

Elevating Equity and Belonging



Why elevating equity and belonging is important on the Island:

No one will argue that as human beings we all want to "belong"! Belonging is an essential part of being human—we are hard wired to want to connect and assert our role as part of a larger group and community—be it with friends, family or the neighbourhoods and communities that we live in. Beyond diversity and inclusion, a sense of belonging is fundamental to establishing a strong sense of community and a person's feelings of safety and well-being. 'Belonging' is centered on tolerance, mutual respect, sharing experiences as well as celebrating the differences and similarities we share with one another and the world around us.

In a City—Parks offer a unique and special place to explore our sense of 'Belonging' since they act as the fabric that weaves our City together—connecting one natural area to another or knitting one neighbourhood to another to create an intricate and rich network of shared spaces that support our daily lives. Toronto Island Park is no exception. Toronto is a City in which everyone is welcome and people and communities from many diverse backgrounds come together. This sense of welcome, community, pride and belonging needs to also be part of Toronto Island Park for all who visit or live there.

Issues to be addressed:

Toronto Island Park is not always perceived as a welcoming, accessible, or safe place for all. The diversity of Island visitors can be limited and does not reflect the diversity of the City's population. One of the most impactful signs of this, is that many communities that live outside of Toronto's downtown core and/or outside the City's limits don't even know that the islands exist, or that it is a

park that they can visit. In addition, its physical presence as an island separates it from the city and requires other means of transportation to get there. This is admittedly part of the charm of the Island, and yet limits access to some of the other park users. The inner harbour acts as one of the most obvious barriers for equitable access to the park. Economic barriers to getting there include travelling to the ferry via transit or personal vehicle in addition to the cost of the ferry ride itself, and prices for food and Island attractions can be too expensive for many. On the Island, getting information about and participating in affordable programming and activities across the park are limited. There is also a lack of inexpensive or diverse food choices and access to water fountains—to say nothing of unpredictable impacts caused by flooding and the pandemic.

What we have heard:

We have heard that many park visitors belong to different equity-deserving communities, but the services and programs offered do not always reflect the diversity of our city or promote opportunities to share different cultural experiences within Island spaces. The Island also includes many significant places and histories that are hidden or untold, leading to confusion about why some spaces are valued more strongly as focal points than others. We have heard about the confusion around private and public spaces throughout the park (e.g. the Marina and Yacht Clubs)—some of which are perceived as private, unwelcoming spaces—either as a result of operations and management practices, dedicated use agreements and leases, or legacy fencing inadequate pathways and missing or confusing signage. Yet these spaces are part of the park and should be more open and accessible for park uses. We have heard that the Island—specifically Hanlan's beach is a historic place for the LGBTQ2S+ community and that it is the original site of the historic Caribanna festival, the site of the first Pride Picnic and a beloved destination for many immigrant and refugee communities settling into a new life in Canada. Considerations for the future park need to embrace the storied past and legacy of the Island as a refuge and sanctuary, a place of healing and sharing and a place to gather and restore, a place that celebrates our diversity and reinforces the sense of being part of a larger community.

Ideas + Actions being considered:

The following ideas are based on inputs received through an extensive engagement process during Phase 1, and include inputs from City staff at various divisions, advisory groups, and the public.

1. Relieving economic barriers

- Explore program opportunities to provide affordable access and activities for all ages, abilities, and incomes on the Island
- Reinvest in existing infrastructure and spaces to enhance affordable experiences and enjoyment of the park
- Provide affordable and diverse food options

2. Diversifying representation in Island businesses and programs

- Create a variety of spaces and opportunities to attract and retain diverse and under-served service providers to the Island
- Simplify park permit processes (e.g. BBQs and Fire Pits)
- Provide more picnic tables and shelters distributed through the park
- Implement Business Strategy recommendations to support diverse procurement and business operations

3. Expanding opportunities for visitors experiencing disabilities to explore the park

- Encourage multi-sensory experiences within natural areas (such as quiet areas to encourage listening for wildlife)
- Provide accessible transportation to and from the island and throughout the park
- Provide accessible paths within natural areas and water access at beaches and within the water
- Create rest and gathering areas along pathways and access routes

