



**active spaces** | people places

PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES MASTER PLAN

## Interim Consultation Process Report

 **TORONTO** Parks, Forestry & Recreation

Prepared in collaboration with: Swerhun Facilitation  
July 2016

# PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES MASTER PLAN ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

## Phase 1



**Contents**

- Introduction ..... 1
- Understanding Needs and Establishing Principles: ..... 2
- Activities and Feedback ..... 2
  - Key Themes ..... 2
  - Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting 1 ..... 6
    - Overview ..... 6
    - High-Level Summary of Feedback ..... 6
  - Online Survey 1 ..... 7
    - Overview ..... 7
    - High-Level Summary of Results ..... 8
  - Town Halls ..... 10
    - Overview ..... 10
    - High-Level Summary of Feedback ..... 11
  - Stakeholder Focus Groups ..... 13
    - Overview ..... 13
    - High-Level Summary of Feedback ..... 13
    - Additional Youth Focus Groups ..... 17
  - Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting 2 ..... 18
    - Overview ..... 18
    - High-Level Summary of Feedback ..... 19
  - Master Plan Website ..... 20
    - Overview** ..... 20
  - Toronto Planning Review Panel ..... 23
    - Overview ..... 23
    - High-Level Summary of Feedback ..... 24

## Introduction

The City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PFR) Division is undertaking a new Facilities Master Plan that will guide the Division for the next 20 years. This is an update to PFR's 2004 Council approved Recreation Facilities Report. It will create a comprehensive inventory of the City's indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, identify and prioritize future investment and opportunities for parks and recreation facility provision, and develop strategic investment priorities by facility type based on a principle of equitable distribution across the City.

The development of this plan will be informed by a robust consultation process that engages individual users of parks and recreation facilities, as well as non-users, and organizations that provide and / or advocate for parks and recreation facilities and activities. The consultation process is taking place in two phases:

***Understanding Needs and Establishing Principles*** – the City will share and seek feedback on the current provision of facilities, principles for investment, and facility gaps and needs. The views and perspectives shared by participants in this phase of the consultation process will help inform the needs assessment and Draft Master Plan that will be developed in Phase Two.

***Testing and Refining the Draft Master Plan*** – the City will share and seek feedback on proposed facility needs and strategic directions. The views and perspectives shared by participants in this phase will help inform refinements to the Draft Master Plan. The Master Plan will then be finalized and taken to Council for approval in 2017.

This interim consultation process report provides a summary of all public and stakeholder consultation activities and feedback collected during the Understanding Needs and Establishing Principles phase. This feedback will be used to help inform the technical analysis and development of the Draft Master Plan. This report will be updated to include the Testing and Refining the Draft Master Plan phase activities and feedback at the conclusion of the consultation process. This report is a compilation of the individual feedback summaries that provide a more detailed account of the feedback collected during each consultation activity.

## Understanding Needs and Establishing Principles:

### Activities and Feedback

This section provides a summary of the public and stakeholder consultation activities and feedback collected during the Understanding Needs and Establishing Principles phase. The activities that took place in this phase and are summarized in this report, included:

- Two meetings of the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG)
- One Online Survey
- Four Public Town Halls
- Six Stakeholder Focus Groups and Seven Youth Focus Groups
- Feedback collected through the Master Plan website ([toronto.ca/parks/facilitiesplan](http://toronto.ca/parks/facilitiesplan))
- One meeting of the Toronto Planning Review Panel

### Key Themes

The key themes below are derived from the summaries of the various public and stakeholder consultation activities that took place during the first phase of the consultation process. The key themes are organized by the six challenges that the Facilities Master Plan will address:

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

Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG), Town Hall, Stakeholder Focus Group and Master Plan Website participants all talked about the importance of demographic changes for determining facility needs.

- SAG participants felt that the City should focus both on high growth areas as well as areas that are experiencing lower-level intensification (e.g. the redevelopment of detached houses with stacked townhouses)
- Town Hall participants identified a number of areas that had recently grown or were anticipated to grow in the near term and were therefore in need of new facilities

- Stakeholder Focus Group participants suggested making facilities more accessible and responsive to the needs of the growing number of newcomers in the city
- Master Plan Website participants felt that the City should plan and deliver facilities and services that meet demographic needs, for example those of seniors, newcomers and low-income communities.

