

CWNA c/o The 519 Community Centre
519 Church St.
Toronto, ON, M4Y 2C9
info@cwna.ca

March 6, 2024

To: Executive Committee

Item EX29.3 Update on Weston Foundation Donation for Queen's Park North Revitalization

Dear Councillors:

Queen's Park North (QPN) holds deep historical and cultural significance for the 2SLGBTQ+ community, serving as a vital hub for expression, activism, and connection for over a century. While these narratives were largely absent from previous heritage evaluations, such as the 2015 report, the current revitalization project explicitly integrates a "Queer lens" into the park's new Statement of Significance to reflect a more modern and inclusive history.

- **Early Gathering and Surveillance:** Since the early 1900s, the park has been a meeting place for the community. However, it was also a frequent target of police surveillance and raids. In the 1970s, the City even removed park bushes specifically to discourage "queer presence" in the public space.
- **Symbolic Activism:** Despite this history of discouragement, QPN became a powerful site for visibility. In 1974, it served as the terminus for Toronto's first Pride Week march, cementing its status as a symbolic gathering space for queer rights and celebration.

The City has prioritized 2SLGBTQ+ voices through dedicated focus groups with both organizations and community members. This engagement has directly influenced several design considerations:

- **Safety and Visibility:** Community members emphasized the importance of maintaining clear sight-lines, appropriate lighting, and specific planting strategies at the base of trees to support safe day and night use of the park.
- **Cultural Representation:** Feedback highlighted a strong desire for the park to tell a story beyond its colonial past, incorporating educational and interpretive features that honor its role in Pride history.
- **Civic Commons:** The community views QPN as a "civic commons" that must continue to host informal community events and public protests without being overshadowed by commercialization or institutional interests.

Today, the park remains one of the few free public sites in Toronto for a wide range of gatherings, continuing its legacy as a site for social mobilization and the public expression of community identity.

CWNA is an active participant in the ad-hoc Friends of Queen's Park North in the complex design process now under way. CWNA urges that the final design comes back to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee to maximize community buy-in.

Connie Langille,

Chair Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association