



urban fragments

2023



urban
design
awards



Before, Michael Phair Park



After, Michael Phair Park

Michael Phair Park

Urban centers are freckled with utilitarian spaces and forgotten parkettes bursting with unwritten opportunities for intentional community building. These in-between spaces are blank canvases with boundless potential to connect people across cultures and social bubbles through shared experiences centered around art, gathering, and play. Michael Phair Park in downtown Edmonton was the quintessential example of this. An urban fragment diamond in the rough.

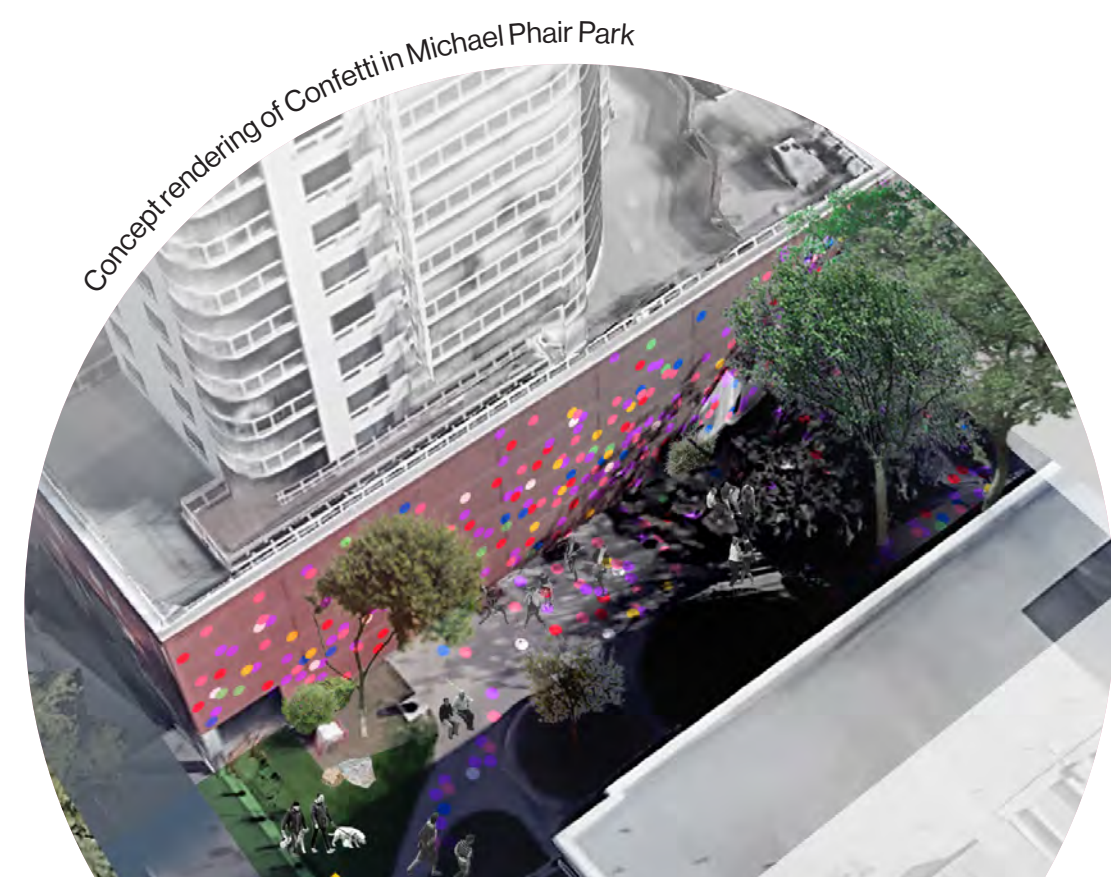
Named in 2016 after Alberta's first openly gay former City Councilor Michael Phair, the park celebrates Phair's distinguished career as a politician, an LGBTQ2Ai+ community advocate, and his many contributions to the City of Edmonton at large.

However, the original design of the park was not fully realized due to budget constraints, which resulted in the micro-park not fully achieving its potential.

In 2021 the parks renewal plan began when Phair, with full support from the Downtown Edmonton Community League and Urban Development Institute, engaged a local firm to conceptualize ways to improve the parkette. The group successfully applied for a City of Edmonton Downtown Vibrancy Strategy grant for three interventions in the park: painted murals on the adjacent building walls, a permanent stage, and overhead lighting to increase safety and extend operating hours.



Michael Phair giving opening speech at Confetti's community reveal



Concept rendering of Confetti in Michael Phair Park

Confetti

Michael Phair Park's Confetti (the first intervention) is the physical realization of Michael Phair; vibrant, playful, provocative, celebratory, impactful, and welcoming. The key to Confetti's success is its simple but undeniable ability to capture those intentions as a design byproduct of Phair's profound positive legacy, passion for community, and the mark he continues to leave on the City of Edmonton.

Confetti is thousands of equally sized circles, in 16 vibrant colours, covering the building walls that frame the park and spread across the ground, acting as an iconic unifying component of the entire park area. Their placement is explosive, performative, and random. An exuberant proliferation of colour bursting out of the park. As the paint fades with time, new circles will be added to maintain the vibrancy of the piece and hopefully inspire other areas of the City to reflect Michael's wide ranging impact across Edmonton by adding a little colour.

Big City Moves

What was once a forgettable shortcut is now a community hub for formal and informal gathering; Confetti Fridays, dog photoshoots, a lunch spot for weekend warriors. Confetti brought Michael Phair Park to life with an explosion of colour. The once anonymous urban parkette now defines an intentional place in the city's core in celebration and support of the LGBTQ2Ai+ community. An example of radical placemaking to keep the city full of energy.

Confetti early concept development



Confetti Friday in Michael Phair Park



Michael Phair Park with Confetti mural



CIVIC EMPLOYEE LEGACY TOWER PLAZA AND STREETScape

DESIGN NARRATIVE

In the heart of downtown Edmonton, a modest yet transformative project has breathed new life into the streetscape surrounding NorQuest College. Located on 108 Street, this project re-imagined an aged and unfriendly streetscape into a vibrant and accessible urban environment.

The original streetscape had a hard grade-separated edge, creating a disconnect between the street and the building's elevation. Moreover, the raised south plaza posed limitations to pedestrian flow from the nearby LRT station. The new design thoughtfully softens the building edges, bringing the grade down to the sidewalk and creating a seamless and inviting streetscape.

The redesigned 108 Street is adorned with undulating retaining walls and naturalized planting beds, inviting elements reminiscent of the river valley and feathers, celebrating Edmonton's natural beauty. Two large yellow balau wood decks punctuate the streetscape, their herringbone patterns reinforcing the feather metaphor. Cantilevered aluminum benches clad in yellow balau offer welcoming resting spots for students and the public amidst the bustling cityscape.