Survey respondents generally felt that there are the right number of parks and recreation facilities within their neighbourhoods, with two-thirds indicating that there are just the right number. Slightly more felt this way about outdoor facilities (67%) than indoor facilities (63%).

### **Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs**

SAG, Town Hall, Focus Group, Master Plan Website and Toronto Planning Review Panel participants all suggested that the City explore ways to make both existing and new facilities more flexible to accommodate a range of uses, balance demands for grass roots and premium sports, better respond to evolving needs and maximize capital investments.

Focus Group participants suggested improving facilities to match the needs of seniors and youth, including adding community kitchens, drop-in un-programmed space, and intergenerational spaces.

Participants at the Town Halls also suggested converting underutilized facilities to uses more in line with growing recreational activities.

Master Plan Website participants suggested facilities that can accommodate environmental and cultural activities.

Survey respondents generally felt that the City's indoor recreation facilities are doing a good job of meeting their needs, with four in five (81%) agreeing that the facility they use most often meets the needs of their community and three in five participants (63%) agreeing that indoor facilities overall have the features they are looking for.

### **Providing Quality Facilities**

Stakeholder Focus Group and Town Hall participants felt that quality facilities are those that are in a good state of repair, up to current standards and that are clean, safe, and appealing. Master Plan website participants suggested that many parks and recreation facilities are in need of renewal.

Participants at these consultation activities also felt that quality facilities are those that can accommodate a range of activities year round and have adequate support amenities such as washrooms and lighting.

Three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that overall, the indoor facilities they use are in good condition and slightly more than two-thirds (69%) indicated they liked these facilities the way they are, but felt some updates are needed. Similarly, just over three in five (62%) indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of outdoor parks and recreation facilities.

### **Working with Others to Meet Needs**

Stakeholder Advisory Group and Focus Group participants suggested looking at examples of existing partnerships that the City has with other organizations. Focus Group participants in particular felt that there were lessons to be drawn, including how the City can better coordinate, collaborate, communicate and support partner organizations.

Participants at these two consultation activities, along with those from the Master Plan website, also suggested that the City explore the co-location of a broad array of community services at parks and recreation facilities.

Focus Group participants and Town Hall participants suggested partnerships with specific types of organizations, including school boards, places of worship and community organizations. They felt that these partnerships could help provide access to space that is underutilized during off-peak times and better animate and activate facilities.

Nearly 7 in 10 survey respondents (69%) felt that the City should work with other service providers to provide parks and recreation facilities, with slightly more supporting partnerships with service providers like schools, libraries and non-profit agencies (80%) than with the private sector (58%). Three-quarters of respondents supported the co-location of community centres together with other types of spaces and services (e.g. child care centres, libraries, social services, cultural facilities or retail shops).

### **Improving Accessibility for Everyone**

Town Hall and Focus Group participants discussed access in terms of ease of travel to facilities, highlighting the importance of locating facilities along transit and active transportation connections and providing accessible parking.

Participants at these consultation activities also talked about access in terms of the design of facilities and ensuring that they are welcoming spaces (e.g. redesigning

community centre lobbies to promote user-staff interactions, providing space for cultural activities, animation and events). Master Plan Website participants expressed a desire for more amenities such as concession stands and washrooms.

Stakeholder Advisory Group, Focus Group, and Toronto Planning Review Panel participants stressed the importance of the physical design of facilities (particularly outdoor facilities) and how that can impact access for people with disabilities, along with access to information about accessibility, adequate signage and trained staff. They also emphasized the importance of ensuring access for those with greater need (e.g. locating facilities in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas).

Approximately three-quarters of survey respondents felt that the City's parks and recreation facilities are conveniently located. 82% felt that facilities are welcoming to all members of the community, while 54% felt that facilities are accessible for persons with disabilities. However, less than 1 in 10 respondents (7%) self-identified as a person living with a disability and very few (2%) indicated that they had lived in Canada less than 10 years.

### The Funding Challenge

Stakeholder Advisory Group participants suggested reframing the funding challenge to express the value and return on investment that parks and recreation facilities provide (e.g. physical, mental and social health benefits and resultant money saved on other social service spending).

