

What We Found

B-2 MASS/VOID ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY STRUCTURE AND THE PUBLIC REALM

Historically, mass void diagrams have been used as a tool in the analysis of dense urban fabric. The Noli map of Rome, for example, describes a carving out of public spaces within the city. A public space is not simply the “negative space” between buildings, but more importantly, the way the buildings are connected to their site and interact with each other.

The natural landscape of Gibsons coupled with a tradition of built form has the potential of supporting a rich network of public spaces within the town. Mass void diagrams are useful in helping us interpret the existing relationships between the public and private spaces.

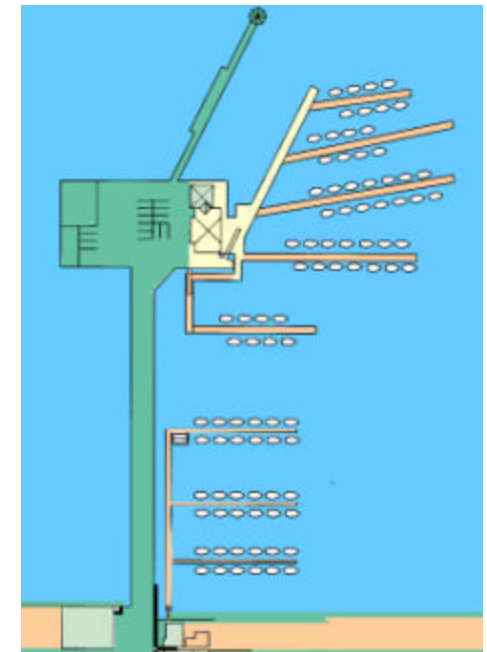
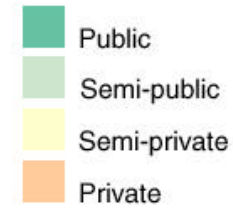
The following nine diagrams are examples of both residential and commercial developments within Gibsons. Categorizing the spaces as public, semi-public, semi-private and private, we discovered distinct patterns within the urban fabric of Gibsons.

The Government Wharf and Molly's Reach

As a street in itself, the pier assumes the importance that comes from a town which has grown from the sea. Connecting boats and docks with streets and buildings, the pier mirrors the sea-side character of the town, which has been an integral aspect of its growth over the last hundred years. With piles driven into the ocean floor, the pier retains a sense of permanency. In contrast, the floating docks are private and transient. Easily multiplied or subtracted the docks may be rearranged and reinvented as demands change seasonally as well as over the years.

Molly's Reach, a noted monument of the town and in Canadian film culture, is located in a pivotal position at the edge of land and sea. As a compromise, Molly's Reach faces North along Marine Drive. While it once met foot passengers arriving on the harbour by ship, it now greets traffic which arrives along Marine Drive from the ferry terminal.

What We See



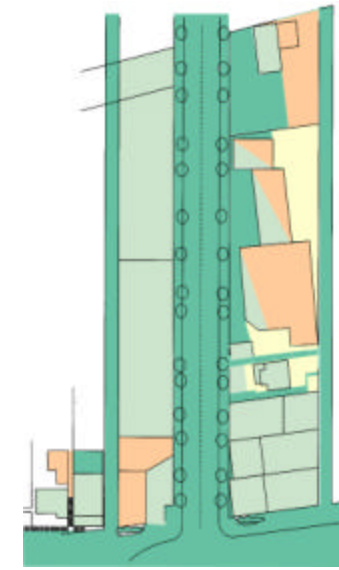
Government Wharf

What We Found

Lower Gower Commercial District

The two sides of this section of Gower Street, while connected geographically and economically, are experientially dissimilar. The side of the street bordering the water is defined by an impenetrable edge. The arcaded sidewalk connects the road to a seamless row of shop windows and doors. The shop façade becomes a boundary which impedes the visual and open physical connection between Gower Street and Molly's Alley below. The use of the alley for commercial activity might warrant a greater permeability between Gower street and the alley, which is currently provided through the shops themselves.

On the opposite side of Gower Street is a collection of commercial buildings imbedded into the hill. Together, they create a jagged edge against the street. With a variety of setbacks and spacing between the buildings, this stretch of road allows for the permeability of the commercial strip into residential areas. Stairs lead past platforms and up to Periwinkle alley, which provides access to private residences.



Lower Gower Street

South Fletcher

This extract of South Fletcher Street, typical of the older residential areas in Gibsons, follows the contours of the land around the harbour. Addressing views is of prime importance, and as a result, some houses are skewed against the layout of property lines. Houses on the upper side of the street are open to the street and view alike, but those on the lower side face the view predominantly, with entrances that are often hidden from the street by shrubs. Generally, the houses are in close proximity to each other and the street. From the front door a footpath connects the home with a public network of streets. Address postings and mailboxes identify the individuality of each residence.



