

City of Toronto – Parks, Forestry & Recreation

# **New Park at 229 Richmond Street West**

## **Phase 1: Pre-Engagement & Visioning Thought Exchange Summary Report**

December 2022

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# Contents

- Project Background ..... 3
  - Phase 1: Pre-Engagement and Visioning ..... 3
  - Thought Exchange Process..... 3
  - Project Timeline ..... 4
- How We Reached People ..... 4
  - Print Media ..... 4
  - Digital Media ..... 4
- Thought Exchange Results ..... 5
  - Participation ..... 5
  - Key Insights ..... 5
- Appendix A: Demographics ..... 11
- Appendix B: Response Summary ..... 12

## Project Background

### A new park is coming to 229 Richmond Street West!

There will be a new 2,600 square metre park located at 229 Richmond Street West on the south side. The park site is currently leased to a restaurant and used as an outdoor patio. The City is conducting a two-stage design competition to select a creative and experienced design team for the new park. There will be various opportunities for the community to get involved in the park design process.

### Phase 1: Pre-Engagement and Visioning

As part of the pre-engagement and visioning phase, community members were invited to engage in a conversation about the new park at 229 Richmond Avenue. This exchange of ideas took place between September 28 and November 4, and received a **total of 1,968 responses** from **3,303 participants** of various ages and backgrounds.




The following report provides a summary of the key insights that will help to inform:

- a community-generated park vision
- the park's future character, design and programming

### Thought Exchange Process

Thought Exchange is an online engagement platform that allows community members to confidentially and independently share their thoughts, appreciate other points of view, and understand how their perspectives are connected to decisions made in the park design process. Community members are first invited to share their vision and ideas about what they would like to see and do in the new park. Participants are then invited to review and prioritize the thoughts of others by placing stars next to the ideas that were most important to them.

Overall, the process includes 3 basic steps:

-  **Share answers** to open ended questions
-  **Add stars** to thoughts shared by others
-  **Discover** what is important to the community

## Project Timeline

The anticipated timeline for this park project is as follows:

- 2023: Hire a design team through a two-stage design competition
- 2022 to 2024: Community engagement (current phase)
- 2023 to 2024: Design development
- 2024: Detailed design and hire a construction team
- 2025: Construction starts
- 2026: Construction complete

The timeline is subject to change.

## How We Reached People

In general, the community was informed of engagement activities through social and print media, listed below:

### Print Media

#### Signage near the site

Project information was displayed on a 36x48 notice board placed on the new park site. The notice board provided information about the project and how to access additional information on the project webpage.

### Digital Media

#### Project Webpage

A webpage ([toronto.ca/229RichmondStreetWest](https://toronto.ca/229RichmondStreetWest)) was set up as a communications portal to inform the public about the new park project. The webpage hosts all up to date information regarding the project, including a sign-up button for e-updates.

#### Social Media and Digital Ads

The City of Toronto used its Facebook and Instagram accounts to promote the virtual community meeting and online survey through paid advertisements and organic posts from September 28 to November 4, 2022.



# Thought Exchange Results

## Participation



3,303

Participants



1,968

Thoughts



50,557

Ratings

## Key Insights

A complete summary of results for the survey questions and responses can be reviewed through this [Thought Exchange auto-generated summary](#). The thoughts shared have been arranged into major themes and sub-themes that highlight specific areas of interest shared by community members. An analysis on the starring patterns of participants was conducted, which surfaced as areas of priority for the community. The following major themes emerged in the thoughts of community members with the total number of thoughts per theme shown in brackets:

- Green Space (866)
- Sports Facilities (475)
- General Park Design (343)
- Accessibility (240)
- Safety (200)
- Park Maintenance (80)
- Seating (62)
- Winter Programming (34)
- Pets (30)
- Shade (26)
- Play Features (24)
- Fitness (23)
- History (23)
- Water Features (20)

Feedback received regarding a dog off-leash area has been noted and will be shared with the appropriate City Staff and will remain outside the scope of the **design** and **construction** project.

