

Moss Park Improvements & John Innes Community Recreation Centre Replacement Project

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT: Indigenous Communities' Meeting #1

August 31, 2022



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| 1.0 About this Report | 3 |
| 1.1 Project Schedule | 3 |
| 1.2 Indigenous Communities' Engagement Timeline | 3 |
| 1.3 Meeting Overview | 4 |
| 2.0 What We Heard | 5 |
| 2.1 Summary of Key Findings | 5 |

1.0 About this Report

This report summarizes key findings, insights and input collected from the Moss Park Improvements & John Innes Community Recreation Centre Replacement Project's first meeting held with Indigenous Communities.

1.1 Project Schedule

Summer 2022 - Phase 1: SET THE STAGE

Introduce the project, explain the process, and lay the project groundwork.

WE ARE HERE

Summer 2022 – Fall 2022 Phase 2: CONFIRM THE VISION, PRINCIPLES, BIG MOVES

Introduce the project, revisit More Moss Park findings, and explore how things have changed since 2015. Better understand evolving local issues and how the project can best support local needs. Confirm the Principles and Big Moves of the project.

Fall 2022 to Spring 2023: Phase 3 - CONCEPT DESIGN OPTIONS

Use what we learn in Phase 2 to start developing ideas for park amenities and concepts for the new Community Recreation Centre. Review ideas through design options presented to the community and revise ideas based on feedback.

Spring 2023: Phase 4 - PREFERRED CONCEPT

Refine the concept plans for the park and John Innes CRC based on feedback and present the preferred concept to the community. Review ideas with the community and revise plans and designs based on feedback.

1.2 Indigenous Communities' Engagement Timeline

Engagement with Indigenous Communities' will include ongoing direct communication with local Indigenous organizations and individuals at each phase of the project. The following are scheduled engagement activities with the Indigenous Communities:

- **Connect with Council Fire - Spring 2021 (COMPLETE)**
- **Indigenous Communities Meeting #1 (COMPLETE)**
- Indigenous Communities Meeting #2
- Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council Meeting
- Indigenous Communities Meeting #3

1.3 Meeting Overview

| | |
|---------------|---|
| WHEN: | August 31, 2022, at 4:00 PM to 5:45 PM |
| WHERE: | Virtually on Zoom |
| ATTENDEES: | 13 Participants |
| PROJECT TEAM: | City of Toronto – Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division PROCESS (Public and Stakeholder Engagement) The Planning Partnership (Landscape Architecture) Two Row Architect (Landscape Architecture & Indigenous Lens) MJMA (CRC Architecture & Design) |

The virtual meeting took place over Zoom, with a total of 13 participants. The meeting began with a welcome and Land Acknowledgement. The project team went over the goals for the meeting which included the following:

1. Provide an update on Moss Park Improvements & John Innes Community Recreation Centre Replacement project
2. Provide some background and context for the project
3. Present Park design work
4. Present Community Recreation Centre design work
5. Have a group discussion

The group discussion was facilitated by Trina Moyan, Indigenous Engagement Lead for the project. The discussion was open-ended so participants could comment on all aspects of the project goals and components. The discussion was guided by a general set of questions:

- How can the future Moss Park and John Innes Community Recreation Centre better serve Indigenous communities? What is important to include in the park to reflect Indigenous Placekeeping?
- What is important for the project team to consider when designing the future of these community spaces
- What features, programs or amenities in the park would help you and your community feel welcome?
- What values and approaches to the park improvements design and operation are important to you?
- Are you interested in stewardship opportunities? What would that involve?

2.0 What We Heard

2.1 Summary of Key Findings

The following section is a summary of key considerations for the future John Innes Community Recreation Centre and Moss Park improvements shared during the meeting. Overall, participants wanted to ensure ongoing involvement with the park improvements and Community Recreation Centre redevelopment. As summarized below, participants reflected on:

- **Opportunities for Indigenous Placekeeping**
- **Features, Programs or Amenities**
- **Values and Approaches**
- **Design Considerations**

Opportunities for Indigenous Placekeeping

Participants shared that there is a need for clear, open, and visible invitations to enter the new CRC and improved park. For participants, this could look like incorporating Indigenous art into the design of fencing or having seating areas for park users to listen and share. For the playground area, it was suggested to have simple Indigenous words that children can learn in hopscotch squares or along the ground or walls. They also felt that the basketball court would be a good spot for Indigenous art. Creating a legacy space within the Community Recreation Centre, in areas such as a study room was also suggested - the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund was suggested as an organization that could facilitate this component. One participant asked about what the City's definition of Indigenous Placekeeping Included and they were directed to page 44 of the [2022-2032 Reconciliation Action Plan](#).

Features, Programs, or Amenities

When reflecting on features, programs and amenities that would make Indigenous communities feel welcome, participants shared that it would be meaningful to have spaces for ceremony and healing. Regarding stewardship, participants felt that it would be appropriate for the City to partner with Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving organizations to support the operations of amenities and programs in the park and in the community recreation centre.

Spaces for Ceremony

Participants inquired about the possibilities to have smudging ceremonies inside the facility and on the proposed green roof. City staff referred to the presentation which showed where a proposed smudging room would be in the community centre. Staff also mentioned that there would be seasonal access to the green roof to hold smudging ceremonies as well.

