



Toronto Island Park Master Plan

Big Ideas Public Workshop Meeting Summary

July 21st, 2021, 6:00 – 8:30 PM
Via Zoom

Overview

On Wednesday, July 21, 2021, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division (PFR) hosted a virtual Big Ideas Public Workshop for Phase Two of the Toronto Island Park Master Plan. Over 100 people attended the workshop along with the project team, represented by PFR staff, their consultant Design Team (DTAH), Business Strategy Team (FS Strategy), and Engagement Team (Swerhun Inc.). See Appendix A for the list of project team members.

The Big Ideas Public Workshop was part of the City's iterative engagement approach to developing Big Ideas in Phase II of the Master Plan engagement process. In addition to the Big Ideas Public Workshop, the City engaged several other audiences about the Big Ideas in Phase II, including:

- the broader public through an online engagement in June

- members of its Community Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Committee in a combined workshop on July 13
- elders and knowledge keepers from the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation through a dialogue on July 15
- equity-deserving audiences through Youth Ambassador led engagement in August

Each of these engagement inputs to the Master Plan are documented separately and will be available on the project website at toronto.ca/islandmasterplan.

The purpose of the Big Ideas Public Workshop was to present and discuss refined Big Ideas to inform the Master Plan. The Big Ideas shared in the Public Workshop were the product of several steps of technical work and engagement, including:

- **Development of Preliminary Big Ideas**, with initial ideas proposed by the Design Team rated on and added to by the public in the online engagement
- **Refinement of Big Ideas** through a collective analysis of the Design Team and public's Big Ideas by the Community Advisory Community and Technical Advisory Committee

Lori Ellis, Senior Project Coordinator with City, opened the meeting with a land acknowledgement. Following the land acknowledgement, the City shared a teaching moment through a video interview about the importance of the Hanlan's Point Beach to Toronto's LGBTQ2S+ community. The project team then shared an overview presentation covering the Master Plan process, Phase I outcomes, and a summary of ideas from other parks (see Appendix for the Presentation). Participants asked plenary questions of clarification and then, in small groups, rotated through four breakout rooms where they learned more about and shared feedback on Big Ideas as grouped under four themes: Environment; Visitor Experience; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and History, Culture and Storytelling. In each breakout room, a Master Plan team member provided an overview of the Big Ideas relevant to the theme, and facilitators helped steward and document the discussion, which focused on which Big Ideas participants liked, which (if any) they found concerning, and their suggestions on how to make the Big Ideas a reality. The meeting concluded with a plenary discussion and wrap up. See Appendix B for the meeting agenda.

This meeting summary is structured by the following sections:

- Key themes
- Detailed summary of feedback
 - Questions of clarification
 - Feedback on the Big Ideas
 - Environment
 - Visitor Experience
 - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
 - History, Culture and Storytelling
- Feedback shared after the meeting
- Next steps

Swerhun Inc. — third-party facilitation firm retained by the City to help support community engagement for this project — wrote this meeting summary. This summary is not intended to be a verbatim transcript, rather it summarizes key points of discussion. Participants reviewed a draft of this meeting summary before it was finalized.

Key themes

These points reflect key themes that emerged throughout the discussion. They are intended to be read along with the more detailed feedback that follows.

- **Overall, the Big Ideas are on the right track.** Participants said they appreciated the engagement process and the work done by the Master Plan team, saying they could see feedback from previous public engagement reflected in the Big Ideas.
- **Commercialization, over-development, and crowding remain key concerns.** Participants expressed concerns about the impacts and pressures of development in the downtown core, the potential for commercialization and chain businesses on the Island, and the potential impacts on the environment and the Island's character with increased use.
- **Continued support for Indigenous placekeeping efforts.** Participants said they appreciated the focus on Indigenous placekeeping in the Master Plan. They said it was very important the project team do significant, meaningful

Indigenous engagement to make avoid tokenizing or appropriating Indigenous cultures.

