

Hanlan's Point Beach Community Engagement Summary Report



Phase 3: July, 2023

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Report Overview

This report summarizes a series of engagements aimed at gathering community input from 2SLGBTQ+ communities and Hanlan's Point Beach users to inform the development of the Toronto Island Master Plan. These engagements took place between February and March 2023, in Phase 3 of the wider community engagement process to develop the Toronto Island Master Plan. In total, over 2,500 people participated in these Phase 3 engagements, both in person and online.

Throughout the rest of this document, these engagements will be referred to as the "Hanlan's engagement process". The list of engagements summarized in this document includes:

List of Island Master Plan Events Engaging 2SLGBTQ+ Communities and Hanlan's Point Beach Users in Phase 3

1. Virtual Public Meeting: Hanlan's Event Space Discussion

Location: Virtual (hosted using WebEx)

Date: February 23, 2023

Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Number of Participants: ~385

2. Thought Exchange (Online Tool)

Date: February 23 to March 12, 2023

Number of Participants: 2,471

Number of thoughts submitted: 2,131

Number of ratings: 37,758

3. Hanlan's Point Beach Community Workshop (In Person)

Location: 519 Community Centre (519 Church St.)

Date: February 27, 2023

Time: 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Number of Participants: ~100

4. Hanlan's Point Beach Community Workshop (Virtual)

Location: Virtual (facilitated using WebEx)

Date: March 9, 2023

Time: 5:30 to 8 p.m.

Number of Participants: ~94

Background

The Toronto Island Master Plan will be a long-term planning document that outlines a Vision, Values, Guiding Principles and Big Ideas to guide change and investment in Toronto Island Park over the long-term. Starting in 2021, the City began engaging a wide range of communities to develop the Master Plan that will support Toronto Island Park as a cherished gathering place for many generations to come. At a high level the engagement process is organized into three phases:

Phase 1: Towards a Vision: March to April 2021

The first round of engagement focused on what the future of the park could be. This phase resulted in a new Vision as well as a set of Values and Guiding Principles.

Phase 2: Ideas to Concepts: May 2021 to March 2022

The second round of engagement confirmed the Vision, Values, and Guiding Principles and developed Big Ideas and Concept Plans for Toronto Island Park.

Phase 3: Confirming a Path Forward: December 2022 to May 2023

The final phase focused on putting the finishing touches on the draft Master Plan.

Community Concerns Regarding Draft Master Plan Directions

On November 30, 2022, the Toronto Island Master Plan project team hosted an open house at Canoe Landing Community Recreation Centre as part of Phase 3 of the project's community engagement program. Over 80 community members attended, including some members of the project's Community Advisory Committee as well as the Spadina-Fort York City Councillor. At this open house, some Hanlan's Beach users and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community expressed feelings that the engagement process to date had not adequately engaged 2SLGBTQ+ communities and Hanlan's Beach users, as well as concerns regarding some of the ideas proposed in the Toronto Island Master Plan. Community members requested that 2SLGBTQ+ communities and Hanlan's Beach users be further engaged. As a response, the project team scheduled an in-person *Hanlan's Point Beach Community Workshop* at the 519 Community Centre for February 27, 2023, and later added a virtual option for March 9, 2023.

In the weeks leading up to the workshop, a social media campaign called "Hands Off Hanlan's" was launched, which attracted a high number of followers and amplified many of the concerns of the 2SLGBTQ+ and Hanlan's Beach user communities, particularly regarding the proposal to formalize the existing event space on the lawn near Hanlan's Point. The project team responded by scheduling another virtual public meeting on February 23, 2023, in advance of the scheduled workshop to clarify the City's position and respond to the community's concerns. At this virtual public meeting the team also launched a thought exchange, a virtual engagement activity to gather further insights from community members, which was open for use until March 12, 2023. Participants at both the virtual public meeting and of the thought exchange overwhelmingly opposed the proposed formalized event space.

City Response to Community Concerns

At the in-person open house on February 27th, the project team announced the following immediate actions that would be taken by the City in response to the community's concerns:

- The Master Plan would no longer propose a formalized event space on the lawn near Hanlan's Point Beach.
- A new lens would be added to the Master Plan, called "Centering Queer Heritage, Safety and Community Wellbeing", within which Hanlan's-specific proposals would be consolidated and with the goal of taking a more holistic and targeted approach to addressing the needs of Hanlan's beach users and of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The name of the lens has since been simplified to "Honouring Queer Significance".
- The lawn near Hanlan's Point Beach would continue to host ad-hoc events, including Electric Island, for the time being.
- The Master Plan would recommend two new initiatives to support the Hanlan's community, an Events Strategy and a Safety Strategy.

Previous Engagement with the 2SLGBTQ+ Community

Prior to the February and March 2023 2SLGBTQ+ communities and Hanlan's-specific engagement events described above, the City engaged the 2SLGBTQ+ and Hanlan's Beach user community in the following ways:

1. Public Life Study - August 2020

Early in the engagement process, the City conducted a public life study of the Island's beaches, including Hanlan's. Through the study, a team collected data related to how people were using the beach at different times of day and the week and additional data was collected from beach users through an online survey.

The survey was deployed across all Island beaches and received 390 responses, of which 58% were from Hanlan's users.

2. Pre-engagement – November 2020

Before launching the engagement program for the project, the project team held a series of pre-engagement interviews with stakeholders. This included one meeting with the **2-Spirited People of the First Nation** and another with the **519 Community Centre**.

3. 2-Spirited Peoples Focus Group March 2021.

In the visioning phase of engagement, the project team held a workshop specifically with 2-Spirit community members, including community leaders, artists and designers.

4. Visioning Survey – March 2021

During the visioning phase of the project, the project team launched a visioning survey which gathered over 5,000 responses. 22% of respondents in that process (1,244 people) identified as 2SLGBTQ+; many said they visit Hanlan's regularly.

