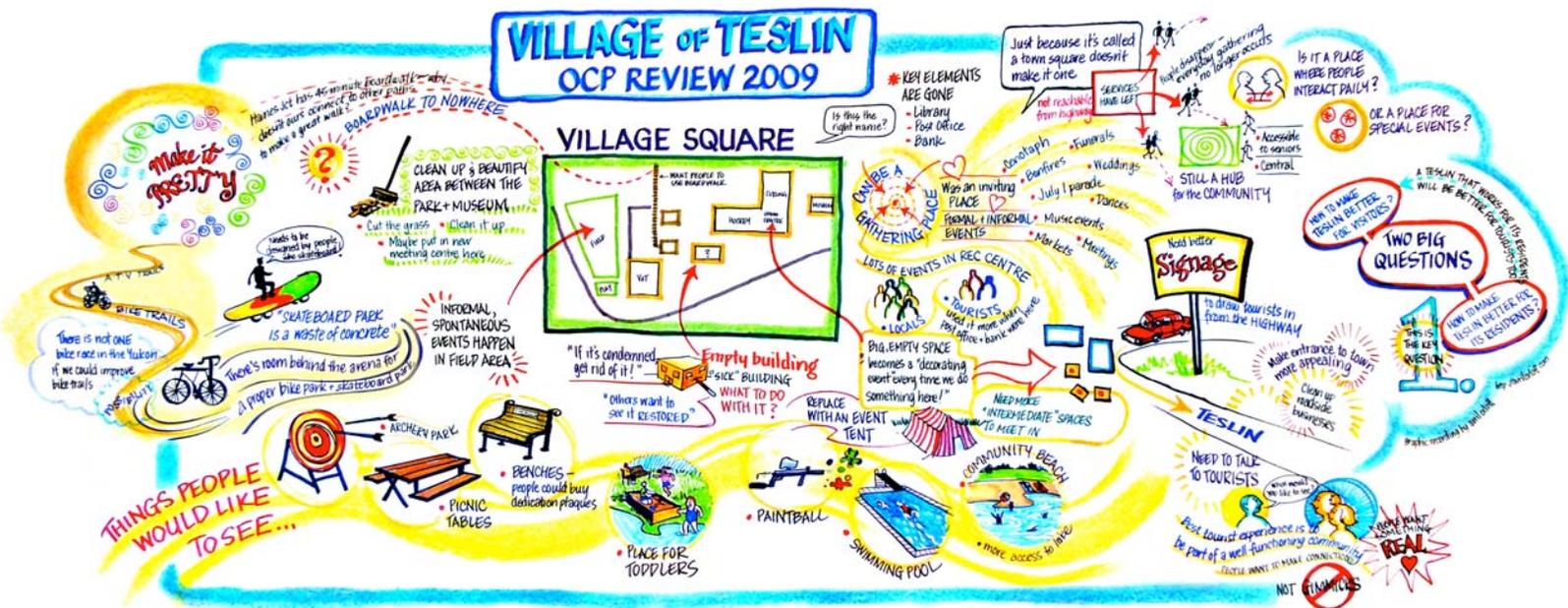
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Teslin Village Square Concept Plan and Design Rationale

Teslin Village Square – The Vision

In light of the community’s concerns about sustainability, and maintaining the walkability of their community, leading to enhanced quality of life for all residents, regardless of age, and incorporating the community member’s ideas about how the centre of their community should be developed, the following vision for the Teslin Village Square was developed:

The Teslin Village Square is the heart of the community where Teslin residents gather and unite. As the community’s hub, it provides space for essential services and community special events. All year round, the square is humming with music and recreation programming, both indoor and outdoor. The area is welcoming, summer and winter, beautifully landscaped with native vegetation, and connected by trails to all parts of the community. Everybody can walk to the Village Square. Everybody meets there when getting the mail, or watching a hockey game, or attending a wedding. Youth and seniors come to the Village Square because of the special programming available, enriching their lives, and permitting the transmission of culture between generations.

