

City of Toronto – Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division

# Wabash Community Recreation Centre

(Phase 2 of 5)

Virtual Small Group Discussions

Integrated Summary

Monday, September 28, 2020, 6:00 – 8:45 pm

Via Webex (online and by phone)



## Overview

On Monday, September 28, 2020, the City's Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PF&R) Division hosted three small group discussions for the new Wabash Recreation Centre (CRC). The purpose of the small group discussions was to have present and seek detailed feedback on the proposed Vision, Design Principles, and Big Moves for the new community recreation centre. Over 18 people participated online and/or over the phone using the Webex platform. The number of participants in each discussion ranged from five to eight. Each session lasted 45 minutes and included introductions, a brief overview of the project, and a facilitated discussion.

These discussions were part of the broader Phase 2 community engagement process for the new Wabash CRC. The other engagement activities included introductory conversations with local stakeholders, a Community Resource Group meeting, and a public townhall. Summaries of these meetings are available on the project website at [www.toronto.ca/WabashCRC](http://www.toronto.ca/WabashCRC).

The small group discussions were held online and by phone in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health and safety of Toronto residents and City staff.

Swerhun Inc. facilitated and documented the small group discussions. The individual summaries of each small group discussion are attached. Please note that these summaries are not intended to be a verbatim transcript, rather it is intended to capture key discussion points shared by participants at the meetings. These individual summaries were subject to participant review before being finalized.

*Note that these summaries do not assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives, nor does it indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives on the part of the City of Toronto.*

### KEY FEEDBACK RECEIVED

The following points capture the key themes shared across all three small group discussions. These key points are intended to be read along with the more detailed feedback in the attached individual small group discussion summaries.

- Overall, participants expressed support for the draft vision, design principles, and Big Moves. Some reiterated the importance of connectivity, heritage, sustainability and building for the future. Others were supportive of the anchor programs, particularly the pool.
- Participants recognize the space challenge, and they shared ideas and encouraged the project team to explore creative solutions to address the space challenge of the site and building.
- The Town Square is an important part of the community life and activities. Preservation of the Town Square's function was expressed by several participants. They also noted that many volunteers from the community have worked hard for many years to fundraise and make it a great space for the community.
- Participants are looking forward to the next phase of the process and see how the team will balance the different design goals or Big Moves within the allocated budget.

# Attachments

Session 1, 6:00 – 6:45 pm

Session 2, 7:00 – 7:45 pm

Session 3, 8:00 – 8:45 pm

# Wabash Community Recreation Centre

## Virtual Small Group Discussions, Session 1

Monday, September 28, 2020, 6:00 – 6:45 pm

### Summary of Feedback

This summary captures the key discussion points shared by participants during the small group discussion and is not intended to be a verbatim transcript. Responses from the Project Team (where provided) are noted in *italics*. Five community members participated in this discussion.

### Overall Sentiment

- **General support for the draft design principles.** Participants said they agree with the design principles and there are no important principles missed. Balancing these principles will be important.
- **The discussion focused on the opportunities to explore creative solutions to accommodate the footprint of the building while keeping the integrity of the Town Square.**
- **Interest in seeing the design options for the site at the next stage of the process.**

### Preserve the Town Square

- Building the new recreation centre on the Town Square may make sense to increase the footprint of the building, but it is important to remember that the Town Square is an important asset that the community has fundraised for, so some do not want to see the Town Square affect

### Site Boundaries

- **Consider building the pool in an abutting area or expand the site boundaries to build the new centre without impacting the Town Square.** Reference the design produced as part of the 2009 Green Feasibility Study, where all the programs with the exception of the pool, were accommodated in the existing building footprint. *We know that the Town Square is very important to the community, and we'll do our best to preserve most or all of it. In regard to the 2009 Green Feasibility Study, it did not have the same parameters we have, including the program components required by City Council (leisure and lap pools, gym and multi-purpose rooms). The required program, not just the pool, are also not possible to fit within the existing building footprint. In the next phase of the project, Diamond Schmitt Architects will develop a number of site design options that will be presented to the community for feedback.*
- **Consider creating a rooftop for dogs to use.** Consider extending the northern boundary of the site. If the site boundary encroaches on the dogs off leash area, consider creating a rooftop on the new recreation centre where dogs can run. *Expanding the site boundary a little bit north to the park is also possible, but we want to minimize the impact to the park as much as possible as we know that's also an important community asset.*
- **Understand the feasibility of expanding the site boundary given the subsurface conditions.** Land contamination due to the previous industrial activities on the site could present a challenge to expanding the site boundary to the parkland area. *It's a good point of advice. Further studies will need to be done to assess the level of contaminants outside the site boundary, but at this point, given what we know, we don't think it's a serious challenge for the project.*

# Wabash Community Recreation Centre

## Virtual Small Group Discussions, Session 2

Monday, September 28, 2020, 7:00 – 7:45 pm

### Summary of Feedback

This summary captures the key discussion points shared by participants during the small group discussion and is not intended to be a verbatim transcript. Responses from the Project Team (where provided) are noted in *italics*. Five community members participated in this discussion.

