

TOM BARRATT + LAURELIN FONDACARO

# SEEING DOUBLE IN WHISTLER

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## COUP DOUBLE À WHISTLER

Dans les tout premiers stades de la planification pour les Jeux olympiques d'hiver 2010, la municipalité de Whistler a décidé de concevoir un village des athlètes qui laisserait derrière lui un héritage – qui pourrait être transformé en logements abordables, réduisant ainsi la pénurie saisonnière d'appartements. Pour les architectes paysagistes de Tom Barratt l'été cela impliquait de concevoir deux projets distincts sur le même site – le tout devant être prêt à temps pour les Olympiques.

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**PART OF PLANNING** for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Whistler involved determining where all the athletes, coaches and their support people would stay. Whistler would need an Athletes' Village for the Olympics, and then for the Paralympics two months later. In the very early stages, however, the Resort Municipality of Whistler decided they would not simply construct temporary facilities. Instead, they would design a village that would leave behind a legacy, an Athletes' Village that could be transformed into permanent, affordable housing for local residents, reducing the town's seasonal housing crunch.

After feasibility studies determined the best location for the Athletes' Village—a brownfield landfill site at the town's south end—the planning and landscape architecture firms, Ekistics and Brent Harley & Associates, took the project through master planning and rezoning stages. As site clearing and landfill conversion got underway in the fall of 2006, our office, Tom Barratt Ltd., began work on the detailed landscape planning and



implementation. The municipality drafted detailed design guidelines, and we collaborated with Ray Letkeman Architects and Eldon Beck Associates to produce a site plan. Landscape Architects Crosland Doak and Senga Lindsay began work on several of the upper site parcels.

### UNDER THE RADAR

The project drew considerable local attention. "A lot of people want to put their fingerprint on this project," the municipal project manager would tell us. Many saw the Whistler Athletes' Village as the place to put new smart growth ideas and sustainability notions into practice. Inevitably, many ideas conflicted with each other and with project plans and budget.

Still, unlike Vancouver's Athletes' Village, the Whistler Village did not draw much media attention, managing to stay under the radar. At the time, we put this down to good luck, often saying, "No news is good news."

### THE WHISTLER STORY

We did wonder how our story would ultimately unfold. How should we approach something so

high profile, with such critically short timelines, limited budgets, and conflicting visions about what it should become? Since a separate new Board of Directors at arm's length from the municipality controlled the project, it was neither a typical development nor a straightforward municipal project. Throw in the Olympics and we had a different creature.

Because the village would house 3,000 athletes during the games and then transform into a permanent community for 800 Whistler locals, we were essentially designing two separate projects in the same place—all under the shadow of the looming Olympic schedule. The word from the client was clear: "You better have the plans ready and approved or we will decide for you and just start building."

### LANDSCAPE MAKES THE VILLAGE

As the project moved along, the role of the landscape architect became greater than any of us had imagined. While the actual village buildings were fairly straightforward, what was going to make or break the village was how it would all tie together in the landscape:

**1** OPENING CEREMONIES OF THE 2010 WINTER OLYMPICS: THE OLYMPICS GAVE "DESIGNING TO DEADLINE" A WHOLE NEW MEANING | CÉRÉMONIES D'OUVERTURE DES OLYMPIQUES D'HIVER DE 2010 : LES JEUX ONT DONNÉ UN TOUT NOUVEAU SENS À LA « COURSE » AUX DÉLAIS.  
PHOTO DAVID MCCOLM PHOTOGRAPHY

the permanent buildings, site functions, and architectural styles. Equally critical was our coordination with the Olympic “overlay”: temporary buildings/tents, storage, transportation, site circulation, security and accessibility issues...and, of course, the Olympic decor.

Very early, as we confronted the realities of budgets and timelines, we realized we would need to combine, scale down, and rationalize some of the “big ideas” being tossed around. Iconic towers, grand entry features and expensive public art pieces were all out of reach. We decided instead to try and embed desirable features into the basic landscape. We focused on some of the simple but important elements that were truly necessary to make the village work, and we simplified our philosophy: “Do at least a couple of things really well.”

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For example, as an Olympic and Paralympic Village, universal accessibility was a driving objective of the design. All building entries, road crossings, site pathways, general site furnishings—even children’s play areas—had to be universally accessible. We began to look more carefully at site furnishings as a way to both effectively achieve accessibility, and showcase art at the same time.