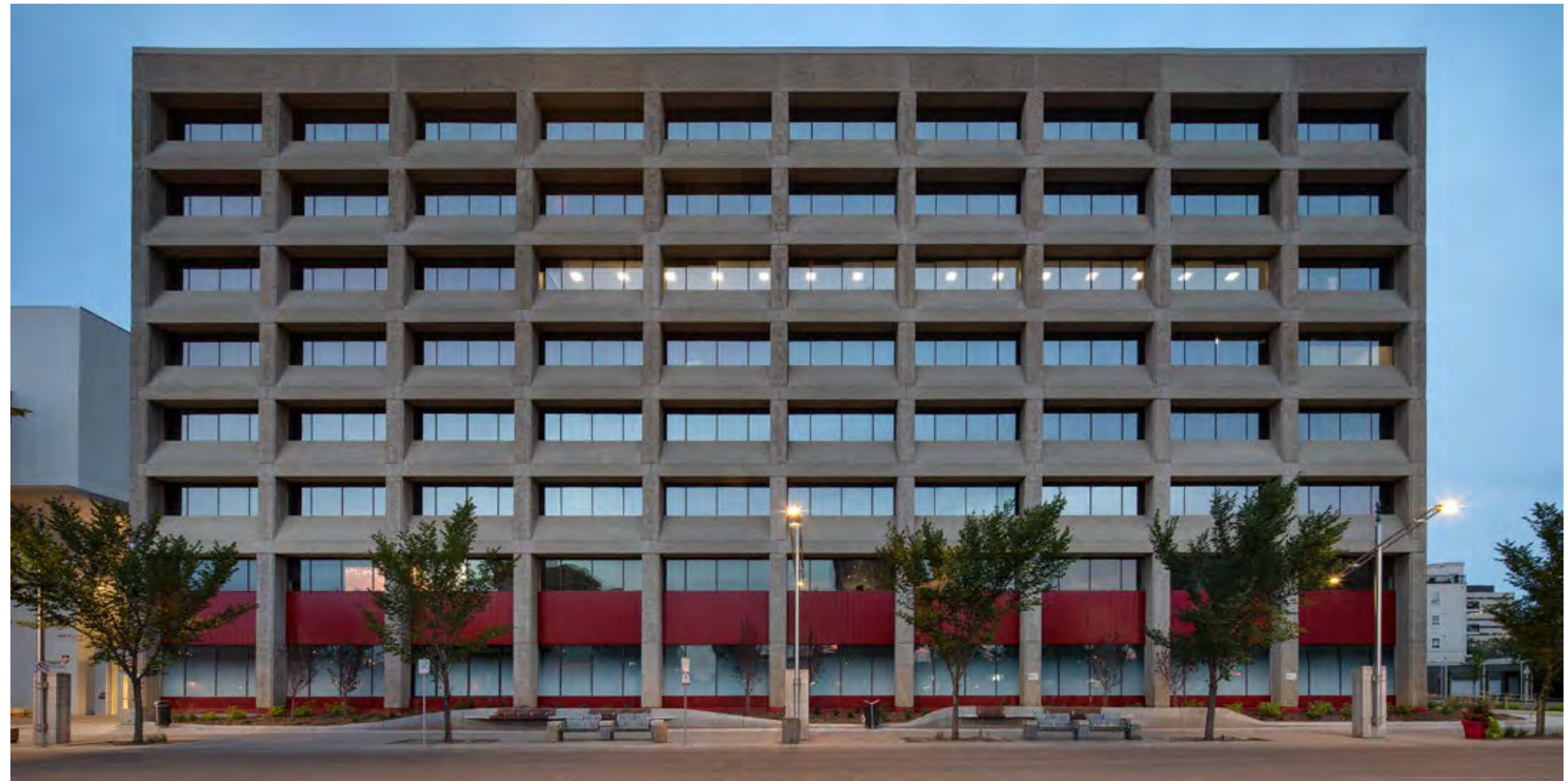
The south plaza has undergone a remarkable transformation, now opened to the street with a new sloped accessible sidewalk and a grand set of steps, becoming a prominent entry point to the campus. A curving wall clad in yellow balau extends the language of the 108 Street streetscape, featuring integrated benches with armrests and small task tables, inviting people to linger and connect. Two leaf-shaped wood benches anchor the plaza, providing additional space for people to enjoy the site's southern exposure.

The plaza and streetscape boast a biophilic design that offers a refreshing counterpoint to the original 1970s brutalist architecture. The inclusion of wood and naturalized plantings infuses warmth into the downtown, fostering a welcoming and inviting environment. The project's emphasis on accessibility creates an open urban context, reinforcing NorQuest College's commitment to providing an inclusive and inviting campus.

The NorQuest College streetscape project serves as an inspiring exemplar of the transformative power of modest interventions in the urban environment. This revitalized space stands as a testament to how thoughtful design can have a significant impact on people's daily lives, enriching their experiences and interactions within Edmonton's downtown.

BIG CITY MOVES NARRATIVE

The Plaza and Streetscape is a testament to the transformative power of thoughtful urban design. By prioritizing the human scale, embracing nature, and fostering a sense of community, this space enriches the lives of those who encounter it. As it aligns with the City Plan's vision of vibrant and livable streets, it demonstrates what is possible when we prioritize the needs and experiences of people. The project welcomes not only NorQuest's students but all Edmontonians.



TOP

Overview of the 108 Street streetscape.

BOTTOM

View of a feather deck that punctuates the streetscape.





LEFT

Leaf bench within the south plaza.

TOP LEFT

Curving yellow balau clad wall that defines the south plaza edge.

TOP RIGHT

Image of the existing grade separated and hard edged streetscape.

BOTTOM

Overview of the south plaza.

Project Name: Plátanos

Design narrative

An homage to the artist's cultural heritage and the many communities that call north east Edmonton home, *Plátanos* graces the Belvedere station. Three individual sculptures of plantain bundles are arranged to mimic their natural growth on trees. The sculptures are inspired by the artist's experience as a Salvadoran immigrant in Edmonton, finding comfort through foods that bring back a sense of home. The intention of the artwork is to speak to the diversity of the Belvedere neighbourhood where the artist was raised, while honouring a staple of many regional diets from South America to China. *Platanos* brings a sense of visual warmth to the space that shelters commuters, especially on dark winter days.

The green banana-like food is part of many cuisines – African, Asian, Caribbean, Latin American. “You notice the overlap of cultures and their markers more, which is why I chose the plantain as my inspiration. We’re all living outside our home regions and it’s so beautiful how these things bring us together. I wanted to honour that.”

Creating *Plátanos* was a homecoming, the artist says: “Part of my journey of learning how to live between cultures

is finding my way back to those cultural markers that I ignored for the sake of surviving. There’s a big cultural push with people younger than me who are honouring their cities and the things they grew up with. I am inspired by that pride because for so long I did not carry that with me. *Plátanos* is part of paying homage to that.”

“Food is important to our well-being. Outside of the necessity of eating, it is a reminder of ‘home’ or where we come from. It’s something I turn to when I need to be grounded and remember who I am.”

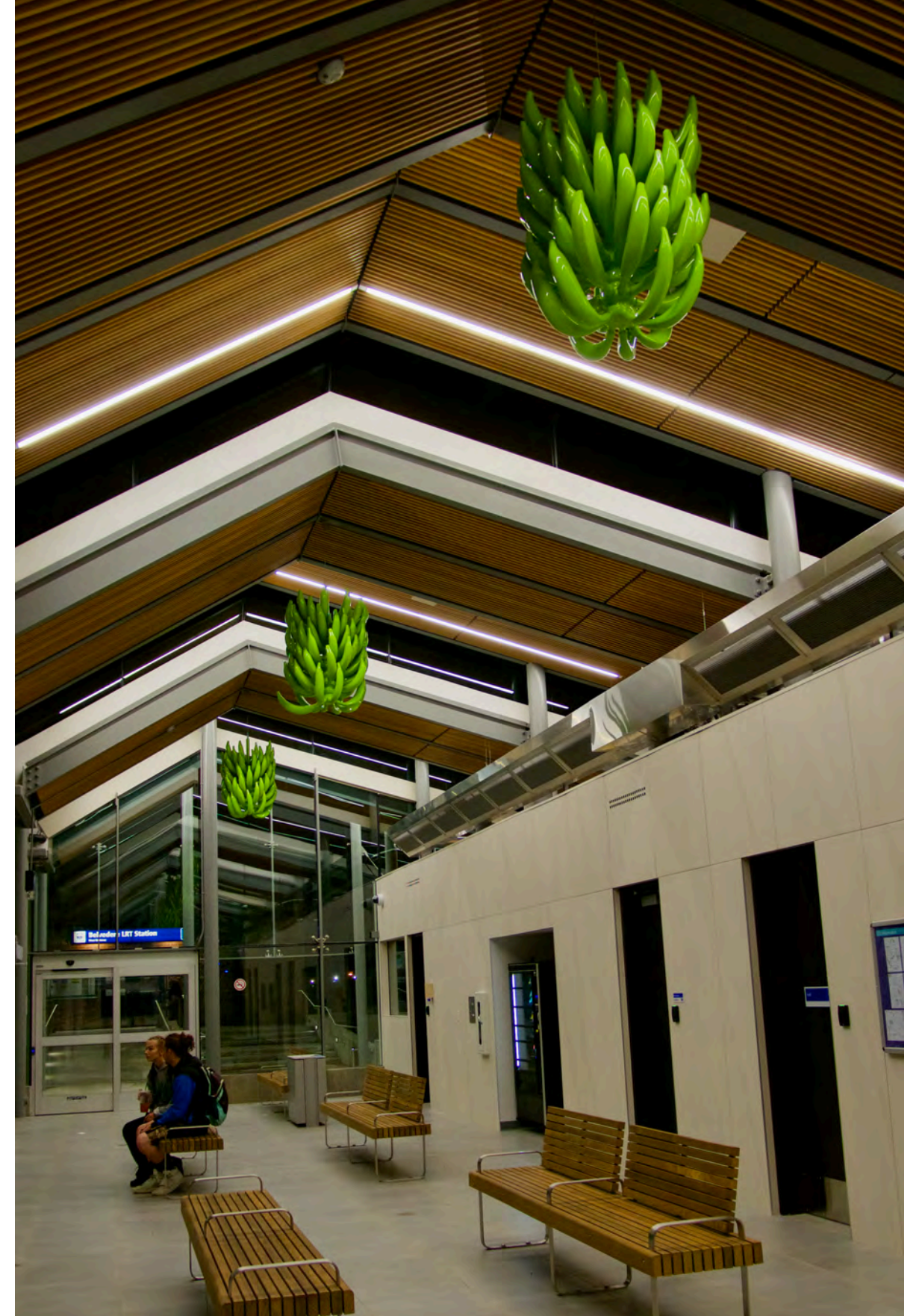
Special recognition: How this project aligns with the Big City Moves of the City Plan

For the Edmonton artist who created *Plátanos*, green plantains symbolize her experience finding home, common connections, belonging and community. An homage to her cultural heritage and the many communities that call north east Edmonton home, *Plátanos* graces the Belvedere station.



