

City of Toronto – Parks, Forestry & Recreation

# Victoria Memorial Square



## Resident's Workshop Summary

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## Project Background

The City is improving Victoria Memorial Square, located at 10 Niagara St., near Portland Street. The park is a designated heritage site and is part of the Fort York National Historic Site and the King-Spadina Heritage Conservation District.

The park currently includes a monument, playground and drinking fountain as well as several heritage features, open lawn areas and mature trees. The park's historical significance and unique site constraints will be taken into consideration when planning the design. The park improvements may include:

- Updated historical interpretive signage
  - to be integrated with City's new wayfinding system
  - to include an Indigenous history component
- Additional heritage interpretation elements
- Upgrade of existing pathways
- Upgrade to existing granite border/pathway
- New site furnishings (i.e. benches, chairs, seat walls and/or picnic tables)
- Passive social gathering areas
- New planting features and trees
- New grass
- New lights

## Resident's Workshop Goal

As part of the engagement program for the project, the project team invited all residents living along the perimeter of the park, including businesses and high-rises, to a workshop. The workshop was held virtually on the evening of June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022. A total of 9 residents were in attendance in addition to staff from PF&R and the Councillor's office. The workshop started with a presentation outlining the scope of the project and was followed by a facilitated discussion and SWOT analysis of the park (understanding of the: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats).

## Summary of Answers

### Strengths

When asked to identify the strengths of the park, many participants noted the character of the space as a quaint, village square. Participants also noted that it is a national historic site and a part of the Fort York.

The location of the park was also noted as a strength, including the proximity to businesses street life.

## Weaknesses

Most participants agreed that the maintenance of the park needed to be improved. It was noted that maintenance staff are always changing and it is hard to relay information. Workshop participants also brought up that the park is heavily used all through the day which adds a lot of pressure. Buildings going up nearby and residents moving in to the neighbourhood have increased drastically over the last few years. Some residents suggested that any updates done in the park needed to take into account the capacity of the City staff to keep up with maintenance.

Another weakness brought up by participants was the amount of dogs/dog owners that use the park as an off-leash area. One resident attributed this to the space being flat allowing dogs to run around and dog owners to throw balls.

## Opportunities

Most participants agreed that landscaping, planting, berms and some added topography as well as hardscaped areas would improve the park. It was also suggested that the project was an opportunity to reveal the character of the space as a "village square" and mentioned examples in cities like Montreal, Savannah, New York and Montreal. Better lighting, including lighting the monuments, was also identified as an opportunity.

Participants noted that the new design needed to highlight the historic significance of the park.

Some participants said that the new design was an opportunity to include elements that deter dogs/dog owners, while one participant acknowledged that the increase of dogs in the neighbourhood was only going to continue and that these users also needed to be factored into the design.

A few participants mentioned that activation and programming needed to be taken into account. One participant suggested a small paved area or platform for performances. Other participants suggested activations that referenced the history of the space, and its connection to Fort York. One participants suggested a changing of the guards. Public art and art event activations and spaces for event programming were also suggested.

Several participants noted that people come to the space for eating and suggested that the new design take into account the lunch crowd, people having picnics, coffee and ice-cream.

A couple of residents suggested that the project take a phased approach that could include expanding the park in the future. Participants also said that the design should take into consideration changing demographics and evolving uses in the neighbourhood.

## Threats

When asked to identify threats, the majority of workshop participants brought up dogs and the impact that they have on the space including digging holes and damaging the grass. This is of particular concern due to the fact that the site is an historic cemetery.

Several participants also noted that the population surrounding the park has increased drastically and that there are more people using the space.