SOMETHING UNIQUE

To bring a unique style to the Athletes’ Village, we purposely departed from the existing aging Whistler Village style and brought in some outside expertise. We collaborated with Urban Movement of New York (Architects, Body Movement Specialists) to produce the custom curvilinear benches, the bus shelters, and the multi-purpose bike rack/stretching features (www.urbanmovementdesign.com). To



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1 BIRD'S EYE RENDERING OF THE NEW COMMUNITY 2 BIKE RACKS ON THE COMMONS 3 CHEAKAMUS CROSSING: SUMMER PLANTINGS 4 WAITING AT THE BUS STOP WHISTLER STYLE 5 ARTIST-DESIGNED BEAR PROOF CONTAINERS | 1 ILLUSTRATION DU NOUVEAU COMPLEXE D'HABITATION 2 PORTE-BICYCLETTES 3 CHEAKAMUS CROSSING: PLANTATIONS D'ÉTÉ 4 PASSAGERS ATTENDANT L'AUTOBUS 5 CONTENANTS À L'ÉPREUVE DES OURS PHOTOS 1 CALUM SRIGLEY 2-4 ©RACHEL RABHAN; COURTESY URBAN MOVEMENT DESIGN 3 TOM BARRATT 5 ROBIN O'NEILL



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produce the essential bear-proof garbage cans, we retained an artist: Issenberg Design of Colorado ([www.issenbergdesign.com](http://www.issenbergdesign.com)). The cutting-edge LED lighting standards were supplied by the Schreder Group.

#### STORMWATER ANGST

Another concern was stormwater management. Kerr Wood Leidal engineers designed a comprehensive stormwater system; we coordinated raingardens, bio-detention ponds and overall site drainage. Plans were complicated by roof runoff from buildings in the lower area of the village, which drained into a series of raingardens. We could not allow the water to seep into the ground, since there was a risk it would leach into the landfill. All drainage had to be sealed with liners to assure water would drain back to the detention pond – a detail that would cause much angst and complications on the site.

#### "GET 'ER DONE!"

As the project evolved, the role of the landscape architect continued to grow. Taking a back seat role was not an option. This was due in no small part to our work in building and maintaining the CAD database, which integrated all consultants' information, including the overlays from VANOC (Vancouver Organizing Committee). This database facilitated close collaboration; we avoided mistakes and oversights. Our office became the dumping ground, if you will, of all site information. Just to make it interesting, VANOC village planners who came with experience from past events brought with them a raft of terminology, methods, and jargon specific to Olympic events, such as the Australian "carwash" – no, not a carwash but a portable bathroom trailer!

Concurrently, VANOC's priorities were strictly short term: to do only what was needed for the games. Yet Olympic planning and security were complex and constantly changing, and



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included essentials such as extra servicing, power, lighting, drainage, and storage. These elements had to fit into the long term landscape plans. We could not get caught up in the pressure to "get 'er done," nor could we afford the "leave the rest for next year" attitude. After the games, we knew, all the momentum and money would be gone.

At times it felt like the integrity of the Athletes' Village landscape might fail. There were unending compromises, losses of vision, and endless cuts from site superintendents with budget shortfalls. We got used to their running joke: "Here, we brought you some Kleenex. This is what we are cutting today." As the 2010 deadline loomed nearer and general stress levels on the site began rising, there would be less and less interest in new ideas, and no time left to deal with complications or fix mistakes.

#### FROM ATHLETES' VILLAGE TO CHEAKAMUS CROSSING

After all the rush and stress and thrill of the games, the site was like a ghost town frozen in time: empty, eerie and waiting for something to happen. There was no measure by which to see if the landscape design was working. Finally, when we entered the Village during the Paralympic Games in March, we could experience it functioning and see that the athletes were enjoying the place, hanging out, interacting and relaxing.

It helped mightily, too, that the village was a fiscal success with virtually all the units sold. As locals moved in, the project became part of our community. It was particularly rewarding to hear the reactions of people we knew and to see them out enjoying their new neighbourhood, finally out of Whistler's ubiquitous basement suites. Other LAs will know the feeling well: sometimes the most stressful and worrisome projects can be the most rewarding.



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#### GOOD VIBES:

Maria Lungren, who visited the Athletes' Village during the Olympics to see her pals on the Swedish National Ski Team, is an athlete, coach, and resident in Whistler's re-born village, now called Cheakamus Crossing.

Maria, who is originally from Sweden, is head coach of the Whistler Nordics Cross-Country Ski Club. The ski club's President, who is none other than LA (and story author) Tom Barratt, is delighted that Maria is now "at home" in Cheakamus Crossing. "It's a big win for the community," he said, adding that affordable housing helped convince her to stay in Whistler. "We kept our coach," said Barratt, and local skiers are reaping the benefits. "She got the Swedish gold medalists, the world's best skiers, to help coach our kids' ski team," he said.



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**6+9** LIFE AT CHEAKAMUS CROSSING **7** WHISTLER PARALYMPIC ATHLETES IN THE ATHLETES' VILLAGE **8** MARIA LUNGREN, SKI COACH + CHEAKAMUS RESIDENT | **6+9** LA VIE À CHEAKAMUS CROSSING. **7** ATHLÈTES PARALYMPIQUES DANS LE VILLAGE DES ATHLÈTES DE WHISTLER **8** MARIA LUNGREN, PROFESSEURE DE SKI ET RÉSIDENTE DE CHEAKAMUS **PHOTOS 6,7,8** TOM BARRATT **9** GABI MOELLER