## Open & Naturalized Green Space

The new park should be built with a higher portion of green spaces that provide respite from a bustling urban setting and positively contribute to mental health and wellness. These green spaces can take on a variety of forms through the introduction of trees and pollinator gardens. They can also be introduced in more articulated forms, such as through integrating pockets of tall, sweeping grasses, or meadowscapes within a

manicured lawn setting. Lawns create spaces for community gathering and a variety of passive and active activities to co-mingle. Opportunities to shift landscaping towards native species dominant compositions should also be considered in the park design.



Popular relevant thoughts:

- "Too many buildings in the downtown core. We need more simple green space where people can just relax." – 4.7 rating.
- "There should be green space and shade. This area of downtown is particularly void of green space" – 4.6 rating.
- "Locals need more green spaces. This is a great opportunity to liven up the area with more natural elements and create a real urban oasis" – 4.6 rating.
- "Having access to green space is important for everyone's health and we need more access in this area." – 4.6 rating.
- "This is great as our city needs more green space. Good for the environment, our mental and physical health." – 4.5 rating.
- "Greenery. It's lacking in Entertainment District." – 4.5 rating.
- "Natural elements and green space are incredibly important. This part of downtown is very busy and can be stressful at times. Having a place to relax is super vital." – 4.4 rating.

### Trees, Tree Canopy, and Shade

The new park should feature a large quantity of trees to enhance pedestrian comfort by reducing the impact of urban heatwaves and improving microclimatic conditions. Coniferous plantings, for example, are suitable in areas prone to stronger winter winds, and will maintain greenery during winter months. New trees along the street frontage will reduce noise and separate the new park from nearby traffic.



Popular relevant thoughts:

- "Trees are the best way to provide heat-relief during summer time. Downtown needs open public space where people can enjoy nature and cool off." – 4.7 rating.
- "Trees bring happiness." – 4.6 rating.
- "Trees are very rare along Richmond Street, take this park as a chance to change that." – 4.5 rating.
- "A focus on tree canopies to provide people with relief from the heat." – 4.5 rating.
- "Planting a lot of mature trees and other greenery." – 4.5 rating.
- "A green space with trees, shade and fresh air. Nature is relaxing and we don't get enough green spaces in the Entertainment District." – 4.5 rating.

Shade provides essential ultraviolet (UV) protection, relief from the effects of extreme heat, and when trees are planted deliberately, can provide a wind break and protection from the cold. Both natural and permanent built shade structures can offer similar benefits to people.



Popular relevant thoughts:

- "There should be green space and shade." – 4.6 rating.
- "We need more walkable spaces in this city, places to sit and eat under shade with trees and fountains." – 4.5 rating.
- "Lots of trees to create lots of shade. Downtown is often described as a concrete jungle, we need more trees to balance that, and to cool off during summer." – 4.5 rating.
- "Seating in sunny and shaded areas" – 4.4 rating.
- "Green spaces with shade." – 4.3 rating.
- "Heat island effect. Keeping our city and residents cool but also showing we can build quality spaces that perform environmental functions." – 4.2 rating.
- "Green areas, trees, and shade. We barely have trees on the sidewalks here. Visually, it lacks natural elements." – 4.2 rating.

## Biodiversity and Pollinator-Friendly Design

Respondents felt strongly that the new park should increase local biological diversity through the provision of native and non-invasive species. This includes providing a safe and healthy habitat for native insects, wildlife, butterflies and bees, which is key for a healthy biological environment. Planting should also be low-maintenance, resilient, and support a diverse, ecologically-sustainable environment.



Popular relevant thoughts:

- "Lots of indigenous tree canopy, evergreens and other flora native to the region. This must be a very green space with life to it year round. There is so little green space in that area. Think urban forest to give us more nature in the city to sustain insects and birds." – 4.4 rating.
- "Plants and their varieties. Nature and greenery is the best for resting, relaxing and breathing in the city jungle." – 4.4 rating.
- "We need pollinators and trees downtown! We need green spaces to sustain the city. As cities get warmer and denser, shared green spaces have positive environmental and social impact." – 4.4 rating.
- "There should be lots of natural elements, such as large leafy trees that provide shade and habitat for animals" – 4.4 rating.

