



Website Feedback Summary – Phase 2

Overview

The City of Toronto launched an online feedback form on the Facilities Master Plan web page www.toronto.ca/parks/facilitiesplan in November 2015 as part of its Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan consultation process. The online feedback is available until spring 2017, providing an ongoing opportunity for residents to give input. As the Facilities Master Plan progresses, the questions on the form are updated to reflect the information requirements of the project.

From November 2015 to October 2016 the online feedback form questions were:

1. How do City of Toronto parks and recreation facilities make a difference in your life?
2. Has your participation in parks and rec activities changed? What has contributed to these changes? What would increase your participation?
3. What can be done to improve City parks and recreation facilities?
4. In order to provide the right facilities in the right places in an affordable manner, what opportunities or strategies should the City consider?

From November 2016 to December 2016 the online feedback form questions were:

1. What are your thoughts on the emerging directions for the Facilities Master Plan [renew and upgrade existing facilities, address gaps and growth-related needs, work with others and explore new opportunities]?
2. How can we improve the parks and recreation facilities that you use most?
3. Do you have any other advice for the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan?

Input received from November 2015 to June 2016 was summarized as part of the first phase of Facilities Master Plan consultation. Input received from July 2016 to December 2016 is summarized in this document as part of the second phase of consultation. Input received as of January 2017 will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to inform the plan.

Between July 2016 and December 2016, 143 people submitted responses to the online form. Of these, 70% responded as individuals and 30% as representatives of a group, with strong representation by tennis clubs. This summary reflects 225 comments received through the online form, and 21 comments received from 14 people by email or telephone.

Analysis consisted of coding individual comments within responses based on the three emerging directions identified for the Facilities Master Plan followed by identification of the key themes or messages under each direction. The key themes are summarized below, organized by the three directions for the Facilities Master Plan.

Summary of Results

Renew and Upgrade Existing Facilities

37% of all comments

Many respondents expressed support for renewing and upgrading existing facilities, in some cases stating that this should be a priority over new projects. Some commented that resources to maintain parks and facilities should be increased. Some comments highlighted the challenge of equitably distributing funding across the city, and the importance of ensuring that upgrades are done well and fully completed.

Many comments focused on making facilities more accessible, with more accessible washrooms and change rooms, automatic doors that are timed properly and pool railings. Multiple respondents recommended high contrast and Braille signage, tactile walkways, and tactile markers and audio instructions for fitness equipment, as well as staff trained to work with people who are blind. There is a need for facilities to serve the deaf community in order to improve their quality of life through sports and recreation.

Many respondents felt that facility design is important, particularly visual appeal, environmental sustainability and accessibility. Flexibility should be "designed into" facilities and safety should be prioritized for sport facilities e.g. have adequate lighting, spaces free from obstructions and reduced glare from floor to ceiling glass walls.

Some respondents reported a need for bigger, well-designed dog off-leash areas with separate areas for small dogs and dog-friendly surfacing that is not pea gravel. It was suggested that the City consider creating master plans for dog off-leash areas as is done in some other municipalities, for example Surrey British Columbia.

Some respondents identified a need for more year-round washrooms in parks, as well as improved security, lighting and more open spaces and picnic pavilions, particularly on the Toronto Islands. Clubhouses and washrooms are in need of refurbishment, more storage space is required, the City's capital budget should be linked to facility lifespans, and stakeholders should be consulted when facilities are being upgraded.

Climate change affects facilities and facility use, and some respondents recommended more shade along walkways and where people sit, for example at benches and sports field seating. Many suggested more bubbled sport facilities and an extended or year-round outdoor tennis season. The City should respond to the growing number of people visiting the Toronto Islands year-round by upgrading ferry facilities, training staff to manage crowding, and improving online ticketing.

Some respondents suggested that the City's older skateparks be professionally reviewed for condition issues, and to identify potential upgrades and expansions. Specific recommendations include modernization at Cummer, possible expansion at Port Union and Vanderhoof, lights at Ashbridges Bay, more amenities at East York and a full rebuild at Underpass to improve its appeal to users.

Many respondents would like to see more resources allocated to upgrade tennis clubhouses, and to repair public and club courts. Some stated that tennis clubs help to maintain courts and suggested that the City could allow tennis clubs to permit nearby public courts, which they could upgrade with new lines and nets. Additional comments addressed the potential future need for expansion at the Cosburn Lawn Bowling Club.

Many respondents confirmed the importance of maximizing the use of existing facilities, particularly in high growth areas where other spaces such as churches are being lost to development. Some facilities are underutilized, for example Warden Hilltop Community Centre and the badminton courts at Amesbury Community Centre.

Recommendations to improve utilization include eliminating seasonal breaks after each ten week program cycle, offering programs at non-traditional times, having courts that can be used for multiple sports, adding lighting to extend facility hours of use, and making more use of multi-story facility designs and rooftops. Pickleball lines and nets could be added to some tennis courts, for example at Laura Hill and Jeff Healey Park.

Address Gaps and Growth-Related Needs

26% of all comments

Many respondents want more facilities and open public play space, particularly in the downtown core. Some identified a need for more multi-purpose trails as a way for people to get to facilities. Additional comments addressed the value of affordable and high quality facilities for people of all ages, and requests for more trees and wildlife.