Photos of *Plátanos* by Doyle C. Marko.

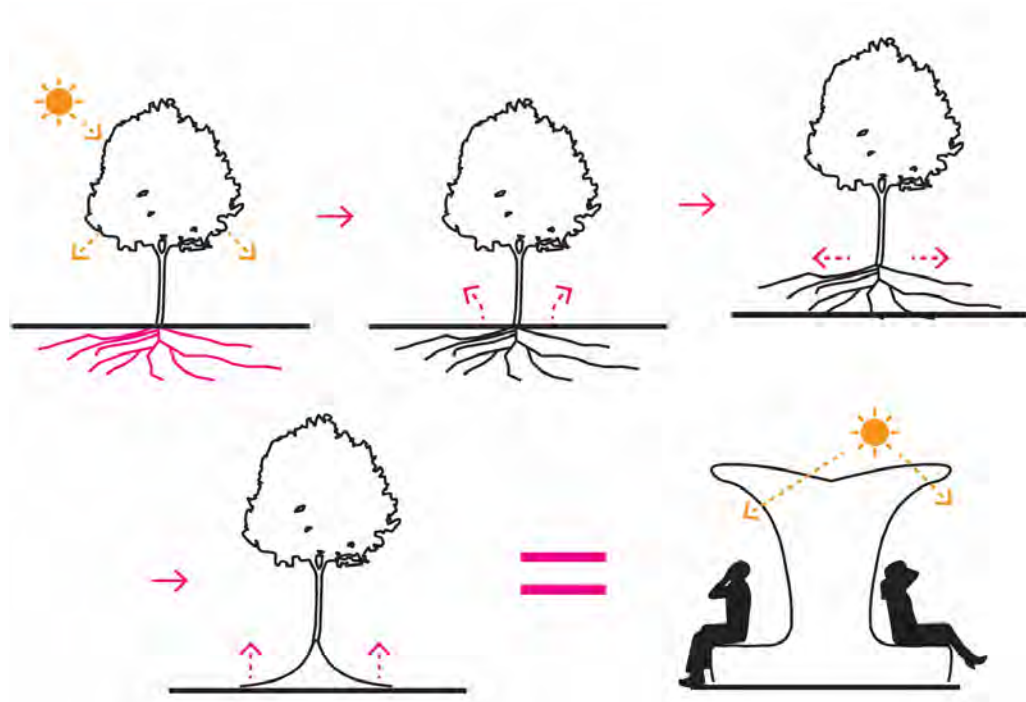
Project Name: Plátanos



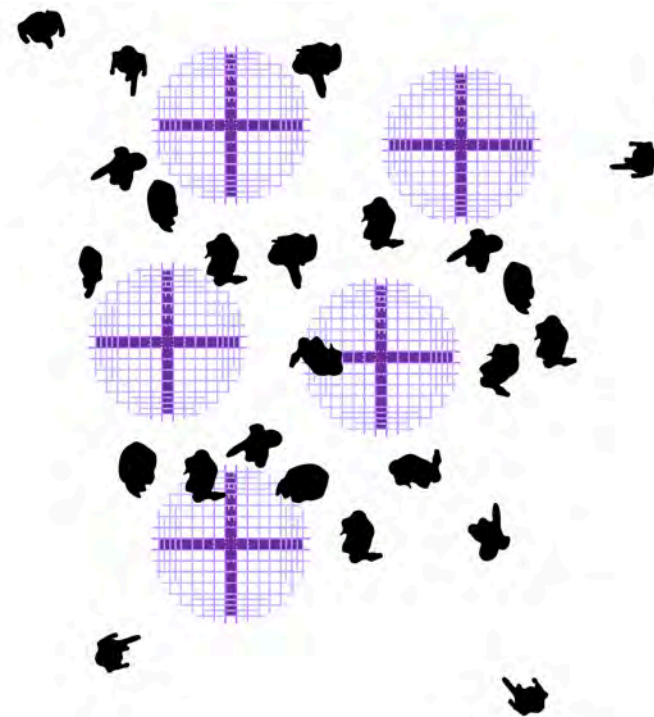
Photos of *Plátanos* by Doyle C. Marko.

CANOPY

a biophilic activation of the public realm exploring how art and architecture can be used as a form of climate resiliency.

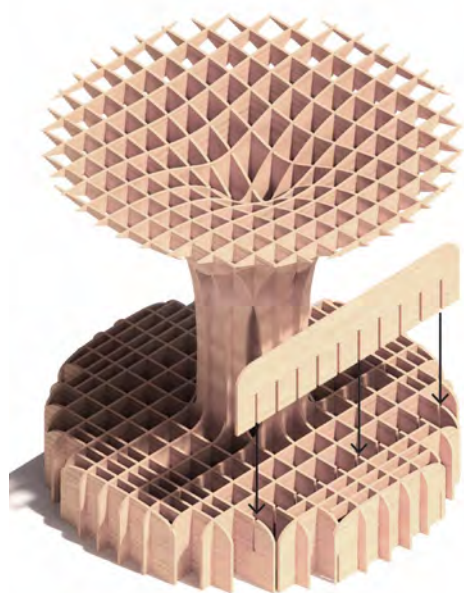


inspiration from tree roots emerging to serve as seating, and canopies to provide shade.



the distribution of the grove of trees ensures people can gather whether sitting, standing or rolling.

simple assembly, disassembly and storage.



fostering social interaction and a place for refuge from the effects of climate change.



grove of completed trees prior to festival opening.

DESIGN NARRATIVE

CANOPY represents an innovative approach to providing playful amenity space for the public to interact with. It is a biophilic installation exploring how art and architecture together can be used as a form of climate resiliency. Tree canopies typically provide natural beauty, filtered sunlight, and an area to relax. In dense, concrete environments that experience extreme heat as the climate changes, CANOPY provides shelter for the public to sit and appreciate art. The place-making art installation uses an interlocking waffle structural system to create an organic, curvilinear aesthetic while remaining structurally robust, and is quickly deployable and re-assembled year after year.

As we reach record-breaking global average temperatures and heat waves across northern communities, we are mandated to think critically about how we use public space today and into the future. CANOPY represents a climate adaptation pilot that considers how design projects as playful as an art installation can provide a form of refuge from the effects of climate change. The installation is conveniently located in one of Edmonton's most popular plazas - Churchill Square - with prominent festivals all summer long.

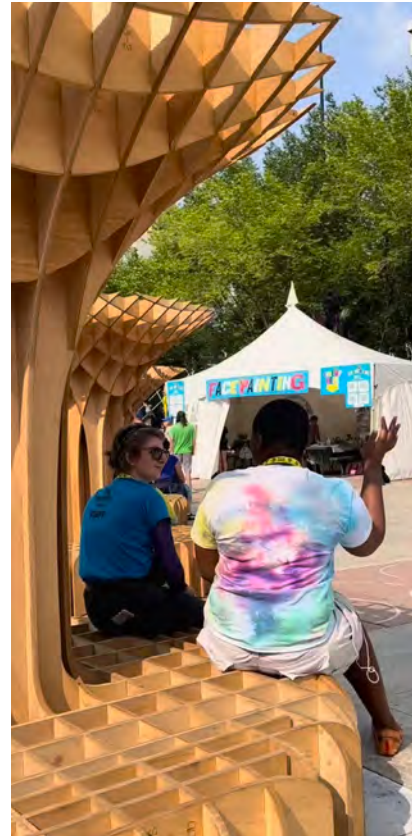
Parametric modelling was used to create the form of a tree integrated with seating, ensuring materials waste was minimized during fabrication and production (which took place entirely in Edmonton working with local partners). The result is an environmentally sustainable build, while also invoking curious minds regarding Edmonton's climate emergency.

Situated at the heart of numerous summer festivals, the project has become a point of interest for people of all ages. Whether it be for shade during the afternoon, or simply a place to sit for an outdoor concert, or a new structure for kids to explore while their parents sit comfortably and enjoy samplings from Edmonton's restaurants - crowds gather at the grove of trees to make each one their own as they enjoy the space. The result is an impactful public realm as vibrant as the diversity of Edmontonians that interact with it.



CANOPY

a biophilic activation of the public realm exploring how art and architecture can be used as a form of climate resiliency.



