

Toronto Island Master Plan

About the Master Plan

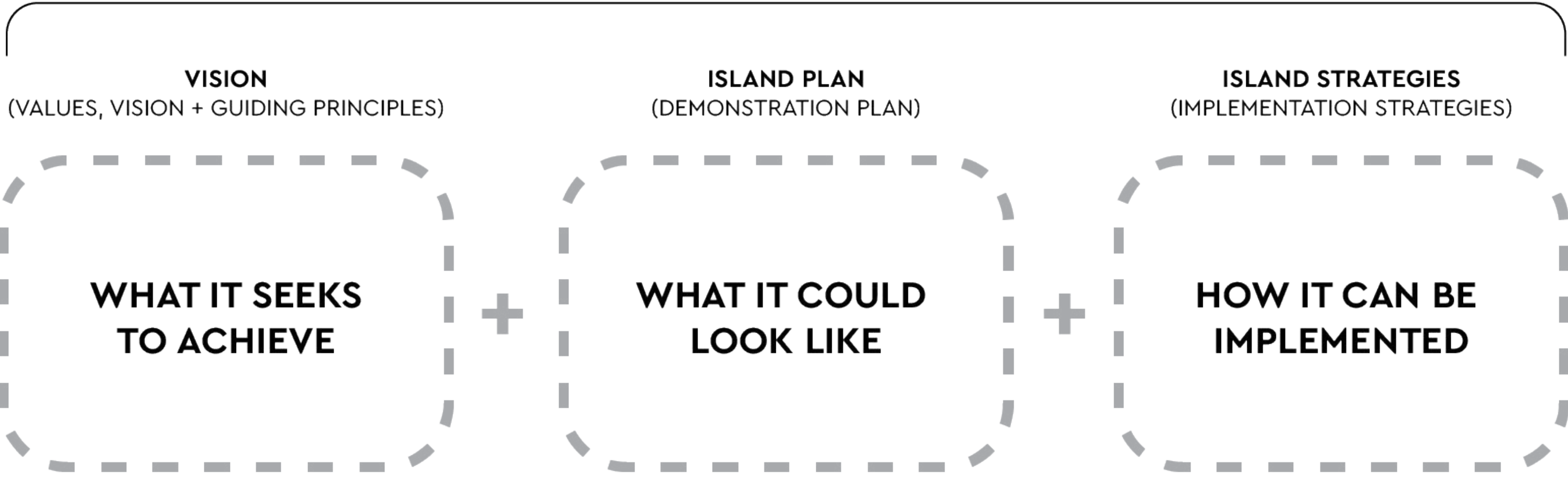
What is the purpose of the Master Plan?

A Master Plan does not get implemented all at once; it guides decision-making over many years.

The Toronto Island Park Master Plan is a long-term planning document that acts as a blueprint to inform future decision-making around improvements, programming, and management of the park. It informs operations and prioritization of future park improvements.

The Toronto Island Park Master Plan is structured into three complimentary parts: the vision; demonstration plan; and, implementation strategies. Together each part explains different aspects of the overall plan.

TORONTO ISLAND PARK MASTER PLAN



For thousands of years, the Toronto Islands have been a place for healing and ceremony for Indigenous peoples. Today they continue to hold significance for the Indigenous Rights Holders and diverse urban Indigenous communities that call Toronto home. They are also one of Toronto's signature parks and act as an oasis for Torontonians from many walks of life. However, in recent years, the park has faced pressures, including increased demand, aging infrastructure and flooding.

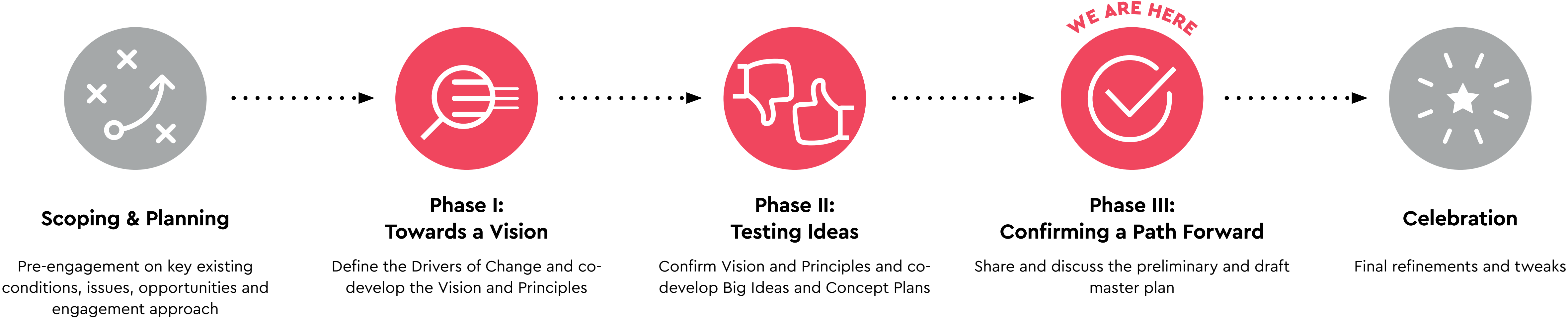
The Toronto Island Park Master Plan will address these issues and ensure the park can be a cherished gathering place for generations to come. It will be a long-term planning document that is being co-created with Indigenous rights holders, local communities, and the public through a gradual process of many engagement opportunities. The Master Plan is designed to be an iterative and responsive process. It will outline a Vision, Values, Guiding Principles and Big Ideas to guide change and investment in Toronto Island Park over many years.

