



Focus Group Summary

OVERVIEW

The City of Toronto hosted thirteen focus groups between March 22nd and 31st, 2016 as part of its Parks and Recreation Master Plan process. Each focus group was targeted to specific individuals and organizations representing: persons with disabilities; access, equity and diversity organizations; partners, sponsors and donors; facility users and permit holders; seniors; and, youth (see Attachment 1 for event details).

The purpose of these focus groups was to share and seek feedback on what is working well, and to identify needs, gaps, challenges and opportunities with regard to the provision of parks and recreation facilities in Toronto. At each focus group, participants were provided with an overview of the Master Plan process and challenges that the Master Plan will contemplate and seek to respond to. Following this presentation, participants engaged in facilitated discussions guided by a series of focus questions (see Attachment 2 – Agenda). In total, 324 people participated, representing 74 organizations (see Attachment 3 – Participant Lists).

Participant feedback has been summarized in two main sections within this report:

- I. High-level summary that synthesizes feedback received from all six focus groups.
- II. Detailed summary, with feedback separated out for each of the six focus groups as follows: Persons with Disabilities (Page 5); Access Equity & Diversity (Page 7); Partners, Sponsors and Donors (Page 9); Facility Users and Permit Holders (Page 10); Seniors (Page 11); and Youth (Page 13).

This summary was written by Swerhun Facilitation, a third-party facilitation firm that is part of the consultant team led by Monteith Brown Planning Consultants (MBPC). This report is not intended to provide a verbatim transcript of the meeting but instead provides a high level summary of the perspectives and advice provided by participants during the facilitated discussion.

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FEEDBACK KEY THEMES

The key themes in this section synthesized feedback from all six focus groups and organizes it according to the six challenges presented by the Master Plan team at the focus groups. These challenges include

1. Responding to a Changing City
2. Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs
3. Providing Quality Facilities
4. Working with Others to Meet Needs
5. Improving Accessibility for Everyone
6. The Funding Challenge

Responding to a Changing City

To respond to a changing city, participants at the Access, Equity and Diversity focus group suggested making City facilities, especially community centres, more accessible and responsive to the needs of the growing number of newcomers in the city. Participants at the Facility Users and Permit Holders focus group discussed the importance of understanding how demographic changes are impacting the popularity of both more traditional activities (e.g. hockey, soccer) and emerging activities (e.g. skateboarding, Australian Football, netball, cricket). Participants at the Seniors focus group recommended creating social, seniors-focused spaces and taking grandchildren into account when planning for seniors. Participants at the Youth focus group talked about increasing and diversifying staffing, and emphasized the need for staff that represent youth and are youth-friendly.

Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs

To reshape facilities to fit evolving needs, participants at the Facility Users and Permit Holders focus group discussed the need for more flexible facilities and multi-use spaces that are better able to respond to a range of uses as needs evolve throughout the City. Participants also suggested the City explore how current facilities could accommodate a wider range of uses. Participants at the Seniors focus group said new facilities should include health, wellness and mental health services and that programs should be geared to three cohorts (aged 55-70, 70-80, 80+) and offered at different times throughout the day. Participants at the Seniors focus group also identified a need for more facilities that appeal to seniors, including indoor spaces, warm pools, community kitchens and intergenerational space. Participants at the Youth focus group discussed ways to make existing and new facilities more youth-friendly, identified different spaces that appeal specifically to youth, said that spaces in community centres should be inviting and welcoming, and identified a need for more drop-in (un-programmed) space, gender specific spaces, better outdoor spaces and improved scheduling of youth and seniors spaces/activities. Participants at the Youth focus group also said that programming contributes to youth-friendly facilities, noting the importance of free and affordable programs, consistent and longer hours, running more than one program at a time, girls-only programs, programs focused on job skills, additional drop-in programs and programs that appeal to the whole community.

Providing Quality Facilities

Participants talked about providing quality facilities at several of the focus groups. Participants at the Persons with Disabilities focus group and Facility Users and Permit Holders focus group discussed improving facilities in terms of maintenance, noting the importance of keeping both equipment and facilities in good repair and up to current standards. Participants at the Partners, Sponsors and Donors focus group and Facility Users and Permit Holders focus group talked about the need for facilities that can accommodate a range of activities year round, with some suggesting an increase in the use of sports bubbles and artificial turf. Some participants at the Partners, Sponsors and Donors focus group suggested improving some High Park infrastructure as well as maintenance and safety within ravines. Participants at the Seniors focus group reported that new facilities are great for communities, there is a need for timely repairs at existing facilities, and provided suggestions to improve facilities and outdoor spaces including staff available to help, WiFi in buildings and parks, cable TV in community centres, and more washrooms in parks and trails.

Participants at the Youth focus group identified what they like best about community centres (e.g. staff, affordability, engaging spaces) and popular spaces (e.g. gyms, youth lounges, music/recording studios,

dance studios, arcades, basketball courts, weight rooms and homework rooms). They also talked about the need to ensure community centres are appealing, clean, safe and provide a range of activities.

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Working with others to meet needs was discussed in a number of ways by participants at the focus groups. Several participants said that existing partnerships and programs should be maintained and strengthened. Participants at the Partners, Sponsors and Donors focus group suggested ways the City could strengthen these existing partnerships, including: catalogue the needs of partner organizations; help coordinate and provide additional resources to volunteer organizations; be more open minded to new ideas; and increase recognition of partnering organizations.

