# **Centennial Park Master Plan Update**

# Public Information and Visioning Session Engagement Summary Report



Wednesday March 11, 2020



(Centennial Park Master Plan Update Public Visioning Session Brainstorming Activity, March 11, 2020)

#### Prepared by:



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# What is the Centennial Park Master Plan Update?

The City is embarking on a Master Plan Update for Centennial Park to guide infrastructure improvements and other changes over the next 20 years. The updated Master Plan will respond to programmatic needs as well as the realities of climate change by integrating a resilience lens (i.e., building and park operations, impacts of severe storms). The master planning process aims to engage a diverse set of users to better understand the different needs and preferences. This will better serve users of the park, including those from the local area and broader citywide users.

#### **Report Summary**

The purpose of this report is to summarize the Public Visioning Session held on March 11, 2020 for the Centennial Park Master Plan Update Project. This report provides an overview of the meeting, including the objectives, the four themes or "stories" of Centennial Park identified by the Project Team, and a summary of key feedback and findings from the consultation. It also includes a Detailed Summary of Feedback, with an overview of the activities that took place.

#### **Meeting Overview**

When:	March 11, 2020, 6:30 – 9:00 PM
Where:	Etobicoke Olympium, 590 Rathburn Road, Centennial Park
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#### Attendees:

Participants:	45 public participants, plus the consultant team and City staff
Consultant Team:	PMA Landscape Architects LTD., the landscape architecture team
	PROCESS, Engagement team
City of Toronto:	Casey Morris, Project Manager, PF&R
	Daniel Fusca, Manager, Public Consultation, PF&R
	Jill MacLachlan, Supervisor, Outreach & Special Project, PF&R
	David O'Hara, Project Manager, Capital Construction Special
	Projects/Rail Deck Park
	Cathy Vincelli, Manager Community Recreation
	Councillor Stephen Holyday

# **Objectives**

The objectives of the public visioning session were to:

- Introduce the Centennial Park Master Plan Update project and team;
- Collectively explore emerging project findings, based on background research and previous consultations;
- Collect feedback (data) to inform the design;
- Ideate on park-wide strategies (Water, Ecology, Movement, Culture) to inform the future design elements of Centennial Park.

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(Public Visioning Session Activity 1, March 11, 2020)

# **Project Themes**

The Project Team developed four 'stories' or themes that were presented to the participants. Activities that followed specifically asked participants to consider the themes in more detail, including potential opportunities for park improvements:

**Water:** The water story at Centennial park is about the entire cycle – how it lands on the site, moves through the site and is absorbed by the site. Water is not only a necessary resource for all flora and fauna, but can also be a source of play, beauty and contemplation. Consider the annoying puddles when it rains, the wetlands that support interesting wildlife, the ponds with the weeping willows and the creeks that are both buried and above ground.

**Ecology:** The ecology story of Centennial Park is not just about the natural environment – the trees, the habitats, the birds and rabbits – it's about the system that links all of these together, successfully or not. Ecology takes into consideration the balance between all species and the environment, including how to mitigate against human impacts and prepare for the changing climate.

**Movement**: The movement story of Centennial Park is about all the forms of transport to and through the site. It is also about equal access for all, regardless of mode of transport; whether you can walk, bike, drive a car, take the bus, need to take breaks often or need a smooth surface to move on. Movement is about the experience as we walk through Centennial Park; the sublime views of nature and water; and whether we know where you are going or not.

**Culture**: The culture story is about everything that contributes to the way of life in Centennial Park. It is about sports fields and playgrounds, picnicking under the willows by the pond or visiting the Conservatory on a rainy day. It's also about community, and how Centennial Park can create, maintain and enhance it.

# Key Takeaways

The following section is a summary of key messages from the public visioning session organized by Centennial Park's Four Stories. The key messages emerge from the Detailed Summary of Feedback provided below. These are points that were reiterated often and/or were deemed important by most participants.

#### Water

- Restore waterways and improve wetland habitats as participants indicated that the creeks are stagnant and the area around the waterways gets very muddy.
- Provide for more opportunities to connect with water such as boardwalks or benches to sit and enjoy the water. Other suggestions included having an amphitheatre or terrace by the water.
- Create opportunities for families and children to connect with water such as swan boats or splash pads.
- Allow for year-round interaction with water sources, such as kayaking in the warmer months and skating in the winter.