What is included in the Study Area?

The study area for the Toronto Island Park Master Plan includes all of Toronto Island Park—including the extensive network of shorelines and internal waterways—and the area around the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal on the city side of the harbour.

It does not include the island's residential areas, the service area around the Island Water Treatment Plant, or Billy Bishop Toronto Centre Airport.

Engagement Process



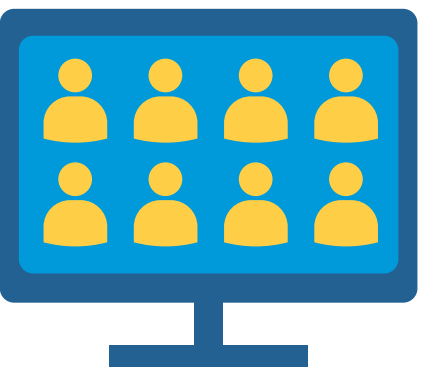
Find out more and get involved:

www.toronto.ca/IslandMasterPlan

Toronto Island Master Plan

Engagement Snapshot

Over the last year and a half, we've heard many ideas, from thousands of Torontonians across the City and from all walks of life, who shared what they would like to see in the future of the park. Here is a snapshot of some of the engagement activities we have completed and some of the comments and inputs we have heard so far:



375+

participants at 2 Virtual Public Workshops and 1 Open House



15

Indigenous engagement and placekeeping meetings including dialogues with First Nations, Métis and urban Indigenous communities



4.5+ million

people reached through social media promotion, with approx. **40,000** engagements



12+

targeted discussions and focus groups, including those about Island's:

- Accessibility
- Natural Resources
- Flood Mitigation
- Programs and Activation
- Tourism and Events
- Infrastructure and Operations
- Cultural Heritage
- Businesses
- Hanlan's and 2SLGBTQ+ Communities & more



10

youth aged 15–27 from across the city involved in the **Youth Ambassador Program**, led:

- pop-ups in 3 parks, and
- 2 virtual games night



5

online engagements with a total of approx. **20,000** respondents about:

- Visioning and What's Working Well
- Big Ideas
- Draft Demonstration Plans
- Wayfinding
- Eat, Play, Explore



8

Meetings with the **Technical Advisory Committee**, and **Community Advisory Committee** including on-island and community organizations, waterfront organizations, city-wide organizations



600+

attended the **Launch Ceremony**, and **Forums on Indigenous Placekeeping and Belonging in Parks**



4+1

4 Deep Dives and **1 Indigenous Sharing Meeting** on the Master Plan lenses with **130+** participants

What We Heard

...through broader public engagement:

Love, appreciation, and respect for the Island and the diversity of things to do and celebrate.

Support and interest in Revealing an Indigenous Place, protecting and restoring nature, and making going to the Island easier and more affordable.

Commonly shared concerns related to potential impacts to the natural environment, and whether adding more people and activities to the park will add to any additional stress.

Other commonly shared advice:

- Improve equitable access and accessibility to and across the Island in a seamless way.
- Improve and add to existing amenities, like more washrooms and rest areas.
- Provide diverse business offerings, from food to rentals, as well as year-round activities.
- Create gateways at the ferry landings and include hubs for activities and information sharing.
- And more!

...through Indigenous engagement:

Indigenous communities must be meaningfully involved in co-management, programming, and collaboration.

Ceremonial space is exciting and needs careful thinking around management, representation, and safety.

The idea of naming and renaming is very important and must be done meaningfully.

