

A wooden sign for Whistler Village. The sign features a stylized mountain peak logo at the top. Below the logo, the text reads: "WHISTLER VILLAGE", "Host Mountain Resort", "2010 Olympic & Paralympic Winter Games", and "Bienvenue". The sign is set against a background of snow-covered evergreen trees and a clear sky.

WHISTLER VILLAGE

Host Mountain Resort
2010 Olympic & Paralympic
Winter Games
Bienvenue

A Tool Only For Accessibility?

Krystyl Bergen | Glen Manning - HTFC

CITY 7470 | Professional Planning Practice | Winter 2017 | April 26th

ABSTRACT

There are particular accessibility tools that cities, neighborhoods, and the buildings within have started developing and using, such as wayfinding systems, that provide easier navigation to, and between, key destinations.

This system can be seen as a planning and design tool to accommodate the older populations that are quickly growing, and also people with disabilities.

In 2003, Winnipeg became the first Canadian city to develop a wayfinding system. The city's system incorporated graphics and maps to ease navigation throughout the downtown area for both pedestrians and car users (Access Winnipeg, 2014). The system is now a decade old, and other Canadian cities, like Vancouver, have started developing their own, more innovative, wayfinding systems.

There are many projects that can be found throughout Winnipeg that incorporate innovative wayfinding systems, these examples include the Health Sciences Hospital elevator systems, The University of Manitoba Campus Plan, and the Margaret Grant Pool. This case study will look at a best practice in wayfinding for recreational facilities and town planning. This case-and-point project is in collaboration with Glen Manning from HTFC, using Whistlers Wayfinding Strategy as background research for two future projects: the Pan Am Pool and the St. James Civic Centre; wayfinding strategies will be developed for both projects in the upcoming months.

1.0 / INTRODUCTION

Many places around the world are beginning to recognize the importance of planning and designing for accessibility and are searching for tools that not only improve urban accessibility, but also enrich user experiences.

The province of British Columbia is a good example of this. In 2014, the Provincial



Whistler, B.C., Canada, 2010

Government worked to create and launch 'Accessibility 2024'. Accessibility 2024 is a ten-year action plan which aims to make British Columbia "the most progressive province for people with disabilities in Canada" (Accessibility 2024, 2014). The plan brings together government, businesses and the disability community, raising awareness and removing barriers that prevent inclusivity throughout B.C. communities.

The Resort Municipality of Whistler, is one of the many communities within British Columbia working towards greater



Paralympic Torch Relay at Whistler, 2010



Whistler Village During Paralympics, 2010

access and inclusion, this can be found as a recommendation within the 'Whistler 2020' Health and Social Task Force as the 'Access Whistler Project' (Whistler BC Canada). The Access Whistler Project has set out 'immediate and short term' plans, which include upgrades to signage, wayfinding information, and the built environment (Whistler BC Canada). As is the process for many new accessibility and wayfinding projects, an audit was conducted of the village and the parks to assess the retrofitting needs for the project. The audit helped to identify areas for improvements. Some areas have started being worked on, while others are being planned for, however, the plan acknowledges that there will always be room for improvement.

2.0 / BACKGROUND

Whistler Village is located at the base of the Whistler Mountain and the Blackcomb Mountain, hosting a range of activities, such as skiing, snowboarding, mountain biking, golf, and hiking.

The village houses a vibrant strip, called the Village Stroll, which is a pedestrian only corridor containing shops, restaurants, hotels, and other tourism attractions. The village's location at the bottom of both mountains,

makes for a pleasant destination for tourists and locals, with beautiful views of the surrounding mountains. The strip is built on an elevated level containing many sets of stairs, however, there are maps and signage at every staircase indicating the closest ramp and its slope information for users to make the best decision possible on how and where to acquire access. In addition, all of this information can be found on the Access Whistler Map.

THE ACCESS WHISTLER MAP

The map, as part of Whistler’s accessibility commitment, is designed to direct users to all accessibility features within the village, improving access and inclusion. The map displays all accessible entrances into the Village Stroll, all ramps and elevators, accessible washroom, parking spots, and entrances into the shops, restaurants and hotels, as well as access into the trail network system. The map was developed “with the premise of providing useful information to empower the best decision-making for people of all abilities”, making Whistler a destination for everyone (Whistler BC Canada).