Indoor facility gaps include indoor soccer centres and pickleball courts, with suggestions of a gymnasium at Scarborough Village, community centres in Mimico and Morningside Heights, and indoor pools in the city centre, Keele Street and Shepherd/ Wilson Avenue, Roding Park and in the Eglinton Avenue redevelopment areas.

Outdoor facility gaps include pickleball courts, downtown sport fields, skateparks (in some areas of the city), and an off-leash area for small dogs in Humber Bay Shores. Many respondents stated that more tennis facilities are needed, and that these should be located on public transit lines. Affordable winter tennis bubbles are needed to meet existing demand, with Birchmount Park suggested as a possible location.

Many respondents noted that Toronto's demographics are changing and this requires a shift in where new facilities are allocated. Downtown needs more facilities and Mimico was highlighted as an area with changing demographics and shortage of parkland.

A number of respondents highlighted that Toronto's population is aging and that social and physical activity improves quality of life, health and decreases the likelihood of cognitive decline. Areas identified as in need of facilities for seniors are downtown, midtown, and the Yonge and Steeles to Finch and Bayview area. Some respondents reported a need for more warm water therapy pools as very few are currently available.

It was recommended that the Facilities Master Plan prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations such as newcomers and residents living with low-incomes. Some asked that the City carefully consider the location of new facilities to ensure that they are in areas where people live and where they will be used. In some areas of North York for example, overall income levels are rising as small houses are replaced with large ones, however many low income people and seniors remain whose needs need to be met.

Work with Others and Explore New Opportunities

14% of all comments

Some respondents noted that facilities are local assets that can be leveraged by local agencies to host activities, support the local economy and provide opportunities for residents. For example, while local agencies can provide start-up catering business with training, they lack certified kitchen spaces that could be provided by recreation centres.

It was noted that community groups can be great partners with the City, and that recreation centre staff should participate in local networks and actively support projects beyond just providing space. Some comments highlighted the importance of engaging with communities in planning, operating and enhancing facilities and the value of sponsoring youth training in sport to encourage lifelong participation.

Many respondents recommended more liaison between the City and permit-holders, for example through annual meetings. These organizations animate facilities, know what is needed and need to be up to date on City initiatives so that they can contribute to facility success. Improved communication could facilitate the volunteer work done by many, for example by better access to City policies and improved processes to request repairs.

Permit groups such as tennis and soccer clubs could be more engaged to support facility planning and improvements. For example, an opportunity exists to address the lack of fields downtown by bringing together local organizations with the City, the Don River Valley Park initiative and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) to explore enhancement of the field at the Rosedale School of the Arts. There are also opportunities to work within the public sector to provide skateparks, for example a partnership with Exhibition Place to provide an indoor skatepark. The City could also engage in partnerships to increase access to sport facilities for the deaf community.

Some respondents stated that tennis clubs build community, increase facility use and result in better court maintenance. It was suggested that a simple process be created to encourage the creation of new clubs and that the City consider letting tennis clubs lease

their facilities as this would encourage longer-term strategic planning and investment. A small number of respondents noted that lawn bowling is part of Toronto's heritage and is played by younger people in Europe. The City could work with clubs to promote lawn bowling, and support them with policies that do not create financial difficulties.

Some respondents suggested that the City improve collaboration with developers to ensure that new development fits into a master plan that includes adequate parks and recreation facilities. There is also potential for collaboration with the private sector partnerships to upgrade facilities through corporate partnerships, and to build more bubbled facilities that could be operated by the private sector.

Additional Comments

23% of all comments

Many respondents confirmed that they agree with the three emerging directions for the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. Some found it difficult to comment as the directions do not provide enough detail on what will be done.

Many respondents reported appreciation for Toronto's parks and recreation facilities, and some reported that they are affordable. Many respondents described the benefits that parks and recreation provide to them, including keeping fit, maintaining health, socializing, enjoyment and contact with nature. The importance of maintaining nature and outdoor facilities was mentioned, as was the idea of educating the public and elected officials about the value of these benefits and their contribution to the city.

With respect to programming, some respondents reported that there are not enough special needs programs including adapted and integrated summer camps, and pointed out the value of ensuring that programs are available to the most vulnerable populations in the city. Others suggested that the registration system be improved so that it is fair to everyone and flagged challenges with the implementation of free programs, which fill up quickly and may not be available to those who need them or who live nearby. Some respondents provided specific program suggestions, for example more adult and family badminton at Amesbury Community Centre, more skating lessons at Chris Tonks Arena, and more free community skate time at the Centennial Recreation Centre West rink.

A small number of respondents stated that additional funding is required for parks and facilities maintenance, that the community plays a role in keeping parks clean, and that trees should be pruned up to 2m from the ground to improve visual access in parks. Other highlighted that it is important to have staff be trained in how to work with people who are blind or have other disabilities, and to monitor facilities and enforce rules.

Additional comments were to ensure a realistic capital budget and future operating budget when building and renovating facilities, that that extended delays in opening new facilities, such as York Community Centre, are not acceptable, and that public access is essential for City-operated facilities,