## Skate Park / Skateboarding Area

Respondents were enthusiastic about building a skateboarding area that includes diverse and varied features for a broad spectrum of difficulties (e.g., from beginner to more advanced features). Supportive amenities should include lighting at night, waste bins, seating, shade, and a drinking water fountain.



Popular relevant thoughts:

- "Having lights will allow full utilization of the park through later hours. Have an abundant amount of trash cans to allow waste to be put away." – 4.5 rating.
- "I believe the city needs more legal spots to skateboard. With an ever expanding population, people need a safe space to gather and push themselves." – 4.4 rating.
- "Skateboarding. Promote active lifestyle and prevent people from skating at private properties and being kicked out." – 4.4 rating.
- "A place to play – for skateboarders and roller-skaters. Accessible sports, popular with lower income, BIPOC youth, and older white folks – unite a huge cross section of people for fitness, fun community." 4.4 rating.
- "Growing sport – healthy for kids and adults – creates positive and inclusive space and safe for everyone." – 4.4 rating.

## Picnic and Gathering Space

Spaces for picnics, gathering and social interaction were identified as priorities for the new park. While these types of features may vary depending on need, such features may include picnic tables, patios and café-style tables, event and gathering spaces, and seating areas (muskoka chairs, seatwalls, benches, etc.).



Popular relevant thoughts:

- "Green space and places to gather." – 4.5 rating.
- "Downtown core absolutely needs more green spaces. Dissipate heat in summer while acting as an outdoor social gathering spot." – 4.5 rating.
- "Benches, benches, benches and tables. People need places to sit, linger and enjoy the park." – 4.3 rating.
- "An outdoor space for people to meet, socialize, exercise, and have community. This is a very dense populated area with most people in condos. We rely on safe public outdoor space to do all the above." – 4.2 rating.
- "Green space and areas to sit and enjoy food. To be able to socialize with people and get greenery in the city." – 4.2 rating.



## Public Art Integration

In selecting park features, consideration should be given to artistic installations that create an attractive, unique and inviting public space. Public art should foster creativity, and may include elements which are interactive and playful, and can be both functional and decorative. Public art may also explore opportunities to celebrate local historic and cultural events, and may play an interpretive or commemorative role, contributing to an identifiable sense of place.



Popular relevant thoughts:

- "Beautiful green space and art." – 4.3 rating.
- "More green space is always appreciated in the city, and I think incorporating art is a great way to bring people together and make Toronto desirable. – 4.3 rating.
- "A park in the downtown core that fosters community, and doesn't cost money to use. Toronto is expensive enough. We need more green spaces which foster community and groups meeting and collaborating. Art and public games in mind." – 4.3 rating.
- "This space needs greenery with all the new development. This is a lively location which should be reflected in the park." – 4.2 rating.
- "Green spaces and an oasis from the main street and pollution from cars. Especially with an emphasis on bringing arts and culture to the community. Bring culture/nature to the forefront." – 4.2 rating.
- "Just came back from Barcelona where parks and squares are plentiful adorned with fountains and art and places to sit under trees. – 4.1 rating.

## Accessibility and Inclusive Park Design

Accessibility is an integral consideration in the park's design. The park will be designed in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, Design of Public Spaces Standards O. Reg 413/12, Ontario Building Code and any other applicable legislation. Consideration should be given to creating an accessible and barrier-free pathway network, access points, resting areas, and drinking water fountain. Avoid the creation of spaces which are disconnected or without a clear purpose.



Popular relevant thoughts:

- "Washrooms. People need to "go". All people." – 4.4 rating.
- "Inclusive and safe area. Everyone should feel welcome and safe while spending time there." – 4.3 rating.
- "Accessible to all, for people of all age groups, abilities and backgrounds. A public space free for anybody to eat, drink, relax through all seasons." – 4.2 rating.
- "Accessibility. Everyone deserves easy access to a public space." – 4.1 rating.

