

City of Toronto – Parks Development & Capital Projects

Western North York Community Centre Youth Workshops Feedback Summary

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Project Background

The site at 60 Starview Lane was purchased in 2015 and is east of Weston Road and Starview Lane. It is next to the Toronto Catholic District School Board's St. Basil-the-Great College at 20 Starview Lane.

The scope of work for this project includes the planning, design and construction of a new 77,000 square foot state-of-the-art community and recreation centre. The new centre will replace the existing Carmine Stefano Community Centre, currently being leased by the City. The new community centre will provide enhanced programming with no interruption to service.

Possible components may include:

- An aquatic centre;
- A gymnasium;
- A walking track
- Fitness centre with studios;
- Flexible multi-purpose rooms;
- A licensed child care; and
- Outdoor spaces.

It will be a place for the community to gather and to socialize. It will be a place that cultivates creativity, health and well-being, inclusivity, and accessibility for all ages and will improve the quality of life for the community.

The new Western North York Community Recreation Centre will be designed through engagement with the local community.

Youth Workshop Overview

Youth will be an important user group at the new community recreation centre. To ensure the centre is designed to be welcoming for local youth, the project team held six youth workshops throughout December of 2020. Each workshop included 5 to 10 high school students and lasted approximately 1 hour. The workshops were hosted online using Miro, an interactive online platform that allows participants to vote, leave notes and questions throughout the workshop.

All student participants attend St. Basil-the-Great High school, which is located directly adjacent to the new community recreation centre. Students participating outside of regular classroom hours (the Youth Group and Black Youth Workshop participants) were provided 1 hour of community involvement hours¹ in recognition of their time and effort to provide thoughtful feedback.

The workshops included:

1. Grade 10 Girl's Gym Class A – 6 participants
2. Grade 10 Girl's Gym Class B – 10 participants
3. Grade 9 Boy's Gym Class A – 6 participants
4. Grade 9 Boy's Gym Class B – 5 participants
5. Youth Outreach Worker – Youth Group – 10 participants
6. Black Youth Workshop – 8 participants

In total, 45 students participated in these youth workshops.

¹ Ontario high school students are required to obtain a minimum number of community involvement hours in order to graduate.

Black Youth Workshop

The City recognises that anti-Black racism is part of the lived experience of Black youth in the City. Recognising that Black youth can face specific forms of discrimination because of their race, the new community recreation centre should be a space where Black youth feel welcome and a sense of belonging. As part of working to transform the City and its spaces into ones that are actively anti-racist, a workshop was hosted specifically to gather feedback from Black youth. The goal of this workshop was to create a space where Black youth feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, experiences, ideas, and suggestions to inform the new community centre's design. Recognising the importance of creating a safe and comfortable online space for participating youth, a facilitator was hired specifically for the Black youth workshop. The facilitator had experience working with youth and experience/relationships with Black, African and Caribbean communities in Toronto.

Outreach

Outreach included:

- City staff contacted the Principal at St. Basil-the-Great high school about the opportunity for youth to participate in these workshops, who then notified teachers. Teachers who were interested contacted City staff to arrange in-class workshops.
- Staff worked with a teacher at St. Basil-the-Great high school to arrange the Black youth workshop.
- A City of Toronto Youth Outreach Worker arranged for a workshop with their weekly Youth Group.
- City staff reached out to Gulfstream Public School to extend the opportunity for in-classroom workshops. No response was received.

Summary of Feedback – Overall

The number of students who supported each suggestion/comment are included in parentheses ().

- Outdoor sports/activity spaces and seating/social areas are important spaces for youth. These must be designed with youth use in mind. Outdoor spaces that students are interested in include:
 - Basketball courts (16)
 - It is important to provide seating around the basketball courts for those who are not paying, including benches, bleachers, and especially picnic tables so youth can eat near the courts. Youth also suggested a shaded seating area by the basketball courts.
 - Provide a water fountain by the basketball court.
 - Some students noted they don't feel comfortable when there is a clear gender imbalance (e.g. all men/boys) at basketball courts. Young women would like to see others like them in the space and explained that it is unwelcoming to be one of the few young women in a space.
 - Provide lighting around the basketball court so it can be used in the evenings.
 - Outdoor seating and social areas (15)
 - When students are with friends in outdoor spaces, they feel comfortable and welcome when there is plentiful seating for groups (e.g. picnic tables and benches), tables with seating where they can eat food, and choices between shaded (e.g. a gazebo) or sunny seating spots. In addition to shade, outdoor shelters should provide protection from the rain.
 - Some students noted that it can be more welcoming for youth to have social spaces that are off to the side instead of in the middle of a public space so that they don't feel like they are on display or being monitored. Students often feel judged by adults, so a space that is off to the side provide youth with a space they feel comfortable being loud, without feeling like they are disturbing to or being judged by adults.
 - A few students noted that they liked grassy areas to sit on/ hang out at.
 - Outdoor fitness stations (13)
 - Multi-sport court (10)
 - E.g. soccer, tennis, volleyball , have adjustable volleyball/tennis nets
 - Playground/Jungle gym (10)
 - Swings (3)
 - Sand pit (1)
 - Spinning cups (1)
 - Community garden (8)
 - Outdoor track (7)
 - Beach volleyball (4)