Participants at the Access, Equity and Diversity focus group and Facility Users and Permit Holders focus group suggested the City work with the Toronto District and Toronto Catholic District School Boards to explore ways of increasing community access to outdoor school space. Participants at the Seniors focus group identified the community hub model as a good way for the City to co-locate and work with other agencies. They also suggested the City collaborate with churches to access local space and increase its support for volunteerism. Participants at the Youth focus group felt community centres would benefit from better integration with other City facilities/departments and suggested working with other community centres and providers to increase participation in programming.

Participants at the Partners, Sponsors and Donors focus group identified issues with dealing with multiple City departments / approval authorities and suggested that these issues could be mitigated through better coordinating communication between the City and its partners.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Participants talked about improving accessibility for everyone in several different ways at the focus groups. Participants at the Persons with Disabilities focus group, Access, Equity and Diversity focus group and Seniors focus group talked about the importance of physical design, including the need for standardized accessibility policies and signage for all facilities. Participants at the Access, Equity and Diversity focus group also talked about the importance of designing facilities in a way that promotes access for all.

Participants also discussed the impact staff have on the experience of users and suggested that frontline staff in particular undergo accessibility training. Participants at the Access, Equity and Diversity focus group said it is important for the City to take active steps to ensure their staff create positive and safe places for everyone. Suggestions were provided to increase newcomer awareness and use of City facilities, for example through orientation sessions and providing space for cultural activities and events.

Participants at all the focus groups said that the City's registration program and online presence could be improved to promote greater access. Some suggestions included making more information accessible online, making information available in more languages, providing persons with disabilities more assistance with the registration process, and using online tools, including social media, to raise awareness of the facilities and programs the City has to offer. Participants suggested making information available in other venues such as grocery stores.

Participants at the Persons with Disabilities focus group, Partners, Sponsors and Donors focus group and Seniors focus group also talked about access in terms of physical access to facilities and ease of travel, noting the importance of accessible parking, facilities being accessible by public transit, ensuring all residents of Toronto have access to facilities, and providing facilities and programs in areas with greater need (i.e. Neighbourhood Improvement Areas).

Participants at the Facility Users and Permit Holders focus group discussed access in terms of the allocation of facilities and space, suggesting that the City look at the historical allocation of facilities in comparison with emerging activities to ensure that emerging activities and the groups working to provide them have adequate access. Participants also said that the City needs to think about marginalized groups when improving access to facilities.

Participants at the Seniors focus group discussed the need to make outdoor facilities, the beachfront and events more accessible for people with disabilities.

Participants at the Youth focus group felt that earlier and more engaging community consultation is needed, and that many voices are missing. They recommended planning for the 8 year old, the 17 year old and the 90 year old, and to provide programs that appeal to the whole community.

Participants at the Seniors focus group and Youth focus group talked about access in terms of equity and affordability, suggesting that free programming only be available to local communities and introducing a small charge for residents who are not part of the immediate community.

The Funding Challenge

Participants at the focus groups offered a number of different ideas to respond to the funding challenge, including:

- Identifying low cost maintenance and repairs to improve facilities
- Investigating ways to tap into additional funding from the province
- Exploring public private partnerships
- Encouraging people to make donations
- Exploring creative funding strategies and advertising to improve profitability at facilities
- Creating opportunities for business through event partnerships
- Identifying opportunities for public stewardship
- Helping identify external funding sources organizations can tap into
- Locating facilities on non-traditional lands (e.g. hydro corridors)
- Managing permits more efficiently
- Identifying and promoting facilities that are underutilized
- Providing more multi-purpose spaces
- Co-locating or leasing space with or within other organizations
- Re-inventing existing City lands

Participants at the Partners, Sponsors and Donors focus group also discussed the need for funds to maintain facilities as well as the importance of transparency around funding. Participants at the Facility Users and Permit Holders focus group identified some funding challenges their organizations and members are facing, including: maintenance costs; increasing permit fees; and costs associated with risk and liability.

DETAILED FEEDBACK

This section provides a detailed summary of feedback from all six focus groups. Each focus group is summarized in a separate sub-section. As with the high-level summary in the previous section, feedback in the detailed summary has been organized to correspond with the six challenges. Feedback that falls outside of the six challenges has been included as additional feedback. In certain instances, responses to participant feedback were provided by representatives of the Master Plan team. Where these responses are included, they are denoted in *italics*.

Persons with Disabilities Focus Group

Providing Quality Facilities

Participants discussed improving facilities in terms of maintenance (i.e. keeping equipment in good repair) and improving current facilities to meet the standards set for new facilities.

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Participants suggested that the City should continue to work with groups that use Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities on a regular basis. Participants also suggested exploring more public private partnerships to help fund needed renovations and new construction.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Several participants talked about improving accessibility in terms of the physical design of City facilities and provided a number of suggested improvements. Participants said there is a need for standardized accessibility policies and signage across all facilities. Washrooms and change rooms were also discussed with suggestions to increase the number of accessible washrooms in parks and near sports fields and include more accessible features in existing washrooms (e.g. adult table lifts and automatic amenities). Participants also talked about the need for emergency response action plans for persons with disabilities, with one participant suggesting the installation of visual alarm systems.

Participants also talked about improving accessibility in terms of the design of objects and equipment. Suggested improvements included: cement paths in parks for people in wheelchairs; accessible lifts at swimming pools; no open backed stairs; high contrast equipment in fitness centres; highly visible garbage cans; and tactile markings to help the visually impaired travel through facilities.