5. Social Pinpoint – March 2021

The project team used an interactive mapping tool, called Social Pinpoint, to collect site-specific feedback for the project. 390 comments were collected through this tool. One of the areas with the highest concentration of comments was Hanlan's Point beach.

6. Big Ideas Campaign (Idea Board) - June 2021

As a way to generate specific ideas for the Master Plan, the project team used an online ideas board to collect 141 ideas for improving the Islands from the public. 9 of the top ideas were directly related to Hanlan's and/or 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

7. Hanlan's Focus Group – October 2021

In Phase 2 of the project, the City held a Hanlan's Focus group with 11 invited stakeholders to discuss some of the ideas that had been generated up to that point. The meeting was attended by queer community leaders and activists, academics and service providers. After the meeting, two participants joined the Community Advisory Committee for the project.

8. Equity Forum – December 2021

To close the second phase of the project, the team hosted a speakers forum focused on Equity and Belonging. The project team invited Jen Robertson, an urban planner with extensive experience of planning

for queer communities, who spoke about the importance of Hanlan’s for the 2SLGBTQ+ community and observations of how to improve safety.

Executive Summary

What we heard across all four Hanlan's-specific engagement opportunities in Phase 3

Several common themes emerged from the Hanlan's engagement process. These included concerns regarding the safety of queer communities and the loss of queer spaces, a desire to elevate the queer significance and history of Hanlan's, and calls to protect beach ecology. Participants clearly opposed the idea of a formalized event space at Hanlan's, though there was some support for smaller-scale events to be accommodated there. There was a general sentiment that even with guardrails, any formalized event infrastructure would create conflicts between beach goers and event attendees and put the safety of 2SLGBTQ+ communities at risk.

Participants generally agreed that the beach was in poor shape primarily because it has been deeply affected by erosion. This has significantly reduced the size of the clothing optional area, which has exacerbated crowding issues, especially among queer beach users. It was noted that the reduction of the clothing optional area, in combination with an influx of new visitors, has created conflict between users who either were not aware of the clothing optional designation and history of the beach, or else were not respectful. There was a general sentiment among participants that the clothing optional designation of the beach should be expanded and that the "new beach" associated with the dune restoration project closer to Gibraltar Point should be acknowledged as a part of Hanlan's Point Beach and the historic epicentre of its queer use. Participants also generally agreed that cultural markers which clearly identify the beach as a queer historic site were needed and would contribute to a feeling of safety. Participants noted that these markers should tell a nuanced and complete story of the beach and its users, including community members who are Indigenous, Trans, Black, and people of colour; the first pride; the role the beach played as a gathering place for the organizers of the first demonstrations on Parliament Hill for gay rights, called the "We Demand Rally"; and the decades-long and ongoing role the beach has played as a safe space for 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

There was also a general sentiment that the ecology of the beach should be better preserved and restored. Participants raised concerns about the state of the dunes, the water quality and garbage on the beach. Several ideas and comments resonated with people for addressing these issues, from comprehensive educational and stewardship efforts with beach users, to seasonal closures, revegetation and adequate waste management.

There was also a clear apprehension among participants towards police and an acknowledgement that any actions that brought more police towards the beach would result in unsafe conditions for queer beach users. There were mentions of historic events of police harassment at the beach and cruising sites across the city.

Finally, participants felt strongly that any efforts to improve Hanlan's Point should not contribute to the commercialization of the Island. Several people recommended that vendor opportunities prioritize independent businesses run by community members who are queer, Indigenous, Trans, Black, and people of colour.

Phase 3 Hanlan's-Specific Engagement Event Summaries

The following sections of this report provide summaries of the four engagement activities that took place as part of the Hanlan's engagement process in Phase 3 of the overall Island Master Plan engagement process. This includes:

1. Virtual Public Meeting: Hanlan's Event Space Discussion

February 23, 2023

2. Thought Exchange (Online Activity)

February 23 to March 12, 2023

3. Hanlan's Point Beach Community Workshop (In Person)

February 27, 2023

4. Hanlan's Point Beach Community Workshop (Virtual)

March 9, 2023

1. Virtual Public Meeting: Hanlan's Event Space Discussion

Overview

This virtual meeting was held on February 23, 2023, to address concerns regarding the Toronto Island Park Master Plan and the ideas proposed for Hanlan's Point, particularly the idea of formalizing an existing event space near Hanlan's Point Beach. The meeting was scheduled in response to a growing number of online conversations and an influx of emails to the project team with questions about the project and requests not to proceed with the proposed event space. Approximately 358 people participated in this virtual public meeting. The meeting began with opening remarks by Spadina-Fort York Councillor Ausma Malik and Toronto Centre Councillor Chris Moise followed by a presentation from the Master Plan Project Lead Lori Ellis and Manager of Public Consultation for Parks, Forestry and Recreation Daniel Fusca. The presentation included an overview of the Master Plan, a summary of engagement so far, and the ideas proposed for Hanlan's Point. Following the presentation, the project team opened the floor to questions and comments.

Feedback Summary

Clear opposition to event space

It was clear that the primary reason people attended the public meeting was to express their concerns about and opposition to the idea of formalizing the existing event space near Hanlan's Point Beach. Participants shared that an event space could create conflicts between event attendees and beach users

and potentially increase cases of sexual and gender-based violence. It was mentioned that there had been recent a gay-bashing incident on the Island near the Hanlan's Ferry Terminal. Participants questioned how the project team arrived at the recommendation to formalize the event space, which seemed to contradict some of the Master Plan directions aimed at protecting the natural environment and which was not something most process participants expressed a desire for. Additional concerns regarding an event space included the fear of more police presence on or near the beach to manage crowds, which could lead to queer communities being harassed by police.

Concerns regarding environmental impact

Participants also raised concerns regarding the environmental impact that an event space would have on local ecosystems. Some participants mentioned that big events on the Island have, in the past, caused damage. One participant suggested that the Island should be treated as a natural reserve and not welcome large events.