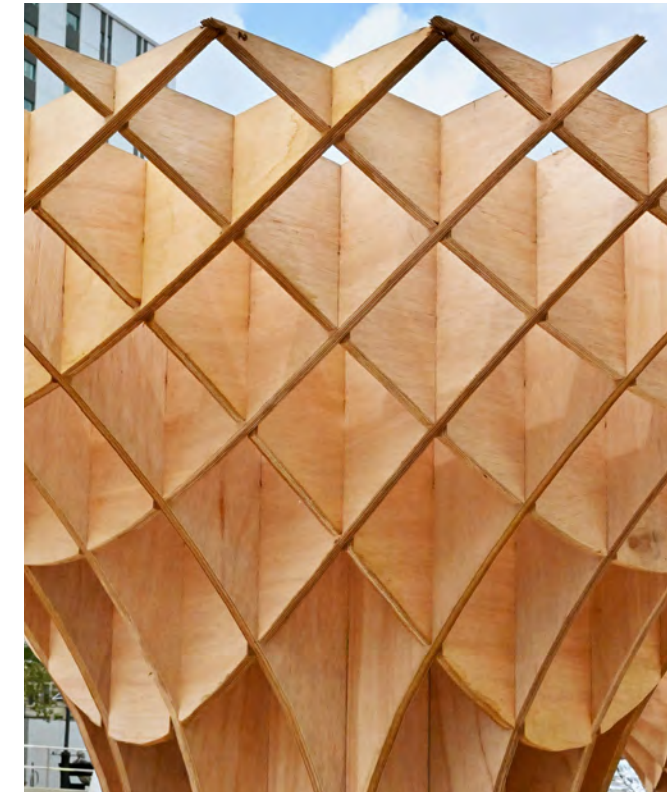
upper four photos: various scenes of people gathering under the trees during summer festivals.

BIG CITY MOVES EDMONTON CITY PLAN

CANOPY's function and narrative is consistent with "Greener as we Grow". In addition to supporting climate resiliency, the project's specialized fabrication process minimized materials waste and is re-used each summer rather than being single-use and temporary.

CANOPY is designed to foster social interaction in a comfortable, shaded space for people of all backgrounds, aligning with "Inclusive and Compassionate". Art should be accessible to all, and CANOPY does so in an engaging and functional manner.

CANOPY used as a place for reading.



lower two photos: detail shots of materials.

OFFICE HEADQUARTERS

Located at the intersection of 106 street and 102 avenue sandwiched between the existing Alberta Craft Gallery building and the future City of Edmonton Warehouse Campus Park , this retrofit began as an unassuming office industrial building with good bones.

As the new headquarters to a local real estate developer, the building required a retrofit that would communicate the company's dedication to city-building and commitment to architectural excellence. The subject property saw its exterior and interior renovation completed in the summer of 2020. The building was originally constructed in 1949 and operated as various uses prior to the current ownership's purchase in 2018.

The existing building's relationship to the street was challenged - the main floor and windows are raised above the street level, creating a non-accessible and visually disconnected condition between the building users and the pedestrian realm. However, the opportunity to respond to the Warehouse Park proposed directly south of the building informed the design solution focused on porosity, accessibility and connection to greenspace.

First priority was the inclusion of a lift to provide accessibility from the street and within the building. To bring outdoor space to the building users and natural light to the lower level, the east building facade was cut back to create a courtyard at the south corner. The

result is a widened sidewalk experience that is punctuated by a large specimen tree from the courtyard below, improving the pedestrian realm on 106 street.

Large expanses of glazing articulated with exaggerated frames highlight visibility into the building and encourage street activation. A simple palette of glass, metal and paint acknowledge the existing building while highlighting the new architectural interventions and fine detailing.

The subject property is a small project with big impact. The ethos of this retrofit resonate with the 'Big City Moves' with particular emphasis on the greening of our everyday experience of the pedestrian realm and the preservation, adaptation and celebration of Edmonton's existing built form.