Focus Group, Town Hall, Master Plan Website, and Toronto Planning Review Panel participants shared further specific ideas on how to respond to the funding challenge, including:

- Locating facilities on non-traditional lands (e.g. hydro corridors) and co-locating or leasing space with or within other organizations facilities
- Identifying and promoting facilities that are underutilized
- Undertaking site-specific planning for new facilities as soon as possible to better take advantage of funding opportunities with other levels of government
- Better advertising programs and services to bring in more users and revenue
- Encouraging people to volunteer/make small donations and seeking donations of space from faith-based groups and large land owners
- Exploring corporate sponsorships and private donations
- Working with community and other partners
- Reworking the distribution of Section 37 funds in order to distribute more funding to neighbourhoods where the need for amenities is greatest



Participants at both the Focus Groups and Town Halls suggested responding to the funding challenge by identifying opportunities for low cost maintenance and repairs to improve facilities. Two thirds of survey respondents expressed a preference for renovating older community centres, pools and arenas rather than completely rebuilding them.

## **Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting 1**

### **Overview**

On November 26, 2015, the City of Toronto hosted the first of three Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) meetings as part of its Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. At this first meeting, SAG members were provided with an overview of the Master Plan Process and the project team's views on parks and recreation facility challenges. Following these presentations, SAG members engaged in a facilitated discussion guided by four focus questions:

1. What are you hearing from your members / networks about the current state of parks and recreation facilities?
2. What are the most significant trends or factors that are (or should be) shaping the provision of parks and recreation facilities?
3. What is the most important thing that the Master Plan should achieve?
4. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the Master Plan process?

### **High-Level Summary of Feedback**

#### **Responding to a Changing City**

It was suggested that it will be important to take into account demographic changes in both high growth areas as well as those resulting from lower-level intensification (e.g. the redevelopment of detached houses with stacked townhouses).

#### **Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs**

SAG members provided advice on potential sources of information the project team could use in determining the evolving needs for parks and recreation facilities, both during the Master Plan process and throughout its implementation.

## Providing Quality Facilities

SAG members suggested that providing quality facilities could include greening buildings to make them more energy efficient and planning for flexible facilities/spaces to better respond to evolving needs/limited capital dollars.

## Working with Others to Meet Needs

Several SAG members talked about looking at examples of ongoing partnerships and drawing lessons from them.

SAG members suggested that co-location of services with parks and recreation facilities can help maximize responses to community need for recreation and social services.

## Improving Accessibility for Everyone

SAG members spoke of accessibility and inclusion at a number of scales, from parks and recreation facilities as a great social leveler to specific facility features that facilitate inclusion and designs that inhibit access to people with disabilities.

## The Funding Challenge

Several SAG members suggested that the funding challenge be reframed to express the value and return on investment that parks and recreation facilities provide. They felt that there could be an opportunity to better position parks and recreation within the city, highlighting the physical, mental and social health benefits and resultant money saved on other social service spending.

These SAG members felt that the value of parks and recreation facilities could be articulated through a number of means, including: drawing on existing parks and recreation studies and policy positions, and considering the framing, trends, metrics and results of Toronto-focused quality of life and social planning reports, studies and tools.

## Online Survey 1

### Overview

The City of Toronto hosted an online survey between December 1, 2015 and January 24, 2016 as part of its Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. The online survey was available on the Master Plan website. In the nearly two months that the survey was available, 3,320 people responded to the survey, with approximately 60% completing the 36 question survey.

The purpose of the survey was to help establish a broad picture of recreation facility needs and preferences by focusing on facility usage, gaps and principles. The survey featured questions related to three categories: indoor facilities, outdoor facilities, and demographics. As survey respondents were self-selecting, the results should not be interpreted as a statistically significant representation of public opinion on the questions asked in the survey.

## ***High-Level Summary of Results***

### **Responding to a Changing City**

Respondents generally felt that there are the right number of parks and recreation facilities within their neighbourhoods, with two-thirds indicating that there are just the right number of parks and recreation facilities in their neighbourhood. Slightly more felt this way about outdoor facilities (67%) than indoor facilities (63%).

### **Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs**

Respondents generally felt that the City's indoor recreation facilities are doing a good job of meeting their needs, with four in five (81%) agreeing that the facility they use most often meets the needs of their community and three in five participants (63%) agreeing that indoor facilities overall have the features they are looking for.

When asked about their preferences for recreation facility size and number of features, a majority of respondents (58%) expressed a preference for small recreation facilities that are closer to their homes instead of large recreation facilities with more features that are farther from them.