The Master Plan does not mention 2SLGBTQ+ History

Some participants noted that the history and significance of Hanlan's was missing from the Master Plan. It was noted that not only did the first Toronto Pride happen at Hanlan's, but that it was also the space where activists gathered later that same summer to plan the first gay rights march on Parliament Hill, called the "We Demand Rally".

Requests for a new lens

2SLGBTQ+ participants mentioned that they generally didn't feel seen in the Master Plan process and suggested that the project was missing a lens that prioritized queer communities and safety.

Engagement of queer communities

Some participants noted that the meeting was not accessible to all and that they wished the meeting had been promoted through print posters in the Village. There were critiques of the format of the meeting and the lack of opportunity for people to speak.

Losing queer spaces in the city

Several participants commented that they were concerned about the growing loss of spaces geared towards 2SLGBTQ+ communities in the city and noted that this was a strong motivation for community members organizing with intention to protect Hanlan's.

Opposition to vendors

While some participants supported the idea of expanded vendor opportunities at Hanlan's, many other participants opposed it, saying that it would only lead to commercialization.

2. Thought Exchange

(Online Activity)

Overview

A thought exchange is an online activity that allows community members to share and interact with each other's thoughts on a given topic. It asks participants to share thoughts related to a single open-ended question and then prompts them to rate the thoughts of others, creating a dialogue that leads to a deeper understanding of overall community priorities. The City ran a thought exchange on the topic of an event space at Hanlan's from February 23, 2023, to March 12, 2023, which asked the following question:

"What are the concerns and opportunities related to creating an event space on the lawn at Hanlan's Point?"

In total, 2,471 people participated in the exchange. They shared 2,124 thoughts that were rated 37,625 times, meaning the exchange facilitated 37,625 interactions amongst participants. Participants each rated an average of 18 thoughts.

A dynamic summary of the exchange, which includes the ability to view all thoughts within each theme, is posted online and can be found [here](#).

Summary

In general, feedback through the thought exchange was similar to that received through the virtual and in-person meetings summarized in this report. The thoughts collected were coded into 19 different themes, plus one category of miscellaneous thoughts. Each thought was coded with as many as two themes. The themes that emerged are listed below, organized by the number of thoughts community members shared within each theme:

1. Concerns about loss of queer space (827 thoughts)
2. Concerns about safety/queer safety (803 thoughts)
3. Concerns about the environment/keep it natural (438 thoughts)
4. Concerns about commercialization/corporatization (259 thoughts)

5. Concerns about crowds and crowding (174 thoughts)
6. Not needed/Leave it alone/Bad idea (129)
7. Concerns about access (118 thoughts)
8. Concerns about noise (78 thoughts)
9. Support for an event venue (59 thoughts)
10. Concerns about loss of privacy (51 thoughts)
11. Concerns about the police (48 thoughts)
12. Qualified support for an event venue (31 thoughts)
13. Support for community-led/queer programming (15 thoughts)
14. Improve the beach/beach amenities instead (13 thoughts)
15. Concerns about the engagement process (11 thoughts)
16. Focus on/improve existing venues instead (8 thoughts)
17. Support for small events (7 thoughts)
18. Put it somewhere else (5 thoughts)
19. Support for occasional events (2 thoughts)
20. Miscellaneous (62 thoughts)