- Soccer field (3) / Mini soccer space (2) / Turf Field (1)
 - Some students suggested the soccer field at the adjacent high school already provided enough space for soccer, if it remains accessible after school hours.
 - Ice rink (in winter) (2)
 - A few students suggested providing boards for new skaters to hold onto and seating around a rink.
 - Tennis (1)
 - Table tennis (1)
 - Art (1)
 - Splash pad (1)
- When students are alone in outdoor spaces, they feel comfortable in quiet places with comfortable seating (e.g. Muskoka chairs), where they can be around nature and hear the sounds of birds.
 - Regardless of whether they are alone or with friends, youth feel more comfortable in public spaces:
 - That have lots of nature, including plants, trees, and grass.
 - Where any staff presence is outgoing, friendly, and welcoming.
 - That are clean, and have plentiful waste bins.
 - Are well lit at night.
 - Where members of the community are caring and look out for youth, without being judgemental.
 - Some students suggested the outdoor community centre spaces play music to create a more welcoming environment.
 - Students feel unwelcome in outdoor spaces when:
 - They feel monitored or judged by adults, especially for their volume.
 - There is not enough seating.
 - Spaces are unclean or unsanitary (e.g. lots of litter).
 - That are too crowded.
 - With off-leash dogs or wild animals (e.g. raccoons).
 - There is a clear gender imbalance in a space (e.g. all men/boys on a basketball court)
 - Around smokers
 - Indoor gym activities students are most interested in include:
 - Volleyball (17)
 - Basketball (16)
 - Soccer (12)
 - Martial Arts (10)
 - Dodgeball (10)
 - Badminton (6)
 - Tennis (4)
 - Floor Hockey (4)
 - Self-defence Classes (3)
 - Fitness Classes (2)

- Handball (2)
- Table tennis (2)
- Lacrosse (2)
- Gymnastics (1)

- Other fitness related indoor activities students are interested in include:
 - Weights/Weight room (22)
 - Cooking (12)
 - Zumba/dance exercise (11)
 - Dance (9)
 - Drop in programming (7)
 - Weekly (registration-required) programming (6)
 - Sewing (5)
 - Drawing (5)
 - Music (4)
 - Low impact exercise or stretching (4)
 - Walking groups (3)
 - Hair braiding (3)
 - Language classes/classrooms (3)
 - Yoga/meditation (2)
 - Painting (2)
 - Drama (2)
 - Table Tennis (2)
 - Computer room with a printer (2)
 - Play room for younger kids/siblings with childcare (2)
 - Intramurals (e.g. 5x5 basketball, volleyball, and other sports) (2)
 - Fitness/Conditioning equipment (e.g. ladders, pull-up bars, etc) (2)
 - Aerobics (1)
 - Bocce (1)

- Students suggested the Community Living Room could include features that allow for the following activities to take place:
 - Lounging, meeting people, or hanging out
 - Eating
 - Café access
 - Watch movies & TV
 - Homework/studying
 - Peer support or counselling
 - Painting/art space

- Students suggested the Community Living Room include:
 - Lots of comfortable seating (e.g. couches)
 - Tables
 - Music (on speakers)
 - Both social and alone spaces
 - Quiet space for studying
 - Natural light
 - Charging stations, potentially integrated into seating

- Vending machines
- Snack bar
- Water fountain/bottle filler

- Students suggested the Gaming Garage could include features that allow for the following activities to take place:
 - Digital drawing
 - Video games (large screen, multiple gaming systems)
 - Tutoring/homework
 - Making music
 - Ping pong
 - Board games and cards
 - Foosball
 - Music/track recording
 - 3D printing
 - Screen-printing
 - Bingo

- Students suggested the Gaming Garage include:
 - Comfortable seating
 - Couches
 - Gaming Chairs
 - Bean bags
 - Tables (e.g. for homework and for games)
 - Tech:
 - Lots of outlets and charging stations
 - Integrate charging outlets into seating
 - Laptops and platforms/desks for laptops
 - Multiple gaming systems and controllers
 - Equipment to record music/tracks
 - 3D printer
 - Large screen/projector
 - Speakers
 - Both social and alone spaces
 - Provide different spaces for youth to use depending on how they are feeling. For example, a more social space and a more quiet/meditative space.
 - Quiet room for homework
 - Vending machines
 - Fan/AC/Heaters (climate control)
 - Art on the walls
 - Lots of space
 - Screen printer
 - Ping pong table
 - Pool table
 - Windows/Natural light

