

# Hanlan's Beach Focus Group Meeting Summary

December 1<sup>st</sup>

## Purpose

Through review of preliminary ideas around access and activation, we will:

1. Confirm access routes and servicing strategies for the park and infrastructure year-round
2. Identify opportunities appropriate to the context and that contribute to an island-specific approach

## Community Participants

- ██████████ - *RyePride (Ryerson University)*
  - Activist and Academic
  - Activist, Author and Academic
  - Aids Committee of Toronto (act)
  - *(advocated for the clothing optional designation of Hanlan's)*
  - *Supporting Our Youth*
  - *Activist (advocated for the clothing optional designation of Hanlan's)*
  - *Trans Lobby Group Toronto Trans Coalition*
  - Pride Toronto
  - *Minister at Trinity St Paul's Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts, former MPP for Parkdale-High Park, and in attendance at the first Gay Picnic at Hanlan's Beach*
- ██████████ - Public Education Coordinator at Yellow Brick House | Centre for Women and Trans People

## Project Team

City: Lori Ellis, Daniel Fusca and Pablo Muñoz,  
Consultant: Victoria Bell - DTAH

## Agenda

Presentation shared: City Staff; Lori Ellis and Consultant; Victoria Bell  
Questions and answers facilitated: Lori Ellis and Consultant; Victoria Bell  
Discussion facilitated: Pablo Muñoz, Daniel Fusca, Lori Ellis and Victoria Bell

## Summary of feedback

The project team facilitated a discussion using 3 questions as a starting point:

1. What are some ways we can make Hanlan's Beach Safer?
2. How might we collaborate with beach users to protect environmentally sensitive areas?

3. What cultural markers are needed at Hanlan's beach to honour its history and significance while maintaining its character?
4. Additional comments or suggestions?

The discussion was facilitated using a Miro board. Answers from participants are summarized and grouped into themes below.

## Safety

### Water Access

#### **Lifeguards**

One of the top concerns raised by participants was safe water access. It was noted that when the lifeguard stations appear to have been moved on at least two occasions so that they were not within in the clothing optional zone.

#### **Motorize Water Vessels**

Several concerns with sea-doo's and boats were also raised. There are no buoys or indicators to keep boats away from swimmers in the clothing optional zone, which means that motorized water vessels go right up to the beach and around swimmers. Loud sound systems on the boats and the disruption of the quiet enjoyment of the beach was also a concern shared by many participants. And finally, it was noted that motorized water vessels pollute the water for swimmers. One suggested solution was creating exclusion zones/swimming zones that keep out motorized vessels.

#### **Sand Quality**

Some participants mentioned that the quality of the beach and sand is also a problem, and that there is often broken glass among the sand.

### Transportation

Several participants mentioned a homophobic attack that happened at the Island over the summer of 2021. It was noted that the incident happened on the pathway on the way to the ferry dock and not at the beach itself. One participant noted that pathways emanating from the Hanlan's ferry dock funnel people to different areas of the park, serving more than just Hanlan's beach goers, and suggested that transportation options such as bike share would provide some safety. The desire to have a bike sharing system on the Island was shared by many participants.

It was also noted that for accessibility reasons there should be some form of transportation other than bikes. One participants suggested a tram.

### Hanlan's Beaches

#### **Crowding**

Participants recommended to expand the "clothing optional" designation in order to address many of the emerging safety issues and challenges. It was brought to the project team's attention that the clothing optional designated area is a small percentage of the overall beach, yet the majority of Hanlan's beach users consolidate in the clothing optional designated area. The rest of the beach remains open/underused in comparison.

### **Clothing Optional Beach and Messaging**

Some participants shared that the expansion of the clothing optional designation would make a clear statement that the beach is a queer friendly space and potentially deter violent, homophobic and transphobic people from attending the beach.

Expanding the boundaries of the beach can be decided with the economic development commissioner. It doesn't need City Council approval. That can be done at any point. –  
Workshop Participant Clothing Optional Beach Designation Activist

### **ESAs**

It was also suggested that this would disperse people across the beach and away from the ESAs, thus reducing the amount of trampling of the environmentally sensitive area bordering the south end of the beach.

### **Designated Areas**

Some participants suggested that if the entire beach was made clothing optional, it could create room for special designations within the beach, like for example a "nude only" area. Some of the nudist participants who attended the workshop remarked that the beach is more and more frequented by people wearing clothes and that there is less space for the nudist community. It was also suggested that there could be a "loud music" section or quiet areas.

