

MAYOR'S URBAN DESIGN AWARDS

Kensington Plaza

URBAN FRAGMENTS

Project Description:

Kensington Plaza gained recognition as a popular gathering place within the urban fabric of Kensington. However, its aging infrastructure no longer supported the modern expectations for public spaces. This project provided an opportunity to enhance public interest for the community and rejuvenate the area to benefit the local community, businesses, and visitors.

Collaboration with the City of Calgary and active engagement with the public and community groups led to the redevelopment of the triangular plaza at this iconic Kensington location, resulting in a head-turning, reinvigorated, and multisensory space that enhances community vibrancy within Kensington's urban landscape. This was achieved through creative insight and driven by our goal to provide the community with an exciting, dynamic gathering space for events and a peaceful retreat.

The plaza redesign features structural art installations, interactive lighting, and organic shaped seating incorporated within urban street trees that create a welcoming and aesthetically pleasing environment, drawing people to relax, interact, and linger. We implemented a multi-disciplinary approach to increase the size of the plaza to its maximum allowable limits (as determined by roadway limits) while enhancing safety via traffic calming for vehicles turning onto Kensington Crescent.

Sustainable initiatives were a primary consideration throughout the design of the plaza, and as such, the implementation of soil cells was strongly advocated for to facilitate tree health and stormwater management. The site captures surface runoff within a trench drain that distributes the water to the soil cell system at frequent intervals for an equal distribution; this enables a healthy root system for the five new street trees to flourish in their urban environment.

Our work on Kensington Plaza addresses the essential Urban Design Elements in several ways. The project enhances the plaza's distinctive identity through creative design elements that reflect the unique cultural and historical context of the area, fostering a strong sense of place. Since its completion in early 2024, this dynamic plaza has supported an increase in users and contributed to the vibrancy of the surrounding area. Within the plaza space and overall community, it now functions as a flexible venue for community events, as a family-friendly space to sit and enjoy ice cream, or to gather before or after showings at the renowned Plaza Theatre. Lighting frames the space through the introduction of illuminated bollards and showpiece benches, enhancing aesthetic interest, while extending the use and safety of the plaza for night markets or informal nighttime gatherings, making the plaza a destination worth coming back to – day or night.