- **The Master Plan should continue to focus on balance.** Consistent with previous public meetings, participants said a key focus of the Master Plan must be balancing increased use of the park with protecting and maintaining the Island's ecology and character for generations to come.

Detailed summary feedback

The following summarizes questions, suggestions, and comments participants shared throughout the meeting. Responses provided by the project team, where provided, are noted below in *italics*.

Questions of clarification

Is there a direct relationship between the number of new developments on Yonge Street and renewed City interest in Toronto Island Park? It appears the City is proposing using Toronto Island Park as the green space for the growing Downtown (as opposed to providing new greenspace in the core). *PFR staff said the City's Parkland Strategy focuses on expanding, improving, and connecting green spaces across the City, including around the waterfront and Downtown, and that Strategy is part of what is informing the reason for the Master Plan.*

Is there the potential for a dogs off-leash area? *Victoria Bell from DTAH said the Design Team has not yet made a recommendation on whether there should be an off-leash area or not. The Design Team is aware that off-leash dogs could affect the other animals and birds on the Island.*

How will you balance the needs of visitors who need bathrooms and amenities but keep Toronto Island Park from turning into a commercialized area like the harbourfront? *Victoria from DTAH said the Design Team has been looking at different ways of identifying the park's carrying capacity. The park already has Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and Provincially Significant Wetlands (PSWs), several of which could be expanded. The Design Team is taking a balanced approach, is not intending to accommodate all those in new Downtown development or commercialize the park.*

Are the airport lands part of the Toronto Island Park Master Plan (since the tripartite agreement expires in 2033)? *The City confirmed that the airport lands are not part of the Master Plan. Over the course of the process to date, the project team has heard a lot about the airport lands and is aware the tripartite agreement expires in 2033. Decisions about future of the airport will be made by the different levels of government, not PFR. PFR will pay attention to that decision making process, but for now, the Master Plan team's focus is on the 600 acres within its jurisdiction. The team is also documenting feedback about the airport so that, if there is a decision that would result in some or all of the airport lands being transferred to parkland, that feedback can inform future thinking. The Vision and Guiding Principles that are developed through the Master Plan would apply to any ideas considered for the airport lands.*

Feedback about the Big Ideas

In breakout rooms, participants shared feedback on which Big Ideas they liked, were concerned about, and made suggestions for helping the Big Ideas become a reality. This section organizes the feedback under the four themes of Environment; Visitor Experience; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and History, Culture and Storytelling.

Environment

The project team shared the following Big Ideas in the Environment room (along with examples of how the ideas could be made a reality):

1. Embrace the unique character and diverse experiences of the Island
2. Create experiences and programs that encourage exploration across the islands
3. Share and promote Island information
4. Expand connectivity on the islands
5. Provide facilities and activities year-round
6. Create diverse active recreation options throughout the islands
7. Engage with the Island at night
8. Provide year-round food options that change

Participants shared feedback about what they liked, where they were concerned, suggested additional ideas, and other, broader feedback about the Environment Big Ideas.

What participants liked

In general, participants liked the **Environment Big Ideas**. Specifically, they liked ideas related to protecting and enhancing wild and natural spaces; improving internal waterways for boats, kayaking, swimming, and habitats; balancing natural flooding and flood mitigation efforts; and reintroducing more native species to the islands.

Where participants had concerns or felt something was missing

A few were concerned that consideration of the **Toronto Island Airport** was missing from the Environment Big Ideas, saying its current operations emit noise and air pollution. They suggested the project team consider these impacts as part of the bigger picture context, including considering a potential future without the airport.