According to survey respondents the most important types of indoor facilities include indoor swimming pools (67%), community centres (51%), and indoor arenas (36%), and the most important outdoor facilities include open green space/multi-purpose fields (49%), skating rinks (34%); and outdoor swimming pools (32%). There was some alignment with the activities that respondents (or members of their households) participated in most frequently, with lane/leisure swimming (36%) and instructional swimming (36%) as the top two indoor recreational activities that respondents most frequently participated in and leisure skating (34%) as one of the top three outdoor recreational activities.

## Providing Quality Facilities

Three-quarters of respondents indicated that overall, the City's community centres (77%), arenas (75%) and indoor swimming pools (72%) are in good condition, and slightly more than two-thirds indicated they liked these facilities the way they are, but that some updates are needed. Similarly, just over three in five (62%) indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of outdoor parks and recreation facilities.

Respondents were more likely to agree that indoor pools were too crowded and busy (40%) than disagree (30%). In contrast, respondents were less likely to agree that community centres (28%) and arenas (23%) were too crowded and busy than disagree (38% and 43% respectively). Amongst those who have not used an indoor facility in the last 12 months, one-quarter said it was because they had found facilities to be too crowded. In comparison, crowded facilities were cited by just over one in ten (13%) respondents as the reason that they had not used an outdoor recreational facility in the last 12 months.

## Working with Others to Meet Needs

Nearly 7 in 10 respondents (69%) felt that the City should work with other service providers to provide parks and recreation facilities, with slightly more supporting partnerships with service providers like schools, libraries and non-profit agencies (80%) than with the private sector (58%). Three-quarters of respondents supported the co-location of community centres together with other types of spaces and services (e.g. child care centres, libraries, social services, cultural facilities or retail shops).

Respondents are already using non-City facilities just as much as they are using City facilities. In the last 12 months, 90% of respondents had used a non-City indoor facility compared with 83% who had used a City indoor facility. Similarly, 76% of respondents had used a non-City outdoor facility compared with 81% who had used a City outdoor facility.

## Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Survey respondents generally felt that the City's recreation facilities are geographically accessible, with approximately three-quarters (73%) saying that the City's indoor facilities are conveniently located and just over three-quarters (77%) feeling the same about outdoor facilities. Furthermore, most respondents felt that it takes them a reasonable amount of time to travel to community centres (89%), arenas (85%) and indoor pools (87%) specifically.

At the most frequently used community centres, indoor arenas and pools, respondents generally felt that conditions are good, with nine in ten reporting that these facilities feel

safe, and eight in ten reporting that they are welcoming to all members of the community. A slim majority agreed that the support spaces (change rooms, washrooms, seating) are adequate at community centres (56%), arenas (57%) and indoor pools (54%), and a similar proportion felt that facilities are accessible for persons with disabilities (57% for community centres, 55% for arenas and 50% for indoor pools). However, less than 1 in 10 respondents (7%) self-identified as a person living with a disability and very few (2%) indicated that they had lived in Canada less than 10 years.

## The Funding Challenge

When given a choice between renovating older community centres, pools and arenas or completely rebuilding them, even if it means moving them to another location, two-thirds of respondents (66%) expressed a preference for renovations while just under one in five expressed a preference for rebuilding (18%). Almost as many did not express a preference, with 16% indicating they could not decide / did not know.

## Town Halls

### Overview

The City of Toronto hosted four public town halls on February 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> and March 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 as part of its Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. These town halls were held across the city, with one each in Toronto-East York, Scarborough, Etobicoke-York and North York.

The purpose of these town halls 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 town hall, participants were provided with an overview of the Master Plan process and challenges that the Master Plan will seek to respond to. Following this presentation, participants engaged in facilitated discussions guided by a series of focus questions:

1. What is the best thing about the City's parks and recreation facilities?
2. How can the City's parks and recreation facilities be improved (e.g. expanding existing facilities, constructing of new facilities)?
3. Do you have any suggestions on how to address the challenges associated with providing parks and recreation facilities?

All four town halls were live webcast, providing residents with the option to view and listen to the presentation and participate in the discussion either in-person or online. In total, approximately 140 people participated in the town halls, with over 40 community, sports and interest groups represented.