Other commonly shared advice:

- Make Indigenous history, identity, and living culture more visible, including through signage, interpretation, landscaping, and other Master Plan elements.
- Create economic opportunities for Indigenous businesses.
- Create spaces for arts and cultural programming.
- And more!

Toronto Island Master Plan

Tell us what you think!

What part of the Draft Master Plan do you value most and why?

Is there anything missing in the Draft Master Plan, or anything you would like to see changed?

What would you like to see prioritized in the Draft Master Plan and why?

For any other questions or comments, email: islandmasterplan@toronto.ca

Learn more about Toronto Island Park Master Plan:



www.toronto.ca/IslandMasterPlan

Toronto Island Master Plan

Drivers for Change

The following challenges and opportunities have been identified and drive the need for the development of a comprehensive and strategic plan for Toronto Island Park:

The Island's one-of-a-kind identity is uncelebrated.

Since time immemorial, the Island has been a place of escape, respite and healing. It is also a meeting place for family and friends that welcomes a wide range of visitors including the Indigenous community, newcomers and LGBTQ2S+. Toronto Island is a one of a kind place and yet its natural character, rich and storied past and unique identity is largely unknown.

The Indigenous history and significance of the Island is not well known.

The Island is an important Indigenous place, and has been for millennia. For the Michi Saagiig, it was simply known as Mnisiing, meaning “on the islands.” Later, they were collectively known as Aionwatha or Hiawatha’s Island. It has also been long considered as a meeting place and a place of healing and ceremony for Indigenous people. This rich history and living culture is not reflected in Toronto Island Park as it exists today.

The Island's cultural and natural heritage are undervalued.

The Island is a place rich in cultural and natural heritage. It includes several significant ecosystems that contribute not only to local ecological processes, health and function, but also form part of larger important regional systems, including being a part of migratory bird flyways. The diverse and complex history of human use and interaction within the Island's natural and built spaces and it's value as a refuge and escape for many underserved communities are also unshared are not well known. Many people are unaware of the origins of the Island's natural land form and significance as a defining feature for the inner harbour and the role this played in the establishment of Toronto as a settlement, and the city that we know today.

The Toronto Island visitor experience could be improved.

Toronto Island is a special place that offers a different experience to everyone that visits or lives there. People come to Toronto Island for many different reasons, for example: hiking, biking, picnicking, spending time at Centreville, participating in events and celebrations, cruising on boats, paddling the internal waterways or spending a lazy afternoon at the beach. Many people simply come to escape the city—to recharge and reconnect with nature. Despite the many different reasons for coming, the Toronto Island visitor experience has untapped potential and has room for improvement!

The Island has unrealized and under-realized business opportunities that should be explored and improved to advance a holistic visitor experience.

The Toronto Island is a dynamic place with many opportunities for small and large businesses to provide diverse and high-quality visitor experiences. These opportunities should be better coordinated island-wide to ensure Toronto Island Park reaches its full potential. Currently, there are gaps in commercial offerings and it is difficult for small and diverse suppliers to enter the Island's market. These challenges also extend to customer service, commercial offerings, improving the operating environment and trying to reduce or remove some of the logistical challenges of running an on-island business. Current business operations on the Island need to be examined to ensure the City is doing all it can to facilitate high-quality and diverse service offerings which respond to the needs of Toronto Island Park visitors through all seasons.

Access & Accessibility – It can be difficult to get to the Island.

Toronto Island should be a place for everyone with limited or no obstacles and barriers to getting there and getting around the Island itself to share in the many Island experiences. This includes accessing dock areas, ferries, buildings, and park amenities, as well as the Island attractions, beaches (including the water) and the many natural experiences the Islands have to offer.

Toronto Island is a dynamic environment that is constantly changing.

The Toronto Islands originated as a sandbar and has evolved over time into the islands that make up the park we are familiar with today. The landform is subject and vulnerable to the whims of mother-nature, the island's environment is constantly changing, presenting ongoing operational, service delivery and management challenges that require on-going investment.

Toronto Island and its supporting infrastructure is aging.

Much of the Island's infrastructure was installed decades ago and is aging and in various states of repair. In addition, environmental impacts from high lake effect, flooding and erosion have contributed to the decline of Island infrastructure. Despite ongoing capital investments and improvements to ensure the safety of the public and continued use of the park facilities and amenities, additional investments and updates are required. To ensure public safety and mitigate environmental impacts of flooding and erosion, a more strategic plan for coordinating these improvements is needed. This will help to ensure that the future function and sustainability of the park is maintained for future generations.

Population Growth is placing increasing demands on Parks.

