

Reimagining Your City for Winter: A Brief Guide



Bus waiting areas should be kept clear of snow and ice.
Photo: Metro Transit

Redesigning urban landscapes for all seasons is often a challenge, especially for cities which experience months of cold, dark, and snow. Too often, urban environments reinforce the cold weather by funneling wind down streets lined with gray stone or steel buildings. Luckily, by following a few simple design guidelines, it is possible to make urban spaces just as vibrant and inviting in winter as they are in other seasons.

Making Winter Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Transit Friendly

The experience of cities such as Copenhagen show that people are willing to walk or bike in winter if provided the right environment. Protected bikeways that are clear of snow and adequate bike storage are essential. Ensuring a comfortable pedestrian environment means preventing ice or snow windrows from collecting at street corners and crosswalks. As every transit trip starts as a pedestrian, these steps, along with creating heated or protected bus shelters can make using transit much more comfortable in the winter.

Winter Events

Any great urban space needs reasons for people to be there. This is especially applicable in winter when cold temperatures and short days can be a barrier to getting people out of their homes. Winter-friendly events or uses include heated outdoor cafes, holiday markets, ice skating, ice sculpture festivals, outdoor curling courts, mobile saunas and more!

For More Information

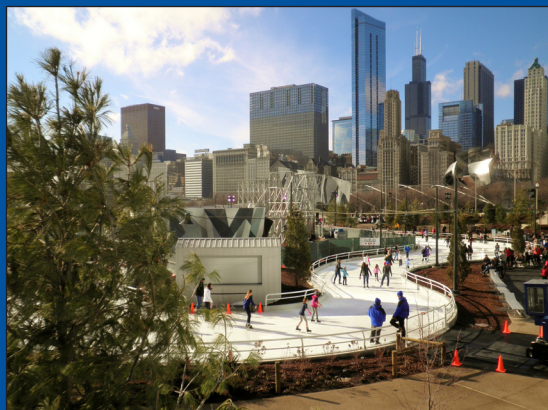
The Metro Transit TOD Office hosted a TOD Forum on Winter Cities in February 2017. A full-length video, presentation slides, and the City of Edmonton's Winter Design Guidelines are available for more detail on how to create a great four-season city.



Color, light, and fire can make a space much more appealing in winter. Photo: LaPresse

Ice Ribbons: Taking skating beyond the rink

Ice ribbons are popping up in cities all over North America. Different from the conventional ice rink, ice ribbons allow visitors to skate along an endless river of ice that surrounds one or more "islands." Additional features such as elevation changes and attractive landscaping have made ice ribbons such as the one at Maggie Daley Park in Chicago extremely popular. Check out the new ice ribbon in Maple Grove's Central Park as a local example!



Maggie Daley Park in Chicago. Alanscottwalker: CC BY-SA 4.0

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF WINTER DESIGN

1. Block Wind:

Even warm winter days can feel cold when exposed to stiff winds. Blocking wind through the use of canopies, setbacks and trees (particularly evergreens) can increase pedestrian comfort

2. Capture Sunlight:

Making the most of limited winter sunshine is crucial. Street grids and buildings should be laid out to maximize street level sunshine during winter.

3. Use Color:

Bright, vibrant colors feel warmer than neutral browns and grays. Brightly colored buildings can greatly "warm" a street in winter.

4. Use Warm Building Materials:

Wood and clear glass feel much warmer than exposed steel, stone or mirrored glass.

5. Use Creative Lighting:

The long nights of winter should be counteracted with the use of creative lighting or fire, each which can make a space much more visually attractive in dark winter months.