

deck the dark

Improving community safety and encouraging interactive play by illuminating Vancouver's parks during the dark winter evenings

fall 2013

CitvStudio

Press Release

'Deck the Dark', a Strathcona Community guerrilla event that brings light to dark spaces, will be happening in MacLean's park on Sunday, Nov. 17 at 4 p.m.

Lights, equipment and warm drinks will be provided for the community to come together and sporadically light up the space during the beginning of the dark winter months. Residents are welcome to bring their own lights and equipment to add to the display.

This event is brought to you by CityStudio, a student studies program funded by the City of Vancouver.

Promoted by Vancity Buzz, Strathcona Residents' Association, Village Vancouver, Bored in Vancouver.

Project Summary

What: Deck the Dark aims at improving community safety and encouraging interactive play by illuminating Vancouver's parks during the dark winter months.

Who: Lindsay Cole, Park Planner and the Vancouver Parks Board
Ethical Bean Coffee
Strathcona Residents Association

Timeline of Events: *October 22, 2013* -first light bombing experiment/prototype in South East False Creek community.

October 23 - November 16, 2013 - Contacting blogs, companies and community groups to promote the upcoming event. Sending out sponsorship letters to coffee shops to obtain hot beverages for our



attendee's at our event. Securing a power source at the MacLean park field house. Creating a light display design and a community engagement activity. Designing, printing and posting posters and flyers in Strathcona community

Purchasing materials and building light canopy

November 17, 2013 - Deck that Dark event at Maclean Park in Strathcona Community

Why: Vancouver's dark areas create a lack of security and community ownership in the city's public space. Deck the Dark aims to bring communities together in public spaces during the dark winter months.

Executive Summary

Aiming to improve community safety and encourage interactive play, Deck the Dark is a CityStudio project that brings communities together by illuminating Vancouver's public spaces. We have created a light package consisting of an 8' x 15' light canopy, light-up recreational activities, and power supplies that can be utilized by communities to expand usage of dark areas and increase safety within Vancouver's neighbourhoods.

Methodology

Deck the Dark came to light October 2013 based on a shared interest of bringing people together in unexpected ways. Specifically, the vision was to bring people together to light up community spaces during the dark winter months.

Originally, we aimed to promote holiday spirit in communities, until we realized that our project had potential for a greater purpose. After discussions with Duane Elverum, our course instructor and Mitra Mansour, from the Museum of Vancouver, we chose to focus our project around the goal of improving community safety in public spaces during the dark winter months. In consideration of community safety, this project fits well into the City of Vancouver's goal of creating a city that celebrates its shortcomings [dark public spaces].

On October 22, 2013, we tested the guerrilla lighting concept for Deck the Dark with a group of ten students in a residential area in South East False Creek. The group was provided with



Seth Parker | Industrial Design | Emily Carr University

Kate Beck | International Relations & Human Geography | University of British Columbia

Debbie Yeh | Ecology and Conservation, Environmental Science | University of British Columbia

Gareth Wasylenko | Business Administration | Simon Fraser University

six strings of light, a ladder, extension cords, and an outlet, then given creative freedom to decorate the area. Using feedback from the participating students and the residents we engaged with, we used this event as a learning lesson for the larger-scale community event we held later in November.

On November 17th, 2013, we launched our large scale Deck the Dark event in Strathcona's MacLean Park. While other neighbourhoods were considered, including UBC, MacLean park was selected from a number of different parks in Vancouver because of: the pre-existing strong community ownership of the space, the lack of light in the park at night, and pre-existing source of public electricity. To ensure community involvement, we distributed flyers and posters around the neighbourhood, notified local businesses and community centres, and promoted the event through social media. We received assistance from the City of Vancouver and the Parks Board to gain access to a power source located in the on-site field house. Ethical Beans provided event attendees with warm beverages.

