



PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE SUMMARY REPORT HIGH PARK MOVEMENT STRATEGY

CITY OF TORONTO

PROJECT NO.: IM21202061
APRIL 2023

WSP E&I Canada Limited
3450 Harvester Road, Suite 100
Burlington, Ontario, L7N 3W5

T: +1-905-335-2353

WSP.com



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	ABOUT THIS REPORT.....	1
2	OPEN HOUSE OVERVIEW	1
	OPEN HOUSE OBJECTIVES	1
	FORMAT	1
	PARTICIPATION	1
3	SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED.....	2
	KEY THEMES	2
4	NEXT STEPS	4

1 ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report summarizes the Public Open House for the High Park Movement Strategy that was held on Monday, April 3rd, 2023. It provides an overview of the public drop-in session, open house objectives, information presented, participants, and summary of key themes and feedback gathered.

This report has been prepared by WSP. WSP was retained by the City to provide technical support and expertise in transportation and environmental planning for the High Park Movement Strategy.

2 OPEN HOUSE OVERVIEW

OPEN HOUSE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the open house was to provide an opportunity for the project team to meet with park users and share information about the overall study process and details of the preferred strategy. The information presented at the session provided details about the preferred strategy, how it was developed, findings from background analysis, feedback from the multi-phased engagement process, a description of the evaluation process, and a summary of the coordination with the Parkside Drive Study. Participants were encouraged to discuss proposed changes with the project team, clarify elements of the preferred strategy, share feedback and engage in discussions with other participants. The project team members were positioned throughout the room and collected verbal feedback through conversations. No formal surveys or polls were conducted during the event.

FORMAT

The open house was held on April 3rd, 2023. This event was held in-person from 4:30pm to 7:30pm at Lithuanian House (1573 Bloor Street West, Toronto). The meeting venue was accessible and accommodations were made for participants who requested it. Meeting materials were shared online in advance of the meeting.

The presentation boards were set up to provide attendees with an overview of the project and details on the preferred strategy, evaluation approach and strategy selection. This included written descriptions, precedent photos, conceptual renderings, and maps demonstrating changes to vehicle access, traffic calming measures and pedestrian improvements, cycling improvements, parking, transit and shuttle services, and public realm opportunities.

PARTICIPATION

The open house was promoted through posters within and around High Park, social media advertisements and City social media accounts, the project website, mailing list and email, the local Councillor's newsletter, and was publicized in local media outlets. In total, 308 individuals registered for the open house through an online registration form. Registration was not required for attendance but helped inform staffing resources.

Approximately 280 people attended the public open house. Attendees reflected a wide range of interests and opinions and included local residents and park users from across the city. Staff heard from attendees who represented a range of ages, mobility preferences and park user groups including but not limited to volunteers for environmental organizations, sports players, runners, cyclists, dog walkers, bird watchers, restaurant patrons, gardeners, participants in various park programs including children's camps, and zoo visitors.

3 SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED

The project team collected feedback from open house participants through one-on-one and group discussions, as well as through follow-up phone calls and emails. A total of 54 emails and 6 phone calls providing follow-up feedback on the open house were received. Follow-up feedback was generally consistent with the comments shared during the open house.

WSP analyzed the feedback and identified key themes and topics that were discussed with staff during the open house and in follow-up emails and phone calls. Much of the feedback related to the projects goals of improving safety, accessibility, and the park's environment.

The feedback from the open house was consistent with many of the themes and comments gathered through the other phases of the engagement process and confirmed that there continues to be differing opinions on the appropriate level of vehicle access in High Park.

Key feedback themes and feedback received are summarized below.

KEY THEMES

- **Vehicle Access.** Comments on where, when and how vehicles should be permitted within High Park was the focus of many discussions. This topic continues to elicit differing opinions among park users. Many attendees expressed support for road closures, noting that a car-free park improved their overall experience and enhanced safety, the park's natural environment and reduced levels of noise and air pollution. Some attendees who supported a car-free park noted the need for measures to address accessibility concerns including improvements to pedestrian infrastructure, increased number of accessible parking spaces around the park, and better transit and shuttle service. These participants suggested that these changes should to be fast tracked to implement a car-free park sooner. Some participants expressed support for the preferred strategy, expressing that it balances the needs of all park users. Staff heard from many attendees who opposed all limitations to motor vehicle access and movements in the park, particularly to the interior destinations. These attendees often identified as park users who travelled from other parts of the city, users who were not able to walk or cycle long distances, those with family members with mobility needs, and park users that travel to the park to transport equipment (i.e., sport facility users, allotment gardeners, and dog walkers). Some were specifically concerned about weekend vehicle access to High Park, noting that this was their preferred time to visit. Some local residents expressed concern over spill-over traffic and parking impacts that they felt would result from the proposed changes.
- **Park Entrances and Exits.** Participants asked questions to clarify the proposed changes to the park's entrances and exits, and how it differs for motorized and non-motorized transit. Concerns about queuing times and congestion at the entrance and exit were expressed. Some park users mentioned that limiting the number of motor vehicle entrances and exits is inconvenient. Other park users did not think that the

proposed motor vehicle route would reduce motor vehicle volumes and deter cut-through traffic. Some expressed concerns with motor vehicle compliance; especially at the Bloor Street West entrance, where visitor vehicles would not be permitted to enter. Some participants expressed support for the preferred strategy, noting that it maintains access to the majority of interior destinations and parking lots.