Several participants also talked about including building sensory rooms and pools for therapeutic purposes, providing additional storage space for adaptive equipment, increasing the amount of accessible parking, and remodelling change rooms to make them larger and reduce the amount of negative space. Participants also said that existing facilities, especially older buildings, should be updated to meet current accessibility codes and requirements. One participant suggested using a classification system for facilities to identify the level of accessibility offered at each facility (and sharing this information online).

Participants also discussed the creation of new facilities, noting that new facilities should be fully accessible and that consultation with persons with disabilities should be part of the design and implementation process.

Participants felt that the City could improve its online presence by including more information about programs and disruptions to service, making websites easier to navigate and more accessible for screen readers, and ensuring that all information is up-to-date. Participants also suggested using social media and developing an app to raise awareness of the programs and facilities available.

Many participants also discussed the staffing of parks and recreation facilities and shared that while many staff are welcoming and supportive, additional accessibility training was recommended, especially for frontline staff. One participant said that staff should be trained to work with people with a variety of disabilities to ensure all users feel comfortable using City facilities. One participant said the Canadian Helen Keller Centre could train staff on how to work with and assist people that are deaf and / or blind. Participants also suggested that the City hire persons with disabilities to both work at parks and recreation facilities and to test facilities to ensure they are accessible.

Participants said that the registration program and the permitting process could be improved for persons with disabilities. Participants suggested having a pre-registration process at local facilities for persons with disabilities with staff to help. There was also a suggestion to have videos with American Sign Language to explain the registration program. Participants also talked about how the current permitting fee structure impacts smaller groups, noting that the total fee is amortized over a smaller number of athletes making programs more expensive.

Participants also talked about access in terms of ease of travel to facilities, noting the importance of facilities being accessible by public transit. Participants also said that facilities should have adequate space for Wheel-Trans. One participant suggested the City look into providing a shuttle bus service for persons with disabilities.

One participant suggested that adults who have undergone physical rehabilitation also need to be considered when the City is thinking about accessibility, noting that these individuals have social, physical and emotional care needs that may impact their ability to access programs and facilities.

The Funding Challenge

Participants suggested responding to the funding challenge by identifying low cost maintenance and repairs to improve facility space, investigating ways to tap into additional funding from the province, exploring public private partnerships, encouraging people to make donations and considering the use of paid washrooms in some cases.

Additional Feedback

Several participants had positive things to say about the City's parks and recreation facilities, including:

- Affordability
- Friendly, welcoming staff that provide great customer service
- Flexible schedules
- Newer facilities are much more accessible, which shows a move in the right direction
- Many locations across the City, with several accessible by transit
- Efforts are being made to work with the local community to ensure that needs are being met

Participants also suggested that the 20-year Master Plan process include check-in points (e.g. 2 years, 5 years and 10 years) to ensure that the necessary steps are being made to address needs identified.

Access, Equity and Diversity Focus Group

Responding to a Changing City

Participants talked about making City facilities, especially community centres, more accessible and responsive to the needs of the growing number of newcomers in the city. They suggested a number of ways the City could help with this, including:

- Providing space for different cultural activities and programs (e.g. dance, prayer rooms, women only spaces / times, and kitchen space for events that involve food)
- Ensuring community centres have space and programming for multiple ages so that all members of a family (young children, teens and parents) can use one facility
- Increasing the amount of multipurpose space to better accommodate a wider variety of activities and programs
- Working closely with local communities to better understand what they need and want from their local facilities and how this can change over time
- Becoming more involved with the organization of different cultural events to increase awareness of the facilities and programs the City has to offer

Participants also suggested introducing places for camping in the City to make it more accessible for people who are new to Canada. One participant shared that camping would allow children to get hands on experience with many things they learn about in school.

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Participants suggested that the City establish, and in some cases re-establish, partnerships with settlement programs and workers to better understand and meet the needs of newcomers.

It was also suggested that the City work with the Toronto District and Toronto Catholic District School Boards to explore ways of increasing community access to outdoor school space (e.g. allowing community groups to permit outdoor school grounds). *A member of the Master Plan team noted that this can often be challenging because the City and the school boards are separate organizations and the City receives funding to provide space and facilities whereas the school boards do not.*

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Participants said that information available online can be difficult to access and understand, noting that if information is only available in English it can create a barrier for many. It was suggested that information be offered in additional languages, including French. One participant said that finding out when programs and activities are being offered can be challenging (e.g. when pools are open) and suggested making websites more user friendly.

Participants also discussed raising awareness of available programs and facilities, especially for newcomers who may not know what a community centre is and what it has to offer. Some suggested ways to increase awareness included distributing flyers with information about local facilities and hosting orientation sessions at community centres. One participant suggested sharing flyers with local schools to raise awareness among students and their families.

The registration process was discussed and participants identified some barriers that currently exist. Language was identified as a barrier and participants suggested including more information in more languages, especially online. Participants also said that people who are unfamiliar with the registration process often miss out on programs and that more needs to be done to help more people understand the process. It was noted that the registration system is not set up to properly accommodate different family structures or children between the ages of 5 and 14 who identify as LGBT and inter-gendered, which can cause people to feel uncomfortable and use other services and programs (e.g. the YMCA). One participant said that it would be helpful to have a list of programs online that still have space after registration has closed. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that while the Plan is focused on facilities, a refresh of the registration system is in progress and it will have opportunities for public input as well.*

One participant said that free community centres are an excellent resource, especially for newcomers, in part because it allows people to access a community centre without having to first go through the City's Welcome Policy. Another participant shared that it is important for community centres to be located near schools to give students a place to go after school that helps to provide them with a sense of belonging. One participant asked if there would be additional free community centres in the future. *A member of the Master Plan team shared that this Plan will not address the cost of programs themselves but the program that created the free community centres is revisited every five years. He also noted that there are currently 39 free centres across the city, which are identified according to the low-income census tracts within the City.*

Participants also talked about access in terms of creating positive and safe places, noting that community centres and other facilities must go beyond simply identifying as safe places and must also take active steps to being safe places. Participants discussed the environment created by staff and the importance of equity awareness training for all staff, especially those on the front line. One participant shared that a lack of sports literacy can be a barrier, especially for members of the LGBT community that may not have had access to sports as youth because of systematic barriers resulting from homophobia and transphobia.