While participants acknowledged that there were several sacred fire locations identified in adjacent communities, they shared that the ability to have Sacred Fires in Moss Park was important. City staff shared that a draft plan for sacred fire locations in downtown parks which is being led by the Indigenous Affairs Office (IAO) has identified Allan Gardens and Regent Park but not Moss Park for sacred fires, based on engagement with Indigenous communities. However the conversation about sacred fire locations is still open and feedback from this

meeting will be shared with IAO staff. Staff also confirmed that while the City is in the process of decolonizing permits, a permit is not currently needed for a sacred fire to be hosted. Sharing an example from Eglinton Park, one participant felt that having a medicine garden space that is gated would also be culturally responsive. They suggested that the garden be gated to discourage inappropriate conduct in the garden by members of the public.

Many participants mentioned that having a permanent sweat lodge would be important. They felt that the sweat lodge should be permanent and be kept in a secluded area such as the rooftop. Having the sweat lodge in an area that is away from high traffic areas in the park or community recreation centre could protect it from vandalism. Members of the project team noted that a sweat lodge will be included in the new Anishnawbe Health location – it is important to note that this is not a public/City run space. Participants mentioned that a sweat lodge was planned for Allan Gardens, however staff were able to confirm that a sweat lodge is not currently being planned for Allan Gardens. Furthermore, Matthew Hickey of Two Row Architects, advised that the rooftop is not suitable for a sweat lodge as sweat lodges need to be on the ground, very secure and private.

Programming

Participants proposed that there be times dedicated for Indigenous-only programs such as youth fitness in the John Innes CRC fitness area. They suggested the creation of a hub or a room such as an Eshkiniigjik Naandwechigegamig (ENAGB) for Indigenous programming and gatherings. City staff that were present confirmed that programming that is currently running at the CRC will continue in the new space and that another consultation will be held closer to the end of construction to learn how local organizations would like to use the space.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Participants wanted to ensure that the park was accessible to all. While there was mention of the need to accommodate different modes of transportation including wheelchairs and skateboards, participants were focused on ensuring that existing park users, specifically those who reside in the park or in nearby shelters that use the park during the day, would access the park in the future. Citing the growing number of tents in Allan Gardens in recent months, one participant asked how many people are currently residing in Moss Park. City staff confirmed that there are no encampments in the park at present. Staff explained that the park will not be designed for people to live in the park because overnight stays are not allowed by City by-laws. They also shared with participants that there will be social elements in the park design for use by all park visitors that will help as many people as possible are comfortable accessing the park. The features being considered include drinking water, misting stations during hot weather, hand-warming stations, washrooms accessible from the park, and showers as a recreation feature that can be used by everyone. Participants agreed that these elements will ensure that the park is inclusive and supports the needs of a range of park and community centre users.

Values and Approaches

Approach to Engagement

Participants shared that it was important to ensure that the Indigenous communities' needs are included within the plan and that this was a signifier that the Reconciliation Action Plan is being meaningfully implemented throughout this process. One participant asked about how the

Indigenous community has been engaged in the design of the recreation centre to date. It was explained by a member of the project team that we are currently in the early stages of the process.

Overall, participants felt that the future park should incorporate features and programs that are trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and practical. For participants this would include incorporating a sweat lodge which would bring healing, identifying job opportunities that are associated with the park improvement and community centre renovation, and helping to mitigate the disruption to current park users by construction. They also felt that the programs and services should be free and accessible to youth.

Employment Opportunities

Regarding employment opportunities, participants felt that this could be approached by identifying opportunities throughout the duration of the project life cycle and beyond that Indigenous people can participate in. Participants described that during the construction phase, opportunities for hiring Indigenous-led contractors or establishing local hiring initiatives with hiring targets would be beneficial (such as a Community Benefits Agreement). This was described as a poverty reduction measure that could help develop sustainable careers for community members over the long term.

In the operation stage, participants shared that it would be important that the City of Toronto hire Indigenous staff and stewards in the park and community centre. It was felt that City staff often have a lack of cultural competency which makes it challenging for Indigenous people to navigate booking systems, for example. For participants, it would be easier to explain why they would like to hold cultural events such as a sacred fire to another Indigenous person. However, they felt that all City staff should be able to support Indigenous community members who need to navigate City procedures and systems.

City staff confirmed that they are working on implementing directives to increase recruitment of Indigenous people and that they are also reviewing the hiring practices for Indigenous communities. They also highlighted several initiatives that are currently underway: hiring for Parks, Forestry and Recreation Policy Development Officer (Indigenous Placekeeping Framework), Parks Program Officer (horticulture and Greenhouse Operations), and mandatory Indigenous competency training for City staff.

Safety Considerations

Upon reviewing what the project team has learned in earlier stages of the Park Improvements and Community Recreation Centre consultations, participants were concerned with how safety concerns were framed around issues with people experiencing homelessness. They brought up the intersection between homelessness and Indigeneity and shared that one of the biggest challenges that Indigenous communities have in the park is navigating stigmas and stereotypes associated with Indigenous populations which make the park unsafe for them. Participants felt that there needed to be further acknowledgement that people experiencing homelessness are vulnerable. The incorporation of spaces for healing such as a sweat lodge as well as social support services including employment connections were seen as ways to support this user group.

Design Considerations

Green Roof

Participants liked the idea of having a green roof on the Community Recreation Centre and saw it as an essential element of the design. They also saw the opportunity to use the green roof as a training space for those interested in low carbon construction job opportunities.

Natural Heritage

Participants expressed concerns about the number of trees that were removed during the Metrolinx construction project. They inquired about the potential to have a tree removal ceremony with Indigenous people. The tree removal ceremony would memorialize and respect the life of the trees that will be lost during construction. City staff shared that they would reach out to the Metrolinx Liaison to initiate a conversation about hosting a tree removal ceremony.