

8.0 Pathway and Trail Enhancements

8.1 Pathway/Trail Experience

When designing a pathway or trail, not only should we consider the technical guidelines, but also the overall trail experience. The following experiential items should be evaluated as part of the detailed design process. They are summarized from the article “*What Makes a Better Trail? An Experiential Approach*”, by Glen Manning and Rob Nedotiafko, published in the Winter 2006 edition of *Landscapes/Paysages* (the publication of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects). Also included are some guidelines which may be considered during the detail design phase to help achieve each objective.

Diversity: The pathway/trail route should provide a diversity of experiences, not only in overall experience, but in details and landscape qualities.

Guidelines: Consider elevation, viewpoint, and spatial characteristics, light, colour, wind direction, slope, and materials in the design of the pathway or trail route. Use planting design to enhance spatial experience if the landscape lacks variety.

Involvement: The pathway/trail route should be absorbing and provide stimulus for the senses. Routes that actively involve the user in their surroundings are more enjoyable. A key component of involvement is “thrill”. Perceived risk can lead to a greater enjoyment of the trail. Choices stimulate people and increase the level of pathway or trail experience. Foreshadowing can effectively provide a sense of mystery along a route.

Guidelines: Provide looping networks of pathways and trails – with increasing levels of difficulty to challenge users. Design trails and pathways so that the flow of the trail is appropriate for the primary user. Avoid short abrupt changes in direction. Provide glimpses of upcoming features, such as sounds of flowing water, to provide foreshadowing.

Coherence: While diversity is important, it is also important to have a route that is clear and easily navigable. Way finding should be simple and allow any user to be able to determine their preferred route. Maps and trail markers are critical in allowing users to be aware of where they are on a trail.



The award winning hydro transformer site on 14th Avenue provides a diverse pathway experience connecting urban areas to naturalized valleys and open meadows.



Trail markers are a critical way finding tool.
www.nutron-osm.com



Routes through natural areas increase the opportunity to view wildlife.

Guidelines: Provide openings and resting points along the route to allow users to orient themselves. Provide adequate maps, distance markers, and directional signage to allow clear way finding. Where possible, use consistent names and signage to create a unified pathway and trail “brand”.

Care: A trail/pathway that appears well cared for can contribute to a more positive user experience.

Guidelines: Design pathways and trails with appropriate materials for the local situation. Pathways and trails must be maintained (by the Town or by volunteer efforts) to demonstrate that the route is important.

Ephemeral Qualities: Though not easy to achieve, trail experiences which create lasting impressions will leave the user with more enjoyable experience. Subtle effects such as light breaking through the clouds or a close encounter with wildlife can create an association with the route for a user. Though difficult to purposely create, vistas, views, and outlooks can help to create opportunities for such effects to occur.

Guidelines: Provide overlooks to scenic vistas and scenery. Ensure that pathways and trails through natural areas are restored along the route to ensure minimal disturbance to the ecological community.

8.2 Public Art in the Landscape

In addition to the qualities discussed above, public art can add to the pathway and trail experience. Public art, in the form of both large and small installations along pathways, can be implemented along pathways and trails, taking the form of a show piece in a prominent location, park, trail head, and/or making a place of interest. This could include sculptures, murals, earthworks, light displays, etc. The Town of Markham is currently preparing a Municipal Public Art Plan that will guide the placement of public art on private and public lands as well as prioritise sites for public art opportunities. The plan recommends that artists be invited to work with pathway and cycle-route planners to create paths and routes of travel that are distinctive and unique. Outdoor walking experiences can be enhanced by using signs, surface patterns and trail markers that are designed by artists. In addition, sculptures can be used to mark entryways, intersections, delineate pathways, or as features at prominent destinations along the trail. Examples of the successful integration of public art in public spaces were showcased as part of Markham’s 2005 and 2006 Environmental Art Events.



Volunteers working on a trail demonstrate that the trail is cared for. www.fs.fed.us



Creating outlooks can increase opportunities for memorable experiences.



Photograph of installation from Environmental Art Event.