### Overall Sentiment

- **General support for the anchor programs, particularly the pool.** Participants were glad to see a pool be part of the new community recreation centre.
- **The discussion focused on the opportunities to make the new centre an efficient and flexible space that could accommodate different types of uses.**

### Design principles need to support community life and prioritize health, safety, and community benefits.

- **It is important to keep the functionality of the Town Square and the Fieldhouse.** One participant was a big proponent of keeping the Town Square and the Fieldhouse. Many volunteers in the community have worked hard over the years to make the park area a great space for the community. Building the new community recreation centre is not just about creating a new public space. It should also support the infrastructure that allows for the community activities on the site to continue. For example, there is a need for electrical outlets to watch movies at the Town Square, there is a need for storage that the Fieldhouse provides, and there is a need for access to water outside the Fieldhouse for the ice rink, etc.
- **Prioritize design principles that would benefit the community.** A participant said that they do not care about the chimney and preserving it should not be a main priority, especially if the money used to preserve it could be put towards other design priorities that could benefit the community.
- **Consider health and safety as a design principle.** Given our experience with the pandemic, it is important to think about safety and the flow of human traffic to limit the spread of infectious disease. Access to outdoors is also important especially since most activities are only allowed if done outdoors.

### Program components need to utilize limited space in a smart way and be designed for people's enjoyment.

- **Design the pool to maximize people's enjoyment.** Given that not all pools are created equal, make sure to design a pool that efficiently uses space. Avoid non-standard shapes and do not combine the lap pool and leisure pool as it impacts the turbulence of the water for lane swimmers. Look into the pool designs at Trinity Community Recreation Centre and Scadding Court Community Centre.
- **Consider making the lobby a multi-purpose space.** Instead of making the lobby just a passageway, activate it by allowing different activities and programs to happen. For example, it could be used as a place for the Farmers' Market in the wintertime, or as a place to host temporary art exhibits.
- **Consider having only one set of change rooms given the space constraint.** The image showing the core program components shows two change rooms, one for the pool and one for the gym, so consider having only one set of change rooms. *Providing a change room with direct connection to the pool is important for wet swimmers. The number of the change rooms will depend on the distance between the pool change rooms and the gym. If they are*

*in close proximity, it makes sense to have only one set of change rooms that could be used for both.*

- **Access to washrooms at all hours is important.** Many activities happen on this site so access to washrooms at all hours is important. Consider making the washroom accessible from outside, without having to go inside the main building. Providing family change rooms is also important.

#### **Other suggestions and questions included:**

- **Design the facility that will allow use during emergency situations.** Community centres are often used as emergency shelters in emergency situations. Consider how the new centre could accommodate people and serve as a place of refuge.
- **Environmental strategy should cover the construction phase** by minimizing the amount of construction materials ending up in the land fill.
- **Is there a mandate to include parking on the site?**  
*Exploring parking opportunities on the site is part of the scope of this project. There is no set number of parking spots required, but the parking requirement will be reviewed with City Planning, based on the site and expected parking demand for the building. Given the size of the site, the opportunity for surface parking is very limited and underground parking would be prohibitively expensive, even if feasible.*

# Wabash Community Recreation Centre

## Virtual Small Group Discussions, Session 3

Monday, September 28, 2020, 8:00 – 8:45 pm

### Summary of Feedback

This summary captures the key discussion points shared by participants during the small group discussion and is not intended to be a verbatim transcript. Responses from the Project Team (where provided) are noted in *italics*. Eight community members participated in this discussion.

### Overall Sentiment

- **Overall, participants were supportive of the draft vision, principles and the Big Moves, with some reiterating the importance of connectivity, heritage, sustainability, and being future-oriented.**
- **The discussion focused on creative ideas to address the space challenge of the site and the building, ways to commemorate the cultural and architectural heritage, opportunities for the multi-purpose rooms, the importance of parking, and the challenge of achieving all the Big Moves with the existing budget.**

### Build for the future

- Look at the anticipated composition of the community in 2026 and beyond. By the time the community recreation centre is built, a lot of the things may change, and the feedback provided today may not be relevant anymore.

### Town Square is an important part of the community life and serves many different functions

- Town Square is important for community. It is a space to hold really large community events like concerts, social events like movie nights and farmers' markets, and it provides important flat space that younger children use on a daily basis. It's the safest spot in the area to ride a scooter. Stepped plazas do not work so well in this context. Another participant added that many parents in the community feel this way about the Town Square.
- The grassy areas in the park need improved maintenance and drainage. Providing more open green space would be beneficial for the community. *Thank you for this comment, unfortunately, that would be outside of the scope of this project.*

### Explore safe creative solutions to the existing site limitations to have more space for the building

- 24 Noble Street, 347 Sorauen Avenue and Watson Lofts are examples of getting around the 30-m setback requirement. The property owners built a barrier for the derailing trains and were able to build within 30 meters from the railway. *Thank you for sharing these examples. From our preliminary discussions with City Planning, we know that Metrolinx's preferred approach to rail safety and risk mitigation is that we provide 30 metres of horizontal distance from the edge of the railway right of way, in addition to a 2.5 m berm and a fence. **Possible** alternatives (which will require detailed engineering) may include an Alternative Setback (a combination of horizontal and vertical setbacks to the occupied portions of the building), or an Alternative Safety Barrier (a very thick concrete crash wall). We will be exploring our options including exploring the types of activities that could take place within the 30-m setback. While assembly occupancy uses are not allowed, transitory activities like parking and loading could be explored.*

- Is the 30-m setback a new requirement? Some of the older residential properties only have 10-m setbacks.
- Rail safety is really important. There have been two train derailments along Dupont. It is important to ensure that alternative options provide safety and train safety engineers are consulted.
- Push the northern boundary of the site up into the existing dog park and consider building a new dog park within the 30-m setback zone.