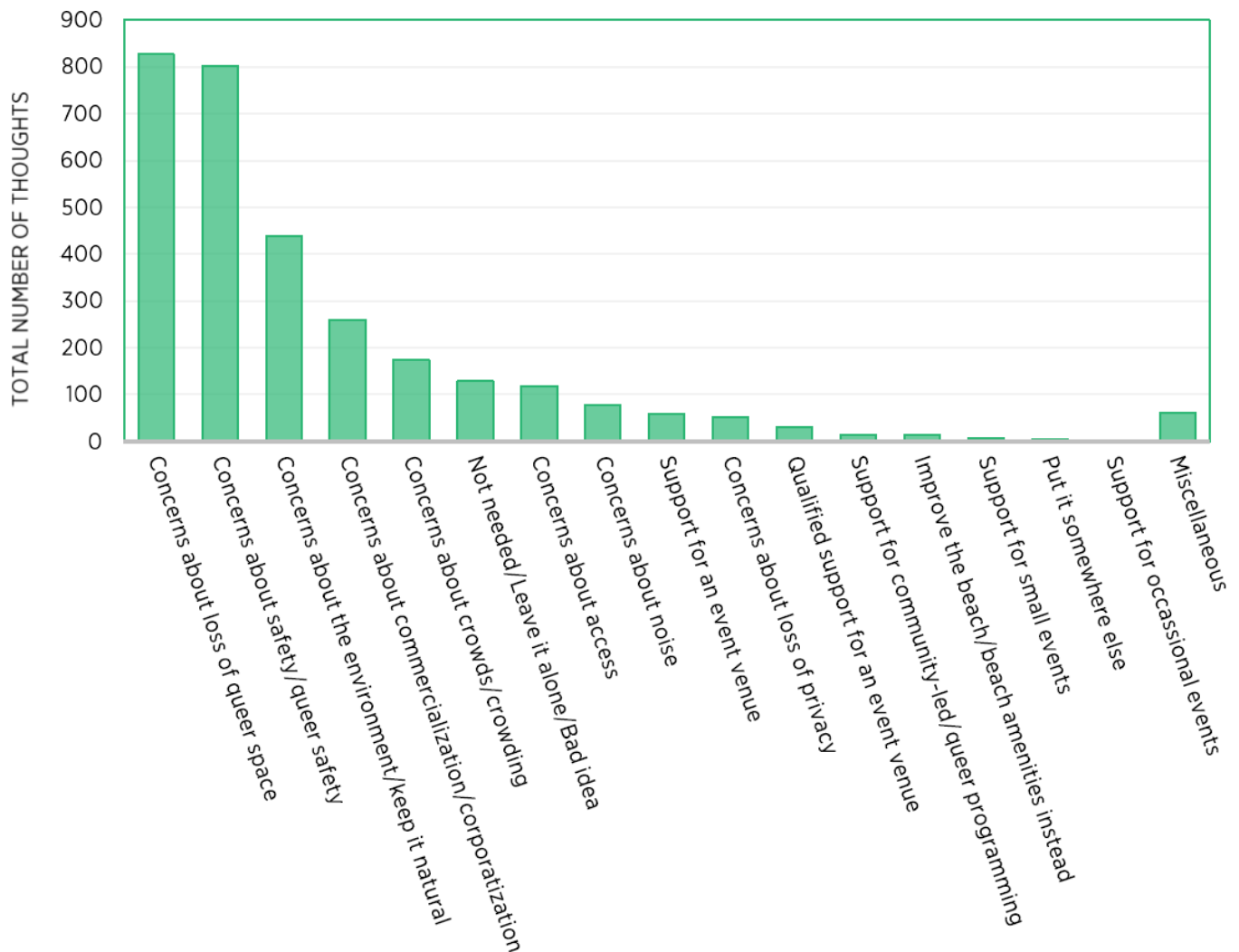


Figure 1: Thought Exchange Results: Coded Themes by Total Number of Thoughts in Each

Organizing themes according to the average rating of thoughts in each theme (as opposed to the number of thoughts in each theme) allows for a better overall understanding of community priorities. Organized in this way, it becomes clear that the community prioritizes its concerns about the proposed event space almost equally, while support for an event space is notably lower. Organized according to the average rating of the thoughts within them, the themes rank in the following way:

1. Concerns about commercialization/corporatization (4.7/5)
2. Concerns about loss of queer space (4.7/5)
3. Concerns about crowds and crowding (4.6/5)
4. Concerns about loss of privacy (4.6/5)
5. Concerns about safety/queer safety (4.6/5)
6. Concerns about the environment/keep it natural (4.6/5)

7. Not needed/Leave it alone/Bad idea (4.6/5)
8. Concerns about access (4.5/5)
9. Concerns about noise (4.5/5)
10. Concerns about the police (4.5/5)
11. Focus on/improve existing venues instead (4.5/5)
12. Concerns about the engagement process (4.4/5)
13. Put it somewhere else (4.4/5)
14. Improve the beach/beach amenities instead (3.9/5)
15. Support for community-led/queer programming (3.6/5)
16. Support for occasional events (3.4/5)
17. Qualified support for an event venue (3.1/5)
18. Support for small events (3.1/5)
19. Support for an event venue (1.9/5)

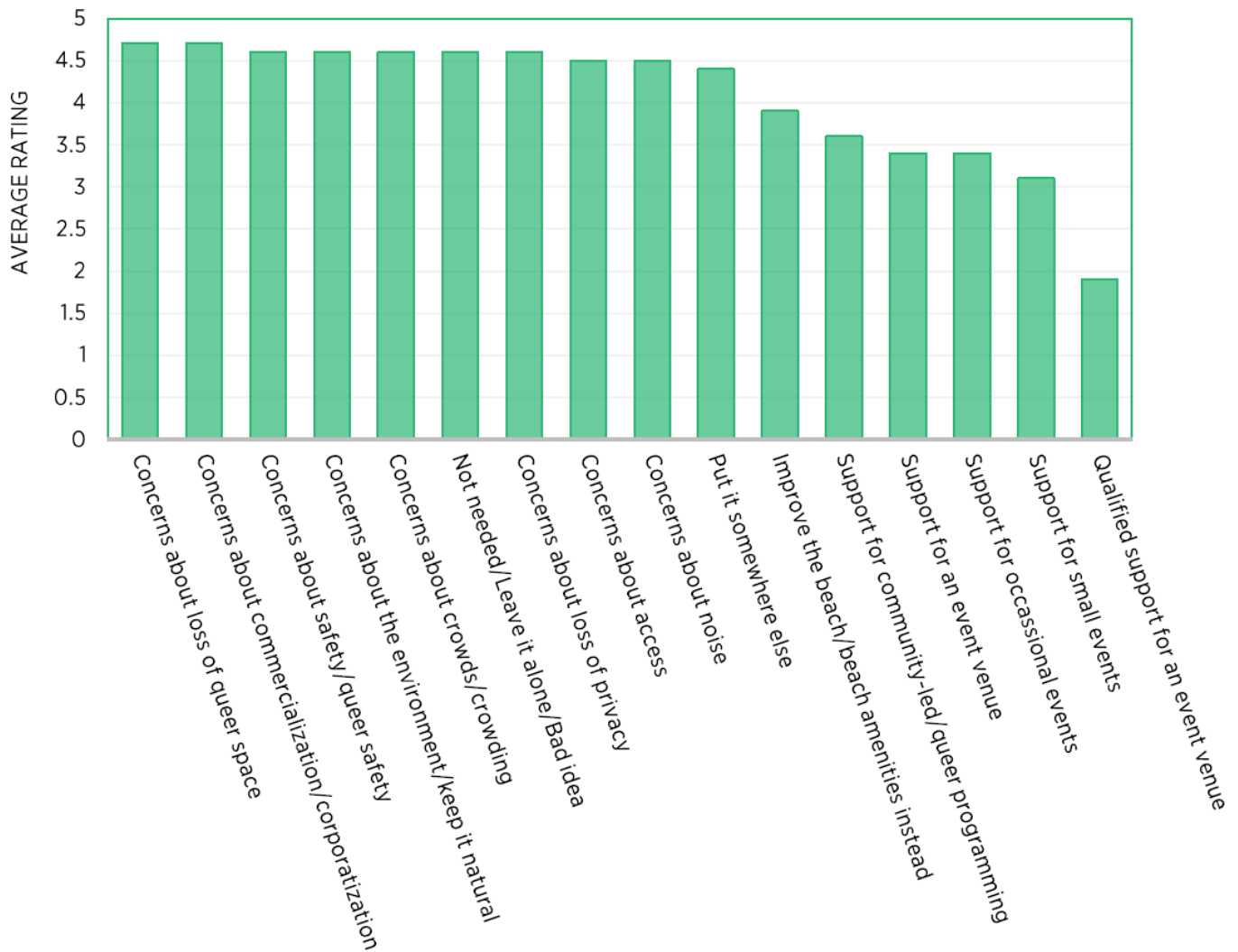


Figure 2: Thought Exchange Results: Coded Themes by Average Rating of the Thoughts in Each