#### Ecology

- Enhance nature and tree coverage by having new forms of greenery (trees, flowers, community gardens) as well as creating "wild" or naturalized areas for people to explore and discover.
- Increase accessibility to nature by creating more pathways that lead to and around natural environments.
- Balance naturalized environments with open spaces for passive and active recreation.
- Create more opportunities for stewardship of the park and education around nature.

#### Movement

- Separate different modes of transportation by having designated bike lanes and sidewalks for pedestrians.
- Create a network of cycling and walking paths throughout the park and connect them to the wider network.
- Improve wayfinding and signage on how to access the site at gateways as well as improved navigation throughout the park.
- Paving pathways to ensure they are physically accessible for both cyclists and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

#### Culture

- Enhance the conservatory as a "destination" by incorporating improved wayfinding and by offering programs and activities for diverse ages.
- Bring together a diversity of people to improve the sense of community by creating gathering spaces such as picnic areas, community gardens, and events like movie nights on the ski hill or in underutilized parking lots.
- Animate vacant or underutilized areas, such as the baseball fields, to create space for basketball, soccer and cycling.
- Consider a skating trail in the winter months.
- Include opportunities for food such as a cafe in the chalet or by the conservatory as well as permitting food trucks during regular operation times.



(Participants and Facilitator at Public Visioning brainstorming activity, March 11, 2020)

#### **Public Visioning Session Participants**

Approximately 45 public participants attended the Public Visioning Session. Based on a quick show of hands at the meeting, participants mostly attended from Etobicoke, mostly within a 1 – 7km distance (some within 2km of the park). There were few participants who were Toronto residents living more than 7km from Centennial Park.

Participants indicated a range of reasons why they visit the park:

- To meet family or friends;
- Picnic or participate in other passive activities;
- Visit the conservatory;
- Participate in recreational activities (cycling, soccer, running or walking, skating, playing hockey, skiing or tobogganing, swimming in the Olympium, disc golf and BMXing).
- Attend community events including cultural events like Ukrainian Independence Day, arts events, and major events such as Toronto Ribfest or Jerk Fest.

Participants shared fond memories of learning to ski at Centennial Park or their children learning to ski or swim.

"My son uses this park for many sports including hockey, baseball, soccer"

"My kids learned how to ski and swim here"

#### Other opportunities to engage

It is important to acknowledge that while the meeting was designed to be inclusive and notice was provided to the community through the local Councillor, on the City website, and through social media outlets, it is difficult to engage all stakeholders. It is important to consistently ask "who is missing", what experiences are not represented and what steps we can take to better engage people. For instance, there were very few youth at the meeting. For this project, we are including an online engagement tool to better connect with people virtually, who could not attend the meeting.



(Participant and Facilitator at Public Visioning brainstorming activity, March 11, 2020)

# **Detailed Summary of Feedback**

The following sections contain feedback from each of the brainstorming sessions. For Activities 2 and 3, the feedback has been organized based on Centennial Park's Four Stories: Water, Ecology, Movement, and Culture.

\*Note to reader: FEW indicates 0-12 responses; SOME indicates 13-25 responses; MANY indicates 26-38 responses; and MOST indicates 39-45 responses.

#### **Brainstorming Activity 1: Storytelling**

In Brainstorming Activity 1, participants were asked to participate in three activities:

- 1. On a storytelling map, participants were asked to describe who they are and any connections/stories they have about the park.
- 2. On a large piece of paper, participants were asked to answer the question "How can YOU contribute to the future of Centennial Park?"
- 3. A display board describing the project and the project's Principles where participants are asked for their comments on the updated Master Plan Principles from the 2008 Master Plan Project.

The feedback from this activity was consolidated and organized based on participants' current experiences of the park and how they want to be involved or experience the park in the future.

#### Some of the ways participants currently experience the park include:

- Participate in winter sports such as skiing or tobogganing.
- Children learn to play sports such as skiing and swimming.
- Children participate in active recreation including BMX and hockey.

Other Comments:

- Participants indicated that the splash pad used to be popular among children, however, it is now in need of repairs.
- Participants indicated concerns over noise and parking on the site.

#### Participants would like to be involved in the park in the following ways:

- Create opportunities for local residents and volunteers to host guided walks around the park about areas that they know or are interested in (such as birding and nature).
- Join a "Friends of Centennial Park" group.