### **Homophobic and Transphobic Attacks**

Many participants shared that they were concerned about homophobic and transphobic attacks at the beach or when leaving the beach/park. Some participants brought up a 'queer bashing' that occurred during the summer that sent a young Latinx man to the hospital.

### **Policing and Service Providers**

Several participants brought up fears of policing and over policing as a safety issue. Some participants mentioned racial profiling and racial discrimination on the part of police. Some participants noted that BIPOC beach users are overly policed for drinking at the beach compared to their white counterparts. Some participants said that they didn't feel safe being in the vicinity of armed police officers. A participant stated that the "The last thing we want is more police."

Some participants suggested that there are better ways to regulate what happens at the beach in a way that is culturally sensitive, evidence-based and effective. It was suggested that partnerships could be formed with community outreach groups to keep the beach safe. A beach ambassadors was suggested, particularly one that engages groups that already have a relationship with the queer community. It was mentioned that this could be an opportunity to bring resources back to the community. It was noted that ACT Toronto already does outreach at the beach, and that this could be a model for this approach. The idea of "Community caring for community."

### **Cultural and Historic Markers**

#### **LGBTQ2s+ History**

All participants acknowledged the importance of the beach for the LGBTQ2s+ community and the historic significance of the beach for Canadian queer rights. Some participants at the workshop attended

the first pride picnic hosted at the beach in 1971 and suggested that plaques should be placed at the site to commemorate this, including through the use of photos. Participants also noted that even before the first pride celebration there was gay nudist use of the beach going back to at least the 1940s.

### **Clothing Optional Designation**

Some participants shared that they would like to see a plaque commemorating Hanlan's point becoming clothing optional. This designation was won through a lot of organizing and advocacy by the community and it is very much considered a victory for queer people. One of the participants shared that *"It was Victoria Day weekend. Olivia Chow and Jack Layton were there. It was chilli and wet but it was a fun time."*

### **Cultural Markers**

Most participants suggested that cultural markers and indicators should be placed at the beach so that beach goers know that they are entering a queer-friendly place of historic importance to the community. Some participants suggested a rainbow arch at the ferry docks. A few participants suggested installations with interpretative information on the history of Hanlan's on the way to the beach. One participant mentioned that Artscape Gibraltar hosts an intergenerational LGBTQ program that could be a good partner.

Some participants suggested that the beach display a code of conduct, or beach values somewhere as you enter the beach. This was described as "Signage that declares the values of the space as anti-racist, against transphobic and anti-homophobic."

### **Indigenous Connection**

Many participants talked about the importance of integrating Two-Spirit and Indigenous stories into the beach. Some participants acknowledged that the reasons why Indigenous and queer people have historically attended the beach are very similar: to restore, reconnect, and regenerate.

### **Leading to the Beach**

Some participants suggested installations on the walk up to the beach.

### **Mindful and Respectful**

Participants agreed that cultural markers and interventions needed to remain honest to the natural surroundings and that it would be great to have art installations along that area to tell the narrative in a way that is respectful. Acknowledge why that space needs to remain safe.

## **Environmentally Sensitive Areas**

### **Fencing and Designated Boardwalks**

Some participants noted that the fencing on the north end of the beach and ESA is effective. The south end used to have adequate fencing but because of erosion so much beach has been lost and it has forced people onto the ESAs.

### **Provide Shade**

Some participants noted that not everyone wants to be in the sun when they go to the beach and that it is hard to find shade at Hanlan's. There is desirability for pathways and spaces that are shaded.

### **Expand Clothing Optional Designation into the Park**

Some participants suggested that they would like some parkland, particularly grass areas, to be designated as clothing optional and that this would reduce the amount of people at the beach and on the ESA's sandbars. It was also suggested that expanding the clothing optional designation to the entire beach would reduce the amount of crowding and trampling of the ESA in the South end of the beach.

#### **Plant More Trees**

Some participants suggested that the City planted more trees, shrubs and vegetation. One participant shared that a lot of trees have been lost due to erosion and that this has an impact on the ESAs. It was suggested that trees and shrubs could be planted in the grass areas in the south end (south entrance) of the beach and in southern areas in between Gibraltar and Hanlan's.

#### **Board Walks**

Participants suggested boardwalks to keep people out of the ESAs.