Top Thoughts

The top five most highly-rated thoughts are:

1. **“Concerned about commercialization of a beautiful park, island, beach space.** Hanlan’s beach and the land behind is gorgeous and seemingly untouched. Find a concrete space for a new concert venue, not a beautiful island.” (Total rating of 4.7/5; rated 34 times; coded as “Concerns about commercialization/corporatization”)
2. **“I don’t want the one place I feel safe in the city in my queerness to become a trendy venue.** Bringing people who are not queer or possibly allies to the island when it is a queer space will destroy the

allure of enjoying a respite in the city." (Total rating of 4.6/5; rated 34 times; coded as "Concerns about loss of queer space/cultural space" & "Concerns about safety/queer safety")

3. **"It would completely ruin the island and the feeling of safety, community, and escape that the beach brings. PLEASE DO NOT CONSIDER AN EVENT SPACE. PLEASE RESIST ALLOWING CORPORATE INTERESTS TO RUIN HANLAN'S."** (Total rating of 4.6/5; rated 34 times; coded as "Concerns about commercialization/corporatization" & "Concerns about queer safety")

4. **"This needs to remain a safe queer space for the community. Toronto is diminishing queer spaces and more, when the city has a larger queer community."** (Total rating of 4.6/5; rated by 34 people; coded as "Concerns about loss of queer/cultural space" & "Concerns about safety/queer safety")

5. **"Commercialization of a unique public realm. Elimination of a quiet passive recreation."** (Total rating of 4.6/5; rated by 33 people; coded as "Concerns about commercialization/corporatization" and "Concerns about noise")

Common Ground Among Differing Viewpoints

A thought exchange identifies areas of polarization or division among participants and areas where those same participants are aligned, based on their rating patterns. In this exchange, people who supported the idea of an event space and people who opposed it found common ground around the need for a safety plan for Hanlan's, the importance of queer safe space, and the need to improve ferry access and infrastructure such as washrooms and concessions.

Survey Responses

Participants in the thought exchange were also asked a series of short survey questions. A full summary of responses to the exchange survey can be found in Appendix A. Below is a brief overview of key findings:

- 88% disagree or strongly disagree with creating a permanent event space at Hanlan's Point.
- 8% agree or strongly agree with creating a permanent event space at Hanlan's Point.
- 77% indicated that they have never felt unsafe while visiting Hanlan's Point in the past.
- 16% indicated that they have felt unsafe while visiting Hanlan's Point in the past, including:
 - 31% of respondents identifying as Trans women (10 of 32)
 - 20% of respondents identifying as Asian (41 of 204)

- 20% of respondents identifying as living with a disability (62 of 309)
- 19.5% of respondents identifying as First Nations, Inuit or Metis (18 of 92)
- 19% of respondents identifying as Trans men (7 of 37)
- 19% of respondents identifying as non-binary (68 of 354)
- 18% of respondents identifying as Black (20 of 110)
- 16.6% of respondents identifying as immigrants or refugees (37 of 223)
- 15.7% of respondents identifying as Latin American (22 of 140)

Hanlan's Point Beach Community Workshops - Framework

For both the in-person and virtual Hanlan's Point Beach Community Workshops, the project team consolidated the ideas that had emerged throughout the Master Plan process to that point and that were relevant to the 2SLGBTQ+ and Hanlan's Point beach communities. These were presented to workshop participants for review, validation and to advance them in further detail. The ideas were organized using the project's lenses (which were used to evaluate and compare ideas and proposals within the Master Plan). At the meeting, the City also announced the addition of a new lens, called "**Centring Queer Heritage, Safety and Community Wellbeing**". This has

subsequently been simplified to "Honouring Queer Significance". This new lens was added as a response to community feedback from the Virtual Public Meeting: Hanlan's Event Space Discussion and the thought exchange activity. All six lenses are included in the graphic above.



In the workshop, ideas related to Elevating Equity and Belonging were not discussed, as most Hanlan's-related ideas under that lens had been moved to the new lens.

Each lens discussed in the workshop, associated ideas that emerged through the engagement process, and workshop prompting questions include:

NEW Lens: Centering Queer Heritage, Safety and Community Well Being (Now called Honouring Queer Significance)

Prompt Question: What does acknowledging the significance of Hanlan's for the 2SLGBTQ+ community and its history look like?

Prompt Question: What does community safety and wellbeing look like and what tools do we need to get there?

Ideas:

- Establish Permanent Markers.
- Publicly acknowledge Hanlan's Point District as a 2SLGBTQ+ Safe Space.
- Develop a safety plan for Hanlan's Point.
- Create an ambassador program that is able to respond to emergencies on the beach.

Lens: Protecting the Dynamic Environment

Ideas:

- Expand planting to improve opportunities for shade, privacy and spatial definition.
- Build new boardwalk infrastructure to replace and reconnect aging pathways through dune habitat.
- Improve dune habitat protection through communications, signage, fencing, education and stewardship.
- Implement seasonal closures to protect dune habitats and promote beach retention and prevent erosion.