The Facts about the Village Square Site and Surrounding Area

The Village Square precinct of the Village of Teslin is defined as an area of approximately 0.85 hectares, bounded roughly by the Municipal Hall on the west, Nisutlin Drive to the south, and the RecPlex to the north and east.

During the consultation process it became apparent that some adjacent areas should be included in the Village Square planning as pedestrian connections and facilities function as part of the Square activity zone. The area of the expanded Village Square is approximately 1.25 hectares. This area does not include interior spaces or the play fields to the west.

The main Square area is made up largely of gravel parking and circulation areas, with four access points onto Nisutlin Drive. The original Municipal Building, which has subsequently been significantly added to and modified, is located between the RecPlex and the Municipal Hall. This building formerly contained the bank, the post office and the main library, but it is currently empty because it has been deemed unusable due to mould problems. Its future is hanging in the balance, as to whether it has heritage value, and therefore should be remediated and restored, or it does not, in which case it is likely to be torn down.

The Municipal Hall is located on the western side of the gravel parking and circulation areas. It has offices, Council Chambers, and extensive garage facilities for emergency response equipment, including fire truck, “jaws of life” emergency rescue, and ambulance. To the north of the Municipal Hall is the Municipal works yard. This fenced area extends north to the drainage ditch which takes surface drainage from the RecPlex building west towards the lake.

West of the works yard and Municipal Hall are grass playing fields and a children’s play area, called Friendship Park. North of the works yard and the RecPlex is a forested area with a boardwalk that connects the Municipal building to the Alaska Highway and to two side boardwalks, which have been built in the forested area.

A skateboard park has been built between the RecPlex and the works yard, but is rarely used. Discussions as part of the community consultations identified that it is too difficult to learn on, meaning that its use is confined to older teenagers with previous skateboarding experience.

The RecPlex contains a hockey arena, a community hall, and a curling rink. Several offices are located in this building as well as a youth activity area, storage rooms and a weight room, which are currently under construction on the second floor.

Note that certain issues concerning the Nisutlin Drive right-of-way and surveyed lot lines in relation to the built environment emerged in the preliminary stages of the design process. The Village of Teslin has remedied these over the course of 2009. See Appendix 1 for details.

Community Ideas and Input for the Village Square Plan

As part of the 2009 Official Community Plan review process, community consultation workshops were held during the week of May 2009. A graphic recording process augmented the discussions and conventional note taking process. The mural that resulted from the specific focus group related to development of the Village Square concept plan is featured on page 1 of this report. Given the naturally overlapping considerations of community members when discussing other components of the Official Community Plan Review, ideas also emerged at other sessions.

A summary list of ideas that emerged from the workshop is presented here:

- Create an area for community events- bonfire nights, small music festivals.
- Accommodate arrival & greeting of visiting teams for hockey tournaments.
- Improve facilities for teens, such as skateboarding and biking.
- Improve connections to play fields.
- Expand 'green' presence of Village Square.
- Bring back community facilities, such as post office, bank and library.
- Provide areas for a variety of indoor activity areas, including flexible "intermediate"-sized spaces.
- Make the Village Square work for locals first, rather than tourists.
- Make it beautiful.
- Keep it accessible for seniors.
- Link it effectively to other parts of the community, particularly for people who are walking.

The draft Village Square Concept Plan was presented to the community in September 2009 at follow-up community consultations, again part of the Official Community Plan review process. Generally the ideas presented in the plan were acceptable to the community members. No major concerns were expressed, except about the adequacy of proposed parking. For certain community events, like funerals, there is insufficient parking planned at this time. Reducing the parking may cause certain types of problems. The key question to be resolved by the community is whether or not the site should be designed to accommodate the maximum amount of parking required for unique events, or whether it should be designed to accommodate a moderate amount of parking, and special provisions be made in the case of unique events to accommodate the parking that would be required.

There were some comments offered to improve the draft plan, which should be addressed as part of more detailed implementation planning. Of particular concern was the question of whether or not to have a demountable stage area near the doors of the RecPlex, or whether to establish a more permanent stage facility in the area identified for culturally relevant public art. There is a lot of work involved in mounting and demounting a stage superstructure, and apparently they are less desirable from the performers point of view as well. The benefits of having a demountable stage area in proximity to the doors of the RecPlex would include:

- ❑ Proximity to the indoors and the rest rooms, particularly important for winter festivals;
- ❑ The stage superstructure would not interfere with the views to the south, across the lake, from the deck in the proposed addition when festivals or performances were not in progress.