South Fletcher

What We Found

Skyline Drive

This area of Gibsons demonstrates how changes in elevation operate to denote areas exclusive to the public. The topography of the land creates a natural "island" of rock. Despite the 360-degree view, there is no evident public access to lookouts. Following the topography, the road is at an incline, with driveways branching off of each side at a steeper grade, either up or down. The driveway is often met by the anonymity of a garage door, for the houses face into the view. Fitting amongst the trees with architectural distinction, these houses are only "rule-bound" in so far as what building technology will allow for the condition of the land.

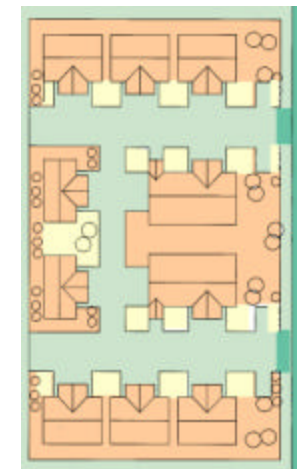
Twin Oak Village

This newer development, classified as low-density, multiple-family residences, is indicative of how a "detour" in the road operates to sustain an inward-looking, non-site specific, community. The duplexes face each other along the semi-private road, with carports denoting individual residences. A fence around the perimeter encloses organized grounds with little private area or opportunity for personal expression. A communal gazebo and garden suggests the unity of the village. The absence of sidewalks discourages pedestrian circulation.

What We See



Skyline Drive



Twin Oak Village, North Road

What We Found

Oceanmount

A sign marked "dead end" identifies the cul-de-sac that lay beyond vision in this curving streetscape. This warning discourages public traffic through the area, supporting instead a semi-public vehicular route to single-family houses. The absence of sidewalks, as well as the distance from commercial conveniences discourages pedestrian traffic.

The curve of the road is reflected in the irregular shape of the lots and houses that loosely follow the line of the street. Despite this apparent flexibility in layout, the houses are similar both in appearance and treatment of the landscape. The driveway and front door meet the street, while the more private patios and decks respond to the view on the opposite side of the house.

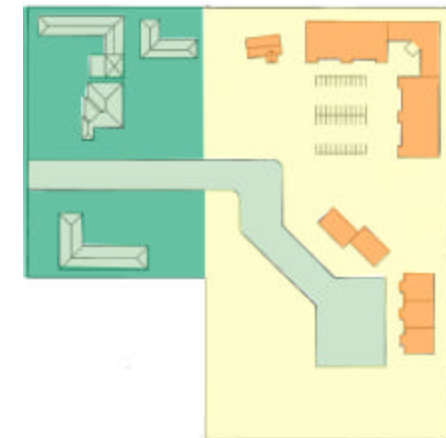
What We See



Oceanmount Drive

Apartment

This collection of apartment buildings is a typology that breaks away from the single family "norm". While the previous diagrams are characterized by private driveways and front doors, in the apartment building the front door to each residence is removed from the exterior of the building and embedded within a layer of semi-public and semi-private zones of circulation. There is a semi-public road that leads from commercial buildings to a parking lot located in front of the building. From there a common entrance leads to a semi-private lobby and corridors before entering the private apartment.



Apartment, Farnham Road

What We Found

Elphinstone

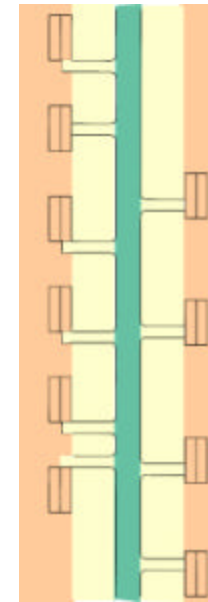
Modest single family houses characterize this area, which lies outside the boundary of Gibsons. Since the landscape is flat there is no need to orient the lots and buildings according to the view. The roads are straight and there is no back lane for the houses. Pedestrian traffic is not common as this area is located quite far from any commercial sites.

All the buildings face the street and are similar in size but still express individual tastes. The yards are not immaculately landscaped but rather seem to reflect how they are used by not always hiding the junk and clutter. Some older trees still exist in this area and there is a denser green belt around the houses.

Sunnybrooke Mall

The appropriateness of this generic North American strip mall in the town of Gibsons may be questioned. Built for economic reasons, this quick and inexpensive construction brings a turnover of chain stores. Reliant upon the automobile, the strip does not support areas of public interaction, aside from the semi-public nature of interior corridors. It is set back and cut off from the highway by a large parking lot and landscaping.

What We See



Elphinstone, Rosamund Street



Sunnybrooke Mall, Sunshine Coast Highway

Concluding Remarks

As the first few diagrams of South Fletcher area and the Lower Gower commercial strip demonstrate, the founding of Gibsons around the harbor followed the topography of the surrounding hillside. Buildings were arranged as to respond to the specific conditions of their locations and were better integrated into a public realm. However, as the more recent developments of Twin Oak Village and Oceanmount demonstrate, street layouts are increasingly protecting and disconnecting the home from the public. These inward-looking sub-communities are often grafted to a site without addressing the surrounding environment. In considering the future growth of the town of Gibsons, attention must be given to the enrichment of public spaces; better connection between the private and public spheres; and site-specific development.