Lens: Enhancing Visitor Experience

Ideas:

- Improve vendor opportunities and beach rentals.
- Revitalize washrooms (make them winterized and gender inclusive).
- Create an Island Ambassador Program.
- Expand the clothing optional beach area and explore opportunities in the park for a screened area to protect the privacy of nudists.
- Expand the safe swim zone.
- Improve beach amenities (i.e. proposed alternative toilets).
- Improve waste management and reduce waste at the beaches.
- Provide shade.
- Provide a weather shelter.

Improving Access and Connection

Ideas:

- Improve ferry service.
- Implement network bike rentals.
- Implement people mover/train with stops in the area to connect to other ferries.
- Improve lighting around pathways.
- Improve cellphone connection.

3. Hanlan's Point Beach Community Workshop – In Person

Overview

The in-person workshop was held on February 27, 2023, at the 519 Community Centre in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village. The venue was selected to be familiar and accessible to 2SLGBTQ+ communities. The workshop was held in the venue's ballroom. Ten round tables were set up across the room, each with assigned facilitators to help guide conversations and take notes during breakout session discussions. The event started with opening remarks by Spadina-Fort York Councillor Ausma Malik; Toronto Centre Councillor Chris Moise; and Beaches-East York Councillor Brad Bradford. The Master Plan project lead Lori Ellis and Manager of Public Consultation for Parks, Forestry and Recreation Daniel Fusca opened the meeting with a presentation which included an overview of the project with a particular emphasis on Hanlan's Point Beach. At this meeting the project team announced that the recommendation to formalize an event space near Hanlan's Point Beach was no longer being pursued and would not be included in the draft Master Plan moving forward. It was also announced that the project would be adopting a new lens, "Centering queer heritage, safety and community wellbeing". Both of these initiatives were well received by attendees. After the presentation the project team received questions from the public before heading into breakout sessions facilitated at each table.

The Hanlan's Community Collective provided refreshments and pastries to attendees. The City is grateful for their contributions.

What We Heard

Lens: Centering Queer Heritage, Safety and Community Well Being (Now called Honouring Queer Significance)

Expand the clothing optional area of the beach

The primary recommendation heard across all tables at the workshop – with the most amount of comments – was to expand the beach as a way to make the space safer. It was noted that erosion throughout the years has reduced the clothing optional area at Hanlan's, leading to severe overcrowding. This was exacerbated by the pandemic, which brought a lot more people to the Island. Some participants noted that they felt they were being encroached upon by other beach users who are not part of the queer community and who come to gawk at beach users who are not wearing any clothing.

Some of the comments recommended acknowledging the entire area surrounding Hanlan's Beach as a Hanlan's district that included the dunes, the beach farther south towards Gibraltar Point and the beach farther north towards the airport. Some people shared that they would like to see what is being called the "new beach" farther South towards Gibraltar point as part of Hanlan's, recognizing the historic use of that space by queer communities. There were some additional recommendations to create exclusively nude areas.

Flags

Most participants agreed that pride flags would help make the beach safer because they would let non-queer beach users know that they are entering a 2SLGBTQ+ space. Participants suggested installing pride flags at either end of the beach as well as one at the Hanlan's ferry landing. One table suggested installing a Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation flag as well.

Signage

Several participants identified that signage could play an important role as cultural markers and could improve queer community members' safety. The feedback regarding signage ranged from a desire for signage indicating that Hanlan's is a clothing optional and 2SLGBTQ+ space to signage that shares the queer history of the beach and of Toronto.

Some additional locations suggested for historical plaques included around the beach, on the way to the beach from the ferry terminal, and along boardwalks.

Themes and stories

Participants shared themes and stories that they would like to see reflected at Hanlan's through cultural markers. The ideas included telling the queer history of the beach but also extended to telling broader Toronto and Canadian queer history, and acknowledging that Hanlan's is a national historic queer site. Some participants noted that the history needed to start with Indigenous communities, two spirit people and the Indigenous significance of the space. It was also suggested that the history of the first pride picnic be acknowledged as well as the nude/clothing optional history of the beach. Some participants said they would like the history of police brutality towards the queer community acknowledged, noting that queer people were often targeted by police at the beach.

Other suggestions for storytelling through cultural markers included acknowledging the AIDS crisis and broadening the history of Hanlan's beyond the history of gay men to be more encompassing of broader 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Specific installation ideas

Ideas for specific installations ranged from statues and plaques to murals. A few ideas for specific installations suggested commemorating the first picnic: one participant suggested a picnic blanket made of tiles, while others suggested a fire pit on the beach to represent the early gathering site.

Inclusive heritage study

Some participants recommended conducting a heritage report for the beach that includes the queer heritage of the Island and noted that the current heritage study for the Toronto Island Master Plan only takes into account the built form (buildings). It was also suggested that the space should be declared a historic site or a cultural heritage district as a way to recognize the past, present and future significance of the beach to the 2SLGBTQ+ community and the role that it has played in 2SLGBTQ+ activism and rights across Canada.

Police are not considered safe for queer people

Several participants noted that police presence does not make them feel safe. It was recommended that emergencies and reports of things like harassment should be dealt with without police or security guards, possibly through a community ambassador model that harnesses existing capacity within the community, including through partnerships with queer-serving organizations.

Some participants said that there should be an apology by Toronto Police Services for the past arresting and brutalizing of queer people at the beach and an apology from the City for its anti-queer history of attempting to push the community off of the beach.

Community charter

Some participants suggested that there should be a community charter for the beach. They suggested that the charter could tell people that they are entering an Indigenous, safe and queer space and indicate how beach users should behave, how to treat others and how to treat the environment. It was suggested that this charter would be helpful particularly for people who have never been to the beach, and that it could be a symbol for non-queer folks so they know this is a queer-friendly space. One recommendation was to learn from how the Wreck Beach (Vancouver) community charter was developed for that space.