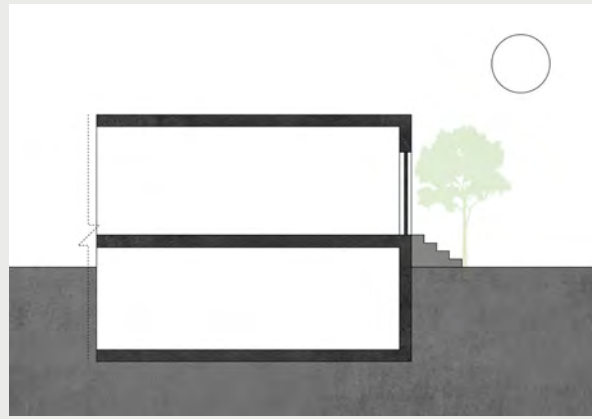
VIEW OF COURTYARD



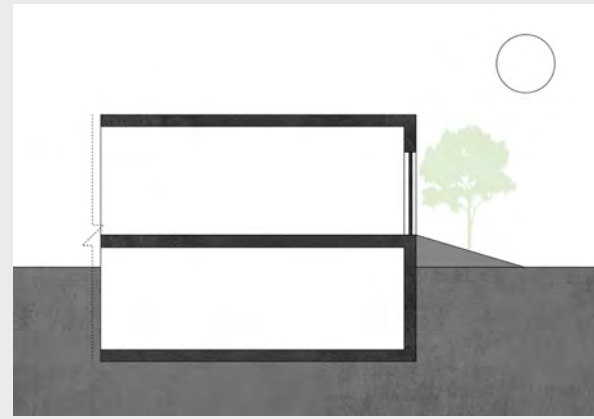
EXISTING EAST FACADE



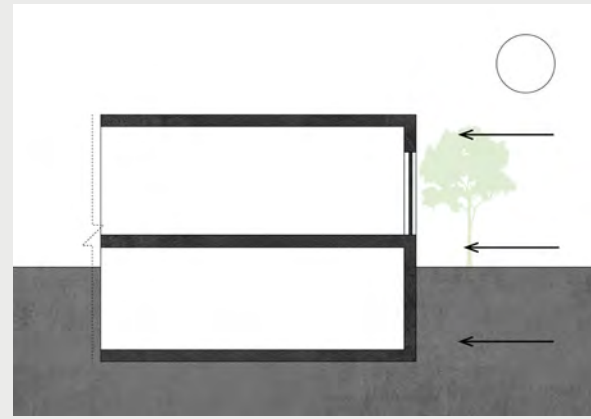
RENOVATED EAST FACADE



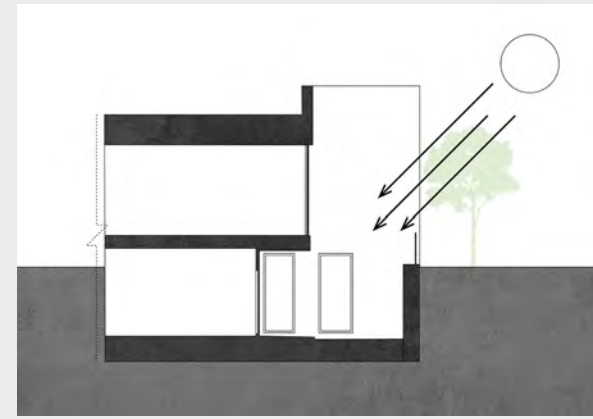
EXISTING CONDITION



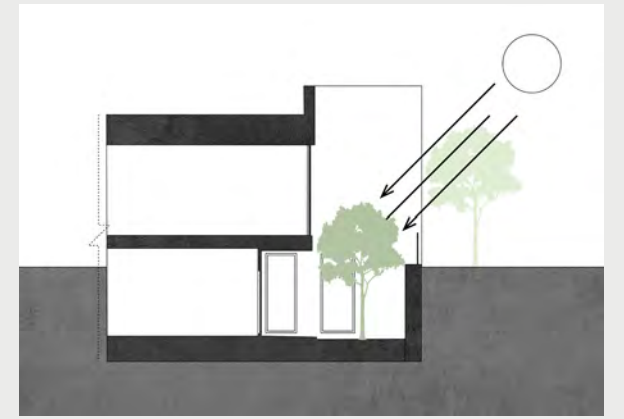
ADD ACCESSIBILITY



INCREASE POROSITY + CONNECTION TO STREET



COURTYARD FOR NATURAL LIGHT PENETRATION

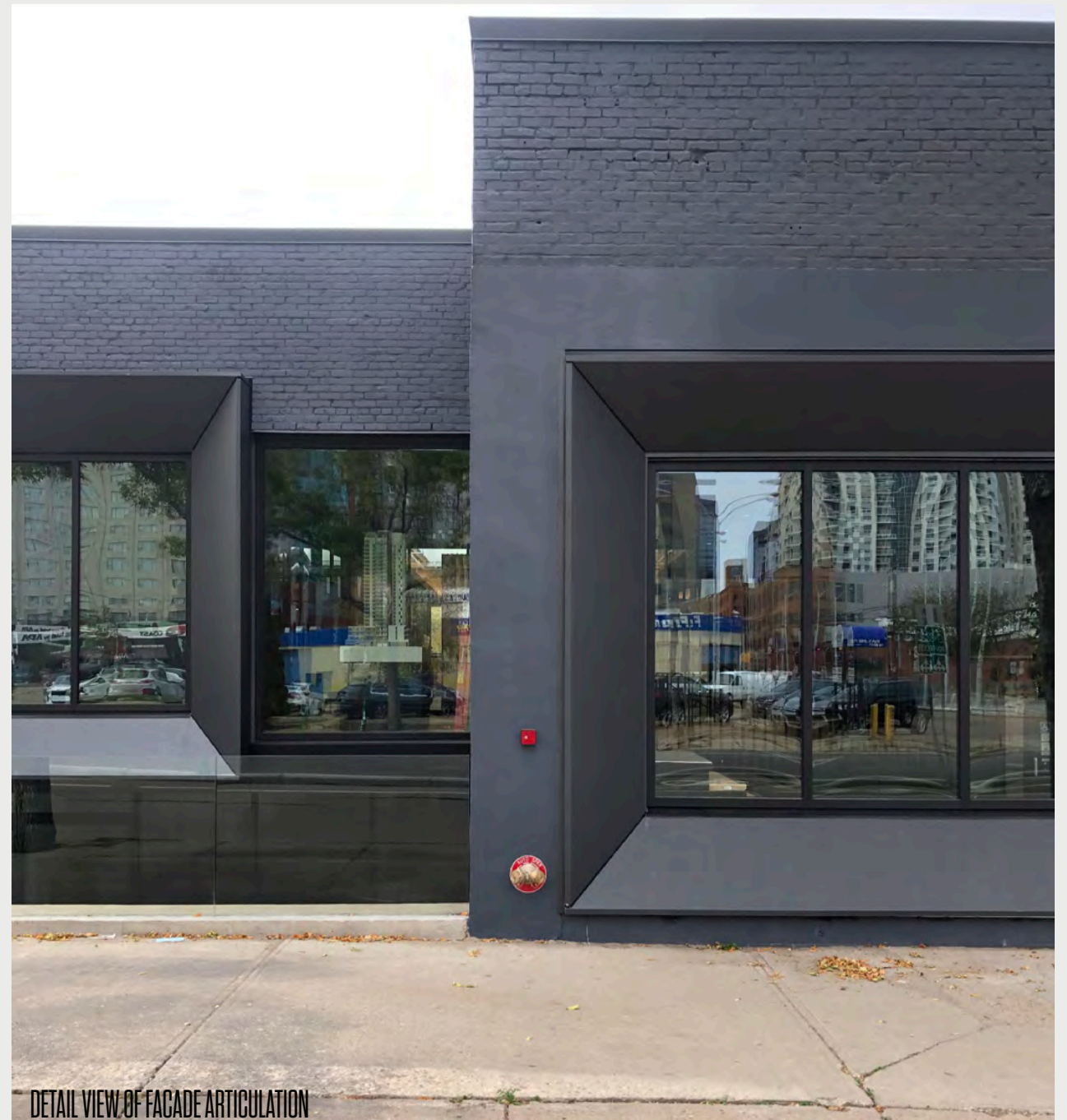


COURTYARD FOR CONNECTION TO GREENSPACE



SITE PLAN

FUTURE PARK



DETAIL VIEW OF FACADE ARTICULATION

Project Name: If The Drumming Stops

Design narrative

If The Drumming Stops symbolically connects transit users to stories of the Papaschase Cree territory.

It is the intention of the commissioned artist pair to give voice to the spirit of the language, land, histories and present realities of Indigenous peoples in what has become the current neighborhood of Mill Woods, but which was and will always be carried in the hearts of Papaschase descendants. Working within their interpretations of the protocol of being a guest in Papaschase territory, the artist pair invited a third artist with family roots in the Papaschase First Nation to join the project. This collaborative work asserts the Papaschase Cree people's belonging and histories within the matrix of the contemporary cultures, peoples and eco-systems of the Mill Woods neighborhood today.

With this work, the artists show the complex interrelationship of the past and present, highlighting the historical injustice of the Papaschase Indian Reserve dispossession. Each element of the piece was carefully selected, inspired by the histories of Indigenous peoples who lived in the area. The artwork juxtaposes archival images and drawings of the site's original ecosystem and society with the modern, diverse community, allowing a commuter to look through the eye of the buffalo while standing within the glass transit shelter, for example.

Cree syllabics featured on 'woodpecker-red' glass share a traditional 'Wake-up Song' in Cree, and the title of the work relates to historical accounts and current presence of the Papaschase community. The 'Wake-up Song' was sung at the beginning of each day by an osākawēw (camp crier), as for the nēhiyawak (Cree people), the sky is a sacred being. Today, it is still sung at special events and ceremonies across this land.



Photos of *If the Drumming Stops*.



Project Name: If The Drumming Stops

Special recognition:

How this project aligns with the Big City Moves of the City Plan

Through this project the artists are working to bring communities together and make us feel connected. Engaging with the community and the Papaschase First Nation was important for the creation of the artwork. The artist pair

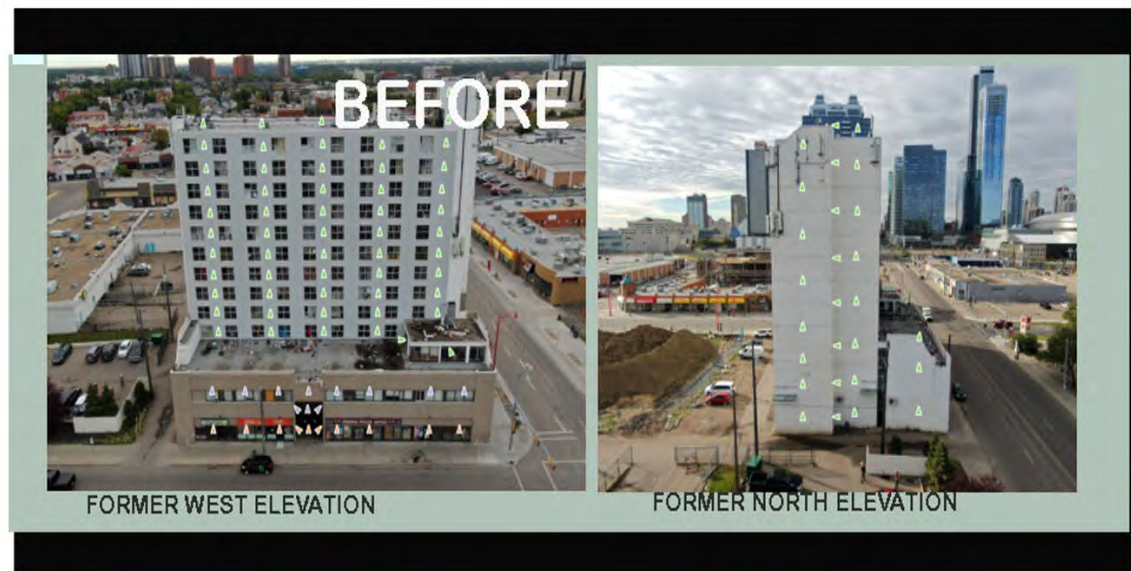
hosted a public event for members of the community and the Papaschase band to come together. In addition to sharing the concept for the stop art and gathering feedback, this event was also about community building.



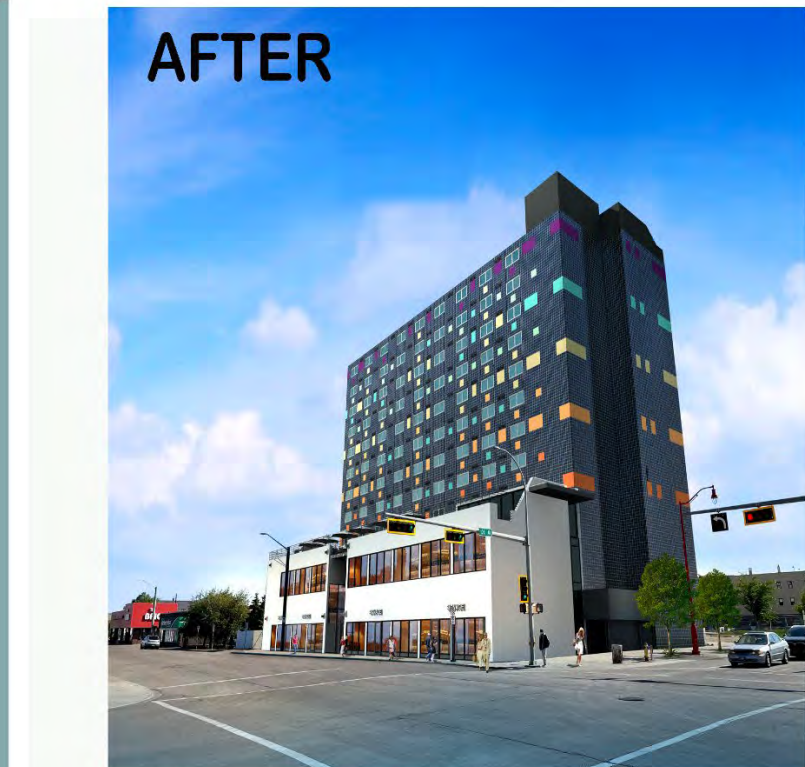
Photos of *If the Drumming Stops*.