The population of downtown Toronto is growing at a pace that far exceeds the population growth for the city as a whole, with an estimated 10,000 residents added each year. According to the City's new TOcore Downtown Secondary Plan, downtown could nearly double in size by 2041, to reach a population of 475,000. The TOcore Parks and Public Realm Plan has also identified that downtown Toronto is highly parkland deficient and has linked population growth with increased demand and use of parks. In response, the City's Parkland Strategy has identified Guiding Principles to Expand, Improve, Connect and be more Inclusive with our Park system to respond to the city's growth and to ensure our parks become more accessible, functional, connected and resilient. Toronto Island Park can help to achieve these goals for the benefit of the downtown core and overall city.

Toronto Island Master Plan

Values

Through engagement and collaboration with Rights Holders, City staff, community representatives, and the general public the following values were developed to guide the master plan process and recommendations.

Values are fundamental requirements for guiding the master plan. They are overarching ideals that are universally true, regardless of context or specific conditions. The values outlined here form the basis of the vision and guiding principles in support of the overall master plan. They also apply beyond the limits of this study and align with the City's corporate and divisional strategic initiatives overall. Quite simply, the Toronto Island Park Master Plan must embody all of these values.

Respect for both people and nature by:

- acknowledging the land as a living being;
- advocating for the rights of all living beings and systems first - and as part of interconnected and interdependent systems and existence; and,
- honouring the practices and rights of past, present and future inhabitants.

Diversity of cultures, practices and people as well as biodiversity by:

- prioritizing inclusion and celebration of differing worldviews, experiences, and abilities;
- ensuring equitable access to amenities, facilities, and services; and,
- protecting and restoring sensitive and unique environments and habitats.

Balance between active and passive, local and visitor, long-term and short-lived by:

- considering the needs of all parts of a system in the sharing and distribution of resources; and,
- prioritizing the needs of the natural environment in addition to human use and comfort.

Accountability in process, practice and principles by:

- committing to transparent processes;
- developing sustainable investment in social, environmental, and economic initiatives; and,
- cultivating lasting relationships with rights holders, stakeholders, and communities in stewardship of this place.



Toronto Island Master Plan

Vision

The vision identifies the aspirations and speaks to the end goals of the master plan. It looks to the past for context and understanding, identifies a path forward, and also sits within the shared values of the project to reveal the outcomes and realization of this master plan.

The Park will be a place to:

Protect + Restore

The Toronto Islands have long been a place of rest and respite for all living beings. They have been a place of healing and escape for generations of humans and a home to many unique and significant natural habitats that are integral to the health and resilience of local and global natural systems.

As Toronto continues to grow and evolve, Toronto Island Park will be a place where dynamic natural environments and sensitive habitats are protected and supported through stewardship, education, and management that prioritizes ecological integrity and sustainability. It will be a safe place for community, where all are welcome and equitable access is central to the experience of the park for all living beings. It will be a place to seek refuge from urban life and stresses and experience the healing and restorative powers of being immersed within nature. It will be a park for generations to enjoy and experience through thoughtful management and understanding of the needs of all living beings that call this place home.



Honour + Celebrate

The Island has been a place of significance for various communities over generations. It has been a place to meet and gather, to celebrate what makes us unique and what we share. It has long stood as common ground where all who came here were visitors and shared what the islands could provide.

Toronto Island Park will be a place that embraces the sovereignty of the land, water and sky within the park as living beings and actively seeks to share the Indigenous significance through placekeeping, place-making, and place-revealing. It will be a place where diversity is celebrated and supported through sharing the identity, character, and legacy of the islands by uplifting and sharing different perspectives and revealing all the stories of the park, new and old. It will be a place of belonging that is inclusive and celebratory of Indigenous communities, Black communities, People of Colour, LGBTQ2S+, women and gender non-conforming people, disabled people, children and youth, seniors, people experiencing poverty and all equity-deserving communities.



Play + Explore

The dynamic nature of the Toronto Islands and the sand-swept landscape have always been a source of awe and wonder for visitors. The shifting forms and changing ecology created a place that was new and different each time one set foot on its shores. Its restorative character created ideal spaces for recreation and escape and the islands evolved into destinations for play and adventure.

Toronto Island Park will be a place that embraces the wonder and joy of the ever-changing landscape through a new understanding of play for all ages and abilities—over time and through all seasons. It will deliver experiences that are special to this place by acknowledging the uniqueness and dynamic character of the islands—past, present, and future. It will promote sharing, learning, and teaching through land-based practices, partnerships with diverse and under-represented voices, and programming that reflects the variety of lived experiences and worldviews that make up Toronto. It will ensure equitable access through accessible and affordable spaces, experiences, and connections that invite all to visit, experience and explore the natural and man-made wonders the park has to offer.