Suggested additional Environment Big Ideas

Participants suggested additional ideas focused on protecting natural and wild spaces, including:

- installing boardwalks (especially where trampling happens and in sensitive areas)
- designing spaces for intended uses (fencing and signage may not be enough to protect these areas)
- limiting public access to sensitive and natural areas of the park
- creating educational spaces that share information about local ecology and environmental topics — including changing climate, water conditions, and habitats — similar to the Biosphere Environment Museum in Montreal
- adding more garbage receptacles emptied regularly around the Island
- expecting food vendors to use packaging that produces less waste

Other feedback and advice about Toronto Island Park and the environment

Bigger picture concerns about environmental impacts on the Island including climate change, land erosion, and the pressure put on natural spaces as a result of Downtown's growth. Several talked about the importance of balance, saying the team needs to show how it is thinking about recreation, nature, and community

needs. Others said balancing many different uses, demands, and functions would be challenging.

Toronto Island Park could be a model for sustainability — similar to the Leslie Street Spit or East Bayfront — with efforts to enhance and protect nature serving as a draw. These efforts could include low-impact development, permeable surfaces, solar-energy, and special rules to limit or ban plastics.

The park does not need tremendous improvements since so many people are already drawn to it. The team should avoid “Disney-fying” the park, with a suggestion to do nothing since the park is great as it is.

Visitor Experience

The Master Plan team shared the following Visitor Experience Big Ideas (along with examples of how to make the ideas a reality):

1. Embrace the unique character and diverse experiences of the Island
2. Create experiences and programs that encourage exploration across the islands
3. Share and promote Island information
4. Expand connectivity on the islands
5. Provide facilities and activities year-round
6. Create diverse active recreation options throughout the islands
7. Engage with the Island at night
8. Provide year-round food options that change

Participants shared feedback about what they liked, where they were concerned, suggested additional ideas, and other, broader feedback about the Visitor Experience Big Ideas.

What participants liked

Participants liked Big Ideas about:

- **improving wayfinding**, especially from an accessibility perspective. Some said they favoured physical wayfinding like signage and paper maps, saying the infrastructure needed to support digital wayfinding (like cellular towers) could produce electric and magnetic fields; others preferred digital approaches to wayfinding, saying these approaches could help reduce waste and offer a

seamless experience between apps, the City's webpage, QR codes, and more. A virtual tour could also improve the accessibility of a Toronto Island Park experience.

- **year-round access and winter programming.** Though participants liked the idea of year-round access and winter programming (especially winterized washrooms), some said that, due to climate change, the project team may want to avoid over-committing to activities like skating, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. They suggested instead designing for passive winter activities like winter walking tours.
- **new food options.** Participants liked Big Ideas around new food options, said saying access to more varied and better food options was important to achieving year-round use of the park. Others were less enthusiastic, saying food was not important to their experience at Toronto Island Park and that too many vendors could lead to increased garbage and waste. Those that were concerned about the impacts from new food options said they preferred smaller food operations to destination dining.

Suggestions about the Visitor Experience Big Ideas

Participants suggested additional ideas to improve the Visitor Experience at Toronto Island Park, including:

- expand options for kids and families, including through summer camps about outdoor education and Indigenous ways of knowing
- separate different uses on the Island, especially active and quiet uses
- expand connections throughout the Island, including by leveraging waterways and developing thematic walking circuits
- consider ways to maintain a peaceful natural retreat experience, including moderating loud noise, eliminating garbage, and maintaining the Island's cleanliness and character (especially if exploring night sky viewing or camping).

Other feedback and advice about the Toronto Island Park and Visitor Experience

Most said they would like to see the project team protect and maintain Toronto Island Park's character as a respite and natural oasis away from the City, saying rest and rejuvenation should be at the centre of the plan and visitor experience.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Master Plan team shared the following Big Ideas about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (along with examples of how to make the ideas a reality):

1. Celebrate the Island's identity as a safe and welcoming space
2. Create a continuous network of accessible connections throughout the park
3. Enhance water access within and beyond the park
4. Create opportunities for all park users to participate in programs and activities
5. Expand access to rental equipment
6. Expand access to diverse and affordable food and retail options
7. Build environmental, social, and economic sustainability into the business model for the Island

Participants shared feedback about what they liked and broader suggestions about the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Big Ideas.

What participants liked

Participants especially liked Big Ideas around expanding access to rental equipment, including kayak racks, bike storage, beach umbrellas. They also liked ideas focused on identifying more places for people to dock boats.

Suggestions about the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Big Ideas

Most of the discussion in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion breakout rooms focused on suggestions on how Toronto Island Park could be a more welcoming, inclusive place. Specific suggestions included:

- **Expand, enhance, and protect Hanlan's Point Beach.** Some said that Hanlan's Point Beach is becoming overcrowded with parties and noise from party vessels and that this important LGBTQ2S+ space needs protection. Some suggested adding a "nudist only" designated area (instead of making the entire beach clothing optional).

- **Prioritize making the Island accessible for people with disabilities** by creating destinations close to ferry docks, offering small electric motorized transport (like golf carts) to help people get around, making sure ferries are accessible, providing beach wheelchairs for accessing the water, and ensuring there are rest points and shaded areas across the entire park.
- **Offer affordable options for people to get to the Island**, such as passes for people who live downtown and free tickets for seniors.
- **Enhance water access within and beyond the park** by improving signage and identifying areas of the Island that are not accessible from the water.
- **Build partnerships with community organizations to attract new, diverse users**, including local organizations, schools, and community centres. Allow programs and activities to change and adapt based on interests and who is using them.
- **Prioritize a few simple, affordable food options**, to avoid overwhelming visitors with too many options. Other suggestions included offering picnic baskets with local fruits and vegetables and making ice more accessible.

History, Culture, and Storytelling

The Master Plan team shared the following Big Ideas about History, Culture, and Storytelling (along with examples of how to make the ideas a reality):

1. Celebrate the Island as an Indigenous place
2. Provide spaces within the islands for ceremony, gathering and knowledge sharing
3. Build a culture of stewardship for the Island
4. Share all the Island Stories
5. Support permanent and rotating art installations
6. Create multifunctional spaces for diverse events

Participants shared feedback about what they liked, where they were concerned, and suggested additional ideas about the History, Culture, and Storytelling Big Ideas.

What participants liked

Participants liked several of the History, Culture, and Storytelling Big Ideas, including:

- **the emphasis on Indigenous placekeeping**, suggesting the team look at recent placekeeping efforts at The Forks in Winnipeg as a good example. To make these ideas a reality, participants suggested the project team create opportunities for Indigenous art and places for sacred ceremony. Some suggested the project team engage organizations like Anishnawbe Health and Artscape who already work with Indigenous communities around placekeeping.
- **exploring Indigenous placenames on and around the Island**, including developing a process to identify those names.
- **community-led stewardship of the Islands**, with suggestions for: an enhanced or strengthened role for Island residents (since many already see themselves as stewards or caretakers role) and a Park Ambassador program that volunteers could sign up for to act as stewards. Some suggested that stewardship should be embedded in the park's identity somehow, so that, as soon people arrive at the Island, they understand they're responsible for it (potentially via a code of conduct or public listing of performance indicators of the Island's health).
- **permanent and rotating art exhibits.**

Where participants had concerns or felt something was missing

A few participants were concerned that, without meaningful engagement, Indigenous placekeeping efforts could be tokenistic. They urged the team to be thoughtful and careful in proposing Indigenous placekeeping ideas to avoid appropriating or otherwise tokenizing Indigenous cultures.

Others were concerned about the proposed Big Idea around a multi-functional space for events, saying any multi-functional space should have a minimal footprint and be designed as a primarily outdoor space, not a building.

Suggestions about the History, Culture, and Storytelling Big Ideas

Participants suggested additional ideas about the History, Culture, and Storytelling, including:

- **broaden the concept of sustainability** to think of long-term “living culture” of Indigenous communities as an important component of sustainability

- **consider performance as a way to share culture and stories**, including a performance on the ferry (building off a recent piano installation on ferries that invited the public to play during the journey) or on-island first-person performances that interpret or tell cultural stories.
- **explore ways to tell stories about the importance of the Island to different generations of people**, including people who immigrated to Canada and for whom the Island has special significance.
- **include interpretation of the recent history of the island**, including the history of hotels and the Island's baseball park and the influence different generations of Island residents have had on the Island.
- **recognize that sport culture is important to the Island**, since some sports events are closely connected to the park's identity, like the Dominion Day Regatta, which has a 130 year history and attracts thousands of people.

Feedback shared after the meeting

After the meeting, the project team received e-mails from participants with additional feedback, summarized below. Original e-mails are included in Appendix C.

- promote the use of canoes, kayaks, stand up paddle boards, and paddleboats over gas-powered vehicles and powerboats
- concern about impacts from camping and associated activities, like fires and increased garbage.
- identify capacity targets and make sure ferry service supports those targets
- concern that the Island is becoming overrun with too many visitors and that the master plan needs to consider the capacity of the Island when discussing increased access
- develop a clear policy on dogs (including suggestions to ban dogs from ferries and the park to protect wildlife)

- continue to increase equitable access, such as making beaches accessible via mesh installations on the sand that are navigable by wheelchair ([recently done in Mississauga](#))
 - explore small “boutique” food carts that serve a variety of food
 - implement walking tours and guided excursions to make the park a better-known tourism destination
 - support for exploring winter experiences on the Island
 - reserve airport land for park uses, not development, if it is ever removed
 - appreciation for engagement efforts, including Indigenous engagement.
-

Next steps

The project team committed to sharing a draft summary of the meeting for participants to review. They also said they would continue to let participants know of upcoming public engagement opportunities connected to the Master Plan. They said that the next steps of engagement included Youth Ambassador-led engagement in August, and that, following the summer, the Master Plan team would begin work in developing Concept Plans based on the Big Ideas and other work to date.

Appendix A – List of Project Team Members

City of Toronto, Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division

Casey Morris, Senior Project Coordinator

Christina Iacovino, Manager, Partnerships and Business Services

Daniel Fusca, Manager, Public Consultation

David O'Hara, Project Manager, Strategic Projects, Parks Development and Capital Projects

Lori Ellis, Senior Project Coordinator

Pablo Munoz, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator

Consultant teams

Design team

Victoria Bell, DTAH

James Roche, DTAH

Business Strategy team

Jeff Dover, FS Strategy

Engagement team

Ian Malczewski, Swerhun Inc.

Jacky Li, Swerhun Inc.

Athavarn Srikantharajah, Swerhun Inc.

Appendix B – Meeting Agenda

Combined CAC/TAC Workshop Toronto Island Park Master Plan

Tuesday, July 13th, 2021

6:00pm – 8:30pm • Meeting held virtually

Meeting purpose

To share an update on the Toronto Island Park Master Plan and to workshop the revised Big Ideas.

DRAFT Proposed agenda

- 6:00 PM** Welcome, land acknowledgement, agenda review, introductions
City of Toronto & Swerhun Inc.
- 6:10** Indigenous teaching moment
- 6:15** Master Plan update and Big Ideas overview
City of Toronto and DTAH
Questions of clarification (approximately 6:35-6:40)
- 6:40** Discussion: Big Ideas
1. Which Big Ideas do you think must be implemented now for the Master Plan to be successful? Which ones do you think should happen, but could wait or take longer? Which ones would be nice to have in the future?
 2. Do you have any suggestions on how to make the Big Ideas a reality?
 3. Do you have any other suggested changes or refinements to the Big Ideas?
- 8:00** Report back and plenary discussion
- 8:25** Wrap up and next steps
- 8:30** Adjourn

Appendix C – Additional feedback shared by participants after the meeting

E-mail 1

Hi

I kept losing audio for some reason, so I just wanted to follow up.

I had mentioned in the accessibility group that I had recently been to a beach in Mississauga where they had secured some mesh on the sand, allowing easier access for walkers, wheelchairs, etc.

I found a link with info to that pilot project here:

<https://www.mississauga.ca/city-of-mississauga-news/news/parks-pilot-project-creates-path-to-city-waterfront-and-inclusivity/>

Also, I'm not sure if this was discussed tonight, but I would also like to say that at least in the summer months, I feel that boutique(?) food carts could be a viable solution to adding variety to food offered that is neither permanent nor shuttered and vacant in the winter months due to reduced numbers on the island.

I started attending these meetings because of a ruse, but I was so impressed by how well these meetings have been organized and lead, that I'm now committed.

Thank you,

E-mail 2

I have several concerns about the emerging Master Plan as a result of my experience with Christie Pits and Tommy Thompson Park. The pressure on the Islands will certainly increase as the City adds density without adequate park space.

I would encourage you to add the following:

1. Clear capacity targets and ferry services that support those targets
2. A clear policy on dogs
 - I recommend a no-dog policy in order to protect wildlife.
 - Dogs should be banned from the ferries.
 - Do not add a dog park as control of off-leash dogs will be impossible.
3. Request that the airport be reserved for park space rather than development, if it is released from current use

Thank-you for your well designed and well facilitated on-line consultation.

E-mail 3

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional feedback.

I was very impressed with the presentations last week, and the discussions in my 2 focus groups...

Just wanted to commend the Planning Group for the work completed to date and to again confirm my support to continue with this very important work to revitalize / re-energize the Toronto Islands in a respectful and mindful manner.

My key points of emphasis:

1. continue to enhance visitor experience and move to incorporate all seasons, including winter.
2. Toronto Island to become a better-known tourism venue for the return of "out of country visitors" including their spouses/family members accompanying people attending our many Conventions - implement walking tours and tour guide led excursions.
3. Continue to focus on ways to increase equitable access for our diverse local peoples, including seniors, and those using mobility devices. Increase island

transportation - electric options only & work to eliminate gas vehicles/gas powerboats, while focusing on the use of canoes/kayaks/SUPs/paddle boats!

4. This is indeed a big task when there is also the key need to maintain conservation, increase sustainability and preserve the natural habitat for the existing wildlife while respecting the land and involving indigenous peoples.

I look forward to the next steps and the project's continued progress! Sincerely.

E-mail 4

Thank you for sending the copy of the latest presentation for the Toronto Island Master Plan.

I am having trouble with the how you say there will be an emphasis on the environmental concerns and expansion of the environmentally protected areas, which means re-wilding of some areas, and yet wanting to provide camping and campfires on the Island. Not sure how many of the planning group have been to Hanlan's Point, for example, when there can be over 100 tents erected on any given weekend and seen the devastation with garbage and trampling of vegetation, debris from campfires etc. Makes no sense to me.....the Island cannot be everything to everyone. If you want to preserve some sense of the beauty of the natural environment I don't see camping and allowing fires as viable.

Much talk of winter use and facilities like warming stations, activities etc. So I guess this means that there will really finally be a new ferry which can go through ice in the harbour as opposed to the tiny Ongiara vehicle ferry which was never intended to be an ice breaker. It has been in the works for several years!

Happy to see emphasis on respecting the wildlife and natural environment. Really do hope that is a priority! With the dramatic influx of people moving to the downtown core, I am concerned that the Island will become the go-to place since green-space is so lacking City-side. Recipe for problems....!

Thanks.

E-mail 5

Thank you for the excellent presentations and workshop session last night.

I appreciate the professionalism of your team, and the team's evident sincere commitment to a conservationist approach that will bring minimal changes to Toronto Island Park's sensitive ecology.

Increasing access by non-powered boats, including more links to launching places on Toronto Harbourfront and the portlands (near the Eastern Gap), is important.

The idea of restricting motorboats from certain waterways and to keep them from getting in too close to swimming beaches is excellent.

Thanks,