Within the map, visitors will discover that there are a number of accessible parking stalls throughout the village, all in close proximity to major destinations. Within the 5 Day Parking Lots, there are 23 spots dedicated to accessibility. As well, visitors are able to view all accessible washrooms, selecting ones closest to their location, as this is another example of local businesses contributing to the movement. Most hotels have accessible washrooms off their main lobby, which they make public to everyone, and display within the Access Whistler Map.



Ramps in the Village Stroll, 2010



Second Phase of Whistlers Wayfinding Project, 2017

As part of this commitment, The Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) and many businesses within have partnered to better achieve access by further partnering with the Rick Hansen Foundation. The Rick Hansen Foundations is an online auditing and accessibility rating tool that allows visitors to provide insight regarding the barriers experienced with customer reviews, ratings, and images taken, this also allows people with disabilities to check the ratings and features before arriving (Whistler BC Canada).

3.0 / MAKING A CASE FOR WAYFINDING

Current technologies allow for people to navigate systems and access information effortlessly with the touch of their fingers, because of this, the importance of wayfinding systems and their role in city planning and urban design has grown beyond “the need for basic navigation, identification and information” (Access Winnipeg, 2014).

As mentioned above, the Access Whistler Project identifies wayfinding as an improvement required for better accessibility, which benefits everyone, including those with disabilities. The improvements being focused on include “audible intersection crossing signals, tactile curb cuts, signage at stairs to demonstrate where ramp access is located for buildings on the elevated levels, and the village of Whistler is also in the process of testing new standards for accessible sidewalks” (Whistler BC Canada).

WHISTLER MASTER WAYFINDING AND GUEST ARRIVAL STRATEGY

The RMOW created a plan called the 'Whistler Master Wayfinding and Guest Arrival Experience Strategy'. Like the village's accessibility initiative, this plan is focused on improving and enhancing the pedestrian experience for all users. The intent is to create an atmosphere that is 'easy and friendly to navigate', with improved physical and digital environments and signage (Whistler BC Canada). The strategy has developed an interactive wayfinding map that is fully accessible, broadening the level of inclusion further within the village.

As outlined on the Whistler Wayfinding webpage, it is important that the systems' ease of navigation for facility visitors and regulars is well maintained and up kept. Parkin Architects describes this as "creating and incorporating

Effective wayfinding should be focused on behaviors. Successful wayfinding is easy, universal, effortless, clear, consistent, comprehensive, simple, universal, and legible.

highly organized and effective wayfinding measures from the first steps of the design process, the challenge for any way-finding system developed by architects, designers and planners is that it must help a first-time visitor understand the logic of the physical space" (Parkin Architects Limited, 2017).

The key wayfinding objectives in Whistlers are:

- 1.Help visitors easily navigate the local road network to reach their destination
- 2.Upgrade the pedestrian wayfinding experience, specifically in and around Whistler Village
- 3.Reinforce a sense of place through creative wayfinding tools
- 4.Coordinate with current RMOW planning projects, future initiatives to create a seamless wayfinding journey
- 5.Build consensus through stakeholder engagement
- 6.Consider all modes of travel, e.g. vehicles, pedestrian, bike, public transit
- 7.Understand the needs of international travelers
- 8.Develop a criteria for destination inclusion
- 9.Outline recommendations, priorities and a strategy for implementation
- 10.Provide guidelines for design and planning phases, as well as sustainability, management and maintenance (Whistler BC Canada)



Whistler Village Neighbourhood Improvements, 2014

4.0 / WAYFINDING TOOLS

The tools used within the Whistler Wayfinding Strategy reflect the RMOW community as an 'active, energetic and exciting' culture. This is done with the use of design by implementing "landscaping, lighting, street furniture, landmarks, gateway elements, signage, mapping, banners and public art, as well as related issues such as sustainability, climate, and integration of technology" as tools for achieving this (Whistler BC Canada).

The Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy outlines further tools that are used as part of their strategy, these tools include:

Pre-visit technology: "This provides information for people to investigate the place prior to beginning their journey there, and is the first



Resort Municipality of Whistler Advertising, 2016

opportunity to present an identity for the system and encourage exploration” i.e. the Rick Hansen online auditing tool called ‘Planat’
Experience Technology: “This includes technology for upon arrival that engage visitors by presenting a variety of interactive opportunities, for the user to receive and explore information” i.e. the online interactive wayfinding map

Environment: : “This includes physical cues that help guide users through the village such as landmarks, like the 2010 winter Olympic cues”

Support elements: “This is a series visual, physical, and verbal tools that support the wayfinding system. This communicates a single voice and the identity of the system”

Signage: “The most visible element of the wayfinding system, all levels of signage must be considered together to create a consistent system and a seamless journey”
 (Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy, 2014)

Some examples of these tools include brochures, orientation maps, bus shelters, and pictograms. Brochures, while they represent a traditional form of communication, when done well, can act as an effective tool for both pre-arrival and on-site navigation. It is important that this piece of material is clear and concise, providing only the basic information regarding layout and attractions. Including a map within the brochure helps visitors “establish a cognitive image of the resort layout prior to arriving”, fitting into the overall wayfinding system consistent with colors, patterns, and community/village identity (“Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy”, 2014). Orientation Maps showing landmarks, and access amenities



Whistler’s Pictograms as Part of the Wayfinding Strategy, 2014

are another effective on-site tool. The use of orientation maps can strengthen the use of signage and help provide tourists and village guests with many tools to convey the important information needed to get from point A to point B. As outlined in the strategy, “the use of consistent terminology and display of map artwork across a range of mediums builds trust in the program, and gives the user confidence that the information being presented is accurate and up to date” (“Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy”, 2014). Bus shelters are another important tool to be incorporated into a wayfinding strategy, as this represents a common point of entry for pedestrian’s, allowing them to find their place within the system and the destination they are wanting to travel to. Finally, the use of pictogram plays an integral role in Whistler’s wayfinding system as they display universal messages to tourists who may not speak English or French as a primary language, while displaying the personality of the place and the overall system. The use of universal pictograms replaces the need for words, however, the imagery, in order to properly function within the wayfinding system must be legible and clear to help people find their way. The system “adds an important layer of information and graphic language to the resort environment, the consistent use of symbols, typefaces, colors and patterns across a



Whistler Village Bus Stop With a View, 2014

wide range of elements plays an important role in presenting the program in an organized and seamless manner and help people find their way across all modes of transportation” (“Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy”, 2014).

Overall, there are many tools that can be used to make up the wayfinding system, what is important, is that they are clear, consistent, and legible for all users, allowing for easy navigation.

4.0 / LESSONS LEARNED + FUTURE APPLICATION

There are lessons that can be taken from the Whistler project process and other local Winnipeg projects that have aimed to achieve accessibility and overall greater inclusivity, and be applied to both the St. James Civic Centre and the Pan Am Pool Projects. This case was intentionally selected, as the scale of the project can be stripped down, taking many principles and lessons learned, and applying them to a recreational facility scale.

The first thing to take into consideration, is the difference in tourism intensity within the Whistler Village and both Winnipeg recreational facilities. The tourism industry was a major influencing factor that drove the Whistler Wayfinding Strategy to be as successful as it is and allowed so many resources to be used to further the project initiatives. Whistler also hosted the Paralympic Games, which required barrier removal throughout the village, which in turn helped support the tourism industry long after the Games were over. The Pan Am Pool will be hosting the Summer Games, an event sure to bring in tourism as well, however, the scale is not directly comparable. While the Summer Games only last a couple weeks, and is being hosted in Winnipeg, a city not built up on tourism, principles and lessons learned can still be made applicable for these future projects. For example, the use of multiple tools like brochures, orientation maps, signage, and hand held technology together make a great wayfinding system that would be beneficial for a



facility hosting a large-scale event, and for the local community using the facility after the event is over.

The use of technology as a wayfinding tool is becoming more popular as technology is advancing so rapidly. Designers and planners who accept this and incorporate it within their designs and plans will see greater inclusion, attracting more people. The online auditing tool used in Whistler, is being used across Canada, allowing more people with disabilities to discover accessible places.

Furthermore, there is support from the provincial government in British Columbia to achieve greater accessibility. While there is not actual legislation, the province has made plans to make B.C. the most progressive place for people with Disabilities by 2024. In Manitoba, there is provincial legislation that sets out requirements for removing barriers, however, the implementation of the standards is still in the early phases. The province without legislation is further along in implementation, which could be a lesson for politicians and decision makers.

Overall, the lessons learned from past wayfinding projects that can be applied to all future project is that there must be “sophistication in accommodating people” (Manning, 2017). Sometimes implementing wayfinding initiatives results in compromising design aesthetics for better functionality, but the best way to achieve good design and good accessibility and wayfinding is through consultation and community engagement. This allows opportunities for ideas to be challenged, and provides the opportunity for new boundaries to be pushed, creating and supporting diversity and inclusion in designs.

recognizing the strength in community engagement, and have achieved great designs that appeal to many community groups. There is so much to be learned from community engagement, enriching a project, and appealing to more people as many barriers can be flushed out in the planning stages before implementation has begun.