- Students feel unwelcome in outdoor spaces when:

- They are overcrowded, tiny, and tight.
- They smell bad.
- They are too close to where adults spend time/ are not soundproof, as this leads to complaints about youth being "too loud"
- Students are interested in potentially making/selling food at and being employed at a small snack bar in the new centre. Snack suggestions include:

Healthy Snacks/food:

- Cheese
- Fruits
- Yogurt/granola
- Sandwiches
- Granola Bars
- Salads
- Breakfast foods
- Pasta and Pizza
- Instant Oatmeal
- Dinners

Other Snacks:

- Cookies
- Candy
- Brownies
- Donuts
- Chips
- Gum
- Popcorn
- Snow cones
- Cotton candy
- Slushies
- Chocolate bars
- Cupcakes
- muffins

Beverages:

- Smoothies
- Hot chocolate
- Gatorade/Sports Drinks
- Juice
- Milkshakes

- Other suggestions for the snack bar include:
 - Have a serving window with a rolling shutter between the kitchen space and community living room.
 - Provide specialty equipment such as a cotton candy machine, snow cone machine, slushy machine, and popcorn maker.
 - Include vending machines throughout the centre so snacks and beverages are always available.
- Other suggestions for the new centre include:
 - Encourage staff to be outgoing and friendly. This makes youth feel more welcome.
 - Provide free WIFI throughout the centre.
 - Ensure the centre is fully accessible (e.g. provide an elevator to the upper levels).
 - Gymnasium:
 - Make the gym dividable (e.g. with folding walls or curtains).
 - Provide multiple basketball courts/nets (not just one large court).
 - Make the gymnasium floor out of a bouncy wood.
 - Kitchen:
 - Ensure the kitchen is large enough for big groups.
 - Provide plenty of counter space.
 - Provide stainless steel appliances (durable).
 - Provide cupboards at a lower height so people who are not tall can reach them (e.g. pantry-style cupboards/standing cabinets).
 - Multi-purpose rooms:

- Provide large multi-purpose rooms that can hold more than 50 people (the demand of some youth groups in the area are 50+people).
 - Provide dividers for multipurpose rooms so one supervisor can oversee various activities.
- Outdoor spaces:
 - Add tree-lined walkways to outdoor spaces (e.g. like exists at Dairy Down Public School).
- Other spaces:
 - Provide a quiet study space/room that youth can book for group projects/study sessions.
 - Provide a small area with books/ a small library/a computer lab.
 - Provide a first-aid room.
 - Ensure bathrooms are very clean.
- Programming:
 - Provide free gymnasium drop-in times for young people.
 - Encourage a gender balance in activity spaces.
 - Provide women activity times, as sometimes activity spaces are dominated by men and it is intimidating to join (e.g. for basketball).
 - Provide youth with opportunities to gain their volunteer hours, and employment opportunities at the new community centre.

Summary of Feedback – Black Youth Workshop

Feedback provided during the Black youth workshop are included in the summary above and are highlighted in more detail below:

- It is important to provide:
 - Plentiful drop-in programming, as needing to pre-register for programming can create an unwelcoming space for youth.
 - Staff that are lively, friendly, and welcoming, as they can be the difference between youth feeling welcome or unwelcome in a space.
 - Spaces where youth feel free to be loud and have fun, where they do not feel surveilled or judged by adults
 - Access to calming, natural spaces.
 - Community outreach programs and access to counsellors and peer support programs.
 - Spaces and activities that encourage a balanced gender ratios (e.g. not spaces only dominated by men).
 - Small study spaces that youth can book out to use for group study sessions or projects.
 - Lighting around the outdoor basketball court, and generally, well-lit outdoor spaces.
- Youth are looking for members of the community to look out for them, without judgement.

- Outdoor activities students are interested in include a basketball court, outdoor fitness stations, a community garden, a playground, an outdoor seating/social area, and art/music based gathering spots.
- Indoor gymnasium activities students are interested in include basketball, volleyball, dodgeball, badminton martial arts, and gymnastics.
- Other indoor activities students are interested in include Sumba/dance exercise, weights, dance, drawing, drama, cooking, intramural sports, and both drop-in and weekly programming.
- Students would like the gaming garage to encourage a positive atmosphere, offer different spaces for youth in different moods (e.g. spaces to study and to hang out with friends), offer plentiful comfortable seating, include lots of natural light, artwork, and free WIFI. Students would like to be able to play video games, cards, board games, and watch movies and TV in the gaming garage.
- Students would like the community living room to include plentiful charging stations, and a small café.
- Students suggested the snack bar offer breakfast and dinner options, smoothies, juice, fruits, healthy snacks, chips, and free water. They would like to be able to receive coop placements, and job opportunities through the snack bar, which could be an opportunity to build relationships between the community recreation centre and the adjacent high school.