CAPITAL TOWER RENOVATION

10028 106 AVE NW, EDMONTON



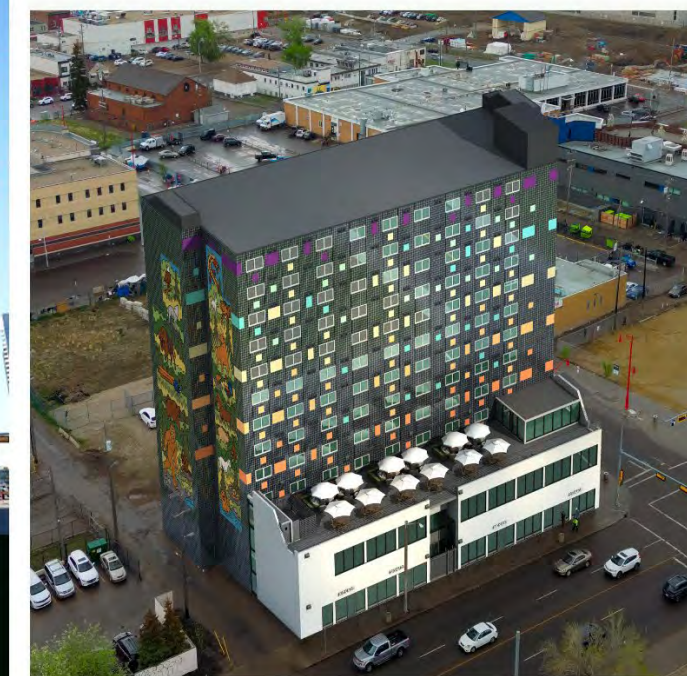
BIRDS EYE VIEW FROM NORTH-WEST



VIEW FROM SOUTH WEST



MURAL ON NORTH FACE.



R E S I D E N T A M E N T I E S

Capital Tower is a 12-storey building in the heart of downtown Edmonton, and the gateway to Chinatown. As a 49-year-old building and former hotel, it has been through many cycles of ownership, and consistently surrounded by community services organizations, such as Boyle Street and Hope Mission, to support low-income individuals who are escaping poverty and homelessness.

We are revitalizing this vacant residential and commercial building to create a high quality, affordable, and comfortable property that stands out as a warm and inviting location on the periphery of Edmonton's vibrant downtown. In recent years, we have seen improvements in entertainment, hospitality, and education in this area, and we're bringing that vibrancy closer to Capital Tower to enhance this up-and-coming neighbourhood. This building is only a 5-minute walk to Rogers Place, 3 blocks from the Royal Alberta Museum, a 15-minute walk from Grant MacEwan University, 2 blocks north of Epcor Tower – one of the newest AA office buildings in Edmonton - and 1 block north of the exciting new Station Lands development. Capital Tower will include several amenities for residents, such as a rooftop garden, library space, games and movie room, fitness centre, storage offices, and refurbished commercial space on the main floor. The building will support a revitalized community, delivering an enjoyable urban living experience for working professionals and students alike. With a focus on sustainability and reducing its environmental footprint, this project has the largest vertical array of solar panels proposed in North America. An 85-foot-tall solar panel mural has been designed and illustrated for the north face by a local Edmonton Indigenous artist, to pay homage to the unity, coexistence, and cultural similarities between First Nations and Chinese cultures from the Cree seven sacred grandfather teachings and the Chinese zodiac. Using a bright spectrum of rainbow-coloured panels, the mural will be a captivating landmark that engages with the public – both pedestrian and vehicular – creating a point of interest visible from both Chinatown and the Ice District. The rejuvenated Capital Tower is spearheading change for downtown Edmonton, creating a space that residents and tenants proudly call home.

Beaumaris Lake Open Space

Built in the late 1970s, Beaumaris Lake is Edmonton's first and largest stormwater lake. The lake serves as both a stormwater management facility and a recreation destination for residents and visitors. A complete rehabilitation of the public spaces surrounding the lake was completed in 2022. The redevelopment features a series of parks and plazas, nine viewing points, and a promenade, connected by over two kilometers of shared-use pathways.

The West Park is the outdoor hub of the community, with a winding accessible path and a grand staircase connecting the lakeside promenade to the nearby library and shopping precinct. A water feature anchors this civic space and provides an opportunity for informal play.

A more formal space, the Promenade has wood-like paving and feature walls with seating and planting. The façade of the wall also received a refresh with a contemporary composite material and bespoke locally manufactured railing.

Rest areas feature signage and space for fitness activities. New finishes and furnishings throughout, as well as new lighting, reinvigorate and will sustain Beaumaris Lake Open Space.



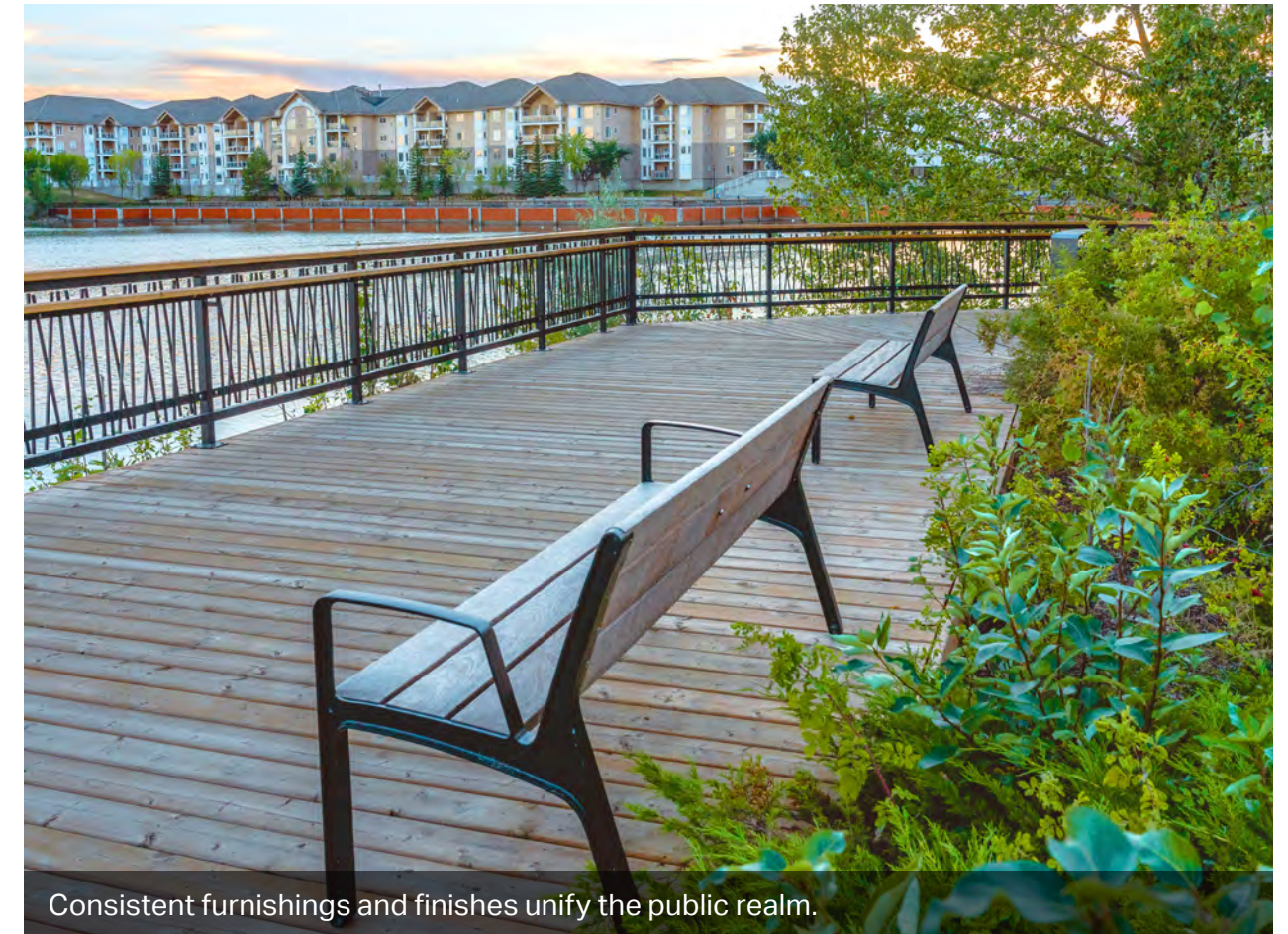
Fine detailing on the Promenade, paving, concrete, steel, and wood.