### **Consider different ways to preserve and commemorate cultural and architectural heritage of the building and the site**

- What is considered a façade? Do you need to preserve all sides of the building? *The term façade refers to a building's exterior walls, but we have not specifically been asked by Heritage Preservations Services to preserve all sides. We will work with them to understand their requirements to preserve some heritage elements.*
- Consider different ways to commemorate the industrial heritage of the building by looking at different elements that could be preserved.
- Consider looking at preserving and/or commemorating the metal train shed. One idea is to move the metal structure to the south side.
- Look into the name “Wabash” and its meaning.
- What is the status of Indigenous engagement? *Note provided after the meeting by the City: The City is researching the Indigenous history of the site. The project will be taken to the City's Interim Indigenous Place-making Circle for feedback and suggestions. The Circle is currently in the process of being formed.*
- Consider commemorating history and culture through Augmented / Virtual Reality Experience. Friends of Sorauren Park are talking to a digital imaging company to do 3D imaging of the building with a goal of developing an app that would allow visitors to point at a certain part of the building and see it in the original form. Is there an opportunity to tap into the existing project budget to preserve history on the site and/or to use the allocated budget for the public art to do this AR work? *Note provided after the meeting by the City: For municipal buildings, the City's Official Plan requires that 1% of the capital cost of the building is to be directed toward public art. (City Planning, during their Site Plan approval review, ensures that we participate. Note that this 1% money (which actually reduces the project budget for construction purposes) must be used for public art, and unfortunately cannot be used for construction/restoration work). All public art commissioned by the City goes through a competitive process as the City does not sole-source, for obvious reasons. The City has public calls for expressions of interest, short lists artists through a jury process, and selects the artwork through a competition of the shortlisted proposals. The City's Economic Development & Culture Division (Arts & Culture Services unit) has carriage of the "competitive" artist/art selection process. They handle the selection of the artist and commission the piece (or if it's a small building and that 1% wouldn't be sufficient to warrant commissioning an artist, they will take the 1% in cash to pool it with other money from other developments to commission a piece). Typically, Arts & Culture Services in conjunction with the architect and Capital Projects, will suggest one of more locations within a development site or building where the City would like to see artists propose a public art piece(s). For more information, contact: Sally Han, Manager, Cultural Partnerships, Arts & Culture Services, City of Toronto (416-392-4012) or Sally.Han@toronto.ca. More information about the public art competition process is available here:*

<https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/history-art-culture/public-art/public-art-monuments-collection/public-art-competitions/>



## **Multi-purpose space should accommodate a good well-rounded mix of activities in all season and during the pandemic time**

- It is important to ensure a well-rounded mix of activities in terms of programming that combine both sports and arts in the multi-purpose rooms.
- It will be important to have a commercial kitchen for the Farmers' Market. Could a commercial kitchen be considered? *Although the City intends to provide a "teaching" or "demonstration" kitchen, the City moved away from commercial kitchens (i.e. kitchens with commercial gas grills or ranges, fire suppression hoods etc., designed for offering food to the public) to teaching kitchens with residential grade appliances years ago because residential grade appliances do not require specialized training and, as such, provide increased access for community use.*
- Consider mirrors and bars along the wall in the multi-purpose spaces.
- COVID-19 has taught us that there is a need for more outdoor spaces. Consider retractable doors and windows, the use of rooftops, and a main floor that's integrated with the outdoors.
- Consider firepits in the winter. Evergreen in Montreal does a good job for creating outdoor programming in winter.
- If there are any vendor spaces, they should be independently owner-operator, not franchised.

## **On-site parking and traffic flow around the site need to be given thorough consideration**

- Install traffic calming measures and crosswalks on Wabash Street, as right now it is a street with a busy and speedy flow of car, bike, and scooter traffic.
- Parking is extremely important for the Farmers' Market. If the vendors cannot park, there will not be a market.

## **It will not be an easy task achieving the Five Big Moves within the \$40 million budget**

- It's quite a challenge to achieve the Big Moves with the \$40 million budget. Some of the proposed Big Moves make others more difficult to achieve.
- Consider prioritizing the following three Big Moves: connectivity and integration with the park and Town Square activities, and the broader area; having a Net Zero Emissions building and sustainable practices (for e.g. using the reclaimed brick); and, preserving as much existing industrial façade as possible while recognizing the building's industrial heritage through art and décor in the building.