Village Square Concept Plan

The Village Square Concept Plan proposes a significant update to the defined area. Conceived as 'the hub of a wheel,' the plan gathers civic, business, day-to-day recreational activities, specific facilities and events into a people-oriented town centre zone. The changes provide a more versatile use of the existing space, creating spaces within which a variety of things can happen. The proposed changes are low-key, simple, relatively low-cost, and very versatile, permitting opportunities for modular implementation. The effect of implementing even a few of the proposed changes would be significant.

Key components of the plan include:

- A generous, central green area for casual gathering and community events.
- Improved links between existing facilities.
- Rationalized parking areas in the Square.
- Schematic proposal for new indoor space for community programs and activities.
- Enhanced activity areas for skateboarding and biking.
- Enhanced pedestrian circulation and links to the trails to surrounding activities.

Please refer to the numbers on the Village Square Concept Plan drawing for this discussion of proposed components of the Village Square enhancements.

Components of Village Square Concept Plan

1. **Parking and Vehicular Movement:** The existing Village Square area has three access crossings to Nisutlin Drive and the area surrounding the buildings is gravel. A goal of the concept plan is to eliminate the vague vehicular driving areas that duplicate movement on the main road. A pull through driveway is proposed at the RecPlex entry, as well as a single vehicular entrance at the Municipal Hall. This eliminates road access for the main part of the main Square area.

Beginning with the east and west ends of the main Square area, we have reduced the parking and circulation areas, and indicated more ordered parking zones. The RecPlex retains 6 parking spaces near the entrance for the use of people with handicaps or seniors. The Municipal Hall area retains an approximate parking capacity of 27 stalls, within a more conventional arrangement. Vehicular circulation through this area will still access the west end and north side of the RecPlex.

Bus parking will be accommodated in the area near the Municipal Hall, with space to accommodate 4 buses. Overflow parking is anticipated to be accommodated by a designated event and overflow parking area to the southwest of Municipal Hall, as well as along Nisutlin Drive itself, and behind the hockey arena, possibly even spilling over into the Museum complex for major events.

2. **RecPlex Addition:** A significant addition to the south side of the existing RecPlex is proposed. This addition would be constructed to provide space for both a seniors centre and a youth centre, as well as offices and a fitness facility. The proposed addition is envisioned to be constructed with lots of glass to capitalize on the views across the lake of the Three Aces mountain, and benefit from passive solar orientation from its south-facing exposure. It should be constructed to use waste heat from the ice hockey arena, so as to require little (if any) additional heating.

The proposed addition would be made up of two stories, creating a step-wise approach to the front of the RecPlex, breaking up the monolithic appearance of the current facility. The lower floor would project further into the Village Square, permitting the creation of a roof deck to be accessed from the second storey. The roof

deck would overlook the central grass area and event space, and could provide a very pleasant seating area in the summer months, whether for a coffee shop, or as part of the seniors centre. The projected floor space for this addition is roughly equivalent to that of the existing “sick” historic building, so would compensate for the building’s loss, should it be demolished.

3. **Atrium within RecPlex:** Between the hockey arena and community centre, there is a vacant unenclosed area that currently serves no useful purpose, and provides significant opportunities for heat loss. Given the need for additional space and light within the RecPlex, enclosing this space on the north side, and roofing it with glass would permit a bright atrium space to be created. This space could be used as a meeting room, or offices, or the library, or a myriad of other possible uses.
4. **Arrival and Bus Drop-Off Area:** At the entrance to the RecPlex, parking is significantly reduced, with the area at the entry dedicated to pick up and drop off for cars and buses. A small number of handicapped/seniors parking spaces are retained adjacent to Nitsutlin Drive.
5. **Gathering and Small Event Area:** The community desired a smaller gathering space for festivals and community events such as Mini Rendezvous, Canada Day, and Yukon Women in Song Music Festival. Bonfires are required for the winter events, and a stage is useful for all of these events, which incorporate music and other types of performance.