## **High-Level Summary of Feedback**

### **Responding to a Changing City**

To respond to a changing city, participants at the Toronto-East York, Etobicoke-York and North York town halls suggested new facilities in locations that had recently grown (particularly higher density neighbourhoods) or were anticipated to grow in the near term, including:

- A new community centre in central Etobicoke
- New community centres serving Ward 20 (both in the south end in the Entertainment District which has experienced a high rate of growth and in the northern end, which has not experienced the same growth but does not have a community centre)
- A new community centre in the quarry lands at Victoria Park and Gerrard
- A new playground at Wynford Drive
- Additional ice pads at Goulding Park
- New community centres at Grand Avenue Park and/or at the site of the former Christie plant

### **Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs**

To reshape facilities to fit evolving needs, participants at the Toronto-East York, Scarborough and North York town halls suggested converting underutilized facilities to uses more in line with growing recreational activities (such as ball diamonds to cricket pitches or making temporary skateboard parks permanent, as was requested at Malvern Community Recreation Centre). Participants at the Etobicoke-York town hall suggested reshaping facilities by making spaces, fields and courts more flexible to accommodate a range of sports and balance grass roots and premium sports.

### **Providing Quality Facilities**

Providing quality facilities was discussed in a number of ways by participants at the town halls. Toronto-East York and Scarborough participants suggested smaller-scale improvements to existing facilities to increase their usability. Participants in Etobicoke-York and North York expressed concerns about facility maintenance and a lack of supporting amenities causing a decline in sport organization membership, shortened playing seasons and potentially increasing the risk of injuries. They suggested that the City improve sports field maintenance and provide supporting amenities such as washrooms, lighting, sports bubbles and artificial turf (although there was some concern about the appropriateness of artificial turf for some sports).

## Working with Others to Meet Needs

Participants identified many different types of organizations that the City of Toronto could work with to meet recreational needs. Participants at the Scarborough, Etobicoke-York and North York town halls suggested that the City work with schools and post-secondary institutions to provide facilities, with participants at the former two town halls emphasizing community hubs on vacated school sites and participants at the latter meeting suggesting facility sharing during off-peak times. Participants at these three town halls also suggested that the City consider partnering with community organizations to help animate and activate facilities and pursuing more corporate partnerships to increase funding and permit fee revenues.

## Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Participants at all four town halls talked about improving accessibility to facilities in terms of ease of travel. While participants in Scarborough and Etobicoke-York shared stories about the need to drive to facilities and difficulties faced by those without access to cars, participants in Toronto-East York and North York suggested that the City also encourage access to facilities through public transit and active transportation. Participants also discussed accessibility in terms of program registration – suggesting that improvements to the registration system would result in greater access, and welcoming spaces – suggesting that efforts be made to improve the look and function of recreation centre lobbies as community space and to promote user-staff interaction.

## The Funding Challenge

Participants at all four town halls offered a number of different ideas to respond to the funding challenge, including:

- Ensuring that parks acquired through section 42 or built through section 37 funds and other development-related funds are large enough to provide outdoor facilities
- Encouraging people to volunteer/make small donations
- Better advertising programs and services to bring in more users and revenue
- Seeking donations of space from faith-based groups and large land owners
- Working with community organizations and sports clubs to fund new facilities
- Undertaking site-specific planning for new facilities as soon as possible to better take advantage of funding opportunities with other levels of government

## Stakeholder Focus Groups

### Overview

The City of Toronto hosted six 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.

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. In total, 147 people participated, representing 74 organizations.

### High-Level Summary of Feedback

#### 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.

### ***Additional Youth Focus Groups***

Seven additional 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 refugees, welcoming lounge areas, signs that reduce language barriers, safe spaces for LGBTQ, female-only spaces, and rooms for religious practice.

## ***Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting 2***

### **Overview**

On April 12, 2016, the City of Toronto hosted the second of three Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) meetings as part of its Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. At this second meeting, SAG members were provided with: (1) a summary of results from the consultation process to date, including feedback collected through the town halls, focus groups and online survey; and (2) an overview of the eight draft Guiding Principles. Following these presentations, SAG members engaged in a facilitated discussion guided by four focus questions:

1. What are your thoughts on the draft Guiding Principles? Do you have any suggested additions and/or refinements?
2. Do you have any observations or comments on the consultation summary? Anything unexpected? Anything you would like to add?
3. How should we engage the public in gaining feedback on the draft recommendations? How can we better engage non-users?
4. Do you have any suggestions for improving our communications and process?