Physical design was also discussed, particularly washrooms, and how it is important that these be thoughtfully designed to promote access. One participant suggested that access to washrooms could be improved by removing gender based images from doors and instead using words to identify gender and only using images to show what can be accessed within the washroom (e.g. a stall with a change room, urinal, accessible washroom, etc.). The importance of providing both gendered and gender neutral space was discussed, with a participant sharing that some individuals who identify as transgendered want to access gendered space as opposed to gender neutral space.

Participants also said that it is important for staff to know which facilities are accessible and which facilities are not. It was also suggested that they work directly with individuals with disabilities to better understand what barriers to access currently exist and how they can be overcome.

Additional Feedback

Participants agreed that they had learned a great deal from the focus group and appreciated having the opportunity to hear ideas and perspectives from others in the room.

One participant suggested that it could be useful to use a program advisory committee for this process to ensure the work being done reflects community needs. *A member of the Master Plan team explained that this process includes a Stakeholder Advisory Group comprised of a number of organizations representing*

a range of interests and expertise, which has been put in place to provide a forum for information sharing, feedback, guidance, and advice to the Project Team at key points during the consultation process.

It was also suggested that the Master Plan Team meet with the executive director of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) to explore new relationships with agencies from across Ontario. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that they would be interested in working with OCASI to help identify local stakeholders when designing facilities.*

Another participant recommended the City think about offering more attractions, similar to the mini zoo at Thompson Park, to attract more families to City parks.

Partners, Sponsors and Donors Focus Group

Providing Quality Facilities

Participants discussed providing quality facilities in terms of accommodating a range of activities and suggested the use of multi-use facilities that can be programmed year round. One participant said that spaces for kids to play are important, noting that sports can help to build life skills. Another participant said that ravines are an asset for the City but are underutilized because they need to be cleaned up and made safer. It was also noted that some park infrastructure within High Park (e.g. trails, fences, stairs, railings) could be improved.

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Many participants identified and explained the partnerships and programs that currently exist between their organization and the City. Participants also suggested ways the City could strengthen existing partnerships and develop new ones, including: catalogue the needs of partner organizations; help coordinate and provide additional resources to volunteer organizations; be more open minded to new ideas and be willing to take a little more risk; and increase recognition of partnering organizations.

Participants also described dealing with multiple City departments/approval authorities as an issue at times leading to delays and impacting the achievement of common goals. It was suggested that these problems could be mitigated through better coordination and communication between the City and its partners.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Participants talked about improving accessibility both in terms of ensuring all residents of Toronto have access to facilities and by providing facilities and programs in areas that really need access (i.e. Neighbourhood Improvement Areas). It was suggested that the City should focus on facilities and programs that are inclusive and provide great experiences for everyone, regardless of age, income, ability, etc. rather than facilities / programs for specific or limited user groups. The High Park Zoo was offered as an example of a broadly inclusive institution. Participants also said there is a need to support the growing demands of youth within the City, including providing educational experiences.

The Funding Challenge

Participants suggested responding to the funding challenge by using creative funding strategies and advertising to improve profitability at facilities, and creating opportunities for business through event partnerships.

Participants also discussed the need for funds to maintain facilities with suggestions to dedicate more funds to staff that maintain facilities and using the Master Plan to dedicate funds to the maintenance of sites.

Participants also said that funding needs to be transparent, especially for groups and organizations that generate revenue. One participant said that people are more likely to donate if they know where funding is going. Another participant raised concerns about section 37 funds, noting that they are not distributed evenly and could be better used to support facilities. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that there are legal limits to where funds resulting from development, including section 37 funds, can be spent.*

Facility Users and Permit Holders Focus Group

Responding to a Changing City

Participants spoke about the need to understand how demographic changes within the City are impacting the popularity of both more traditional activities and emerging activities (e.g. skateboarding, Australian Football, cricket).

Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs

Several participants discussed the need for more flexible facilities and multi-use spaces that are better able to respond to a range of uses, accommodate a wider variety of activities, and changing needs. Participants also suggested the City explore how current facilities could accommodate a wider range of sports and activities.

Providing Quality Facilities

Some participants expressed concerns about the maintenance and condition of existing facilities and fields, noting that poor conditions affect both quality of play and the safety of participants. Participants also said that existing facilities could be improved through adding more washrooms, storage space, parking and access to drinking water.

Participants talked about the importance of extending playing hours and the playing season to better accommodate demand and provide space for activities and programming year round. Some participants suggested increasing the use of sports bubbles and artificial turf. One participant said tennis courts could be used for something other than tennis in the winter months.