- **Transit and Shuttle Services.** The majority of participants expressed support for enhanced shuttle and transit service. There was strong support for an affordable and accessible shuttle service to provide motorized transportation within High Park. Participants provided comments on the expected level of service, desirable stop locations and connection to nearby TTC subway stations. Many participants were interested in a zero- or low-emissions vehicle.
- **Bike Lanes.** A variety of comments were provided about the bike lane design, orientation and cycling by-pass proposal. Some participants suggested building the bike lanes as narrow as possible to discourage fast travelling cyclists and others suggested maximizing their widths to create space for safe passing movements, riding abreast, and bi-directional bike lanes. Clear signage was a common concern to ensure compliance with the speed limit and indication that other modes of transportation (like people running and roller-blading) were welcome in the bike lanes. Strong support for separated bike lanes was received to ensure people cycling do not interact with motor vehicles. Some attendees were supportive of the cycling by-pass but staff also heard from park users who were concerned about the potential environmental impacts and loss of parking.
- **Vehicle Speeds.** Concerns about both motor vehicle speeds and the speeds of people cycling were raised. Participants offered suggestions to reduce speeds like speed humps, improved signage, education/outreach campaigns, "Watch Your Speed" signs, automated speed enforcement and police enforcement.
- **Pedestrian Plaza.** Some attendees sought further information about the pedestrian plaza south of Grenadier Café. Staff heard from park users who were supportive of the idea of additional seating areas and landscaping. Some asked questions about whether people cycling would be required to dismount, and how they would travel from West Road to Colborne Lodge Drive south. Others had questions and concerns around the impact on the adjacent natural areas, the type and intensity of use of a plaza, and suggested that additional commercial activities would be inappropriate.
- **Environmental Impacts.** Some attendees emphasized the importance of protecting High Park as an environmentally sensitive area. Some noted the environmental benefits of reducing motor vehicle traffic but other expressed concern about increases in cycling activity and its potential impacts on wildlife. Staff heard from attendees who were concerned about possible environmental impacts of physical changes to infrastructure including sidewalk widening and the cycling by-pass north of Grenadier Café. Some attendees asked about renaturalization opportunities in spaces where parking is being removed.
- **Parking and Pick-up/Drop-off.** Staff noted that attendees expressed general support for introduction of paid parking and heard from many who were unaware that parking was currently free. However, some park users with active permits, like commercial dog-walkers and allotment gardeners, noted concerns with the reduction of available parking near their destinations and requested exemptions to parking fees. Many agreed on the need for pick-up/drop-off areas, especially around the sports fields. Staff was also asked about special parking and permits for people with disability and mobility issues. Some participants suggested that the City should explore opportunities for parking lots outside of the park and others noted that on-street parking was often in high demand in areas around the park, especially in

spring and summer. Some attendees did not support the reduction of parking capacity in the park and were concerned that parking demand would spill over into adjacent neighbourhoods. Participants suggested increasing the percentage of accessible parking spaces to ensure people with accessibility needs are guaranteed a parking space.

- **Project Process.** Many attendees came to the open house to seek clarity on the preferred strategy and how the final decision on proposed changes would be made. Some attendees asked about the engagement process, specifically who was reached and how consultation events were promoted. Staff were asked about data collection, how input from various advocacy and interest groups was being considered, and how the proposed strategies were evaluated.
- **Recreational Cycling Pilot.** Differing opinions on the need, appropriateness and program design of a cycling pilot were expressed. Many attendees expressed desire for a program explaining that High Park is a popular destination for training, and there are limited appropriate training spaces available in the city. Attendees who did not support the cycling pilot raised concerns about safety and the potential for conflicts with other park users, like pedestrians and runners. Some attendees expressed concerns about the impact to wildlife, highlighting that morning hours are when wildlife movement is most likely to occur.
- **Parkside Drive.** Attendees raised concerns about traffic and safety along Parkside Drive. Some attendees highlighted that the proposed changes may increase vehicle congestion and speeding on Parkside Drive, particularly near the Parkside Drive entrance to High Park. Attendees offered suggestions for improvements on Parkside Drive like bike lanes, signal timing improvements, traffic calming measures, police enforcement, and more frequent bus service.
- **Next Steps.** Comments were received regarding next stages of work like future engagement opportunities and suggestions for detailed design and implementation approaches. Many emphasized the need to clearly communicate future changes so that park users could best plan their visits.

4 NEXT STEPS

The feedback received from the public open house will be reflected in the final staff report and will help to inform future communication and engagement efforts. Many of the questions and comments received are expected to be addressed through the report and the detailed design phase.

The final staff report will describe the preferred strategy for travel network improvements in High Park and will be presented to Infrastructure and Environment Committee and City Council on April 26, 2023. The public will have the opportunity to depute at Committee, and information about the decision making process and public participation can be found on the [City's website](#). The final decision for which solution is implemented, and the components of the solution, will be made by City Council.

Following Council decision, further work will be required to advance design, costing and implementation details. Additional opportunities for engagement will be offered through this next phase of work and will be shared on the project website (www.toronto.ca/highparkmove).