4. Encouraging strategic partnerships to promote access and programs

- Explore opportunities to enhance existing programs and partner with new service providers who specialize in affordable community programming
- Identify opportunities to revitalize and share existing island facilities and infrastructure to deliver complementary programs and improve access through partnerships through all seasons

IDEAS & ACTIONS (embedded within other lenses)

Enhancing Visitor Experience

1. Sharing information to help plan your visit

- Improve communication about how to get places and where to go (map)
- Provide useful and consistent wayfinding signage island-wide
- Expand infrastructure to support on-Island digital access to information
- Create accessible and scalable open spaces at arrival points and distributed throughout the park that can adapt to seasonal fluctuations, and special programming to deliver a consistent visitor experience and help plan your "Day on the Island"
- Provide clearer and friendlier access to information, both online and in-person at the ferries, landing and throughout the park using Island Ambassadors

3. Expanding opportunities for food, rental and retail

- Create a destination at Centre Ferry Landing to provide year-round visitor amenities and programming at Centre Island
- Create new rental opportunities for bikes, boats and beach equipment distributed throughout the park where people need them
- Revitalize ferry landings and gateways to provide a sense of arrival and amenities to address visitor's needs and requirements in peak and off-peak seasons
- Create new space at Gibraltar Point to promote Island-wide activity, embrace opportunities near the Lighthouse and Trout Pond and better connect Centre Island with the west side of the park

4. Enhancing uses on water

- Improve safe and universal access to the Cove and Eastern Channel mooring wall
- Improve swim experience on all beaches

5. Enhancing uses on land

- Create dedicated welcoming spaces, or hubs, at all ferry landings to mark arrival, share information, orient visitors, and provide access to key facilities and amenities to start and end visits to the Island
- Formalize infrastructure to support the event space at Hanlan's Point (e.g. landform, amphitheatre)
- Create affordable overnight camping along a portion of the Hanlan's Mooring Wall and north of Trout Pond to take advantage of existing facilities nearby
- Revitalize Olympic Island to mitigate flooding and restore pavilion and structures to celebrate and enhance views of the city skyline
- Expand Hanlan's Beach clothing optional area
- Enhance and revitalize existing structures across the islands to create spaces for gatherings of various sizes in all seasons
- Identify opportunities for new structures, warming shelters and winterized washrooms associated with new and existing circulation routes and activity hubs to support year-round use of island facilities

6. Sharing all the Island stories

- Enhance online information and storytelling
- Expand Wayfinding island-wide
- Curate Narrative Trail and loops / lookouts
- Identify and share history and cultural heritage of the entire Island
- Establish strategy for Cultural markers and flags in alignment with City policy

7. Celebrating the role of art in placemaking

- Identify opportunities to partner with existing Island establishments to deliver programming and enhance existing offerings
- Explore opportunities to deliver seasonal, year-round, and permanent installations
- Identify opportunities for installations, projects, and programs at varying scales to suit sites, expertise, and capacities of partners.

Supporting a Dynamic Environment

5. Enhancing visitor experience in nature

- Expand access to online information about programming and events, trip planning and wayfinding through park website and partner communications
- Develop wayfinding strategy that builds on existing standards and contributes to a consistent and informative experience across the islands and city-wide.
- Integrate interpretation of ecological, social, and historical character of the Island within narrative trails and themed loops
- Create opportunities for multi-sensory experiences (sound, texture, scent) within natural heritage areas for visitors experiencing disabilities and those wanting to explore alternate ways of engaging with nature

Improving Access and Connection

1. Improving (Water) Transportation to the Island

- Enhance Ferry landings to support Ferry Fleet replacement, improved accessibility, sustainability, flood mitigation and improved visitor amenities

2. Improving Circulation on the Island

- Expand pedestrian trail networks to support expanded and intensive uses
- Consider new pedestrian bridges within the park at key points to improve accessibility across the islands
- Create opportunities to use the internal waterways to move through and experience the park through water nodes and enhancement of rental opportunities
- Enhance wayfinding with new signage on land and water and digital information sharing

3. Enhancing Accessibility

- Provide Accessible Tram service to all ferry landings and stops at key destinations across the island
- Provide accessible connections to existing spaces (beaches, in-water, ESAs)
- Create integrated rest areas within new pathway system and along existing routes
- Explore opportunities for digital wayfinding including curated interpretation and signage elements at key locations