## ***High-Level Summary of Feedback***

### **Overall Advice on the Draft Principles**

One group of SAG members said they were impressed with the principles overall and liked the first three (Equity, Inclusion and Quality) a lot. Another group of SAG members suggested that the principles could use more inspirational language to promote broad ownership. A third group of members suggested that performance measures should be developed for each of the principles to help operationalize them and make their attainment measureable.

A few members suggested that the Master Plan should include a vision statement to introduce the principles and that this vision statement should speak to quality of life and include “soundbites” from the engagement process to demonstrate the link to community desires.

One group of SAG members felt that eight principles was too many and that six would be more appropriate. Another group of SAG members suggested merging the Equity and Inclusion principles and the Sustainability and Capacity Building principles.

### **Engagement and Communications Advice**

SAG members shared a number of ideas on how to seek feedback from the public on the draft Master Plan, including:

- Identifying existing networks and going to them to share and seek feedback on the draft Plan;
- Speaking with service organizations to better engage marginalized groups;
- Seeking out community organizations / ambassadors who represent groups that don't typically use facilities;
- Using the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy planning tables to reach out across the city;
- Engage academic organizations to set up a hackathon to crowdsource solutions.

SAG members shared a number of ideas on how the draft Master Plan could be communicated to members of the public, including:

- Using aspirations that the public have articulated to introduce the draft Plan and provide an emotional hook;
- A public service announcement (similar to what was used for the Ravine Strategy, which was quite successful);
- Using social media and Council newsletters to tap into existing networks and encourage word-of-mouth communications;

- Using a number of different communications mechanisms to ensure that they are accessible to all (e.g. seniors and people with disabilities may not be able to easily access online communications).

SAG members suggested a number of groups that the City can continue to seek to engage through the Master Plan process, including: other recreation providers in the city (to solicit feedback from their users on why they choose to use those facilities); representatives of city worker unions; and, cultural organizations that offer programming

## **Master Plan Website**

### **Overview**

The City of Toronto launched an online feedback form on the Facilities Master Plan web page [www.toronto.ca/parks/facilitiesplan](http://www.toronto.ca/parks/facilitiesplan) in November 2015 as part of its Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan consultation process. The online feedback form is available to the public until the end of the second phase of consultation for the Facilities Master Plan in late fall 2016. Between November 2015 and June 2016, 120 people participated, resulting in a total of 1,063 comments received.

The online feedback form consists of the following broad, open-ended questions:

1. How do City of Toronto parks and recreation facilities make a difference in your life?
2. Has your participation in parks and recreation 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?  
In order to provide the right facilities in the right places in an affordable manner, what opportunities or strategies should the City consider?

Analysis consisted of coding individual comments within responses based on the six challenges that the Facilities Master Plan will address, followed by identification of the key themes or messages under each challenge. The key themes are summarized below, organized by the six challenges that the Facilities Master Plan will address.

### **High Level Summary of Feedback**

#### **Responding to a Changing City**

*24% of all comments*

Many respondents reported that parks and recreation facilities are essential infrastructure used by people at all stages of life. They play a key role in supporting physical activity, social/community connection and skills development, and promote physical and mental health and well-being. Outdoor spaces allow people to connect with

nature, provide respite from a busy city, enable active transportation and offer many environmental benefits that in turn improve health.

Respondents felt that parks and recreation facilities are important places for families to spend quality time together, and for children to play, learn and engage in communities. They provide essential, affordable access to formal and informal recreation that supports the growth and development of children and youth. Many respondents articulated a desire for more casual, multi-generational facility use opportunities, such as all ages or concurrent programming for caregivers and children.

Many respondents identified that facility use changes over a person's life cycle, with high use by young families that decreases as children get older. As people age the activities they engage in change – for example someone who played hockey as a youth and young adult may use rinks less, but use trails more.

Issues to consider in providing the right facilities in the right places include intensification, for example in the downtown core. The City should also plan and deliver facilities and services that meet demographic needs, for example those of seniors, newcomers and low-income communities. Some respondents raised issues of facility quality and access, including increased crowding and decreased sport field quality.

