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## Hume: Sherbourne Common is anything but

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Given a choice, it's unlikely many of us would choose to spend an afternoon at a storm water treatment facility.

But then along comes Sherbourne Common, Waterfront Toronto's latest gift to the city, and all that changes. Park on top, sewer below, this Common is anything but. Indeed, it is one of a new breed of hybrid urban projects that have the potential to lead us into the future. Constructed at a cost of \$30 million, it is a fully integrated structure that will serve the East Bayfront neighbourhood and a destination for the rest of the city.

Designed by Vancouver-based landscape architects Phillips Farevaag Smallerberg, with help from The Planning Partnership; Teeple Architects and artist Jill Anholt, the project is a brilliant combination of beauty and banality.

Torontonians got their first look at Sherbourne Common on Friday, when it opened — well, partially opened. Located at the foot of Sherbourne St., it stretches from Lake Shore Blvd. to Lake Ontario. The 1.5 hectare-acre site is bisected by Queens Quay. For now, only the bottom part of the park is accessible. The section north of Queens Quay will be under construction until November.

So far, the Common consists of several rows of maples stretching the length of the park. They culminate in a large field that reaches to the boardwalk that will eventually run along the water's edge, east to Parliament St. and beyond. A zinc-clad pavilion houses a café on one side and hides water-treatment equipment on the other. This striking structure brings a note of high modernity to the scheme. Its designer, Stephen Teeple, created a uniquely 21st century cross between a garden folly and an industrial installation.

Not surprisingly, water plays a large role in the park, most noticeably in a trio of heroic concrete sculptures. Rising nine metres from the ground, each has two "arms" that reach outward; water pours from these arms and then enters a 240-metre channel that flows down to the lake. Though incomplete, they are already landmarks, quite able to hold their own against the Gardiner Expressway just north.

The channel, and the attached "weirs," are an integral part of the water-cleaning process as well as a source of pleasure, compelling and utilitarian at the same time. This also helps connect the park's two halves.

The basic idea behind Sherbourne Common is that of the inhabited infrastructure. That may sound simple, but it runs contrary to the traditional practice of separation by function.

"Collaboration is always a little bit tricky," admits the lead designer, landscape architect Jennifer Nagai. "In this case, we had such an extensive team it was difficult to co-ordinate all the details. But in the end it worked seamlessly. You can't tell where the landscape architecture and public art end and where the water facility begins. We had four teams, and they all had to have an open mind. It couldn't be just a stage with objects imposed on it."

Typically, this sort of operation, with its underground collection tanks and UV purification system, would be out of sight and off-limits. That sort of segregation no longer makes sense in a city where every last corner is under pressure to perform.

Sherbourne Common also works as a piece of urban planning, a way to rejoin city and waterfront and draw people to the lake. From the moment waterfront revitalization was launched more than a decade ago, strengthening north/south connections has been a priority.

For many Torontonians, the city has always ended well before the waterfront. Now, that's where it starts.

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