- "Public useability vs. pretty design on paper. Parks should be for people to relax and enjoy. Green space and furniture should be defined for people to actually spend time there." – 4.0 rating.
- "Actually be open and accessible to the public. The City of Toronto likes to have theoretical amenities that are fenced off and locked. Stop that." – 4.0 rating.

## Community Safety

Residents and community members of the neighbourhood consider safety as a top priority for the new park. Adequate lighting should be provided, while maintaining clear, safe sight lines across the new park. Incorporate other community safety practices by considering the following popular thoughts:

- "Lighting to keep the place safe at night." – 4.5 rating.
- "I want it to be a safe place where people can relax and be calm and alone with their thoughts without having to worry about dangers at night. There really are no green spaces in Toronto that feel safe throughout the night and having that would be very useful to people of the city." – 4.5 rating.
- "It needs to be safe (well lit) and clean. I won't use it as a single woman otherwise." – 4.4 rating.
- "Lighting in the evening. Parks should be able to be used in the evening safely." – 4.3 rating.
- "Safety, security and cleanliness. Very popular location, it will take a lot to upkeep and have it remain at its top quality." – 4.3 rating.
- "Safety is a concern sometimes in this neighbourhood. Please ensure the park is well lit." – 4.3 rating.

## Park Maintenance

Ensure the park is well maintained and garbage bins are strategically spread along walking paths and near access points of the parks, park amenities, and green spaces.



Popular relevant thoughts:

- "Green space within the downtown. Clean & safe." – 4.5 rating.
- "It needs sufficient garbage/recycling bins, that aren't left to overflow." – 4.4 rating.
- "Park should be well lit and have lots of garbage disposal. It's located close to lots of bars; the area will be highly trafficked with people passing through or by, some drunk (i.e. more likely to make a mess)." – 4.3 rating.
- "Good maintenance and upkeep is as important as initial design." – 4.3 rating.

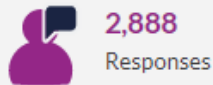
## Appendix A: Demographics

What will be your relationship to the new park at 229 Richmond Street West?



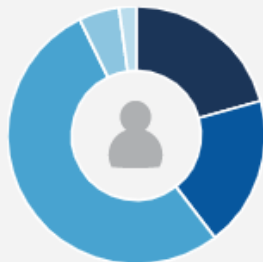
%	Person Icon	Answer
41%	(1198)	I live/will live close to the new park
35%	(1011)	I live in the Downtown Area
24%	(681)	I am a member of the wider City of Toronto community

What are the age(s) of the people who are participating in this activity? Select all that apply.



%	Person Icon	Answer (Multi-select)
8%	(236)	5 to 12 years old
13%	(404)	13 to 18 years old
41%	(1201)	19 to 29 years old
39%	(1131)	30 to 39 years old
22%	(663)	40 to 55 years old
8%	(256)	56 to 64 years old
4%	(135)	65 to 74 years old
2%	(64)	75 years old or above
1%	(40)	Prefer not to answer

What best describes you and your household's access to outdoor space?



