Toronto Parks & Trails Wayfinding Strategy (Phase Two)

June 2015 Stakeholder Meeting Summary

June 17, 2015
Metro Hall – 55 John St Toronto, ON M5V 3C6
6:30 – 8:30 pm

Overview

On June 17, 2015, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry, and Recreation Division hosted the third Stakeholder Meeting for Phase Two of the Toronto Parks & Trails Wayfinding Strategy. The purpose of the meeting was: to review and discuss the developed signage design, mapping, and graphic information concepts, and to discuss draft recommendations for the Digital Wayfinding Service specification.

Approximately 15 people attended the meeting, including representatives of environmental advocacy groups, accessibility groups, cycling and mountain biking groups, and park advocacy groups. Several City staff from Parks, Forestry, and Recreation and members of the consultant team (including Steer Davies Gleave and Swerhun Facilitation) also attended the meeting.

The meeting consisted of welcoming remarks from Janette Harvey, City of Toronto, an overview presentation delivered by James Brown and Craig Nelson of Steer Davies Gleave, three interactive, rotating group discussions, and a plenary report back. Participants also submitted written feedback via workbooks and email.

Ian Malczewski, a facilitator with Swerhun Facilitation, wrote this Meeting Summary and shared it with participants for review before finalizing it. The purpose of this Summary is to identify key themes and to collect detailed feedback from the meeting; it is not intended as a verbatim transcript.

Key Messages

These Key Messages reflect common themes that emerged in discussions at the meeting. They should be read in concert with the more detailed summary of feedback below.

Great work on the sign design concept. Participants generally liked the proposed concept for the sign design, especially the differentiation between parks and trails. They offered some suggestions about the sign design, including increasing the font size, and making the Emergency Services identifier more prominent.

The mapping and information concepts still need some work. Participants liked the general direction the team had taken with mapping and information concepts and suggested some refinements. Key suggestions included communicating accessibility information (like stairs) more clearly, identifying access and exit points, better differentiating between publicly accessible and non-publicly accessible areas (including environmentally sensitive areas and private areas), and showing amenities outside parks (like restaurant clusters).

The Digital Wayfinding Service is on the right track. Participants generally liked the proposed Digital Wayfinding Service description and features and suggested adding some more features focused on helping users in an emergency, encouraging park stewardship, supporting multiple languages, and connecting to 311.

Detailed Summary of Feedback

Participants shared feedback about three different topics:

- The proposed sign design concept;
- Mapping and graphic information concepts;
- Recommendations for the digital wayfinding service and its proposed description and features

Feedback about the proposed sign design concept

Generally, participants really liked the proposed sign design concept, using words like "pretty" and "legible" to compliment it. Many liked that the system would distinguish between parks and trails, though some said it could be challenging to differentiate between parks and trails in some areas. Others said it would be important to include one of the two colours on all the different sign types so that people will always know whether they're on a trail or in a park.

Participants gave feedback about the sign's **content** and its **design**:

- **Content:** Participants liked that the sign included Emergency Services information and that the signs seemed to have "just enough" information. They also liked the 10-minute walk radius and the use of heads up mapping. One participant was very happy to see Municipal Chapter 608 on the sign.
- **Design:** Participants liked the sign's colour, size, and height, saying it was visible and legible. Several participants said they liked the fact the crucial information was placed at a height of 1,400 mm so that children and people in wheelchairs could view it. The use of aluminium instead of Corten was well-received since aluminium is scratch resistant and will not oxidize over time. Participants liked that the team decided not use Corten steel, which would have been heavy, expensive, and potentially damaging to the environment.

Participants also shared a number of suggestions about the proposed sign concept:

- **Increase the font size:** Several participants felt the font size could be bigger, especially on the description of heritage features and on the maps.
- **Make the Emergency Services identifier more prominent.** Specific suggestions included making it larger and placing the identifier higher in the sign. Some participants noted that some of the signs on the display boards were missing the Emergency Services identifier and said every sign in the system should have one.
- **Identify parks etiquette clearly,** such as urging mountain bikers not to ride on the trails when they're wet and reminding all park users to share trails (to minimize conflicts between different users).

- **Make sure the system can accommodate site-specific rules**. One participant noted that some parks (such as High Park) have site-specific rules, so the system should be flexible enough to add those rules. *Janette Harvey from the City of Toronto and James Brown from Steer Davies Gelave, said that some parks would require specific wayfinding strategies, and High Park would likely be one of them*.
- **Consider using a green circle for permitted activities** since green means "ok."
- **Consider developing an even smaller trail marker** in the sign family, since some mountain biking routes are very narrow and the proposed sign marker might be too wide. One participant suggested that something around size of the width of proposed trail marker would work.
- **Make sure signs are placed at regular intervals,** especially trail markers (such as one sign per km).
- **Other suggestions** included: add an icon on the maps indicating the location of heritage features (including built and natural heritage); add difficulty-level markers for different trails and indicate whether a trail is dirt or gravel); include a key on the map showing different paths and trails; use a trapezoid shape for the map to indicate that it's a heads-up map; add a scale to the map; minimize "unused" space on the signs (since it might attract vandalism); include QR codes on the signs; add a safety phone; put a 3D barbell on top to make the sign stand out; and add cameras.