### **Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs**

*21% of all comments*

Many comments indicated that residents value the range of facility options available and reported participating in arts, culture, sport and exploring the natural environment. The availability of registered as well as drop-in and informal activities supports people of all ages and stages. Some respondents reported a trend toward individual vs. organized activities and a desire for multi-use spaces (e.g. open green field). Many expressed a desire for environmental, cultural and other options at facilities, and for small amenities such as outdoor fitness equipment and benches.

Some respondents emphasized that they use facilities to maintain their health. Many respondents reported that in an increasingly urban environment green space is more important than ever. Natural areas are excellent places to relax, decompress and find peace. They provide important environmental benefits (e.g. cleaning the air). Some respondents felt that it is important that the City ensure that existing green spaces are protected and new ones created when new development takes place.

Many respondents described the value of the wide range of affordable recreation options at City facilities, particularly for children, youth and seniors. To encourage



facility use it was suggested that the City improve amenities, reduce crowding, provide more multi-generational options and reduce parking and program fees.

### **Providing Quality Facilities**

*22% of all comments*

Many respondents reported regularly using many facility types, particularly swimming pools, ice rinks, sports fields and that these are important venues for both recreational and competitive sport. Many comments suggest that many of the city's parks and recreation facilities are in need of renewal. Some respondents reported a need for increased greater sport field maintenance.

Suggestions for improvement included ensuring a good state of repair, regular upgrades and refreshes of facilities, amenities and signage, enhanced amenities such as change rooms and lighting, and making equipment more available for use (e.g. weights and sport balls). Some respondents recommended expanding existing facilities in response to community needs and improving maintenance, particularly for sports fields and pools.

Some respondents suggested that facility planning should be done with strong, current data on existing facilities and demographics. It was suggested that the City apply best practices for facility planning, maximize use at existing facilities, and ensure the equitable distribution of facilities. Additional suggestions were to work with partners to create new facilities, and to use materials and techniques that promote all-season use.

### **Working with Others to Meet Needs**

*7% of all comments*

Many suggestions were provided by respondents for working with others to provide facilities. These include exploring community hubs with other providers, working with developers to deliver facilities, partnering with school boards, and improving revenue generating facilities (e.g. arenas). It was also recommended that the City work with community groups, non-profit organizations, and with the private sector including developers to secure land for facilities

Some respondents provided recommendations for service delivery. These included improving customer service and having more staff trained to work with seniors.

### **Improving Accessibility for Everyone**

*22% of all comments*

Respondents generally found that parks and recreation facilities were conveniently located and make regular use of facilities within walking distance. Some respondents

would like to see a greater range of facilities within their neighbourhoods. It was also suggested that facilities could be better linked with the trail system.

Many respondents expressed a desire for more amenities such as concession stands, washrooms, smaller sport facilities (e.g. fitness equipment), and modernized facilities (e.g. splash pad vs wading pool).

It was emphasized by many respondents that City facilities need to keep up with growth and demographic change. Some respondents highlighted the need to provide for adequate provision and maintenance of support amenities such as washrooms and support space. It was also suggested that the City consider facilities in non-traditional locations such as shopping malls.

Many respondents expressed appreciation for the many free and affordable parks and recreation facilities, with some suggesting more discounts for specific population groups (e.g. students, and seniors). A frequent suggestion was to extend hours of operation, for example by being open later at night and increasing lighting to extend the hours of outdoor facilities. Many people would also like to see improved information and outreach regarding parks and recreation facilities and programs.

### **The Funding Challenge**

*4% of all comments*

Respondents suggested sponsorships, community fund-raising, working with community and private sector partners, and revenue generation through leases and permitting as options to help fund parks and recreation facilities. Additional strategies put forward include ensuring that the state of good repair is maintained at facilities and retrofitting existing facilities. Some respondents commented that it was important to ensure adequate funding for Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

## **Toronto Planning Review Panel**

### **Overview**

The Planning Review Panel is made up of 28 randomly selected Torontonians. The Panel was created so that a representative group of Torontonians could help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. They have been asked by the Chief Planner, to work together over the course of two years to provide City Planning and other City divisions with informed public input on major planning initiatives. Members are tasked, in particular, with helping to ensure that these initiatives are well-aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians.