Toronto Island Master Plan

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are the rules for how the master plan should meet the objectives of the project and respond to the drivers identified at the outset of this study. These guiding principles are specific to the approach for Toronto Island Park.

The Park should:

Honour and respect Indigenous communities, placekeeping, and their rights and responsibilities to the islands and water

Celebrate and protect the unique cultural identity and spirit of the islands

Prioritize, protect, and advocate for the ecological integrity of the islands

Leverage the dynamic nature of the islands and waterways to support adaptive and flexible uses

Demonstrate resilience, sustainability, and responsible landscape and water management

Prioritize equitable access and inclusion and correct the perception of private and public spaces within the park's limits

Enhance the visitor experience for all seasons

Provide diverse amenities and experiences to encourage exploration, sharing, and discovery

Support opportunities for diverse and sustainable businesses to thrive

Develop evidence-based strategic investments to ensure long-term and continued success, and plan in a financially sustainable manner

Prioritize the enhancement and adaptation of undervalued assets to support new uses

Ensure any new development embodies the spirit of the Island's character

Toronto Island Master Plan

Master Plan Lenses

The lenses are used to organize ideas, opportunities and challenges that were shared through the Big Ideas engagement and to help understand what the Master Plan should address. The following five lenses helped confirm engagement and technical work for the Master Plan were aligned and supported each other as well as outlining what is important to consider for each perspective in the overall vision and implementation of the plan.



REVEALING AN INDIGENOUS PLACE

Mnisiing, the original name for the islands, is a significant place for the First Peoples of this territory and has been or was used by Indigenous peoples long before written history. Through our continued learning and sharing experiences with elders and traditional knowledge holders, we have heard that since time immemorial, the islands, its sandy shoals, and the sand spits that preceded them were a sacred place where mothers traveled to birth their children, where ceremonies were conducted, where Anishinaabeg harvested staples such as whitefish and wild rice and were places where Indigenous traders to colonial York sought rest and refuge.



ELEVATING EQUITY AND BELONGING

Belonging is an essential part of being human, be it with friends, family or the neighbourhoods and communities that we live in. Belonging is also closely tied to ensuring equity and inclusion – all of which are fundamental to establishing a strong sense of community and supporting safety and well-being. 'Belonging' is centered on tolerance, mutual respect, sharing experiences, and celebrating the differences and similarities we share with one another and the world around us.

Toronto sees diversity as a strength and is a city that strives to create places that welcome people and communities from many diverse backgrounds. This sense of community, pride and belonging needs to also be part of Toronto Island Park for all who visit or live there.



ENHANCING VISITOR EXPERIENCE


Toronto Island Park offers a visitor experience unlike any other while also being one of the largest parks in Toronto. It's spaces have been shaped over time by the Island's rich natural and cultural heritage. Approximately 1.5 million people annually—and as many as 20,000 on a busy summer day—make the journey by boat to the park. The park is home to a wide variety of activities and destinations that offer unique experiences, but the diversity of the City is not fully represented in current food or activity offerings. Island business and programs could be improved.

Toronto Island is open through the summer, while off-season services, programs, and amenities are reduced with limited services in winter. Trip planning and information on the islands needs to be shared beyond the ferry landings.



SUPPORTING A DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT

The Island is an ever-changing place. Formed through the deposit of sand from the erosion of the Scarborough Bluffs over centuries, it supports diverse plants and animals within protected, managed, and unmanaged landscapes. The Island works as an important part of several regional and local natural systems—including being part of the migratory bird flyways—and providing habitat for many endangered and threatened animals and plants. The natural heritage of the park includes municipally, provincially, and federally designated areas of interest. The Island also serves as an active, vibrant, and open park space for exploration and play by humans that is part of the Core Circle of parks and is an important contribution to the City's biodiversity connecting to nearby ecologies.



IMPROVING ACCESS AND CONNECTION

At 242 hectares (598 acres), the Island is one of the largest parks in Toronto with many diverse features that support a wide variety of park experiences for visitors. Toronto Island offers experiences that are only accessible by water. Most of the year, ferries service three landings on the Island and one ferry terminal on the mainland. Private services (water taxi, yacht club tenders) also provide additional access to the islands with landing points across the waterfront. In winter, service is reduced to only the landing at Ward's Island. Circulation facilities on the Island are shared between operations and visitors, which can impact the safety and enjoyment of visitors throughout the park. When on the Island, visitors can rent bicycles and some watercraft through independent businesses.