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Several participants suggested that the City consult / work with sport-specific groups to better understand their needs and to help identify which groups could work well together to use similar spaces and facilities. Participants also suggested the City work closely with the local school boards around issues of

maintenance and permitting. One participant suggested that City maintenance staff should work closer with sports organizations to better understand and support field and court technical standards. Participants also talked about the need for ongoing consultation to help communicate and identify when changes that need to be made to facilities.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Participants said that the City should look at the historical allocation of facilities versus emerging groups to ensure emerging groups and activities have adequate access to facilities. Participants also said that the City needs to think about marginalized groups when improving access to facilities, including women, LGBT, people with low-incomes, people of colour and persons with disabilities.

The Funding Challenge

Participants identified some funding challenges their organizations and members are facing, including: maintenance costs; increasing permit fees; and costs associated with risk and liability. Participants also said that the cost of permits should be fair for the users using the facilities and the City, who maintains the facilities.

Participants also provided a number of strategies to respond to the funding challenge, including: identifying opportunities for public stewardship; helping identify sources of external funding that sports groups can tap into; exploring opportunities for public-private partnerships; locating temporary and permanent facilities on non-traditional lands (e.g. hydro corridors); managing permits more efficiently; and identifying and promoting facilities that are underutilized.

Seniors Focus Group

Responding to a Changing City

Participants recommended creating social, seniors-focused spaces within larger facilities that could be animated and programmed through partnership with other agencies. When planning for seniors take grandchildren into account. Playgrounds, for example the one at North Toronto Memorial Community Centre, are great places for seniors to bring family. It is important to provide a variety of play structures for different age groups and lots of seating.

Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs

New facilities should include health, wellness and mental health services. Some participants felt that senior's spaces and programs should be integrated, as in multigenerational rooms seen in Germany and Japan. Programs should be geared to three cohorts (aged 55–70, 70–80, 80+) and offered at different times including morning and evening as many seniors work and care for children in the day. One participant felt that more seniors will use facilities if meals are offered.

Participants identified a need for more indoor, walk-in and warm water pools, indoor tracks, intergenerational space, community kitchens, and facilities that appeal to seniors e.g. Stanley Park pitch & putt golf. A need for more swimming and wellness programs was discussed, along with increased gardening opportunities (not all in parks, though parkettes may be well suited).

Providing Quality Facilities

Participants reported that new facilities such as York Community Centre are great for communities. At existing facilities the need for timely facility repair was discussed, with a lengthy elevator repair at Don Montgomery Community Centre as an example of a prolonged repairs presenting an access barrier for seniors. Suggestions to improve facilities were to have staff available to help, WiFi in buildings and parks, and cable TV in community centres. One participant felt that Don Montgomery rink needs repainting.

Some participants flagged a need for more washrooms in parks and trails, particularly in winter. Where this is not possible post signs to indicate the nearest washroom. One participant suggested attractive wooden structures around portable toilets to provide winter access as in Mount Pleasant Cemetery. It was recommended to ensure connectivity between City-owned and other green space, for example Mount Pleasant Cemetery and the ravine to its south.

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Participants identified the community hub model as a good way for the City to co-locate and work with other agencies such as health and wellness providers. More partnerships with local organizations would help to avoid duplication of services. One participant suggested that the City collaborate with churches, many of which have empty space and land.

In some communities volunteers are aging and can be difficult to replace. Some participants felt that the City should increase its support for volunteerism and work more with local and issue-specific non-profit agencies to support volunteerism geared at meeting seniors' needs. Community centres could be meeting spaces for volunteers and health professionals, who can educate and support seniors and families on fall prevention, mental health, dementia, etc.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Participants commented that existing facilities seem very senior-friendly and that discounted prices for fitness activities are appreciated. There was agreement on the need to improve physical accessibility, with many barriers faced by seniors also shared by others. Participants also recommended more staff in some facilities, more training for City staff on dementia and working with seniors and people with disabilities, and that more automatic doors are needed.

The need to make outdoor facilities, the beachfront and events more accessible for people with disabilities was discussed, with the example of the winter exhibit at the eastern beaches that was not accessible through the City's beach mat systems. One participant flagged that it can be impossible for someone in a wheelchair or with impaired vision to get close to flower displays in parks. Another reported challenges being a spectator at events at outdoor facilities and arenas due to surfaces, sightlines and other issues. One participant emphasized that barriers persist in buildings considered accessible and shared the experience of coming to the day's meeting –no staff to greet him upon entry, no clear signage in the facility and automatic door buttons not always positioned to enable use or promote safety/ security in an emergency. Washrooms need to be fully equipped with wheelchair buttons and stalls big enough for a person in a wheelchair to use the bathroom independently.

Some participants felt that free programming should be available to local communities only and suggested that in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas priority be given to local residents (consider registration based on postal code). As well, more support is needed for registration.

Some participants felt that large, highly visible signage would help identify facilities and entrances - North Toronto Memorial Community Centre for example has no clear street signage. It was also suggested to improve communication on what happens in facilities through brochures, the media, email, social media and making information available in other venues such as grocery and liquor stores. One participant described not knowing about a new facility in his community and felt that it would be good to communicate proactively about new facilities that are available for people to enjoy.

Transportation was discussed as a critical issue for seniors. Participants recommended improving linkages between facilities and transportation routes (road and public transit), and emphasized that parking is an access issue for seniors with consideration needed of where it is located relative to the entrances, ramps, elevators, etc.. One participant highlighted the importance of ensuring that it is easy and safe to walk to a facility. Ideas put forward included scheduled WheelTrans pick-ups/returns from retirement homes and volunteers to escort seniors living at home. Funding for vans could be sought from corporate partners e.g. Shoppers, Rexall and Loblaws.