For the event, we created an 8 ft by 15 ft canopy from strings of LED lights. The canopy was set up between two trees in the afternoon, prior to the event. During the event, the lights, music, and presence of people created an ambiance that allowed activity to flow naturally.

Following the event, we reached out to community contacts around Vancouver, in order to find a steward that would be interested in putting on Deck the Dark events. Our stewards will receive the light canopy, electrical equipment, light-up outdoor recreational equipment, and instructions to ensure the transition of project ownership goes smoothly.

“The value of bright street lights for dispirited grey areas rises from the reassurances they offer to some people who need to go out on the sidewalk, or would like to, but lacking the good light would not do so. Thus the lights induce these people to contribute their own eyes to the upkeep of the street.

- Jane Jacobs / The Death and Life of Great American Cities

Project Outcomes

Deck the Dark in MacLean park illuminated a dark corner of the park with light, opening an opportunity for families, students, and local residents to gather and interact. A sense of warmth and an increased feeling of safety was felt by the lit up space and the presence of people.

It was mentioned by a local Strathcona resident that diverse groups of people came consistently to Maclean park during the day, using the space for exercise, recreation, and simply spending time with others. At night, however, the space is often underused due to the lack of lighting. As a result of the illuminated park, we observed parents feeling assured enough to stay and socialize under the light canopy, while allowing their children to play on the playground or run around the dark field off in the distance. The natural development of play became the engagement we had envisioned; kids initiated their own games of “light tag” and “light races”.

The success of Deck the Dark can be observed in two ways. First, the observed experiences mentioned above successfully captured the essence of our project: to provide a space where people can gather and play in the dark. Second, we can measure the success by the number of people that came to the event and stayed at the park throughout the night. Over 60 members from the community attended the event and collectively helped to increase the sense of safety within the neighbourhood.

Biggest Lessons & Key Challenges

Our primary challenge was finding an appropriate site to launch Deck the Dark, as the space had to be underutilized at night, and have an accessible power outlet. During our initial small scale experiment in South East False Creek, we had trouble finding power sources that were in public residential areas and accessible to us. Many potential experimental sites that we surveyed were without a power source or had a power source that was inaccessible. At the site we ended up choosing, an outlet located in a garden that we mistakenly assumed was a communal garden for the residential complex and so we did not inquire permission to use the power source. After we lit up the park, we had a neighbour expressed anger at us for using their power source and more so, for stepping on their plants to access the outlet. Despite the other positive feedback we received from people passing by to admire the lights, we learned that engaging with the residents on what was happening in the neighbourhood was important in gaining their support and could have made finding a power outlet to use much easier. We applied this lesson to our main event in Strathcona by promoting the event amongst the neighbourhood with posters, flyers, and social media.

For our community event in MacLean park, our initial site assessment found that the field house at the north west corner of the park had no exterior plug outlets but possibly contained power inside. With the help of City staff and Vancouver Parks Rangers, we were able to access an outlet inside the field house the day of the event. We originally intended on keeping the light canopy up over the winter months, with the lights being controlled by a timer. However, it was unfeasible to keep the extension cord to the field house exposed for an extended period of time, and so the canopy was taken down the night of the event.

Project Barriers

- Locating and gaining access to public electricity sources - We found that using parks with field houses provided us with the most secure source of electricity, however the field houses required access from the Vancouver Parks Board
- Time and budget constraints: Under our limited time and budget, the project ended up consisting of smaller scale experiments instead of many large scale light events that we had hoped to put up in a few neighbourhoods around Vancouver. We also had to make our light installation temporary because we didn't have the time to develop a long term plan with the city to keep the light canopy installation up overnight and for the duration of the winter. This was unfortunate as we had a number of residents in the community ask for the lights to be kept up in the park for the long term.



Current Project Status

When the concept of the Deck the Dark first developed, it was with the goal to leave up a light display in a dark space for the entirety of the winter months. Through project barriers and logistical difficulties, it developed into a single evening light event at MacLean park. Despite the shortened exposure, we were still able to achieve the core goal of our project to bring community together in unexpected ways.