(Participants and Facilitator participating in Public Visioning brainstorming activity, March 11, 2020)



(Participants and Facilitator participating in Public Visioning brainstorming activity, March 11, 2020)

# **Brainstorming Activity 2: Visioning Stations**

In Brainstorming Activity 2, participants were asked to comment on Centennial Park's Four Stories: Water, Ecology, Movement and Culture. For each story, they were asked how they currently experience the story and how they want to experience it in the future.

Below is a summary of feedback from Activity 2. It is organized based on each story (how participants currently experience the story and how they want to experience it in the future).

#### Water

How participants currently experience water in Centennial Park:

- Walk near the creeks and ponds.
- Look for and explore wildlife along the water (birds, frogs, fish, etc).

Other comments:

- Participants describe Renforth creek and the ponds as stagnant.
- Flooding and poor water drainage lead to muddy areas around the creeks, in parking lots, and across fields.

How participants want to experience water in Centennial Park in the future:

- Use formal trails to and along natural water features such as Etobicoke Creek and ponds.
- Experience active recreation on the ponds year-round, such as kayaking in the summer or skating the winter. Some participants who mentioned skating suggested creating a skating trail/loop.
- Enhanced wetlands and wildlife habitats.
- Opportunities for children and families to interact with water in the park (such as a splash pad).

#### Ecology

How participants currently experience ecology in Centennial Park:

- Enjoy the trees and nature. One participant noted the bird migrations on the cricket fields.
- Have difficulty navigating the natural spaces in Centennial Park (due to lack of signage/wayfinding).

How participants want to experience ecology in Centennial Park in the future:

- Enhanced and restored natural spaces.
- Improved pathways leading to woodlots, natural areas, and creeks.
- Balanced naturalized areas with open spaces for picnicking.

#### Movement

How participants currently get to Centennial Park:

- Most drive, especially those who live further away.
- Some who live locally (within 2km) often walk. Paths used by pedestrians to enter the park include the Hollycrest School field, up Renforth Creek, or from the hydro corridor.
- Participants indicated that they currently find things "by fluke" due to the lack of awareness of park amenities and lack of signage.

#### How participants want to move around Centennial Park:

- Enhanced connections between Centennial Park Boulevard and the Conservatory.
- Safer crosswalks, particularly at Etobicoke Creek Trail, Olympium bus stop, Centennial Park Boulevard, playgrounds.
- Slower traffic on Centennial Park Boulevard.
- Separated paths for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.
- More pathways throughout the park to better explore all areas of the park.

# *"There needs to be more safe crossing sites, currently there are no safe crossings when coming out of Etobicoke Creek Trail" - Public Participant*

#### Culture

How participants currently experience and define Centennial Park:

- Participate in informal recreation such as walking, running, and biking as well as formalized sports such as soccer.
- Enjoy the festivals and events, such as Ribfest.
- Picnic in the park.
- Many participants indicated that the site currently feels underutilized.
- The park was identified as "an intergenerational park," used frequently by both children and the elderly.

How participants want to experience Centennial Park in terms of culture/identity

• Create flexible community gathering spaces by holding events, such as movie nights or art events.

"It would be great to bring the community together." - Public Participant

# **Brainstorming Activity 3: Visioning Table Discussions**

In Brainstorming Activity 3, participants were asked a series of questions on the site's challenges using Centennial Parks Four Stories: Water, Ecology, Movement and Culture.

Below is a summary of Activity 3 and it is organized based on each story and how participants currently experience the story and how they want to experience it in the future.

#### **STORY 1 AND STORY 2: Water and Ecology**

Below are questions asked to participants:

- Where would you prioritize creek restoration? Where would you prioritize waterrelated recreation?
- How do you want to access water? What types of programmatic activities related to water could be explored? (Consider canoeing, fishing, etc.)
- Where would you want to see restoration, and where not? (Precedents of restoration)
- How would you celebrate and interpret the ecology of the park? (Precedent examples)
- What are the ways the community can become stewards of the land?
- Do you have other ideas for the future of WATER + ECOLOGY in Centennial Park?

#### Below is a summary of feedback organized by major themes:

#### Pathways

• Increase access and connections by walking/hiking and cycling trails to the waterways and woodlots in Centennial Park. Suggestions include formal and informal trails, boardwalks, lookout points, and docks on the pond.