With more orderly and contained vehicle movement patterns, a large central green space becomes possible, extending from the RecPlex to Nisutlin Drive and from the RecPlex entry to the Municipal Hall parking area. Pedestrian paths provide a graceful walking route around the perimeter of the green space, linking the buildings and providing connections to the play fields to the west and the museum to the east. Future land acquisition may allow for public space on the lakeshore, and possible crossing locations are indicated.

While larger events will use, or be located on, the grass play fields, smaller events will be easily accommodated in the central green area. This would include the events requiring bonfires, and smaller music or other performances. We are suggesting that some mounting structures be built into the grass area to make the erection of a tent or other tensile structure and stage an easier task.

6. **Historic Building:** The historic building currently located between the RecPlex and Municipal Hall was recently taken out of use due to its leaking foundation and mould problems, causing it to be labeled as a “sick” building. Until recently, it housed the bank, the library, and the post office. These functions moved as a result of the building’s condemnation, causing concern, grief, and in some cases, outrage on the part of the local citizens. Until these essential services were removed from the heart of the village, residents had not understood that their village had a central place of such significance.

The key question facing the Village of Teslin about this building is whether to demolish it or to keep it. Arguments in support of demolishing it rely heavily on the cost of upgrading it, and the importance of “not throwing good money after bad.” Arguments in support of keeping it rely heavily on the heritage value of the building. Certainly not all of the building as it currently stands has heritage value. It may be possible to restore the building to its original size and shape, place it on a new foundation either in the Village Square area (where a use could be found for it), or in another part of the Village, perhaps the Museum site. Given the concern expressed by the community to protect architectural and other heritage features within Teslin, a heritage assessment of this building should be undertaken prior to taking a decision as to whether or not to demolish it.

For the purposes of the Village Square Concept Plan, it is shown as a Historic Building, reduced from its current (2009) footprint to resemble the architect’s best preliminary guess as to its original size and shape, and integrated into the concept plan.

NOTE: The historic building resembles the other buildings on-site very closely, given the uniformly coloured aluminum siding used on the RecPlex and Municipal Hall as well as on the historic building. Participants related its story during the follow-up September 2009 consultations. This building was the original municipal structure, built entirely with volunteer labour, with building materials advanced by a local businessman. Over time the municipality was able to pay back the cost of the building materials. The building was used for community dances, as well as other purposes, and so many older residents of Teslin have fond memories of the place. Since then it has been added to and modified, so that its original shape and size are now disguised.

7. **Viewing Dock:** One of the community’s concerns is about ready access to the lake, which is currently quite limited by development along the lakeshore. A related concern is that the boardwalk/trail system is not destination-oriented. To address these concerns, the Village Square Plan envisions improvements and extensions to the existing boardwalk/trail network (see item 13 for full description), and the creation of a destination point by along the lakeshore.

The Village Square Plan proposes that a viewing dock or platform be created along the south side of Nisutlin Drive as a destination point for the trail system, and that one of the excellent exhibits from the George Johnston Museum, about historic boats used on the lake, be relocated to this viewing dock, together with interpretive signage. Signage could also be developed to interpret the mountains across the lake, with their Tlingit names as well as their “official” names, traditional uses of the lake, the lake in relation to the fur trade and Gold Rush, and so on.

8. **Future Building:** In the longer term, we believe that there is great value in having more day-to-day facilities in the Village Square, and so a new building is proposed west of the RecPlex. The concept plan shows a schematic building plan of

approximately 1,000 sq. metres of floor space on two levels. Library or higher educational uses would be ideal in this location. Space for essential village services could also be located here, i.e. bank, library, post office. With additional traffic in the Village Square area, it might also be possible for a coffee shop to be supported. Some outdoor patio areas at the entry to this building are possible, with good trail/walking path connectivity to the rest of the Village Square, and the larger community.