The community is reconnected to the lake via the East Park.



Integration of exemplary public realm, contemporary built forms and environmental design, A Rebuildable City.



Consistent furnishings and finishes unify the public realm.



The low and meandering concrete walls provide informal play and create a stunning terrace to the lake edge.



The contemporary façade and bespoke railing sets the stage for the Promenade.



The planting design responds to the riparian lake edge planting.



Accessible transitions from shared-use path to viewing point.

Low impact development was integrated via hard and soft material selection, protection of the lake and surrounding habitat, bioswales, and an overall reduction in hardscape. Interpretive signage provides information on the local environment and function of the stormwater management facility.

The project team is incredibly proud to have delivered the public realm vision developed early in the project with the community: *"to provide a high quality, natural environment that supports healthy living by offering opportunities for: tranquility and rest, wildlife and stormwater management education, community gathering, and physical activity."* Since completion, the City has received positive feedback from visitors – including *"great job!"* and appreciation for the *"overall feel and look of the place."*

Big City Move: A Rebuildable City

"As Edmonton's population grows, it is important that older as well as newer neighbourhoods purposefully adapt to future change and enable ongoing redevelopment" (City Plan, page 160). Due to its age and success as a community amenity, the open space was deteriorating, causing aesthetic and safety issues. The Beaumaris Lake Open Space rehabilitation embodies Rebuildable City principles by recreating and transforming the beauty, safety and capacity of the open space for current and future generations.



East Facade

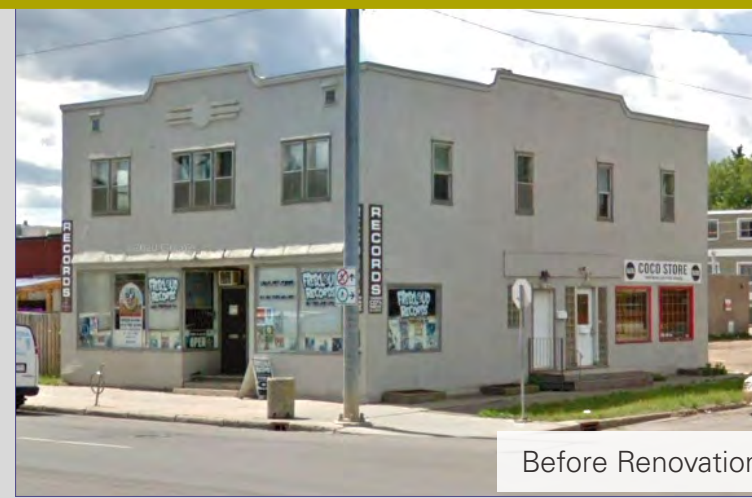
FREECLOUD RECORDS

For over a century the Freecloud Records' Building has stood at the crest of Downtown Edmonton. It has seen history: from horse drawn wagons of grain pulling into town from the surrounding Ukrainian farm settlements, to the genesis of Edmonton's Ice District, a stage for world class entertainment and residence for the ultra elite. The building's 3-year transformation was the collision between raw, art deco style, and rich, modern art.

The design, inspired by The Vatican and Eastern-European architecture, features regal colouring of deep blue, pure white, and noble gold. Carefully integrated LED lighting strips are built into the gold banding that crowns the structure, giving it a prominent, golden glow at night. The building's North facade was designed to appear as heaven's gate and was accomplished through a touch of light.

In its earliest times, the building was an apartment complex for the City's newcomers. Today, each of the upper windows has its own golden sill light, glowing like a single candle. Each light is like a living prayer of hope from the building's old residents who were the generation that built the City into what it is today.

Freecloud Records have had their vinyl record shop at the building for the last 33 years, operating as a museum for the history of music. The building is a cathedral for people to come and enjoy the sound of the living past. To celebrate their legacy, a golden record made of brass was crafted and mounted at the top of the East facade, with sharp angel's wings shooting from its sides, and white light spilling from its back, fulfilling the building's biblical theme. Care was taken throughout the design process. Firstly, to maintain the lighting design to dark-sky standards, so the sky's stars can still be seen through the building's nighttime glow. And then with careful consideration of cost, the design could be implemented onto the building's century old structure without compromise. The finished building brings vibrancy and a calming harmony to the corner it continues to stand on, glowing as it watches the City and its people grow.



Before Renovation



Final Sketch



Day | Northeast View



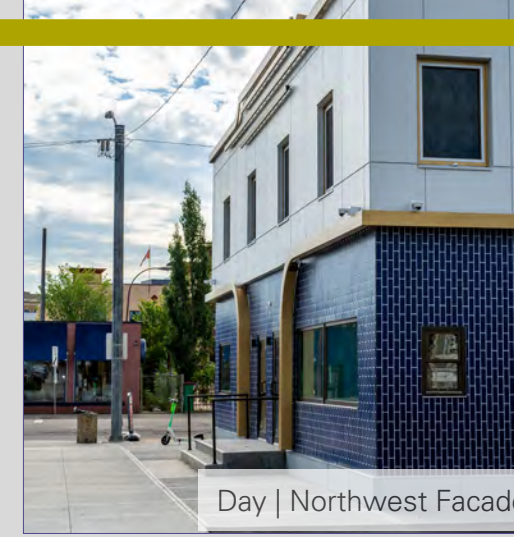
Night | Northeast View



North Facade



Emblem



Day | Northwest Facade



Night | Northeast Facade



Day | Southeast View

BIG CITY MOVES

Freecloud Records is a great example of how an outdated building can be revitalized to brighten a community and become a cherished landmark. The two storey renovation showcases our ability as designers to implement adaptive reuse and insert modern functionality and relevance to space. Now Freecloud Records is poised to welcome a new era of Edmontonians and visitors; it's refreshed and has space for three commercial tenants, instead of two.



North Close Up



Night | North View

Highlands Corner Store

The opportunity to enhance 112 Avenue High Street and the intersection with 65 Street was identified as part of the Highlands Neighbourhood Renewal project. There was a strong desire to refresh the aesthetics and improve the experience of people walking and biking. The heart of the High Street at 112 Avenue and 65 Street was transformed into a community node where neighbours meet and spend time together.

Working with the Corner Store Program and local business and property owners, the team focused on targeted investment in infrastructure upgrades that would support a vibrant and lively public realm and help businesses thrive. Design priorities for a reimagined hub for residents and visitors included:

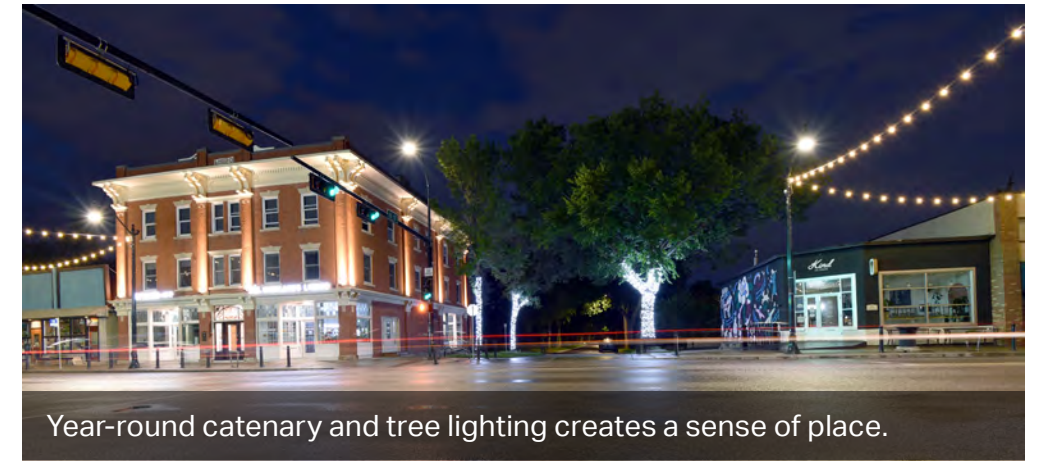
- Retaining mature trees for their character and shade
- Slowing vehicles
- Integrating and elevating the recently completed streetscape on 112 Avenue
- Treatment of the interface with the Gibbard Block (a Municipal and Provincial Historic Resource)
- Winter City design to create an attractive place year-round

Thoughtful design was needed to achieve the vision for a space that could be used for community gatherings, events, or markets. A big move was required, the road was narrowed and raised to create a plaza-like public realm. The city's first continuous crossing was built to provide an accessible space that encourages slower traffic and improves pedestrian visibility as people cross the street.