Our project is in the final phase of transferring ownership to our stewards, who will ensure that Deck the Dark can continue on in communities without our direct involvement. Our community steward will be youth member in the Youth Leadership Program at UTown UBC. We are in contact with their Youth Leadership Coordinator to determine the details of passing over the equipment and information so that they can put on a Deck the Dark event in the UTown community soon.

Stewardship Plan

When we were exploring potential communities to set up our project in, we considered the UBC campus and had met with a staff member from Campus Community and Planning at UBC. While we did not end up launching our event in the UBC community, our project idea was passed on as a potential community engagement project to UTown at UBC, a residential community that includes students, staff and faculty living on campus.

The UTown Youth Leadership Program aims to engage youths in leadership, self-esteem, teamwork, environmental awareness, and community sustainability. The pilot program will be starting in January 2014 and group members will become stewards to Deck the Dark. We will provide the resources for the group to bring Deck the Dark to their community by providing them with our light canopy, light equipment, light toys, and document containing helpful information.

Project Reflection

If we were to start over, we would have brought in interactive play at our main community event by setting up a light up team sport game, such as glow in the dark soccer. When planning our community event, we knew we had to have some sort of engagement activity so that people would have a reason to stay at the event. The form of the activity was a challenge for us to come up with. Due to time constraints, we hastily decided on a black box light where each event attendee that came would pierce a hole in the box. As more people came, the increasing number of holes would allow a light in the box to shine through and thus provide this powerful symbolism of each person making their mark in contributing to lighting up the community. Our experiment of this activity at the event was not as successful as we had in mind. It was an activity where the action happened quickly, especially for children, who cared more about having fun than the symbolism of the idea; the activity was not exciting enough for them to want to do it. When we saw kids initiating their own games of light tag and races, we realized that play was the missing aspect from our event. If we had provided any form of recreational activity at our event, it would have helped to attract more people to the park and our event.

Budget

EXPENSES	SUPPLIER	QUANTITY	Unit Price	
<i>Lighting</i>				
Extension Cord (100 ft)	Canadian Tire	1		\$29.99
Extension Cord (50 ft)	Canadian Tire	1		\$19.88
33 ft LED white light	Home Depot	4	\$18.25	\$73.00
Timer	Home Depot	1	\$9.99	\$9.99
Canopy Framework	Canadian Tire	1	\$3.55	\$7.10
Zap strap 100's	Home Depot	1	3.99	\$3.99
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES:				\$143.95
<i>Advertising</i>				
Poster printing	Copies plus	25	\$0.88	\$22.00
Banner	ECUAD	1	\$28.37	\$28.37
Flyers (4 per sheet)	Copies plus	25	\$0.2	\$5.00
TOTAL advertising EXPENSES:				\$55.37
<i>Engagement Activity</i>				
Wooden light box prototype				
Wood frame 24' (2' x 2' cube)	Windsor Plywood	1	\$8.94	\$8.94
Black Waterproof Material	Home Depot	1	\$19.95	\$19.95
Outdoor Light Socket	Home Depot	1	\$9.88	\$9.88
Interactive Light toys				
Glowing beach balls (3)	Glow Store Inc.	3	2.82	\$8.46
Light up Soccer Ball and post markers	Glow Store Inc.	1	29.35	\$29.35
TOTAL engagement EXPENSES				\$76.58
SUBTOTAL ALL EXPENSES:				\$220.53

Acknowledgments

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Co-Founder of CityStudio

Lena Soots

CityStudio Project Coordinator

Lisa Papania

Simon Fraser University Faculty

Ian Bryce

CityStudio Communications Coordinator

Ethical Bean

Warm beverages supplied for Deck the Dark

References

Jacobs, Jane. *The death and life of great American cities*. New York: Random House, 1961.

Deck the Dark at MacLean Park, November 17, 2013