It is important for planners and designers to acknowledge that accessible and wayfinding practice is always changing and evolving, and because of this, project maintenance and keeping inventory are very important. It is also important that standards are being applied properly and not being made to fit around a design, as this has led to the creation of more barriers.

Indicator strips, when done incorrectly can lead some with a visual impairment right into a barrier or a hazard (Glen Manning, 2017). However, when you stick strictly to the regulatory paving guidelines or City Standards, designers and planners lose creative license on projects in some aspects (Manning, 2017). In some cases, it is not possible to include these into the design as a one size fit all approach does not work when realistically there is simply not enough space downtown to properly and safely add in the feature. The lesson in this is that the designer and planners must weigh the pros and cons for the safety of all pedestrians, and constantly work to refine accessibility and wayfinding tools and supports, work to spread awareness and education, and understand the importance in ongoing maintenance and retrofitting.

5.0 / WAYFINDING ANALYSIS

As mentioned above, effective and functional wayfinding must be clear and concise for users. Thus, poor wayfinding mixes signage sizes, shapes, colors, fonts, and advertently confuses visitors and guests by providing way too much information in too many forms. The intent of Whistler's strategy is to remove all signage that does not follow wayfinding

guidelines, and replace it with clear and organized signage consistent with the rest of the initiative (Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy, 2014).

As noted in the Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy analysis, information hierarchy should be considered at every stage of implementation, as this principle "helps to establish the sequence of information that different types of users may require during their journey. It also sets nomenclature, organizes the information and sets a framework for routing to be used during the sign planning phase" (Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy, 2014).



Trails and Orientation Signage, 2014

6.0 / CONCLUSION

The pedestrian experience is the number one focus and top priority of the strategy, which is part of Whistler's charm. Acknowledging the importance of 'discovery and exploration' as part of the experience provides planners and designers with the context needed to progress the plans. The wayfinding system presents opportunities to connect people with and within their environments and their destinations, allowing for both planned and unplanned encounters while exploring the village. This helps to improve the pedestrian experience, making guests and visitors want to extend their stay, or plan their next trip back, contributing to the overall guest experience and wayfinding strategy.

In conclusion, wayfinding is a useful tool not only for achieving better accessibility, but for achieving overall good planning and design of a place, which in turn will attract more users to the place.

RESOURCES

1. Accessibility. (2016). Resort Municipality of Whistler. Retrieved 8 April 2017, from <https://www.whistler.ca/services/accessibility>
2. Accessibility 2024 - Province of British Columbia. Www2.gov.bc.ca. Retrieved 10 April 2017, from <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/accessibility>
3. Age-friendly and Disability-friendly Official Community Plans. (2014). Accessibility 2024. Retrieved from 10 March 2017. http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov_relations/library/Age_and_Disability_Friendly_OCPs.pdf
4. Atkinson, C. (2017). Second phase of Wayfinding Project now complete. Pique. Retrieved 14 April 2017, from <http://www.piquenewsmagazine.com/whistler/second-phase-of-wayfinding-project-now-complete/Content?oid=2875234>
5. Barrett, B. (2013). Disabled man says public toilet near Olympic Plaza isn't accessible. Whistler Question. Retrieved 14 April 2017, from <http://www.whistlerquestion.com/news/local-news/disabled-man-says-public-toilet-near-olympic-plaza-isn-t-accessible-1.959964>
6. Master Wayfinding and Guest Arrival Experience Strategy Project. (2014). Resort Municipality of Whistler. Retrieved 7 April 2017, from <https://www.whistler.ca/services/transportation/master-wayfinding-and-guest-arrival-experience-strategy-project>
7. Manning, G. (2017). Wayfinding and Accessibility Discussions. HTFC Office.
8. Resort Advertising Vancouver | RMOW | ecstatic. (2016). ecstatic design + communication. Retrieved 10 April 2017, from <http://weareecstatic.com/projects/resort-municipality-of-whistler-3/>
9. Resort, W. (2016). Information for Travelers with a Disability. Whistler Blackcomb. Retrieved 11 April 2017, from <https://www.whistlerblackcomb.com/about-us/disabled-travelers>
10. Urban Wayfinding Planning and Implementation Manual. (2013). Way-finding in Institutional Architecture - Parkin Architects Limited. (2017). Parkin Architects Limited. Retrieved 11 April 2017, from <http://www.parkin.ca/blog/way-finding-in-institutional-architecture/>
11. Wayfinding In Winnipeg - Access Winnipeg. (2014). Access Winnipeg. Retrieved 20 April 2017, from <http://accesswinnipeg.com/2014/06/wayfinding-in-winnipeg/>
12. Whistler. Planat.com. Retrieved 13 April 2017, from <http://planat.com/Venue/Photos?vid=a04b08b7-8276-4e52-88c3-3befafbd1c79&pid=8eaf2cd8-3d5e-4b98-8e75-964bf7484d60>
13. Whistler Access Map. Retrieved 12 April 2017, from <https://www.whistler.ca/sites/default/files/related/030216-rmow-accessibility-dl.pdf>
14. Whistler BC Canada | Accessibility | Tourism Whistler. Tourism Whistler. Retrieved 20 April 2017, from <https://www.whistler.com/accessibility/>
Hapacobo. Retrieved 6 April 2017, from <http://hapacobo.com/project/whistler-village-neighbourhood-improvements/>

15. Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy. (2014). Resort Municipality of Whistler. Retrieved 4 April 2017, from https://www.whistler.ca/sites/default/files/2016/Jun/current-projects/pdf/22266/whistlerstrategyfinal_lowres.pdf
16. Whistler Village Neighbourhood Improvements.

Image Citations:

1. Winter Break 2016 | MLK Weekend | Whistler, BC. (2017). SWAT - The Leader in College Spring Break Trips. Retrieved 15 April 2017, from <http://www.swatup.com/trips-events/winter-break/whistler/>
2. Photo: JESKOVA, J. (2010). Whistler BC Canada | Accessibility | Tourism Whistler. Tourism Whistler. Retrieved 16 April 2017, from <https://www.whistler.ca>
3. Photos: Paralympic torch relay at Whistler. (2010). Windsorstar. Retrieved 11 April 2017, from <http://www.windsorstar.com/Photos+Paralympic+torch+relay+Whistler/2659092/story.html>
4. JESKOVA, J. (2010). Paralympic legacies are legacies for life. Pique. Retrieved 12 April 2017, from <http://www.piquenewsmagazine.com/whistler/paralympic-legacies-are-legacies-for-life/Content?oid=2547976>
5. JESKOVA, J. (2010). Paralympic legacies are legacies for life. Pique. Retrieved 12 April 2017, from <http://www.piquenewsmagazine.com/whistler/paralympic-legacies-are-legacies-for-life/Content?oid=2547976>
6. Atkinson, C. (2017). Second phase of Wayfinding Project now complete. Pique. Retrieved 14 April 2017, from <http://www.piquenewsmagazine.com/whistler/second-phase-of-wayfinding-project-now-complete/Content?oid=2875234>
7. Whistler Village Neighbourhood Improvements. Hapacobo. Retrieved 6 April 2017, from <http://hapacobo.com/project/whistler-village-neighbourhood-improvements/>
8. Resort Advertising Vancouver | RMOW | ecstatic. (2016). ecstatic design + communication. Retrieved 10 April 2017, from <http://weareecstatic.com/projects/resort-municipality-of-whistler-3/>
9. Canada Whistler Village -The bus stop with a wonderful cloud view. (2014). Mixed Up Already. Retrieved 13 April 2017, from om/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/10-Canada-Whistler-village-The-bus-stop-with-a-wonderful-cloud-view.jpeg?cc90dbhttp://mxua.mixedupalready.netdna-cdn.c
10. Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy| Pictograms. (2014). Resort Municipality of Whistler. Retrieved 4 April 2017, from https://www.whistler.ca/sites/default/files/2016/Jun/current-projects/pdf/22266/whistlerstrategyfinal_lowres.pdf
11. Rathkel, L. Whistler Summer Village. Animec Info. Retrieved 2
16 April 2017, from <http://www.animec.info/lsitwkey-whistler-summer-village.html>
12. Whistler Master Wayfinding and Arrival Experience Strategy| Trails and Orientation Signage (2014). Resort Municipality of Whistler. Retrieved 4 April 2017, from https://www.whistler.ca/sites/default/files/2016/Jun/current-projects/pdf/22266/whistlerstrategyfinal_lowres.pdf