#### "Create a sense of losing yourself in the park" - Public Participant

#### Programming & Activities

- Create activities by the water, such as swan boats in the creek, and a new splash pad for children.
- Incorporate nature-related programming for children.
- Have concessions to rent water-based equipment for fishing or water sports.
- Create a sense of exploration through natural environments.

#### "Invite a sense of exploration of wild spaces" - Public Participant

#### Stewardship

- Engage park users in natural environments through either volunteer planting groups or creating a community garden.
- Form a "friends of" group for Centennial Park.
- Offer education opportunities about nature to children and school groups.
- Involve seniors and seniors groups through programming and activities.

#### Enhanced nature/trees

- Increase opportunities to explore nature or "wild"/naturalized areas.
- Enhance the number of trees and green spaces, such as cherry trees; Create a Sakura Project similar to High Park.

#### Stormwater Management

• Restore and maintain Renforth Creek and Etobicoke Creek. Participants indicated that the grass around Renforth Creek turns "mushy" due to stagnant water.

#### Facilities

- Some participants identified the wading pool as being in need of repair.
- Some participants indicated a desire for an amphitheatre and a terrace down by the water.



(Participant's drawing on Centennial Park map, March 11, 2020)

#### **STORY 3: Movement**

Below are questions asked to participants:

- Where would you locate major and minor gateways and wayfinding? What could they be?
- Where and what are the movement conflict areas?
- How would you improve vehicular, pedestrian, and cyclist circulation?
- Do you have other ideas for the future of Movement in Centennial Park?

#### Below is a summary of feedback organized by major themes:

#### Wayfinding/Signage

- Gateways should include signage indicating information about what activities are accessible through the gateway and where the different areas in the park are located. Parking lots should also have maps with "you are here" indicators.
- Create more signage when special events are hosted.
- Create more signage and maps for orientation throughout the park and along pathways.

#### Circulation

- Create a bike network that connects through the park to all access points Eglinton Avenue, Renforth Drive, Rathburn Road, Centennial Park Boulevard.
- Ensure that pathways are paved to be physically accessible by both pedestrians and cyclists. Some participants noted that the current gravel pathways are difficult for cyclists to use.
- Create designated lanes/pathways for different modes of transportation to reduce conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists, and automobiles.
- Create a network of paths that direct people throughout the entire park to different areas/uses and nature.
- Include a variety of pathways through nature as well as in open space.

#### *"Crete more walking and bike paths that are well maintained and accessible" - Public Participant*

#### Gateways/Access

- Centennial Park Boulevard does not provide access to the park and is unsafe to pedestrians and cyclists due to a lack of sidewalk and bike lanes.
- Establish better entry/exit points for automobiles during larger events (ex. Ribfest)
- Include more transit stops and create more connections. One suggestion was for a new stop by the golf course.

#### Parking

- Locate parking closer to facilities and activities within the park and along Centennial Park Boulevard. Few participants indicated a lack of parking along the street. Participants noted there is a sufficient amount of parking throughout the rest of the park.
- Incorporate signs (more awareness) of where parking is located throughout the park.
- Include a central or main parking lot. A suggestion was to have this be located by the Mini-Indy.
- Include better connections between parking lots. Participants indicated it was hard to navigate from one to another.
- Pave the parking lot south of BMX.
- Provide "loading only" zones in the parking lots so park users can drop off/load picnic or sports equipment without walking far distances.



(Participants comments and feedback on plots of Centennial Park, March 11, 2020)

#### **STORY 4: Culture**

Below are questions asked to participants based on three interest areas:

- 1) Recreation and play; 2) ski hill and winter programming; and 3) passive uses.
  - Recreation / Play
    - We are proposing a new accessible adventure playground and splash pad and possibly several smaller natural playgrounds. Do you agree with this? Where would you locate them?
    - We are proposing relocating 3 baseball diamonds. Do you agree with this?
      Where would you put them?
    - We are proposing relocating and upgrading some of the soccer fields. Do you agree with this? Where would you locate them?
    - We are proposing adding basketball courts and a skate park. Do you agree with this? Where would you locate them?
    - Where would you locate new washrooms? A field house? Shade structures?
  - Hill / Winter
    - If the ski hill closes, what new winter activities would you like to see?
    - What alternate hill and chalet use would you like to see?
  - Passive Uses
    - How can the conservatory have a larger presence on the site? Can it's programming extend outside?
    - Where can the community gather? What could they do there? Where would you want to put small groups to large group gathering areas?
    - Do you want to see history (cultural and natural) represented in the park? How?
    - Do you have other ideas for the future of CULTURE in Centennial Park?