Participants also shared differing opinions on whether to light the signs or not. Some said the signs should not be lit since the lighting could disturb wildlife or create the illusion of safety, while others thought signs should be lit so that they would be easier to see in the dark. Some participants suggested adding some kind of reflective material so that cyclists' lights would make the signs more visible at night.

Feedback about mapping and information concepts

The Consultant Team presented a proposed approach to mapping and graphic information concepts (such as icons). Participants gave feedback about the mapping and information concepts:

- **Differentiate environmentally sensitive/private areas.** Participants said the maps should use a different colour to identify sensitive areas so that people don't think these areas are publicly accessible. Others suggested greying out private areas (such as residential areas) for the same reason.
- **Highlight information about accessibility.** Some participants suggested including braille on maps. Others said that stairs should be more clearly marked (potentially by making the star icon larger), and that places that are **not** accessible should be clearly marked. Finally, some people suggested identifying steep slopes with information about grade and path quality.
- **Consider other information approaches for people on bikes.** Some participants felt the trail markers should indicate the distance to the next exit instead of the distance travelled, since for some people it's more important to know how much further they have to go than to know how far they've come.

- **Show different information during different seasons.** The signs should display different information during different seasons (i.e. they should show winter activities in winter and summer activities in summer).
- **Consider identifying other things on the map,** including: the location of nearby amenities (restaurants, washrooms, and on-street and in-park parking); how to connect to different nearby trails, and; tourist attractions. Some participants said the maps should clearly identify all public access points to parks and trails, while others felt marking every entrance and exit might make clutter the map.
- **Considering changing some elements of the map**, like: reconsider the 10-minute walk radius (since it could be misleading in places where there are barriers or indirect routes); make the legend larger and more prominent; make sure the compass shows north.
- **Clarify the process for naming trails.** Some participants wanted to know what the process for naming trails would be and suggested that this process include a community engagement component.

Feedback about the proposed Digital Wayfinding Service specification, description, and features

Generally, participants liked the proposed features for the Digital Wayfinding Service, including: being able to get back on the trail when lost; knowing about barriers on the trail (including surface types and trail conditions); trip planning; understanding connections between parks and trails; understanding the fastest way out of a park in an emergency; knowing where amenities are (including picnic and play areas), and; favourite routes and user-generated tips and comments.

Participants suggested **three new/additional features**:

- **Emergency button.** Provide a quick way for a user to connect to others in an emergency (such as 911, Emergency Services, or friends and family) and automatically identify and share the user's location. One participant mentioned a service called Icedot, which outdoor enthusiasts often use (icedot.org/).
- **Engagement/stewardship.** Consider creating a function that would promote park and trail stewardship and volunteer opportunities and provide an opportunity for people to engage in various park activities and events. This function could incorporate the Toronto Park Events calendar developed by non-profit organization (and Stakeholder Group member) Park People (available at http://parkpeople.ca/node/337).
- **Multi-lingual support.** Basic key information (emergency contacts, trails names) should be available in different languages (including French) both on physical signs and in the Digital Wayfinding Service.

Participants shared some suggested tweaks to the proposed Digital Wayfinding Service features:

- Build in a connection to 311 (using iBeacons, crowd-sourcing, or a two-way communication with 311) to generate, update, and share notifications related to trails (such as washed out trails, construction, washroom closures, etc.).
- Consider adding a "fast research" button that would compile all relevant information a user needs.
- Use iBeacons or a GPS layer for an education a component. For example, when a user passes a rare tree, the users could get a snippet of information about the tree with an option to read more. Another would be to have historical sites or nearby places represented on a map at request.
- Consider adding a feature that lets you to switch from a distance-based map to a time-based one (based on different activities like walking, running, or biking).
- Make sure the system balances encouraging exploration and keeping people on the trail.
- Make sure the service doesn't use too much data by using device-optimized images and ensuring people can download information beforehand (on WiFi). One person referenced Avenza geo-referenced PDF maps, which were created by a Toronto-based company.
- Make sure there are parameters around user-generated rankings so that people use the same criteria to rank routes, trails, etc.
- Create a feature that lets people see how congested different parks are (similar to how online mapping apps can show how crowded/congested roads are).
- Develop a strategy to promote the service once it's up and running.
- Explain how the City is going to develop this Digital Wayfinding Service.

Other feedback

After the meeting, one participant suggested that the City run a year-long pilot so that the signs can be tested in all weather.

Next steps

The Consultant Team and Janette Harvey thanked participants for their feedback throughout the process, and Ian Malczewski committed to sharing a draft Meeting Summary in the coming weeks.

List of Participants

Alliance for Equality for Blind Canadians: Mala Naraine
City of Toronto: Karen Sun
City of Toronto: Janette Harvey
Cycle Toronto: Robert Pylypiw
Evergreen: Nicola Hives
High Park Resource Group: Leslie Gooding
Park People: Kyle Baptista
Riding Feels Good: Jeremy Lootsma
Steer Davies Gleave: James Brown
Steer Davies Gleave: Craig Nelson
Steer Davies Gleave: Phil Berczuk
Swerhun Facilitation: Ian Malczewski
Swerhun Facilitation: Yulia Pak
Toronto Bruce Trail Club: John Hough
Toronto Bruce Trail Club: Wayne Croatt
Toronto Field Naturalists: Bruce Thompson
Toronto Off Road Bicycling Association: Michael Bain
University of Toronto Mountain Biking Team: David Wright
Walk Toronto: John Fischer
Wild Bettys: Barb Besharat