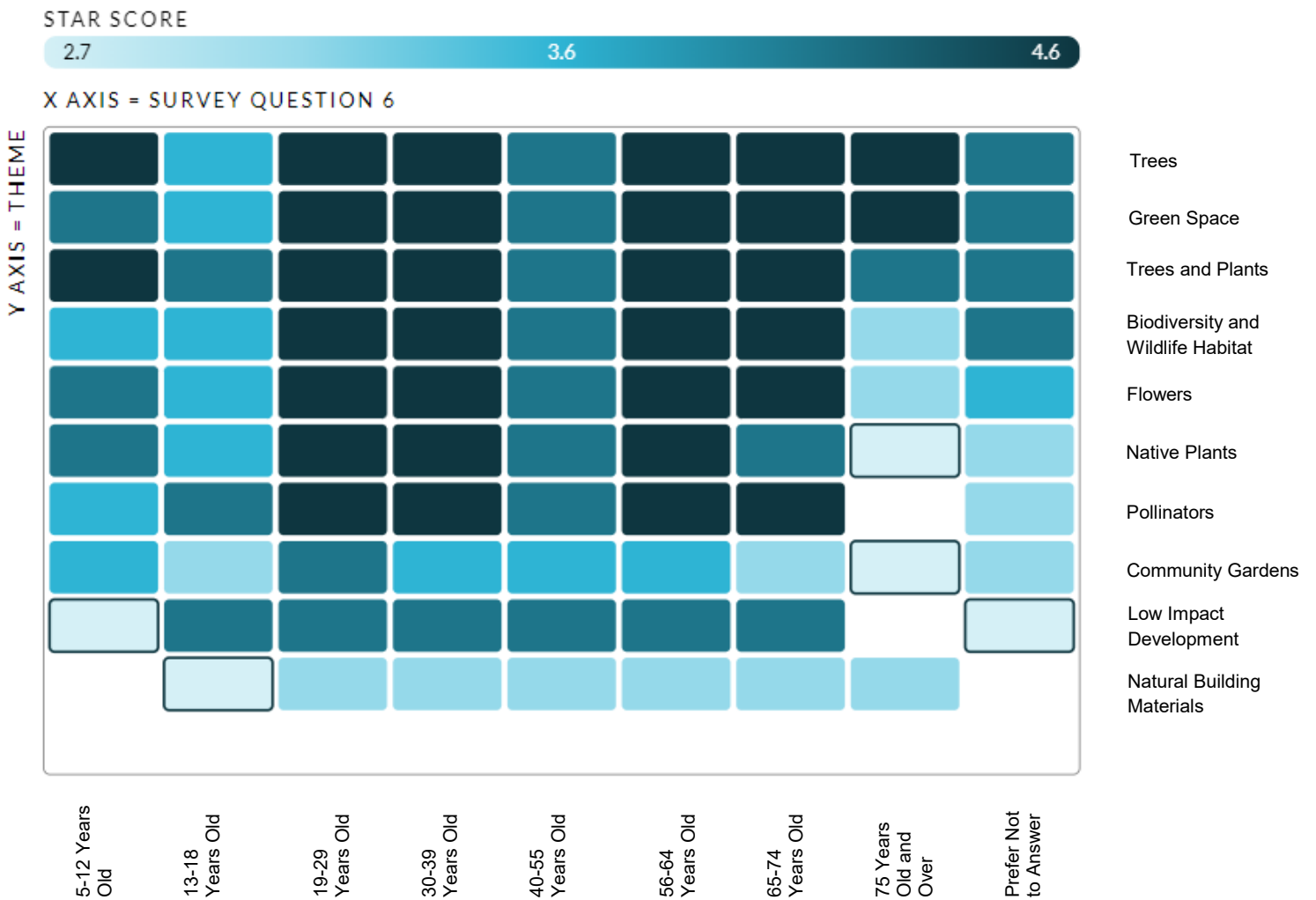
%	Person Icon	Answer
21%	(595)	I/we have access to private outdoor space like a yard
19%	(543)	I/we have access to semi-private/shared outdoor space
53%	(1528)	I/we only have access to public spaces like parks (I do not have access to private or semi-private outdoor space)
5%	(146)	Prefer not to answer
2%	(62)	Other

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## Appendix B: Response Summary

This section of the report includes additional key insights, organized in specific categories that reveal unique user perspectives that will help inform design options. It is important to observe data from various perspectives to ensure the new park, as well as any upcoming engagement events, consider the lived experience of the area's community members. All key themes (Y Axis) are rated out of 5, with 5 representing a highly popular rating and 2.8 or less representing a lower popular rating.