The Funding Challenge

Participant suggestions for addressing the funding challenge included re-invention of existing City lands, making use of little-used or low-activity space, and the overall better utilization of space with an example provided of small pieces of land in New York City being turned into half-size basketball courts that can be locked overnight.

One participant felt that more and strategically located small parks should be added in areas of development, and that they should provide multi-user experiences and amenities such as playgrounds, open spaces, washrooms, etc.. Another recommended more partnerships and sponsorships with large companies, for example paint companies providing paint for ice rinks.

Additional Feedback

One participant felt that many plans are not implemented quickly enough to keep up with emerging issues and that this plan needs timely implementation. Another suggested continuing this conversation next year to review what was done. Some felt that dogs in parks are an issue, with suggestions to step up enforcement and create dog ambassadors to distribute information and provide friendly reminders about the rules. Some participants felt that 311 needs improvement as they have no sense of where a call goes and "it feels like nothing happens".

Youth Focus Groups

Responding to a Changing City

Participants talked about increasing and diversifying staffing, and emphasized the need for staff that represent the youth and are youth-friendly.

Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs

Participants discussed many different ways to make existing and new facilities more youth-friendly. With respect to the overall space within community centres, ideas included improved building footprints and use of space, more rooms to enable simultaneous programming, more multipurpose spaces, wider

hallways (in some centres), and improved access to technology, for example by having WiFi throughout a building and providing iPads and laptops.

Different types of spaces that appeal to youth were identified, specifically fitness and weight rooms, youth spaces/lounges, gymnasiums, indoor track areas, kitchens, homework rooms, and creative spaces such as dance and recording studios, darkrooms and technology rooms.

Participants felt that spaces in community centres should be inviting and welcoming, and that the 'look and feel', amenities and staff help to create a great centre. Some participants talked about ensuring that kitchens, youth spaces and gymnasiums are large enough, that enough amenities (e.g. drinking fountains) are available and that centres are clean and in good condition. Some participants felt that more and bigger youth spaces are needed that offer comfortable furniture, windows that open and natural light.

With respect to use of spaces within community centres, many participants felt that there is a need for more drop-in (un-programmed) space and more double gyms, where one can be open for drop-in and the other programmed. Some participants talked about the need for gender-specific spaces, and to improve scheduling of youth and seniors spaces/activities. One participant suggested that community centres include food courts.

Participants talked about wanting more and better outdoor gym spaces (e.g. muscle bars), basketball courts, and trails and walkways. Some participants suggested providing more and better access to swimming pools, tennis courts, soccer fields, ice rinks and bike parks. One participant felt that youth would like a bowling alley.

Programming was discussed as a contributor to youth-friendly facilities. Participants talked about free and affordable programs, consistent and longer hours, running more than one program at a time, girls-only programs and swimming lessons. Participants reported wanting opportunities focused on building job skills, more drop-in and allowing open drop-in at gymnasiums when they are not in use. Some participants suggested programs that appeal to the whole community, integrating different resources and providers, and that multiple centres in an area could combine efforts to plan and offer events and programs. Some participants felt that youth want new programs and shared ideas, such as a monthly competitive cook off and films in the park.

Providing Quality Facilities

Participants reported that the best things about community centres are staff, affordability, and that they provide engaging spaces that connect to relevant topics and are inclusive of different activities. Within community centres, popular spaces are gyms, youth lounges (referred to as 'hot spots' that provide creative spaces), music/recording studios, dance studios, arcades with games, basketball courts (especially double courts), weight rooms and homework rooms. Some participants talked about the need to ensure that community centres are appealing and clean, and to improve safety and security systems in community centres as well as safety, lighting and maintenance of sport fields. Additional facility types flagged as important for youth were indoor swimming pools, tennis courts and ice rinks.

Participants reported that they value a range of activities, specifically getting together with friends, basketball programs, arts & crafts, cooking, hairstyling, beauty, sewing, design and fashion, dances and photography.

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Participants felt community centres would benefit from better integration with other City facilities/departments, for example libraries. With respect to programming some suggested working with other community centres and providers in the area to increase participation.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Participants felt that earlier and more engaging community consultation is needed, and that many voices are missing. It was recommended to plan for the 8 year old, the 17 year old and the 90 year old, and to provide programs that appeal to the whole community. Some participants discussed the need to make the registration process more equitable to local residents and suggested a \$2 charge for residents who are not part of the immediate community. Equity also needs to be considered for permitting.

Additional suggestions to improve youth access were more youth staff, community mentors and rental kiosks to make sport and other equipment more available (and generate revenue).

The Funding Challenge

Suggestions for addressing the funding challenge were to find more sponsors, pursue fundraising opportunities and provide more multi-purpose outdoor spaces to generate revenue via permitting and events. Some participants felt that the City could co-locate or lease space with or within other organizations such as non-profits and the YMCA, with negotiation of long-term lease agreements that include shared overhead and staffing costs. New opportunities for partnership should be explored, including community hubs.

With respect to facility planning, suggestions included engaging large organizations like Toronto Community Housing and standards that force developers to give more 'back'. One participant highlighted better use of existing space, for example by using empty rooms in community centres to provide other youth programs.

Additional Feedback

Some participants suggested that community centres should be open more on weekends, and that program should be offered more frequently. Some suggested improved coordination of seniors and youth spaces. Individual participants emphasized their desire for more dances, basketball and double gyms.

Additional Youth Focus Groups

In addition to the youth feedback summarized above, an additional seven youth focus groups were held at community centres across the city, engaging a total of 177 youth. The purpose of these focus groups was to seek feedback on facility use, needs, priorities and opportunities from a youth perspective. At each focus group, participants were introduced to the Facilities Master Plan and engaged in facilitated discussions guided by a series of focus questions.