#### Below is a summary of feedback organized by major themes:

#### Recreation/Play

- Create a consolidated playground or one "destination" playground. Some examples given were Evergreen Brickworks Children's Garden and the High Park Castle. A potential location provided was near Rathburn Road. Other suggestions included having several smaller playgrounds in key locations. There was also a preference for natural materials, sensory elements, and inclusive playgrounds.
- Provide opportunities for skating in winter. One suggestion for its location was to be closer to the stadium.
- Consider creating a basketball court.
- Create a centralized exercise equipment area.

- Improve the state of repair of sports facilities, such as tennis courts and soccer fields.
- Relocate or remove underutilized baseball fields. Some participants felt that there were too many baseball fields and a few participants recommended replacing an underutilized baseball field with a soccer field.
- Incorporate new recreational facilities for curling and pickleball.
- Reduce the size of the golf course to make room for other recreational activities or naturalization.
- Locate washrooms and water refill stations near playgrounds and sports facilities.
- Locate recreational activities (sports fields and playgrounds) closer to parking lots or access points.

#### "Make a destination playground" - Public Participant

#### Passive

- Consider new ideas and uses in the park. Some participants provided suggestions on how to make the Conservatory a destination including turning it into a student hub to be used by local students for programming and lunch hours; placing a cafe inside to be used by park patrons; offering space for educational, historical, or cultural activities; and creating a library or gift shop, and event space to be used by all ages (i.e. from children to seniors). Some participants suggested having better wayfinding and signage for the conservatory and a few suggested having better marketing so more people are aware of the space.
- Some participants suggested expanding the gardens outside of the conservatory to create a botanical garden, a pollinator garden, and a community garden that connects to the conservatory.
- Create an off-leash dog park. Some locations suggested were near the ski hill or by the conservatory.
- Include bonfire pits. However, a few participants felt that this could be dangerous and there should be safety precautions or lessons involved in the fire pit rules.
- Improve the sense of safety around the park, particularly at night.
- Encourage options for food throughout the park. Some suggested food trucks to come into the park outside of events.
- Create partnerships with nearby companies and organizations. The second largest employment area in Toronto is located by the park and there is limited access/connection to it.

#### Community Space:

• Participants indicated that the park is popular with newcomer families who picnic in large groups and some participants recommended creating space for large gatherings.

- Provide opportunities for Indigenous partnerships and include Indigenous programming and spaces. A potential partnership suggestion was the Eagle Spirits of the Great Water Indigenous Arts, Knowledge and Culture Collective.
   Suggestions for Indigenous programming included creating a sweat lodge in the conservatory and having a space for Indigenous teaching such as a medicine garden.
- Create designated areas in the Master Plan for community gathering space. Some recommendations were to have covered picnic areas in the open fields, temporary art installations, outdoor theatre spaces, and cafes. Participants indicated the importance of community connections and suggested creating a community garden on the hydro corridor, such as a hydro field in Scarborough that was developed into a community garden and dog park.
- Some participants suggested creating community events such as movie nights on the ski hill or in parking lots or having larger events similar to Ukrainian Day. Others suggested having organized community activities such as walking tours or yoga/pilates.

# *"Having community programming such as movie nights, community gardens, pollinator gardens, bird watching, tours, yoga, Pilates, farmers markets" - Public Participant*

#### Hill / Winter / Chalet

- Use the chalet as a cafe or a rental space for sports teams.
- Some participants suggested eliminating the ski hill as there is not enough snow to use it. Some participants suggested allowing residents to toboggan down the hill instead and provide barriers for safety. Another suggestion provided by some participants was to create a trail on the hill that could be used for walking, snowshoeing, or skating.
- Some participants suggested alternative uses for the chalet such as offering art classes on guitar, crochet, pottery or as a place where seniors could learn new skills (eg. Computer).

#### **Examples of Inspirational Parks:**

Some participants shared other parks and examples that could be used as inspiration for Centennial Park:

- High Park in Toronto (lots of trees, walking paths)
- Evergreen Brickworks (lots of nature programming for children)
- Central Park in New York City (large park with walking paths and green space)
- Trinity Bellwoods (picnic small and day-use)