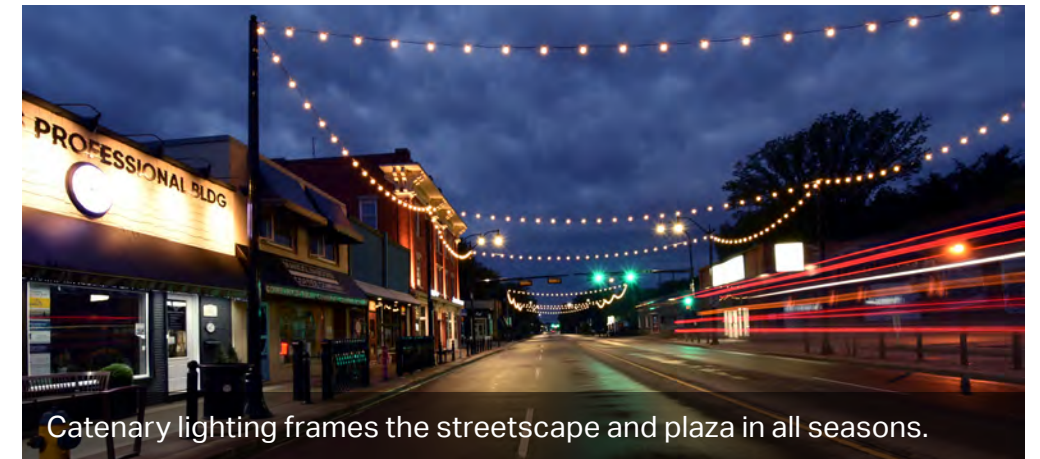
Sidewalks were widened and regraded to improve access for all. The use of concrete throughout unifies and sets the stage for days when the road is closed for events. Surface finishes and placement create the delineation between the multi-modal users.

Catenary and tree lighting aid in creating a sense of place and pedestrian scale.

Highlands Corner Store is a focal point in the community, is welcoming for all and enables small businesses to prosper. It's a place to meet, enjoy the space, and relax. People even get their wedding photos taken here! Feedback from the community is very positive and the local "Paths for People" tweeted "*Great stuff, makes this an even more fun and safe place to be!*"



Year-round catenary and tree lighting creates a sense of place.



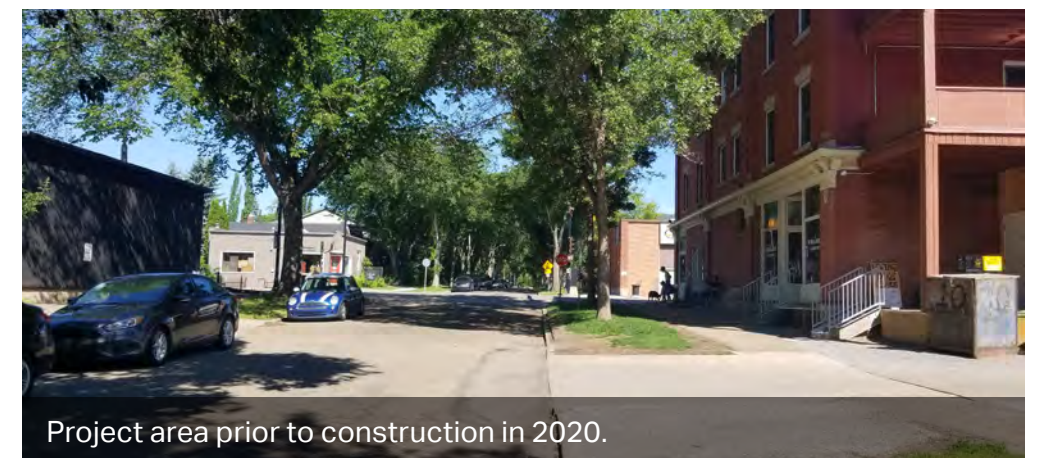
Catenary lighting frames the streetscape and plaza in all seasons.



Narrowing and raising 65 Street enables a plaza-like space and unique user experience. Surface treatments and furnishings unify the public realm.



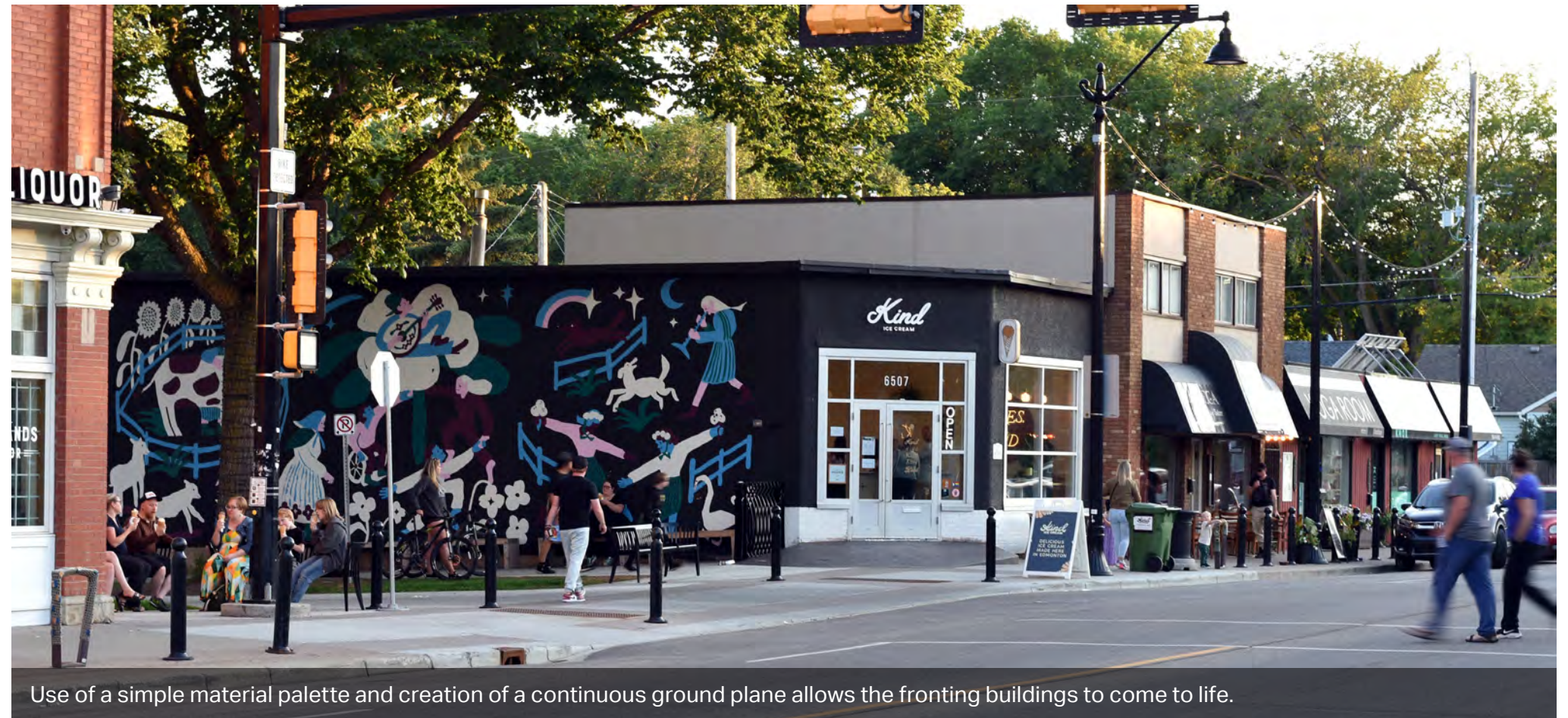
Vibrant façade improvements as part of the Corner Store Program.



Project area prior to construction in 2020.



Sidewalk finishes continue and cross the narrowed 65 Street.



Use of a simple material palette and creation of a continuous ground plane allows the fronting buildings to come to life.

Big City Move: Community of Communities

"A Community of Communities is about making big city life feel less anonymous and more personal. It's about welcoming new residents and developing housing, recreation, schools and employment in all of our districts that can be better accessed through all forms of transportation" (City Plan, page 24). The Highlands project brings this idea to life, supporting active transportation and a district that allows people to easily complete their daily tasks close to where they live.



Lanes are integrated into the raised plaza. Space for waste collection is optimized and made attractive via above/below ground waste management.