Participating youth reported going to parks to hang out (often with music and food) and socialize. They use parks as well as indoor and outdoor recreation facilities for physical activity such as skating, skiing, swimming, skateboarding, playing sports and ping pong. The youth described visiting community centres and libraries to use computers, study and learn, participate in arts activities (dance, music, poetry), relax,

socialize and have fun. When asked to imagine the ideal facility for their community, they included spaces such as skating rinks, skateparks and high quality gymnasiums with modern equipment, as well as arts/dance studios, weight rooms, movie rooms, arcade and game rooms, saunas and youth lounges. Some youth reported a need for gender-specific and female-only spaces. Desirable amenities included places to buy food, indoor bike racks, murals/art, free Wifi and access to technology via computer labs and equipment.

To improve community centres and parks, participating youth suggested adding multi-sport fields, sport courts, play equipment, youth spaces, trees and green space, and specialty spaces such as rock climbing areas and tech/games rooms. There was a desire for bigger and better gymnasiums, kitchens, play spaces, fields, and amenities including shade, drinking water, WIFI, food services and comfortable seating. Cleanliness and good repair would improve facilities, as would accessibility features such as ramps, elevators and automatic doors. To make facilities more inclusive, participants suggested childcare, mental health and translation supports, more sport and youth programs, access passes for refugee, welcoming lounge areas, signs that reduce language barriers, safe spaces for LGBTQ, female-only spaces, and rooms for religious practice.

NEXT STEPS

At the conclusion of each Focus Group, the Master Plan team provided participants with a brief overview of next steps in the process, including:

- All feedback received at the focus groups will be included in a summary report
- The summary report will include feedback from all focus group sessions and will be made available on the Master Plan website: toronto.ca/parks/facilities plan and sent directly to participants who provided their email address and elected to sign up for Master Plan e-updates
- Feedback from the focus groups and other consultation activities will be included in an overall consultation report and this report will be used to help develop the Draft Master Plan
- Feedback will be sought on the Draft Master Plan through a survey that will be available in Fall 2016

ATTACHMENT 1 – Event Details

The dates, times and locations of the focus groups are listed below.

People with Disabilities Focus Group

Tuesday, March 22, 2016
10:00am-12:00pm
North Toronto Memorial Community Centre
200 Eglinton Avenue West

Partners, Sponsors & Donors Focus Group

Wednesday, March 23, 2016
8:30-11:30am
City Hall
100 Queen Street West

Seniors Focus Group

Thursday, March 24, 2016
10:00am-12:00pm
North Toronto Memorial Community Centre
200 Eglinton Avenue West

Access, Equity & Diversity Focus Group

Tuesday, March 22, 2016
1:00-3:00pm
North Toronto Memorial Community Centre
200 Eglinton Avenue West

Permit & Facility User Groups Focus Group

Wednesday, March 23, 2016
7:00-9:00pm
North Toronto Memorial Community Centre
200 Eglinton Avenue West

Youth Focus Group #7

Friday, April 22, 2016
North Kipling Community Centre
2 Rowntree Road

Youth Focus Group #1

Thursday, March 31, 2016
North Toronto Memorial Community Centre
200 Eglinton Avenue West

Youth Focus Group #2

Tuesday, April 19, 2016
Malvern Family Resource Centre
90 Littles Road

Youth Focus Group #3

Tuesday, April 19, 2016
LAMP Community Health Centre – Rathburn
Area Youth
185 Fifth Street

Youth Focus Group #4

Tuesday, April 19, 2016
Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute
135 Overlea Boulevard

Youth Focus Group #5

Wednesday, April 20, 2016
Northwood Community Centre
15 Clubhouse Crescent

Youth Focus Group #6

Thursday, April 21, 2016
Weelesley Community Centre
495 Sherbourne Street

Youth Focus Group #8

Thursday, May 5, 2016
Driftwood Community Recreation Centre
4401 Jane Street

ATTACHMENT 2 – AGENDAS

People with Disabilities Focus Group

10:00am	Welcome Cheryl MacDonald, Manager, Policy and Systems Planning Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City of Toronto
10:05	Introductions and Agenda Review Alex Heath, Swerhun Facilitation
10:10	Overview Presentation Matt Bentley, Project Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City of Toronto Steve Langlois, Monteith Brown Planning Consultants
10:30	Break
10:40	Facilitated Discussion Focus Questions 1. What is the <u>best thing</u> about the City's parks and recreation facilities? 2. How can the City's parks and recreation facilities be improved to <u>eliminate barriers</u> faced by people with disabilities (e.g. improved accessibility, expanding existing facilities, constructing of new facilities)? 3. What <u>types</u> of parks and recreation facilities need to be improved and why? Where are the <u>gaps</u> ? 4. Do you have any suggestions on <u>how to address the challenges</u> associated with providing parks and recreation facilities?
11:45	Wrap Up & Next Steps
12:00pm	Adjourn

Access, Equity & Diversity Focus Group

1:00pm	Introductions and Agenda Review Alex Heath, Swerhun Facilitation
1:10	Overview Presentation Matt Bentley, Project Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City of Toronto Steve Langlois, Monteith Brown Planning Consultants
1:30	Facilitated Discussion Focus Questions 1. What is the <u>best thing</u> about the City's parks and recreation facilities? 2. How can the City's parks and recreation facilities be improved to <u>eliminate barriers</u> faced by residents (e.g. improved accessibility, expanding existing facilities, constructing of new facilities)? 3. What <u>types</u> of parks and recreation facilities need to be improved and why? Where are the <u>gaps</u>? 4. Do you have any suggestions on <u>how to address the challenges</u> associated with providing parks and recreation facilities?
2:45	Wrap Up & Next Steps
3:00	Adjourn

