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Granville Island named best neighbourhood in N. America

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Vancouver's Granville Island has been named North America's best neighbourhood by a New York-based community development organization.

In achieving its first-place status, Granville Island beat out other well-known and popular North American neighbourhoods such as New York's East Village, the Lower Garden District of New Orleans, South Beach in Miami, California's Venice Beach, and Kensington Market in downtown Toronto.

The honour was bestowed by the Project for Public Spaces, a non-profit organization based in New York City that is dedicated to "creating and sustaining public places that build communities," says the group's website. The Project for Public Spaces, which was founded in 1974, receives funding from the Kellogg Foundation and the Ford Foundation in the U.S.

The organization recently ranked the 20 best neighbourhoods, districts and downtowns in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, and singled out Granville Island as North America's best public space.

"Granville Island is a great destination," Fred Kent, president of the Project for Public Spaces, said Wednesday from his home in Brooklyn. "We picked Granville Island because of the whole neighbourhood and the island itself. Granville Island is all local entrepreneurs, local artists and local businesses. It's become a focal point for the whole neighbourhood around False Creek."

City hall says Granville Island is the region's second-most-popular tourist attraction after Stanley Park.

"Granville Island is the jewel in the crown of False Creek," said Michael Gordon, the city's senior planner for downtown. "What's unique about Granville Island is that it's not just tourist-driven. Vancouver residents can go to Granville Island and visit a park, play with their kids, shop at a market, have dinner. Do whatever they want, really."

Lino Siracusa, director of Granville Island, said he was "honoured" by the recognition. "We're quite proud and humbled to be named with such a great group of spaces in North America," he said.

Regarding what makes Granville Island unique, Siracusa said: "It's the diversity of activities. We have activities during the day and in the evening. We don't have the large commercial uses, so people can relate to Granville Island in a very intimate way."

Granville Island, owned by the federal government, was an industrial site until 1978, when Vancouver city council and then federal minister of urban affairs Ron Basford, Liberal MP for Vancouver Centre, decided to develop it. Ottawa invested \$25 million into the island's redevelopment. Private sector investors also contributed, said Siracusa.

Today, Granville Island is managed by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation on behalf of the federal government. A Granville Island Trust advises CMHC on future development of the site and to "ensure we remain connected to the community," Siracusa said.

GREAT NEIGHBOURHOODS:

There are a lot of vibrant places to live, but the New York-based Project for Public Spaces rates Granville Island tops on this continent.

1. Granville Island, Vancouver: Art galleries, a children's park, fish market, and homemade pie make this one of the city's top draws.

2. East Village, New York, N.Y.: On the Lower Eastside of Manhattan, it is a trendy mix of tattoo parlours, Ukrainian bakeries and pubs.
3. North Beach, San Francisco, CA: Between Chinatown and Fisherman's Wharf, this is where the writers of the Beat Generation hung out. Today it's home to the city's Little Italy, and known for its pizza.
4. Camden, Maine: A historic New England town known for lobster and colonial decor.
5. Coyoacan, Mexico City: Cobblestone streets lined with historic plazas, art galleries, museums and cafes.
6. Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, PA.: An upscale dining, shopping and residential district, the centre of which is a park populated with sunbathers and dog walkers. Romantic strolls at night.
7. The Plateau, Montreal: The hippest place in the city, it's located at the bottom of Mount Royal and lined with bars and ethnic eateries.
8. Kensington Market, Toronto: Where you can buy everything from fresh fish to socks. A mix of many cultures selling their wares.
9. Center City, Ponce, Puerto Rico: It's lined with ancient Spanish architecture and filled with museums and cathedrals.
10. Fells Point, Baltimore, MD: Cobblestone streets on the waterfront lined with antique stores and florists.
11. Lower Garden District, New Orleans, LA: Oak treed boulevard that is home to upscale restaurants and cafes.
12. Atlantic Avenue, Delray Beach, FL: Home to trendy night clubs and bars in southern Palm Beach County.
13. Lake Street, Oak Park, IL: Specialty music shops and antique stores comprise this quaint upscale area.
14. 23rd Street, Portland, OR: A trendy coffee shop district for upscale shoppers.
15. South Miami Beach, FL: Night club central. Home to trendy bars and restaurants. Caribbean cuisine.
16. Federal Hill, Providence, R.I.: Colourful Italian neighbourhood overflowing with restaurants and bars.
17. Downtown Northfield, MN: Historic 19th century area with cafes and shops.
18. Chautauqua, N.Y.: Colonial town filled with bed and breakfasts and shops.
19. Venice Beach, CA: World famous boardwalk and home to street performers.
20. Adams Morgan, Washington, D.C.: Famous for ethnic cuisine, especially Ethiopian food.

Illustration:

- Color Photo: (Camden, Maine.)
- Color Photo: (Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, PA.)
- Color Photo: (Granville Island, Vancouver.)

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