### Green Space and Sustainability Interests, by Age

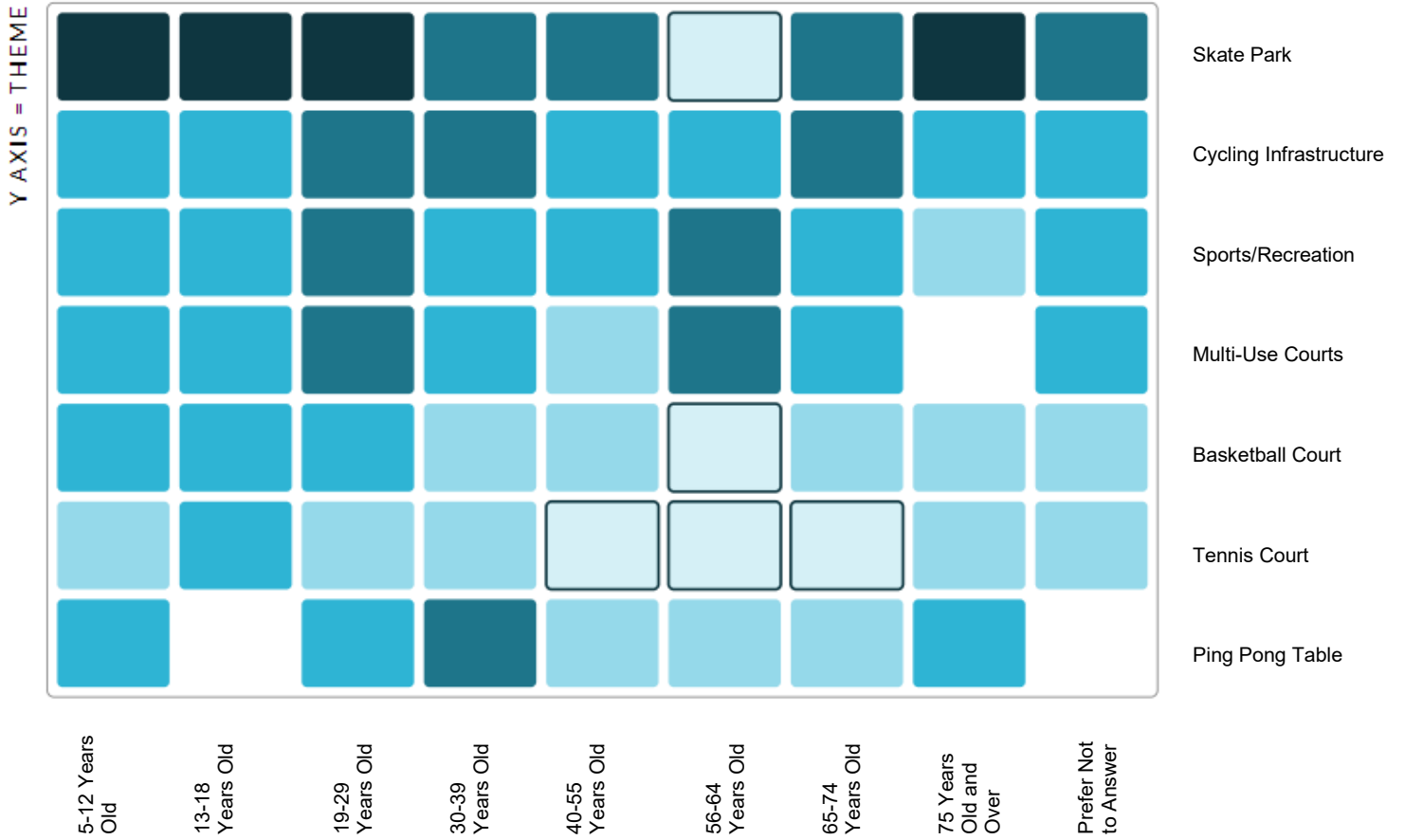


## Sports and Recreational Use Interests, by Age

STAR SCORE

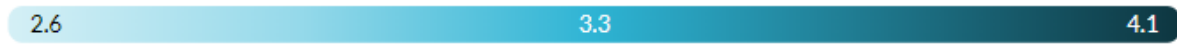


X AXIS = SURVEY QUESTION 6



# Accessibility Interests, by Age

STAR SCORE



X AXIS = SURVEY QUESTION 6