Partners, Sponsors & Donors Focus Group

8:30am	Sign-In and Light Refreshments
9:00	Welcome Laura Atkins, Director, Policy and Strategic Planning, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City of Toronto
9:05	Introductions and Agenda Review Alex Heath, Swerhun Facilitation
9:15	PFR Partnership Development Unit Presentation Robert Richardson, Manager, Partnership Development Unit, City of Toronto
9:30	Overview Presentation Matt Bentley, Project Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City of Toronto Steve Langlois, Monteith Brown Planning Consultants
10:00	Facilitated Discussion Focus Questions 1. Describe your organization's role in the coordination, usage, and/or funding of parks and recreation facilities. Is this role changing? 2. What criteria do you use when evaluating partnership or funding opportunities? 3. What are the types of projects that you are interested in working with the City on? Are there certain types of parks and recreation facilities that need improvement? 4. How can we work together to improve parks and recreation facilities in Toronto? How can we be more proactive with partnering? What can PFR do to attract more partnership and investment in facilities? 5. Do you expect your sponsorship/partnership activity (or that of others?) to increase, remain stable or decrease over the next five years? Why?
11:15	Wrap Up & Next Steps
11:30	Adjourn

Permit and Facility User Groups Focus Group

7:00pm	Welcome Howie Dayton, Director, Community Recreation, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City of Toronto
7:05	Introductions and Agenda Review Alex Heath, Swerhun Facilitation
7:10	Overview Presentation Matt Bentley, Project Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City of Toronto Steve Langlois, Monteith Brown Planning Consultants
7:40	Facilitated Discussion Focus Questions 1. What <u>factors or trends</u> are influencing the provision and use of parks and recreation facilities? 2. What types of parks and recreation facilities need to be <u>improved</u> and why? Where are the <u>gaps</u> ? 3. How can we work together to <u>address</u> these gaps and challenges? 4. What <u>criteria</u> should be used to identify priorities?
8:50	Wrap Up & Next Steps
9:00	Adjourn



Youth Focus Group

6:00	Welcome & Introductions
6:10	Overview Presentation
6:30	Discussion
7:45	Wrap-up & Next Steps
8:00	Adjourn

ATTACHMENT 3 – PARTICIPANT LISTS

Persons with Disabilities Focus Group

Number of participants: 40

Participating organizations:

- Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
- Canadian Hellen Keller Centre
- Community Living Toronto
- Children's Services, Special Services Unit
- March of Dimes
- MOCED
- MS Society of Canada
- Ontario Wheelchair Sports Organization
- ParaSport Ontario
- Raising Cane Initiatives
- Reach for the Rainbow
- Silent Voice Canada
- Special Olympics Ontario
- Surrey Place Centre
- The Participation House Project (Durham Region)
- Toronto Accessible Sports Council
- Toronto Rehab
- University of Toronto – Scarborough
- University of Toronto - Faculty of Kinesiology
- York University - Canadian Disability Participation Project

Access, Equity & Diversity Focus Group

Number of participants: 4

Participating organizations:

- Catholic Cross Cultural Services
- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)
- The 519

Partners, Sponsors & Donors Focus Group

Number of participants: 28

Participating organizations:

- Botanicus Art Ensemble
- Canadian National Shelter Protection
- Canadian Tire Jumpstart
- Downtown Yonge BIA
- Evergreen
- Friends of High Park Zoo
- Futuresign Multimedia Displays
- High Park Nature Centre
- MLSE Foundation
- The Grenadier Group
- Toronto Curling Association
- Toronto Foundation
- Toronto Hydro
- Toronto Office of Partnerships
- Toronto Skateboarding Committee
- VIBE Arts
- Westpoint Construction
- William Beasley Enterprises Ltd.

Permit & Facility User Groups Focus Group

Number of participants: 31

Participating organizations:

- Davisville Tennis Club
- Downsview Football Club
- Etobicoke Kangaroos Australian Football Club
- Gem & Mineral Club of Scarborough
- Lace Up Your Cleats
- Leaside Tennis Club
- Netball Ontario
- North Toronto Soccer Club
- North York Soccer Association
- NYTA Winter Tennis Club
- Mooredale Soccer Club
- Off Road Cyclists
- Ontario Soccer
- Peniche Community Club Toronto
- Scarborough Baseball Association
- Scarborough Tennis Federation
- Sir Winston Churchill Park Tennis Club,
- Tennis Toronto
- Toronto Baseball Association
- Toronto Community Cricket Club
- Toronto Skateboard Committee
- Toronto Soccer Association
- Toronto Sports Council
- Toronto Tennis Liaison Committee
- Wanless Tennis Club
- West Hill Baseball League

Seniors Focus Group

Number of participants: 10

Participating organizations:

- Alzheimer Society of Toronto
- Don Montgomery Seniors
- WoodGreen Community Services
- York West Active Living Centre

Youth Focus Groups (8 sessions)

Number of participants: 207

Participating organizations:

- Antibes Community Centre
- JobStart
- North Kipling Community Centre
- Oriole Community Centre
- Parkway Forest Community Centre
- United Way Toronto & York Region
- West Neighbourhood House