Harm reduction

Several participants thought it was important to acknowledge that people drink and consume substances without stigma at the beach, and suggested that there should be a community-centered harm reduction approach for dealing with issues that might emerge from drugs and alcohol. One of the main suggestions was to include water fountains across the beach. Other suggestions included naloxone kits and paramedics/social workers or community members who are trained to respond to drug- and alcohol-related emergencies.

Queer exclusivity

Some participants suggested that a safe space for queer folks is often a space that is exclusive for queer folks, which is why queer communities tend to congregate in the same public spaces. Some participants expressed the sentiment that queer spaces are being lost in the city and that Hanlan's needed to be protected as a queer-centred space.

Safety plan and event recommendations

Several participants commented on the need for some guardrails for events on the Island and near Hanlan's. It was recommended that any event that takes place on the Island should be able to demonstrate that the crowd they are inviting will be respectful towards Hanlan's beach users. Other recommendations included:

Communications Materials: Event planners should create communications materials for event-goers that describe how to behave towards beach users and how to relate to the ecosystem. There should be event notices for beach users so they know what events are going to take place near the beach and when.

Security and Training: Security often make queer folks feel unsafe. Event staff need to be better trained for de-escalation.

Noise: Loud music and noise is disruptive and antithetical to why most people go to the Island.

Develop a Process: Some participants recommended that the City should develop a framework and permitting process that allows the community to have a say on what events can be hosted on the Island.

Welcome the right events: Some participants suggested that small events that were community-focused would be welcomed in the space.

Ambassador program

There was some support for an ambassador program, but there was a general sentiment that it needed to be well thought out so that it was community-focused and community-driven. Participants suggested that an ambassador program should mobilize members of the 2SLGBTQ+ and Hanlan's communities, including service providers and people who have experience working in de-escalation and harm reduction.

Other recommendations included:

- Setting up a first aid hut with naloxone kits near the beach.
- Setting up emergency buttons linked to ambassadors (not police).
- Having a queer line dedicated to hate crime support for people who need physical or emotional support after an attack.
- Setting up blue light or safety zones for emergencies.
- Bringing back the phone booth that was at the beach for emergencies.
- Ensuring that there is long-term funding for this program.

Lens: Supporting a Dynamic Environment

Vegetation can improve privacy

Participants were generally supportive of expanding planting and revegetating areas of Hanlan's and noted that some areas need better vegetation to screen the clothing optional beach from the main trail. Some comments noted that shade was needed to protect people from the sun.

Not at the expense of losing beach area

While there was support for increasing vegetation near Hanlan's, several people commented that it shouldn't come at the expense of losing beach area. There were also comments that vegetation shouldn't separate the centre part of Hanlan's from the south side of the beach. There were some sentiments that planting might be used to discourage cruising, which the community opposed.

Clothing optional nature trails

Some participants suggested that there should be clothing optional areas outside of the beach, like along the trails and in vegetated areas.

Boardwalks are welcomed

Generally, participants were supportive of boardwalks and liked that they had the potential to protect the ecology of the dunes. It was recommended that the boardwalks should be accessible for people with mobility devices and that some of the boardwalks should go down into the beach and allow wheelchairs into the water. There were some comments that these boardwalks should be perpendicular to the shore and not parallel along the sand dunes.

Inclusive educational efforts

Several participants suggested that there should be educational efforts that invite queer beach users to become stewards of the dunes and of the beach. Some of the recommendations included partnering with groups representing queer, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour that work on environmental preservation.

Cormorants need to be controlled

Some participants noted that the south part of the beach has recently been taken over by Cormorants, a species of large waterbird. Participants questioned if they were an invasive species and if they needed to be controlled because of the effect that they have on the local environment.

Note: Double-crested Cormorants are a species native to the Great Lakes.

Seasonal closures

There was some support for seasonal closures of environmentally sensitive areas to ensure environmental preservation. Some participants suggested that the closures should be based on bird nesting seasons or when plants are particularly sensitive. It was noted that there should be clear communication with beach users as to which areas were being closed, why and for how long. Other recommendations included closing the beach from late fall to early spring and limiting the amount of people that go to the Island on any given day.

Boats create disturbances

A few people commented that the boats that moor along the shoreline off the beach are bad for the ecosystem because they pollute the waterways. It was also noted that the boats often play loud music which disturbs beachgoers.

Lens: Enhancing Visitor Experience

Avoid commercialization

Some participants responded positively to the idea of new and improved vendors near Hanlan's, however there was a general feeling that vendors should be small businesses and that businesses owned by community members who are Black, Indigenous, and/or people of colour should have priority. Some participants were not supportive of the idea of having any vendors near the beach, as they thought it didn't fit the secluded character of the beach. There was one suggestion that the vendors would be better located near the ferry and away from the beach.

There were some suggestions for beach chairs and umbrella rentals and places to buy ice.

Improve existing commercial spaces

While some people wanted to see more commercial offers near the beach, several participants commented that they would like the existing spaces like the Mermaid Café be activated and improved first.

Revitalized washrooms

There was a general sentiment that washrooms needed to be improved and made gender neutral/universal. Some people suggested that there should be signage pointing towards the washrooms because a lot of people don't know where they are. There were also some recommendations to move the washrooms closer to the beach so as to discourage people urinating in the bushes.

Install beach showers

Some participants said that they would like beach showers installed near the entrances of the beach.

Expand swimming area

The primary comments related to expanding the swimming area were related to boats and ensuring they weren't able to get close to the shore, where there could be conflict and related safety issues between boats and swimmers. Some participants also said they would like to be able to swim near the "new beach".

Waste management

Participants agreed that garbage is an issue on the beach. Some comments suggested that there should be waste collection and sand grooming. Some people said that there weren't enough waste receptacles, while others suggested an organics bin.

There were several comments suggesting that people should be cleaning up after themselves and that the space should foster a shared feeling of stewardship and care for the environment.

Weather shelters and shade

There was some support for additional shade and weather shelters, particularly close to the ferry terminal.