More information about the Planning Review Panel can be found at [www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp](http://www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp)

On May 14, 2016, the panel met to offer input on the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. The panel was presented with a series of questions, including:

1. We've identified four important needs that the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan should address: Responding to a changing city; Reshaping facilities to fit evolving needs; Providing quality facilities; and Improving accessibility for everyone. Do you believe we have identified the most important needs facing Toronto's recreation facilities?
2. Because of the "Funding Challenge" we've described, it's not always possible to provide everyone with the facilities they might want. Are there particular facility needs that you believe we should prioritize in this new Master Plan?
3. Partnerships with others can help us meet as many needs as possible. Do you have any suggestions about how we should work with others to provide great facilities?
4. We want to engage all Torontonians, not just our current facilities users, in a conversation about the future of recreation facilities in our city. Do you have any suggestions about how best to engage those who don't regularly use our facilities?"

### ***High-Level Summary of Feedback***

#### **Feedback on Need the Facilities Master Plan Should Address**

Panel members agreed that it is difficult to discuss facilities without a conversation about programming. The group wondered whether the quality of facilities may in some cases matter less than how facilities are programmed to meet community needs, or how great community programs find access to functional spaces in neighbourhoods. They felt discussing the two together would ensure a more valuable conversation with the public that led to more substantive and creative outcomes.

Panelists did agree that the four broad needs that were identified were important and should be addressed in the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. During their discussions, panelists raised and discussed a number of specific issues, but found that they all fit in under the four broad needs identified by the city.

#### **Advice on What Facilities Should be Prioritized**

First, there was broad agreement that priority should be given to geographic communities which are currently underserved, such as Neighbourhood Improvement

Areas. Many believed that this will improve accessibility to recreation facilities for the residents who need it the most and help allay growing inequalities between neighbourhoods in Toronto.

Second, they identified the need to create multi-purpose and flexible recreation facilities. As a diverse city, there would always be a diversity of demands. Plus, neighbourhoods in Toronto continue to change. For these reasons, panelists felt it was very important that facilities become more flexible and modifiable. Providing more multi-purpose and flexible facilities will allow spaces to accommodate different users with changing needs, while reducing the need to invest in costly renovations.

Third, Panelists thought that making facilities accessible for people with disabilities should be a priority. The Panel felt an important step towards creating inclusive and welcoming facilities was to ensure that old and new facilities can cater to the needs of people with disabilities.

Lastly, ensuring facilities are sustainable and environmentally friendly was also identified as a priority. This would help save costs while also decreasing the environmental footprint of the facilities.

### Advice on Partnerships

The Panel felt partnerships were a useful tool to provide great facilities and help alleviate fiscal constraints. Many saw Section 37 as an existing form of partnership between the city and developers, and some emphasized the need to rework the way Section 37 funds were allocated. Though they understood that Section 37 was primarily a way to fund increased demand for public amenities in response to new development, these panelists felt the way Section 37 funds are allocated should be reworked in order to distribute more funding to the neighbourhoods where the need for new amenities are greatest, regardless of the pace of local development.

Panelists also agreed that the City should continue to explore corporate sponsorships and private donations, including through incentives such as naming rights or plaques. Panelists were strongly in favour of a more expansive approach to partnerships between the City and external partners that would expand resident access to recreation and community building opportunities. Though they were supportive of the idea of partnering to build or repair public facilities, they also encouraged the City to take a neighbourhood-based approach including working more with owners of existing under-used spaces (for example in schools, buildings owned by religious and community organizations, and other local assets) to bring public recreational programming into these spaces. It would also mean working with property developers to build recreation spaces that serve the needs of the general public as well as the building's residents or tenants.

Panelists discussed how current programs in park and recreation facilities were sometimes not being used despite existing demand for programs in the local community. Panelists felt residents don't always know what programs are being offered and suggested partnering with local organizations and community groups to better plan and match programs with local demand, and also inform community members about the program opportunities that were available.

### **Advice on How to Engage Those Who Don't Regularly Use Parks and Recreation Facilities**

Panelists agreed that it was important for the City to go where people already are, rather than necessarily asking people to come to special meetings about the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. Attending local community events, for example, was a way to do so. The group also agreed that the conversation about the future of park and recreation facilities can also be promoted through local organizations who have relationships with large user or membership bases. Members of the panel also suggested:

- Improving information-sharing and coordination between city departments so that they didn't cause confusion or 'engagement fatigue'
- Ensuring information brochures are available in different languages
- Providing opportunities for Torontonians to contribute to decision-making through
- Panels like the Toronto Planning Review Panel Panels

For a detailed summary of results visit [www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp](http://www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp)