

# Osler Playground Park Improvements



## Concept Design Focus Group Meeting Feedback Summary Report

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## Background

In September 2021 the Osler Playground Park Improvements project team presented three concept design options to the community for input through a survey, public meeting and a pop up engagement. The designs were developed based on community and stakeholder input from the first phase of the project. There was however, no clear preference identified by the community for any of the three options. In order to ensure that the final design serves the needs of the community, the City invited a group of local residents to a one time focus group with the project team. Participants at the focus group heard about the needs and wants from their neighbours and workshopped potential solutions with the project team. Members of the focus group were identified through a modified civic lottery, a process that picked applications at random based on the applicant's existing uses of the park and basic demographic profile (see Selection Process, below). The reason for this approach was to ensure that the focus group was comprised of a diverse cross-section of park users that was as representative of the overall community as possible.

## Selection Process

All members of the public that opted to stay engaged in the process were messaged and asked to apply to take part of the focus group. In total the project team received 50 applications. Some of the demographic and park use questions included:

### **Frequency of use of the following park features**

- Off Leash Area
- Playground
- Wading pool (while it is operational)
- Lawn space at the park for picnic, sunbathing, lawn games etc. (while weather allows)

### **Demographic Questions**

- Gender
- Age
- Do you identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person of Colour)?
- Do you identify as Indigenous to Canada?
- Do you identify as a person with a disability?

## Meeting Goals

- Review project background and consultation outcomes to date
- Hear from all participants about their needs and priorities for the park amenities
- Gather feedback to help unstick the process and advance a design solution that will benefit **all** park users and that everyone can accept

## Agenda

Each agenda item and activity was crafted to ensure that all participants got a chance to express their interests, hopes and aspirations for the park, and hear/understand their neighbours' as well.

### **Introductions**

#### **Project Team Presentation**

- Meeting Tips & Goals
- Project Background
- Public Engagement to date
- Concept Design Options Overview

#### **Guided Discussion:**

- Deep Listening Exercise
- Trade-Offs Exercise
- Sense Making (Group Discussion)

#### **Next Steps + Adjourn**

### **Meeting Attendees:**

**Community Participants:** 12 selected through modified civic lottery + 1 Representative from the Ossington Community Association

#### **City Staff:**

Rachel Weston, Senior Project Coordinator (City of Toronto, PF&R)  
Daniel Fusca, Public Consultation Manager (City of Toronto, PF&R)  
Elijah Bawuah, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator (City of Toronto, PF&R)  
Paulo Fetalvero, Supervisor Capital Projects (City of Toronto, PF&R)  
Peter Didiano, Program Manager (City of Toronto, PF&R-Capital Projects)  
Charlotte Gick, Councillor Joe Cressy's Office  
Vienna O'Shea, Councillor Joe Cressy's Office

#### **Consultant**

April Szeto, Principal Landscape Architect, Harrington McAvan Ltd.

## Key Highlights and Direction

The workshop proceeded smoothly. The project team felt like they received sufficient information to refine a concept design and present that back to the community. Some of the key feedback included:

- Include an OLA smaller than that shown in Concept Three, but larger than Concept One to allow for more open green space.
- Sandbox and combination wading pool and splash pad option for waterplay area can be excluded from the design to accommodate the other park amenities;
- Incorporate additional tree plantings, including within the OLA;
- Optimize the pathway layout;
- Optimize park use at its perimeters to increase usable green space.

## Next Steps

- Incorporate feedback from this meeting into the development of a single preferred concept design
- Consult with City and School Board Staff and refine the design as needed to meet stakeholder requirements
- Share the preferred design with community members via email, the project webpage, and an online survey, and gather additional feedback on play equipment options
- Finalize the design and prepare the construction documents package
- Procure construction services
- Build the park!

## Meeting Summary

### Presentation:

The meeting started with greetings, a Land Acknowledgement, and sharing of the meeting agenda and meeting tips and goals, and introductions of the project team.

### Project Background

The group was informed that on March 26, 2018, City Council had directed the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to:

- Work in consultation with the local Councillor towards the construction of a dog off-leash-area (OLA) in Osler Playground.
- Undertake a planning exercise for general park improvements.

The group was informed that the project scope of work includes park improvements and school ground improvements:

#### Park Improvements:

- A new Off-leash Area (OLA)
- Playground enhancement
- Waterplay area enhancement
- Greenspace improvements
- Pathway improvements
- New seating

#### School Ground Improvements:

- To be determined with the school board
- New recreational amenities that will be accessible to the community after school hours

The group was informed of what is not in scope for the project:

- Park amenities that overlap park and school ground properties, including the OLA. It was clarified that the school board requires delineation of school grounds with fencing for safety reasons and for other operational reasons.
- Washroom building due to budget and space restrictions.
- Separate small and large dog areas in the OLA due to space restrictions.

A plan showing the park and school property boundaries and plans showing the location and number of nearby parks, OLA's, playgrounds, and water play areas within a 5-minute and 10-minute walk from Osler Playground was presented to the group for context.

The group was informed of the project timeline with the planning for the project starting in 2017 and construction completion is anticipated for summer 2023.

#### **Public Engagement to Date**

An overview of public engagement to date was presented to the group.

The group was informed that the Open House and Online Survey in 2017 identified the following priorities for the park:

- 1) Add an OLA
- 2) Enhance the playground
- 3) Add benches, seating and picnic tables
- 4) Address drainage issues at the west side of the park
- 5) Maintain green space
- 6) Add a ball sports area

It was noted that 81% of the survey participants were in support of installing a fenced OLA at Osler Playground.

The group was informed that 6 Community Visions were developed by participants at the Community Visioning Workshop in 2019. The results of the Online Visioning Survey in 2020 identified Community Vision #5 as the Preferred Community Vision.

The group was informed that Community Vision #5 has a similar layout and balance to the existing park with the addition of:

- New splash pad in place of the wading pool and in the OLA
- New park entry points
- A pathway loop
- Natural features incorporated into the playground and park
- Pathway connection to Humbert Street
- Basketball courts and community garden on school grounds

The group was informed of some design issues with Community Vision #5:

- OLA extends into the school grounds
- Potential maintenance and safety concerns with a small splash pad in the OLA
- Park pathway entrance to Humbert Street crosses through the school grounds

The group was informed of some secondary feedback highlights from the 2020 Online visioning Survey:

- Balance park uses
- Better pathways and connections
- Smaller, fenced OLA is appropriate
- Include a running track/ loop
- Keep it shady
- 66% of the participants preferred a combination splash pad and wading pool, 29% preferred splash pad only, and 5% preferred wading pool only

The group was informed that after the Online Visioning Survey in 2020:

- The anticipated implementation timelines were impacted by the pandemic.
- It was learned that we could not have amenities that overlap both the park and school grounds (i.e. OLA, running track) as the school grounds will need to be fenced for student safety and the park and school amenities need to be separate so that maintenance responsibilities can be clearly delineated between organizations.

Concept Design Options were presented to community members at three consultation events in 2021: a virtual public meeting, pop-up engagement at the park and online survey.

The group was informed that there were 84 attendees at the Virtual Public Meeting, over 50 attendees at the Park Pop-Up, and 905 participants of the Concept Design Options Survey in 2021.

The group was informed that the results from the Concept Design Options Survey showed that 40% of the participants preferred Concept Design Option One with Concept Design Option Three very close behind being preferred by 35% of the participants.

The group was informed that the results from these consultation events were too close to provide clear direction for the development of a preferred concept design. As a result, the Focus Group was created to gain further feedback to assist in advancing the design solution.

## Concept Design Options Overview

The group was given an overview of the three (3) Concept Design Options presented at the Public Meeting (September 13, 2021), the Park Pop-Up (September 18, 2021) and included on the Online Design Options Survey (September 2021), focusing on the key features in the two preferred options - Concept One and Three.

## Discussion Summary

### Deep Listening

Each member of the Focus Group was provided 2.5 minutes each to introduce themselves to the group, speak to their priorities for the park redesign, how the different redesign options may affect their life and use of the park, and towards which concept design option they are more drawn to and why. The following is a summary of what was said, in order of speaker:

#### Member #1:

They are a parent with no dog.

They visit the park regularly with their 5 year old son who loves the green space, playground and would love a splash pad. They expressed their preference for Concept One as a combination wading pool and splash pad is offered; however, they did note that the OLA in this option is small and expressed concern that it may result in dog owners bringing their dogs out to use the rest of the park as such.

#### Member #2:

They are a parent with no dog. They visit the park regularly during all seasons except for winter with their 3.5 year old and 7 month old. They expressed their preference for Concept One as a combination wading pool and splash pad is offered. They also advised that they do not like the inclusion of the sandbox as it results in sand being tracked back home and the need for additional cleaning.

#### Member #3:

They are a dog owner with no children. They are a member of the Ossington Community Association. They expressed their preference for Concept Three with the large OLA as they are drawn more towards the dog park and the functional uses offered rather than the open passive green space. They informed the group that they recognize there are challenges with the space available in the park.

#### Member #4:

They are a dog owner. Children are grown. They regularly use the OLA and find it to be a nice community meeting spot. They expressed their preference for the west side of the park in Concept Three and the east side of the park in Concept One.

#### Member #5:

They are a parent with no dog. They visit the park regularly with their 3 year and 6 month old children. They informed the group that park is used for birthday parties, etc. They expressed their preference for Concept One and noted that Concept Three appears to be similar to the current park design. They recognize that Concept One sacrifices the OLA which would make it difficult for the design. They informed the group that they have a negative encounter in the park on a weekly basis with dogs peeing, etc. outside of the OLA.

#### Member #6:



They are a dog owner with no children. They visit the park regularly with their dog and also to use the open green space to relax. They believe the priority is to design for equal division of space, so their preference is for Concept #3 as it appears to be more equal. They advised that in the summertime they have witnessed park users who are not from the area drink alcohol within the park limits and litter in the green space. As a result, they would be OK with losing a bit of the green space.

**Member #7:**

They are a grandparent and dog owner. They advised that they are a dog owner so their views may be dog-centric but they have grandchildren who would use the remainder of the park space. They feel that the space is nice the way it is. They feel that the smaller OLA will cause overflow into the rest of the park and increase conflict between park users. They expressed a preference for Concept Three. They noted that although it would be nice to have a large open green space to throw a frisbee, etc., they don't believe there is adequate space in Concept One for it to be feasible if there is more than one group wishing to do so. They expressed a dislike of pea gravel being used as the surfacing material in OLA's.

**Member #8:**

They are a dog owner with no children. They frequent the park almost every day, except when the dog park is in muddy conditions or is too busy. They noted that the busiest they've seen the dog park was with 40 dogs and 40 owners. They informed the group that they are most interested in the design of the dog park. They expressed a preference for Concept Three because of the larger OLA, but noted it lacks shade and shelter in the OLA itself.

**Member #9:**

They are a parent and dog owner. They visit the park regularly with their 3-, 4- and 6-year-old children, as well as their dog. They expressed a preference for Concept #1 as the Pathway Loop offers more of a park feature rather than just for a practical use; the open green space can still be used by leashed dogs; and the design feels more interactive. They like that green space provides options for mixed use, and can provide a buffer between the playground and OLA.

**Member #10:**

They are a dog owner with no children. They also use the open green space with friends. They expressed a preference for Concept #3 because they visit the dog park every day with their dog. They felt that the OLA size could be reduced, but the size in Concept One would be too small. They expressed a desire to have a larger gain of trees and more shade.

**Member #11:**

They are a parent and dog owner. They visit the park with their 2 daughter and 2 dogs at different times of the day. They informed the group that they like how the current dog park does not have pea gravel for its surface, and would prefer woodchips or grass. They expressed a preference for Concept #3 because of the size of the OLA, and a preference for the playground and water play area in Concept One.

**Member #12:**

They are a frequent park user with no dogs or children. They expressed a preference for Concept #1 as they would not want to lose open green space. They expressed a desire to see more trees.

### **Trade-offs Exercise**

The Focus Group Members were asked to think about what they just heard from the other members as well as their own experiences and needs and fill in a survey to indicate where they think trade-offs

should be made amongst the various park redesign components (See Appendix A for more details). The results of the in-meeting survey were presented and discussed with the group:

- The group leaned slightly more towards a Bigger OLA than a Bigger Playground
- The group leaned slightly more towards a Bigger OLA than a Bigger Water Play
- The group was neutral in comparing the OLA and Open Lawn size
- The group leaned slightly more towards a Bigger Open Lawn than a Bigger Playground
- The group leaned slightly more towards a Bigger Playground than a Bigger Water Play
- The group leaned more towards a Bigger Open Lawn than a Bigger Water Play

To provide the group with a sense of the budget restrictions, a rough cost relation between the Playground, Waterplay and OLA in the different options was provided:

- The Playground and Water Play Area in Concept One are roughly similar in cost with the OLA being roughly half that cost;
- The Water Play Area and OLA in Concept Three are roughly similar in cost with the Playground and Sandbox being about 3 times that cost;
- The Water Play Area in Concept One is about double in cost of the Water Play improvements in Concept Three;
- The Playground Area in Concept Three is about 1.5 times the cost of the Playground Area in Concept One.
- The OLA in Concept Three is about 1.5 times the cost of the OLA in Concept One.

The group was also informed that the wading pool and splash pad combination in Concept One cannot be combined with the playground and OLA in Concept Three, due to the budget constraints.

### **Sensemaking**

In consideration of what had been shared and learned at the meeting thus far, participants were asked to provide advice to the project team regarding the size and types of amenities that are included in the plan, and what solution would benefit all park users. Advice received from focus group members is noted below:

- Consider making more use of the park perimeter. For example the area southeast of where the wading pool currently is.
- Consider adding vegetation along the west fence line to screen the view of the laneway next door and to also provide additional shade in the park.
- The pathway corridor from Humbert Street in both preferred concepts don't appear to be the best use of space. Consider swapping the new tree line and the pathway so that the trees can also provide some shade for the OLA.
- Consider adding more trees for shade in the OLA.
- Consider making the larger OLA in Concept Three a little smaller to increase the green space.
- Woodchip surface material for the OLA was preferred by several members.
- Consider a splash pad because of the longer season that it is operational.
- It is important to maintain green space as it benefits all park users.
- There is an opportunity to improve the southeastern corner of the park to expand the available usable green space.
- The current park maintenance appears to be lacking as the garbage receptacles are typically overflowing and litter is scattered across the park.

- Consider revisiting the pathway designs to be more efficient.

# Appendix: A

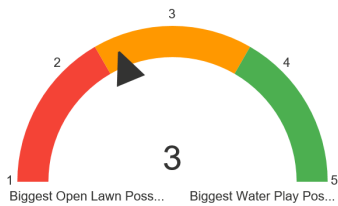
## Trade-Offs Exercise

Following the deep listening exercise, participants were asked to identify tradeoffs they feel should be made, taking into account the needs and concerns of their neighbours.

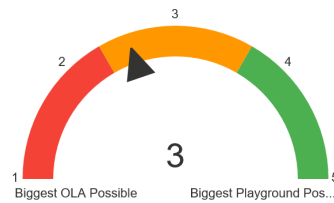
As part of this exercise, participants were shown a series of binary park features and asked to indicate which one they thought should be bigger than the other, or the biggest possible.

The results are shown in graphic form below as averages and indicate a preference for a bigger OLA over a bigger playground or water play area, and also show a preference for a larger open lawn area over a larger playground or waterplay area

Open Lawn and Water Play



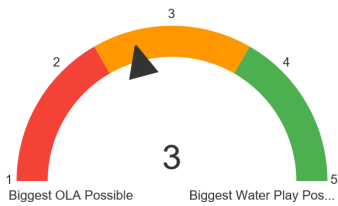
OLA and Playground



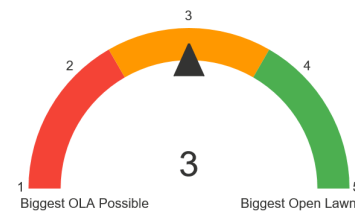
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OLA and Water Play



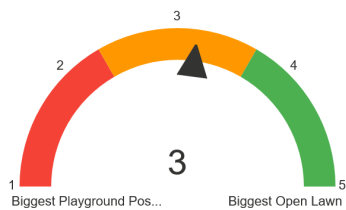
OLA and Open Lawn



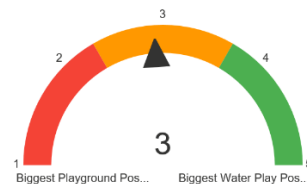
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Playground and Open Lawn



Playground and Water Play



N 12

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