Lens: Improving access and connection

Improved ferry service

Participants wanted the timing of the ferries to be more frequent and to extend later into the night. It was noted that ferries are sometimes cancelled without notice and that there should be better communication about ferry schedules with beach users.

Improve landings

Some participants suggested that the ferry and water taxi landings at Hanlan's should be improved and made accessible. There was a comment that the current Hanlan's ferry landing, with its chain-link fencing, feels hostile.

Public bikes, bike lanes and racks

There was general support for improving bike infrastructure near Hanlan's, including introducing a bike share on the Island, having better delineation of bike lanes and having more bike racks near the beach. Some people noted that beach users often lock their bikes in the dunes, which is detrimental to the ecosystem.

The right amount of lights

Participants agreed that there should be improved lighting around pathways and noted that it can be dangerous to travel to the ferry from the beach after sunset. It was noted however that light pollution should be considered and that additional lighting shouldn't impact the beach or the local fauna.

No strong feelings on people mover

There were only a few comments about the people mover proposal in the draft Master Plan. Some noted that it would be important for accessibility, while others said that it would go against the secluded nature of the space.

4. Hanlan's Point Beach Community Workshop - Virtual

Overview

A second, virtual workshop took place on March 9, 2023. It followed the same agenda as the in-person workshop. This meeting was held to ensure that people with mobility challenges, people who might be immunocompromised, or people who otherwise prefer to participate in a virtual format were able to attend. The event started with opening remarks by Spadina–Fort York Councillor Ausma Malik and Toronto Centre Councillor Chris Moise. The Master Plan project lead Lori Ellis and Manager of Public Consultation for Parks, Forestry and Recreation Daniel Fusca opened the meeting with a presentation that included an overview of the project with a particular emphasis on Hanlan's Point. After the presentation the project team received questions from the public before heading into facilitated breakout sessions.

What we heard

Lens: Centering Queer Heritage, Safety and Community Well Being (Now called Honouring Queer Significance)

Tell a nuanced story

When talking about establishing cultural markers for the beach, the primary theme that emerged was that the markers need to tell a nuanced story that included both the past and the present. Participants mentioned that signage and markers should avoid pinkwashing, and should tell both the story of community coming together and the story of queer persecution. There were mentions of acknowledging the history of violence towards queer people including police brutality and police raids on cruising spots

like Marie Curtis Park and the Pussy Palace and Bathhouse Raids. Some people mentioned that the history and markers should be site-specific and acknowledge that for decades the primary place for queer folks to congregate has been at the south end of the beach.

Global recognition

There were some mentions of acknowledging the significance of the site at a global scale. The role that the beach has played in queer liberation – as a gathering space – has had national and global implications on the queer rights movement. There was one suggestion of pursuing UNESCO heritage recognition.

Ecology and history

Some participants commented that the ecology and queer history of the site needed to be told as one connected story.

Police are considered a threat to queer people

Several participants commented that if safety were going to be addressed at the beach, safety from police would need to be considered. Some people commented that the police are a threat to the safety of beach users and noted that, in the past, the police had conducted mass arrests at Hanlan's. Among the comments was an acknowledgement that some beach users engage in sex work and that they need to be protected and not criminalized. There was a comment that endorsed creating clear boundaries for police not to enter the site unless requested.

Ambassadors are generally welcomed

Participants generally liked the idea of beach/park ambassadors but highlighted that an appropriate framework was needed to prevent ambassadors feeling and acting like police. Their role should be to keep people safe and address the needs of beach users.

Additional safety considerations

- Install a physical phone on the beach.
- Make the entire beach clothing optional.
- Create an evacuation plan for emergencies.

Lens: Supporting a Dynamic Environment

Educational signage

Participants agreed that there should be signage educating people about the ecology of the dunes. Some people mentioned that it was important to tell people not just what they shouldn't do, but also why. For example, instead of just saying people should stay off the dunes, signs should educate beach users about the different species of flora and fauna and the impact that people have on them.

Home of endangered species

Some participants noted that the City needs to do a better job at centering environmental protection laws and that it was important to highlight that the beach is the home of endangered species.

Lens: Enhancing Visitor Experience

The right kind of vendors

Feedback regarding improved vendors echoed feedback at the in-person workshop. There is a desire for beach umbrella, beach chair and kayak rentals. However, there is also a concern that more vendors will lead to over commercialization, which is not desired. Some participants pointed towards the economy of Wreck Beach in Vancouver, which is full of beach artisans, small stalls and small food vendors, as a possible model. It was mentioned that Indigenous, Black, queer and people of colour who are independent vendors should be prioritized and that rentals could potentially be not-for-profit.

Inclusive and close washrooms

Workshop participants noted that washrooms needed to be gender neutral and universal/accessible. It was also suggested that the washrooms should be moved closer to the beach to avoid people urinating in the bushes.

The "new beach" is Hanlan's

Many workshop participants noted that the new beach has historically been where queer folks have congregated and that it should officially be considered part of Hanlan's. Participants said folks congregated there because it was farther away from the airport and from people, but that because of erosion throughout the years people have had to move further north.

Additional amenities requested

- Showers near the beach.
- Water bottle filling stations on the beach.

Lens: Enhancing Visitor Experience

Mixed feelings about tram/people-mover

Participants were concerned about a tram moving through the Island and how it would impact the ecology and the secluded character of the Island. There was one suggestion that there should be a line that goes from Gibraltar point to Wards or from Hanlan's Ferry Landing to Gibraltar point, but not a full network.

Appendix

- Thought exchange dynamic report can be accessed here:
<https://my.thoughtexchange.com/report/a226547f63d04911bf294c9bb0d34963>
- In-person workshop transcribed notes can be accessed here:
https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVMXKM1q0=?share_link_id=513358719843
- Virtual meeting consolidated notes can be accessed here:
https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVMf51SGU=?share_link_id=90291880964