9. **New Skate and Bike Park:** The Village Square Concept Plan proposes that the existing skateboard park be replaced with a new facility, larger and with a greater range of ability-level elements, in part of the area that is currently the works yard. While youth engagement in the design of this facility is desirable, a professional designer with experience of developing combined skate and bike parts should be engaged to undertake the design work.
10. **New BMX Bicycle Park and Trails:** To expand opportunities for youth with BMX-type trick bicycles, the construction of a dirt track with jumps is proposed. This low-cost improvement to the available recreation facilities in Teslin would benefit from youth engagement in its design and construction.
11. **Culturally Important Public Art:** Given the pride of the people of Teslin in their community, and given the need to provide restful places as well active places in a community centre, the idea of creating a space with culturally relevant public art to stand sentry over the Village Square seemed to round out the list of improvements, addressing the community's need for beauty and other aspects of quality of life.
12. **Reduced Municipal Works Yard:** Discussions with municipal staff indicated that the existing works yard does not have to be as large as it is presently, nor does it need to be in this location. As such, we strongly recommend that this area be reclaimed for the Village Square as open space or activity or amenity facilities. The Tlinglit clan circle and the skate park are suggested. A reduced works yard is maintained attached to the north side of the Municipal Hall. Municipal and emergency vehicles will still have access and maneuvering room, and some of the existing functions can remain. A new works shed is shown on the plan. Attractive screening of the works yard from adjacent green spaces is desirable to supplement the security fencing which will continue to be required.
13. **Enhanced trails system:** Throughout the Village Square design area, trails connect the various components, and connect with other trails that connect to the larger community. Pedestrian paths in the newly created green space provide a graceful walking route around the perimeter, linking the buildings and providing connections to the play fields to the west and the museum to the east. New trails/walking paths developed to replace the existing boardwalk (which will deteriorate over time, as it is built of wood) lead north to the Alaska Highway and a new bike circuit/ trials area, west to the play fields and a Tlinglit clan circle, and south to the Municipal Hall. Extension of the existing trail/boardwalk system will create a 45-minute walking route, with a variety of viewing destinations and points of interest. Benches can be

added along the route and at destination points to provide rest opportunities. The extension of the trails/walking path system should be coordinated with the initiatives proposed in the Teslin Recreation Concept Plan.

Summary

Although the proposed Village Square Concept Plan is a relatively simple plan, it requires some significant changes on the ground.

Implementation in stages is possible and desirable. Changes to parking and vehicle circulation would allow for much of the central green space to be realized at a relatively modest cost. Buildings or structural additions would be separate, larger projects, while pathways and tree planting would be smaller independent projects.

The public art component could be a stand-alone feature, or it could be incorporated into a permanent stage area, which might resolve the dilemmas posed by the community concerns about a demountable stage area.

Improvements to the Village Square area should be viewed in light of the community's overall desire for sustainability, enhanced quality of life, and improved recreation opportunities. It is hoped that the proposals contained in this plan assist the community with meeting these goals, and with restoring the community's heart to its rightful place.

Appendix 1:

Notes on the Data used in preparation of the Village Square Plan

The Village Square Plan is prepared using data from a variety of sources including:

- ❑ Satellite data provided by the Teslin Tlingit Council;
- ❑ Aerial photography provided by Natural Resources Canada;
- ❑ Paper drawings of the RecPlex building;
- ❑ Paper engineering drawings of the proposed grading and drainage around the RecPlex; and
- ❑ Field measurements and photography.

There appears to be a reasonable degree of conformity between the various information sources, but it must be stressed that there is an unknown degree of potential error in dimensions and placement of all existing and proposed elements. We believe the data is reliable enough for conceptual planning, but a new survey would be essential for any further design work in this area.

During preliminary design work, certain problems with the existing surveyed lot lines in relation to the built environment were observed, including:

- ❑ Several buildings spanned lot lines, or were on property with independent uses and operators.
- ❑ The road right-of-way for Nisutlin Drive appeared to be 150' / 45.72 metres. We believe that Nisutlin Drive was the route of the original Alaska Highway.

Subsequently, the Village of Teslin remedied these problems through lot line adjustments, and revised the Nisutlin Drive right-of-way to measure 24 metres, which is the dimension used in the preparation of the Village Square Concept Plan.